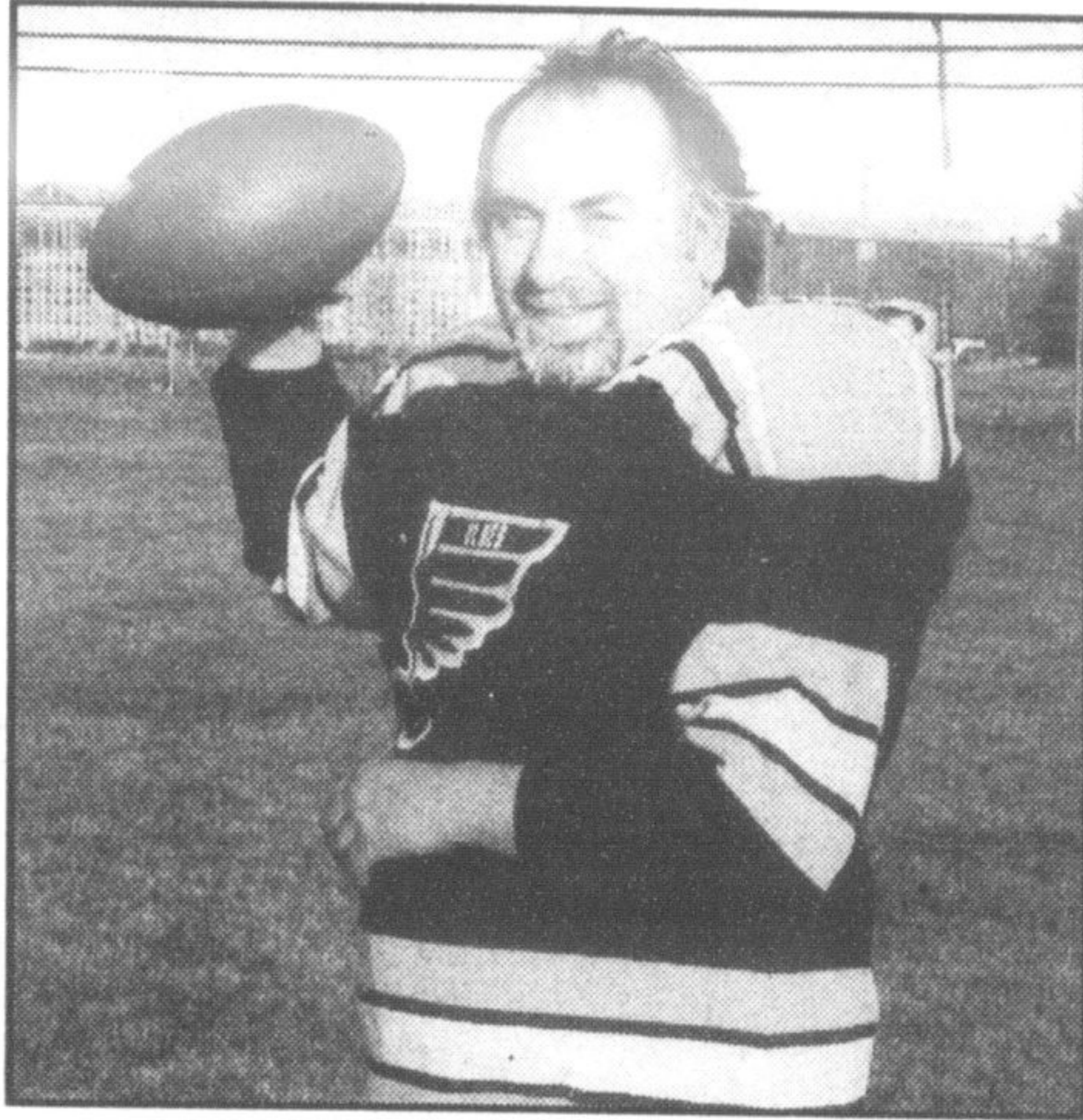


Ouch — that's definitely going to leave a mark

Champion freelance writer Murray Townsend has some fun before being put through a tough — and often painful — training camp workout with the Milton Marauders Tuesday night at Percy W. Merry School.



You ain't got no freakin' idea. If you ever played hockey, think of the hardest hit you ever got, then double it. Then double it again.

That's what it feels like to get hit in football.

You know those little birds you see in cartoons flying around somebody's head when they get their bell rung? I actually saw them, several times. They're blue, in case you want to know.

We were doing the Nutcracker Drill, which I believe is named after the Nutcracker Suite ballet. Nobody was wearing a tutu, however.

There's only six players — two defenders, a centre, the quarterback, the fullback and the halfback — in a small contained area.

The fullback or the halfback gets the ball. The centre takes one defender and it's the job of the running back not carrying the ball to block out the other defender. Except that you have to meet him head-on. It's kind of like running full speed into a brick wall, except that the brick wall is coming full speed at you.

The only thing I know about getting hit, from hockey, is that you have to get up right away and pretend it didn't hurt.

That's about all I did right. I'm pretty sure I fumbled the ball when I carried it. When you get knocked into the land of Oz, it's hard to remember that the most important thing is to hang onto the football.

I removed myself from the running back



Out in left field

with MURRAY TOWNSEND

rotation after a while. I may be dumb, but I'm not suicidal. Or, I may be suicidal, but I'm not dumb. I'll let you know which when the little blue birds stop flying around my head.

And I'll tell you something that no real football player would say: It's downright scary. I want to go home, and I want my Mommy.

And now for a word from our sponsor. It's day four of training camp, and the first day of full equipment.

Mine comes courtesy of T. Litzen Sports Ltd., wholesale specialists in team, league, corporate and school athletics, located in Dundas near Hwy. 5 and Hwy. 6 at Clappison's Corners.

Did I mention that T. Litzen Sports lent me the equipment for free? Did I mention its Website is at www.tlitzen.com?

Football helmets weigh a ton. I can barely lift the helmet, much less my head after I've got it on.

After a while, though, you barely even notice it — right about the time every other

part of your body hurts so much, moving that concern way down in the pecking order.

Meanwhile, the rest of the guys keep going at the Nutcracker Drill. Running back Adam MacPhail takes his turn, my turn, everybody's turn. I'm pretty sure he likes the hitting. I'm pretty sure a lot of these guys like it. I'm pretty sure they're all crazy.

I know for a fact that new head coach Barry Emo is enjoying himself. "Every hit is like a car collision," he tells me later. He's two years older than me, at 47, but he looks like he could step right in and not miss a beat. The former American college lineman was on several CFL rosters during his playing days.

Football coaches yell a lot. Coach Emo's voice booms constantly across the field, but it's not like, say, when your wife yells at you.

It's like an "I care" type of yelling or "get the best out of yourself" type of yelling, which to a player is comforting, not irritating.

The players are working hard, no doubt about that. I've never seen anything like it, in any sport, on any team. There's no sport more physically and mentally demanding than football.

I have more respect for a football team that lost every game last year than I ever thought possible.

But this team isn't going to lose every game. Coach Emo isn't going to allow it.

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