



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

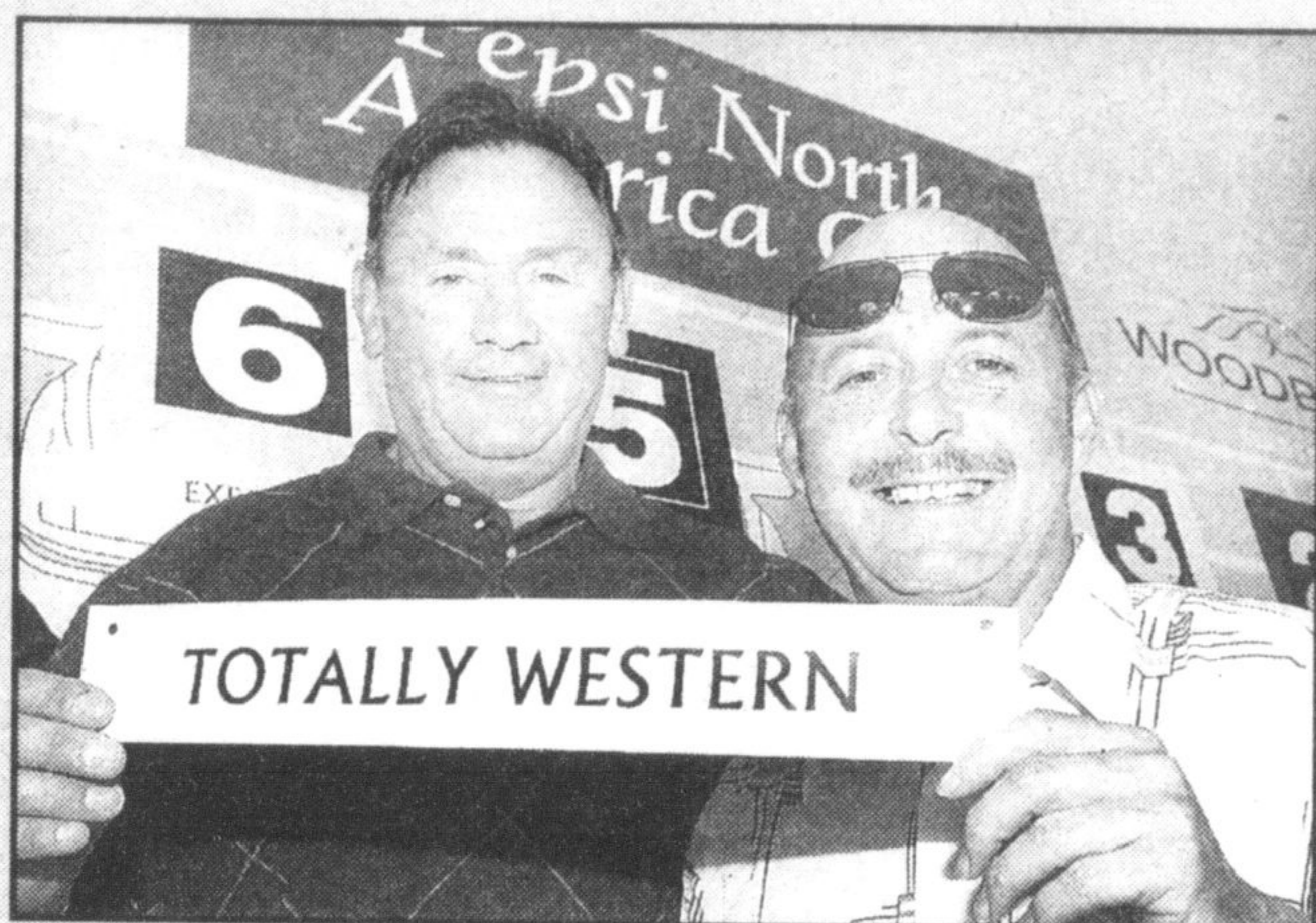
FRIDAY, JUNE 20, 2003



Cup hopefuls ready to ride

Above, Miltonian Chris Christoforou (right) — joined at Tuesday's post-position draw by guest drawmaster and NHL coaching legend Scotty Bowman — will drive favourite Allamerican Native in tomorrow night's Pepsi North America Cup at Woodbine Racetrack. At right, Milton-area trainer Ben Wallace (left) and local driver Mario Baillargeon will be banking on a strong showing from their entry, Totally Western.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE



IceHawks prospect ready for showcase

Lizon aims to crack hometown Jr. A club

By JON KUIPERIJ

The Champion

Many Canadian kids grow up dreaming of playing for their local NHL team.

For now, Miltonian Erick Lizon will gladly settle for cracking the lineup of his hometown Tier 2 Jr. A squad.

The 17-year-old defenceman will take the next step towards that goal this weekend when he participates in the annual OHA Referees School Tournament at the University of Guelph.

The competition will feature eight teams and is for Jr. A hopefuls only. The 20 players on Milton's lineup were selected at the IceHawks' (formerly the Merchants) spring prospects camp last month.

The summer showcase — combined with the club's weekly summer skates — will prepare players for tryouts in August. Steve Ellison and Mike Novak are other local players who'll participate.

Staying grounded

Lizon, who played for Milton's AA midgets last season, is both optimistic and realistic about his chances of cracking the IceHawks' lineup this fall.

"(A lot of the other players) are better skaters than me, but I play physical and work hard," said the 6'3", 182 lbs. blueliner, a surprise standout at Milton's prospects camp.

"If I do weight training and plyometrics this summer to improve my acceleration, I can get a good crack at it."

IceHawks director David Dermo has been impressed by what he's seen of Lizon so far. "Erick's a big physical presence who uses his size to his advantage," said Dermo. "He plays a clean, physical game and he finishes the game the way he starts it."

With the IceHawks losing about two-thirds of the 2002/03 team to the NCAA or

the over-age limit, Dermo believes competition at this year's camp is wide open.

"Are there opportunities to make the team this year? Yes, absolutely," he stressed. "We're looking for everything — goalies, defencemen and forwards. We graduated several players to the NCAA, we had a couple over-agers last year, and we're trying to accommodate some other players who want to play closer to home."

Dermo says the IceHawks would relish having a local player on their roster.

"There is some misconception we don't want local kids," he says. "We give Milton kids every benefit of the doubt. We're always a league leader so some kids seem to have the mindset it would be easier to make lesser teams."

Willing to play anywhere

Although Lizon has played defence most of his hockey life, he's agreeable to changing positions to improve his chances of making the club.

"It wouldn't bother me playing forward, I'll just keep banging around," he says. "Wherever they want me, I'll go."

Such versatility has proven beneficial for players such as Wade Belak of the Toronto Maple Leafs, but it is another member of the Buds that Lizon looks to emulate.

"Gary Roberts inspires me, his heart and the way he loves the game just like I do," Lizon says. "He does a lot that isn't noticeable to the casual hockey fan. When I watch a couple clips of Roberts it gets me going."

Even if he doesn't play for the IceHawks this coming season, Lizon says the experience of trying out will pay dividends in the future.

"I'm still only 17, and I still have a few years left to try and make it," says the Milton District High School 12th grader.

"I'll see it as a positive whether I'm cut or not. I still had fun, and I got to play hockey during the summer. All I can do is go hard every time I'm on the ice."

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