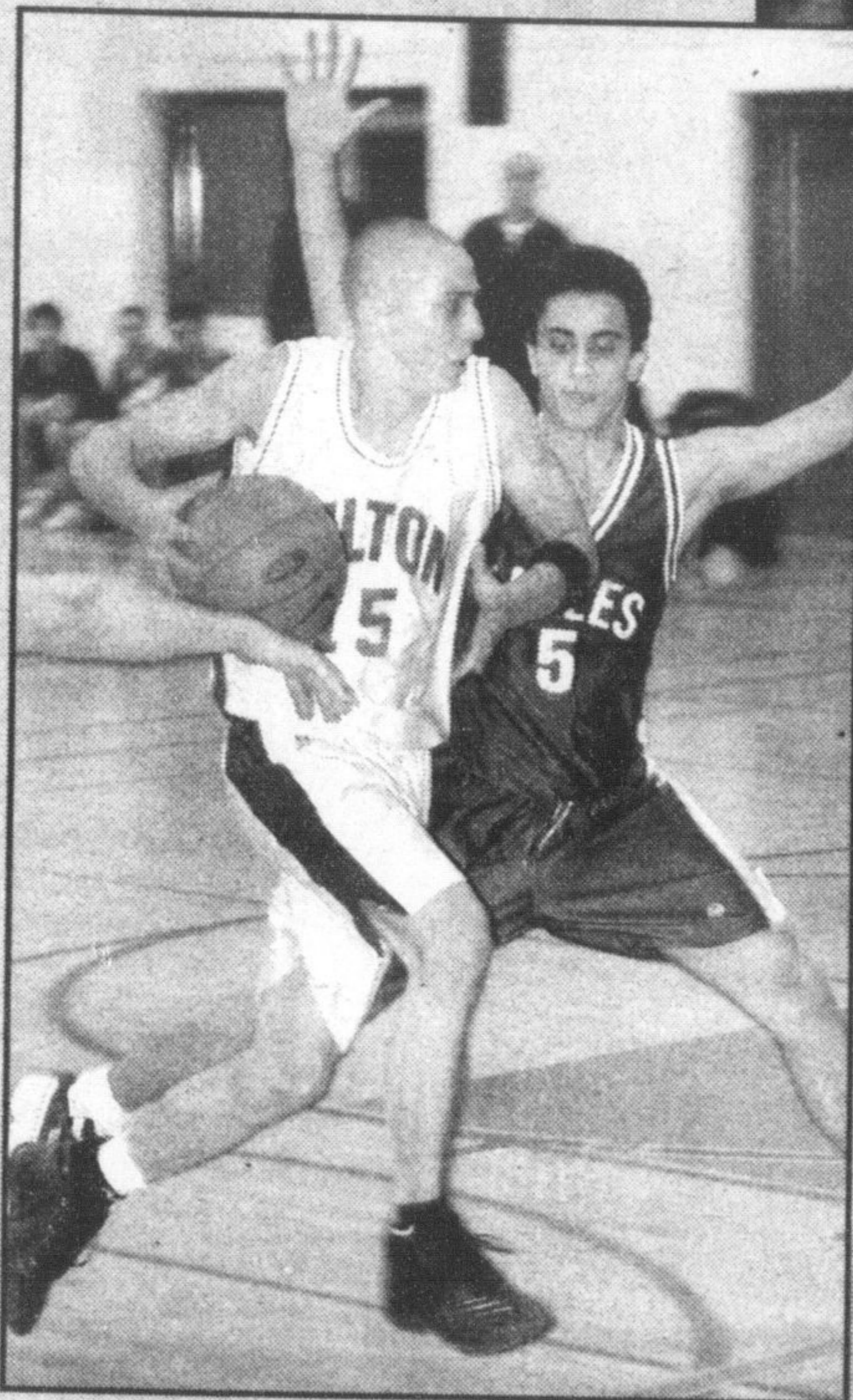




SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

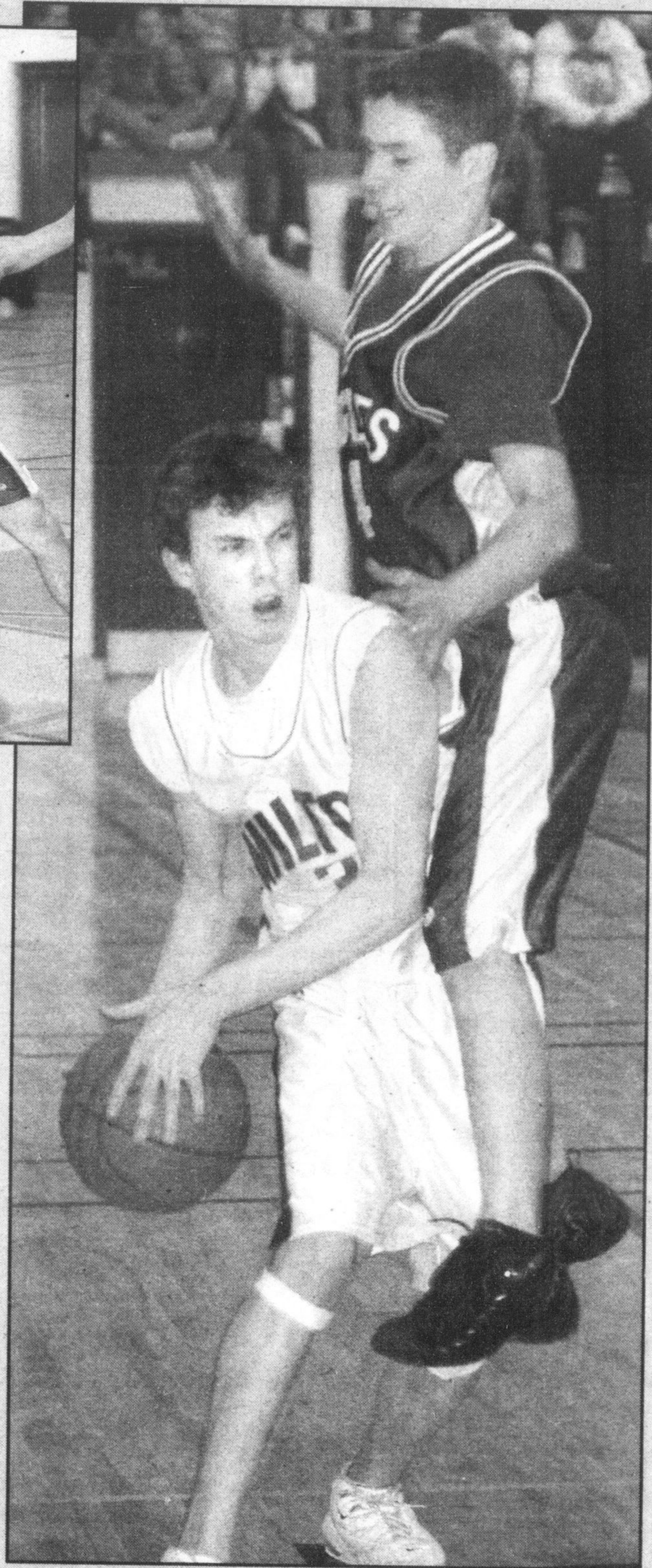
FRIDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2003



Hoop dreams

Milton District guard Tyler Holman (above) drives past Q.E. Park defender McHammy Alshurafa while teammate Kyle Goertz (at right) tries to pass as he's shadowed by Q.E. Park's Dan Thomerson during senior boys basketball playoff action at MD Monday afternoon. The Mustangs won the second-round encounter 70-64 but dropped a 50-42 semifinal decision to Burlington's Notre Dame Irish Wednesday afternoon at MD. For full results of the Mustangs' playoff action, see page 23.

Photos by
GRAHAM PAINE



Merchants ready for Western semis

Milton will face Buffalo for first time in playoffs

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

The Buffalo Lightning's post-season participation wasn't ensured until late January.

But that doesn't make them a potential pushover for the championship-minded Merchants, according to head coach Mario Cicchillo.

"Buffalo's better than they showed in the standings," Milton's skipper stressed at practice Wednesday night. "There's no way they should have struggled to make the playoffs."

That assessment stems from more than just Buffalo's somewhat improbable first-round victory over second-place Hamilton — who despite being rather depleted offensively were still expected to advance to the Western Conference semifinals.

In fact Cicchillo was among the few who picked the lone American club to reach round two.

"I kept saying there'd be an upset," he remarked.

Though winless in five regular-season games with the Merchants this year, the Lightning kept all but one of those contests tight with their speed and fundamentally-solid play — not to mention some effective rough-housing in their own barn.

While many might feel facing Buffalo instead of Oakville in the second round represents the path of least resistance to the conference finals, Cicchillo says he didn't really have a preference for round two competition.

"We had a couple of practices based on either team. We were ready for both," he explained. "It didn't really matter who we faced because from now on you've got to beat a good team (at every stage)."

Milton Merchants vs. Buffalo Lightning

(Western Conference semifinals)

(best of seven series)		
Game 1	Feb. 21	at Milton (7:30)
Game 2	Feb. 22	at Buffalo (9:00)
Game 3	Feb. 24	at Buffalo (8:15)
Game 4	Feb. 28	at Milton (7:30)
•Game 5	Mar. 2	at Milton (3:00)
•Game 6	Mar. 3	at Buffalo (8:15)
•Game 7	Mar. 5	at Milton (7:30)

• if necessary

Cicchillo said avoiding potentially costly stick infractions as well as odd-man rushes based on mental miscues will be keys to success from this point on.

While eligible to pick up a player to replace second-line rookie Vic Oreskovich — who'll miss the entire second round while competing with Team Ontario at the Canada Winter Games in New Brunswick — Milton's skipper has opted against a temporary addition.

His feeling is that any additional firepower from a 10-day hired gun doesn't justify jeopardizing the team's chemistry.

Instead, he'll call on 40-point freshman James Duhamel — whom he expects great things from next season — to jump in and complete the front-line attack.

Oreskovich should be back in time for most, if not all, of the conference finals, should Milton get past Buffalo.

Meanwhile, the neighbouring Georgetown Raiders will do battle with Oakville in the other division semifinal series.

Both Milton and Georgetown won all five regular season games against their round two opposition — which makes a north Halton Western Conference finals a distinct possibility.

The Merchants would have home-ice advantage for that showdown as well, having finished first in the regular season for the sixth time in the past nine years.

Titleist
Cobra
FootJoy

Clarke's Golf

www.clarkesgolf.com

RAM FX 2 IRONS
Graphite Reg. \$549.95
Sale **\$459.95**

Steel Reg. \$449.95
Sale **\$359.95**

ROOTS GOLF SHIRTS
Buy One Shirt
2nd at **1/2 price**

FAIRWAY SHOES
Reg. \$79.95
Sale **\$29.95**

New Stock Arriving Daily

Taylor Made RAC Irons
Callaway X16 Irons
Odyssey 2 ball Putters
Adidas Shoes
& much more

REGRIPPING SPECIAL
from **\$1.99**
5 Styles to choose from - ready next day

Callaway Golf SPALDING

18 Thompson Rd., Unit 7&8, Milton
905-878-1818

Taylor Made

EXCELLENT PRICE

\$344,900

NEED EXTRA SPACE?

Then this superb all brick two storey, four bedroom executive style home is ready to move into, especially with the two extra bedrooms on the lower level. This home boasts a beautiful tiled entrance that leads to kitchen and hall, hardwood in living room and dining room, gas fireplace in family room with fold doors to a deck. This home has many pluses and must be seen to be appreciated. Please call Jack McCrudden

RE/MAX

RE/MAX BLUE SPRINGS REALTY (HALTON) CORP.
JACK MCCRUDDEN, Assoc. Broker
905-878-7777