

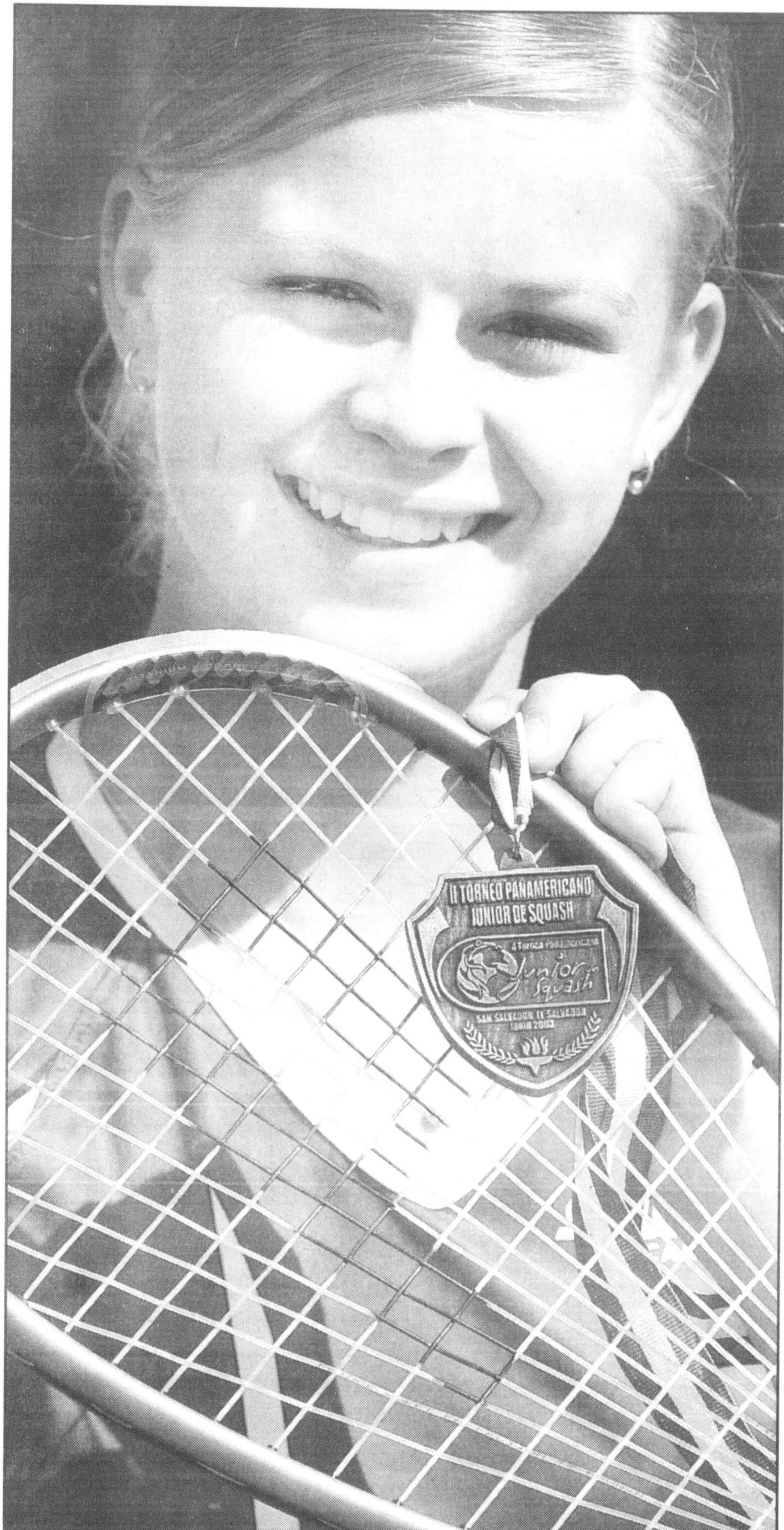


SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY AUGUST 5, 2003

Local squash star claims Pan Am gold



Alisha Turner proudly displays the Pan Am gold medal she recently earned in El Salvador.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Turner helps Team Canada girls prevail

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

There's an age-old saying that if you can't take the heat, you should get out of the kitchen.

Recently Alisha Turner did just the opposite — not only competing amid oven-like conditions, but thriving in them as well. And waiting at the end of a week-long sweat-fest in sun-scorched El Salvador was Pan American gold.

Milton's 16-year-old squash ace admits playing without the luxury of air conditioning in 35-degree temperatures took more than a minor adjustment on her part.

"I'd be sitting there waiting for my match and I'd be sweating," recalled the local teen, who recently earned junior female athlete of the year honours at E.C. Drury High School. "It was a totally different environment than what I'm used to."

But Turner more than adapted to her sweltering surroundings — as well as the style of play created by that intense heat.

"The ball gets a lot bouncier (with high temperatures) and makes for longer rallies, so you've really got to stay focused," she explained.

Evidently that wasn't a problem.

Displaying the same skill and patience that's won her many a high-profile medal — including silver at this spring's Canada Winter Games — Turner went unbeaten in four straight matches at last month's international showcase.

In doing so, she helped Team Canada's Under-17 girls squad reign supreme.

The local squash star eased into Pan Am competition with an embarrassingly easy 27-0 white-wash of an Argentina adversary — whose team was blanked 3-0 in round one.

From there, she prevailed in a must-win situation over Mexico's Imelda Salazar.

With Canada and top-seeded Mexico splitting the first two matches, the Turner-Salazar showdown would decide the second round — and no doubt provide much-needed momentum for the

remainder of the competition.

Inspired by that notion rather than intimidated by it, Turner persevered through a lengthy and draining encounter to prevail 3-1 (9-7, 7-9, 9-5, 9-2).

She battled back to win the first set, and then hung tough for the overall victory.

"There was so much pressure with everyone watching, but I think I really learned to adjust in that second round. I was patient and mixed up my shots well."

Beating Mexico in pool play would serve as a catalyst for their return engagement for the gold — which followed another cakewalk over Argentina in the semifinals.

With Canada downing Mexico in the first two matches, top honours were already secured before Turner even stepped onto the court to once again face Salazar.

Nevertheless, Milton's Pan American rookie capped the sweep with a 2-0 (9-3, 9-7) triumph.

Mexico would exact a measure of revenge later in the day by beating Canada in the boys finals.

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Jr. Mystics edged out of title

Oh so close.

Milton's junior girls fastball team fell just short of defending its own tournament title late last month at Lions Sports Park.

The Mystics matched the 5-1 record they secured last summer. But a new double round-robin format put them in a three-way tie for first following the second wave of games July 27.

With a runs against tie-breaker used to determine the overall victory, the hosts conceded their championship to South London and had to settle for the bronze, finishing behind silver-medalist Clarkson — who handed them their only loss of the weekend.

That 7-4 defeat was the result of a horrible start. Down 7-0 by the end of the third inning, the Mystics threw a legitimate scare into Clarkson down the stretch but could only muster two runs on a bases-loaded-with-no-outs situation in the sixth.

Eryl Morgan shut down opposing batters through the last four frames while her teammates offered a balanced attack at the plate to keep comeback hopes alive.

Milton prevailed at every other turn over the two days, including in their final showdown against the eventual champs. Morgan delivered her second com-

plete-game gem of the weekend — scattering eight hits over seven innings — to topple South London 3-1. A huge double run-down in the fifth inning nixed the visitors' most promising rally of the game. Sherylene Leslie drove in two runs, while the Mystics' other RBI was recorded by Christine Brown.

Milton victimized Kitchener twice over the weekend — winning 9-2 in the tournament opener and 11-6 during day two's round robin.

Morgan was a duel threat in the first game, going the distance on the mound and 3-for-4 at the plate. Other three-hit efforts were provided by Sarah Mooney and Alicia Taylor, while Leslie went a perfect 4-for-4 to power the latter victory over Kitchener.

Also falling at the Mystics' hands were Townsend and Alexander Park — who were upstaged 9-5 and 6-4 respectively. Milton needed extra innings to get past Alexander Park, with heroics provided by Brown, whose sacrifice bunt cashed in Laura Anne Sheehan.

Along with Morgan, Lindsey Harrold and Katie MacKroby offered solid pitching throughout the tournament. The Mystics close out their season August 15 to 17 at the provincial championships in Kars (just outside Ottawa).

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