



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Local skating sisters look to add national gold to hardware haul

Viscontis' Brampton Gold Ice aims for top honours

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

It's all or nothing for Brampton Gold Ice.

The nearby junior synchronized skating team — which includes Milton sisters Alicia and Melissa Visconti — captured bronze at last year's national championships.

So now with another season's experience and victory at just about every turn over the past few months, anything less than gold this weekend in Montreal will be met with disappointment.

"We want to win," 16-year-old Alicia blurted out, almost before the question of national expectations was asked. "That's been our goal right from the beginning of the year."

While that's obviously a lot to live up to, reaching the top of the podium certainly seems attainable — given Gold Ice's recent track record.

Brampton has participated at a handful of events this season and prevailed at all but one — striking silver late last month at an international meet in Detroit.

All other showings have resulted in top honours, including a recent overseas triumph at the Czech Republic's Prague Cup and subsequent win at Sectionals in Brampton.

Remarkd 18-year-old Melissa, "We've gotten better with every competition. The quality of our skating has just gotten stronger and stronger."

A big reason for that ongoing improvement is that among Brampton's 20-member unit, 18 are returnees — which has meant a great deal in terms of the team's cohesion this year.

But the trump card this weekend may just be Brampton's success against Canada's other gold-medal favourites this season. Burlington Ice Image and Quebec's Les Supremes took first and second respectively at last year's nationals, but seem ripe to be overtaken by Gold Ice in Montreal.

The Viscontis helped Brampton upstage both squads on multiple occasions this season, and appear ready to do so again. "We've worked a lot on the total package, our expression and speed," explained Alicia. "Technically, I think we're stronger (than other national contenders)."



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE
Alicia (left) and Melissa Visconti display the gold medals they earned as part of Brampton Gold Ice at the recent Prague Cup. They hope to add to their championship haul this weekend at the junior nationals in Montreal.

Merchants set to punctuate another sweep

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

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The Merchants are poised to put another opponent in the proverbial rearview mirror.

Milton bypassed lowly Streetsville in the minimum four games during opening-round play, and now — although not enjoying nearly as much as dominance — is in position for an equally quick disposal of Buffalo.

With a three-games-to-none hammerlock on their cross-border rivals, the regular season champs will have two chances to wrap up the Western Conference semifinals in front of the hometown crowd this weekend.

Should Buffalo fend off the sweep this evening, the first-time playoff combatants will be back at Memorial Arena Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m. A victory tonight would allow Milton to match its longest winning streak ever — a 17-game run set earlier this season. The opportunity to tie that mark was made possible by Monday's 4-3 squeaker in Buffalo, where the championship-minded Merchants persevered through their stiffest post-season test to date and drew within a win of the division finals.

Milton's supporting cast greased the offensive wheels during this latest road trip. Getting himself on the scoresheet for the fifth consecutive game, baby-face penalty killer Dean Strong struck twice in the second period to pad a lead established on a huge shorthanded marker by fellow freshman Jon Ornelas.

Buffalo would draw within one before star sophomore Rich Meloche made good on the powerplay to restore a little breathing room late in the middle stanza. That deposit wound up being the game-winner, as the Lightning beat Cody Spicer once more before intermission but were blanked through the final frame.

That's been a major trend these days for the Merchants, who've yet to give up a third-period goal in the playoffs.

Meloche also assisted on Strong's second goal for a two-point night, while matching that output with a couple of assists was Brad Eftimiou. The top line partners lead Milton with 21 playoff points each.

Rick Janco, Phil Sbrocchi and Ryan Silveira chipped in single helpers Monday. Like Strong, Silveira has recorded points in his last five outings. Completed by Ornelas, Milton's SOS third line has figured in six of the 14 round-two goals so far.

Tonight's game starts at 7:30 p.m.



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