



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2003

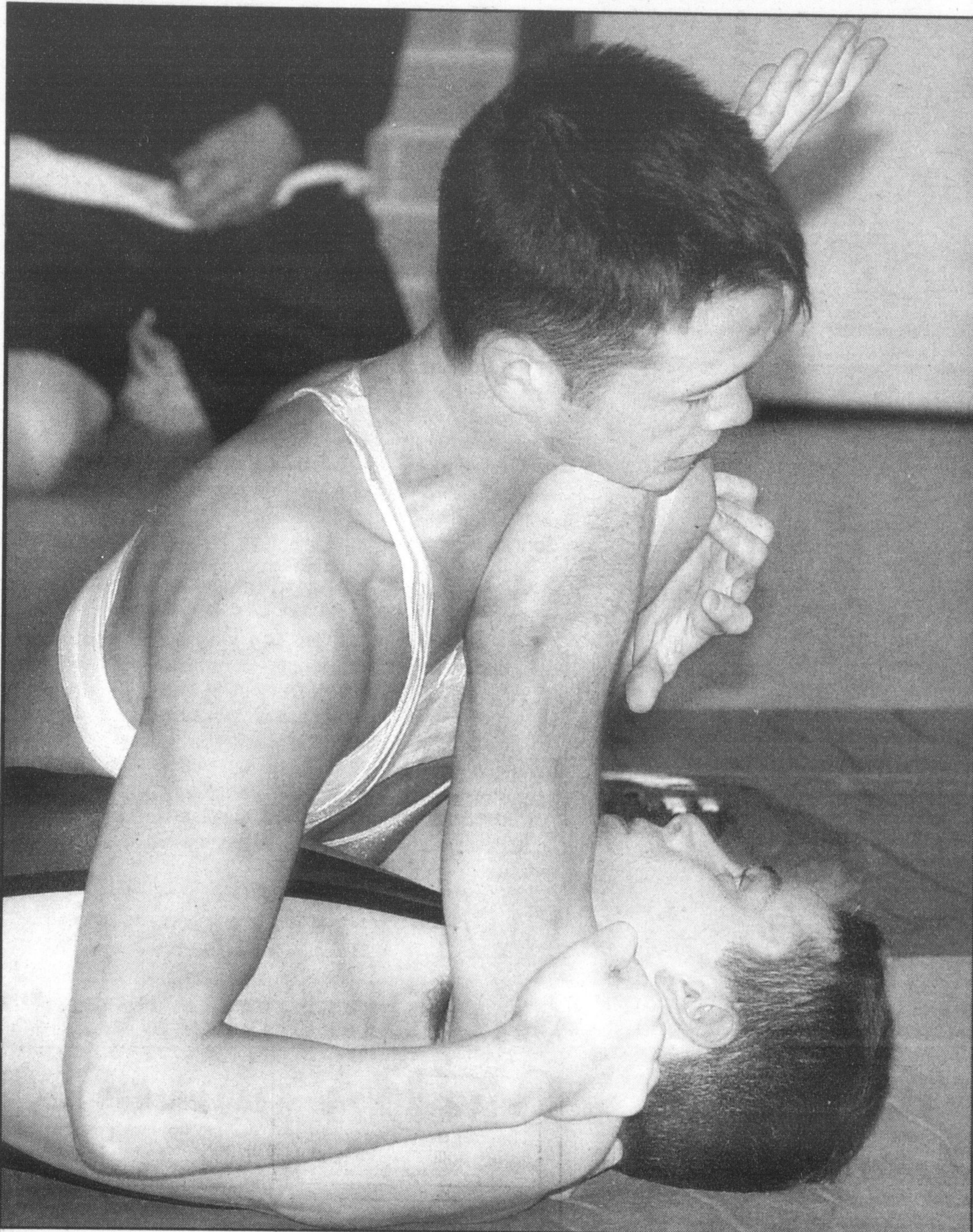


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Down for the count

E.C. Drury's Jordan Lumb enjoys the upper hand on Georgetown opponent Andrew Slocumbe during 67.5 kilogram wrestling action Thursday afternoon during the GHAC wrestling championships. Lumb went on to win the match. For full results of the event, see page 18.

Merchants secure 2-0 lead on Buffalo

Milton still unbeaten in playoffs before last night's road trip

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

The Merchants won't be disposing of their second-round opponents with nearly as much ease as the first.

However, they may do so just as quickly. Heading into last night's trip to Buffalo, Milton was in position for another best-of-seven sweep — having prevailed in its first two Western Conference semifinal encounters over the weekend.

Straight three-goal decisions pushed the regular season champs' win streak to 15 — two shy of the current club record, established earlier this year — and put them within striking distance of the division finals.

The Merchants placed a stranglehold on their cross-border rivals late Saturday night in Buffalo, with fundamentally-sound play and two goals by Scott Ransom fueling a 4-1 victory.

Ransom scored back-to-back markers — the first by way of a dynamite deke — after the hosts knotted things up in the first, while Ryan Silveira notched his second in as many nights to help seal the deal.

Rob Ricci got Milton on the scoreboard early on with a powerplay tally, capitalizing on the visitors' lone opportunity with the man-advantage, while contributing a pair of assists each were rookies Andrew Bonello and Dean Strong.

Cody Spicer turned back 29 shots to post his sixth straight playoff win, with some late penalty killing helping him do so.

One night earlier at Memorial Arena, the Merchants made it more difficult on themselves than necessary before doubling up the Lightning 6-3 for their 23rd straight home win. In front of its biggest post-season crowd to date, Milton overcame a second-

period collapse — thanks largely to all-star Brad Efthimiou.

The former Brampton Capital delivered arguably his most masterful performance since being traded to the local juniors and recorded his second straight five-point game.

Great clutch performance

His best efforts were reserved for the third period, when the fiercely talented winger offered picturesque set-ups to Ricci and Rich Meloche before sinking a wrap-around to shatter a 3-3 tie.

Ricci and Meloche also dented twine in the opening frame, while Silveira jammed in a doorstep leftover by Strong before the game was three minutes old.

Sandwiched in between was a second period void of offensive spark, of defensive accountability — at least on the Merchants' part.

Perhaps rusty from a week-long layoff, the hosts abandoned their usually crisp play through the middle frame before regrouping to hold Buffalo to just a couple of shots in the third.

Linemates Neil Sullivan and Michael Majer accounted for all four Lightning goals over the weekend.

If victorious last night, the Merchants will have a chance to sweep round two Friday night at home. Game time is 7:30 p.m. If necessary, game five will be played at Memorial Arena Sunday at 3 p.m.

Merchant notes: Linemates Ricci, Meloche and Efthimiou shared top spot in the team's playoff scoring derby with 19 points apiece. Should Milton reach the league semifinals, they'll have a good chance of breaking hometown superstar Darren Haydar's post-season record of 50 points ... Rookie Vic Oreskovich is currently competing with Team Ontario at the Canada Winter Games in New Brunswick. Merchant fans can get immediate game results by calling the team's hotline at (905) 878-1681, and can e-mail the team or players at daviddermo@miltonmerchants.com.



It's Playoff Time!
Milton Merchants lead Buffalo Lightening 2 games to 0

NEXT GAME...
Friday, February 28 @ 7:30 p.m.

IF NEEDED...
Sunday, March 2 @ 3:00 p.m.

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