



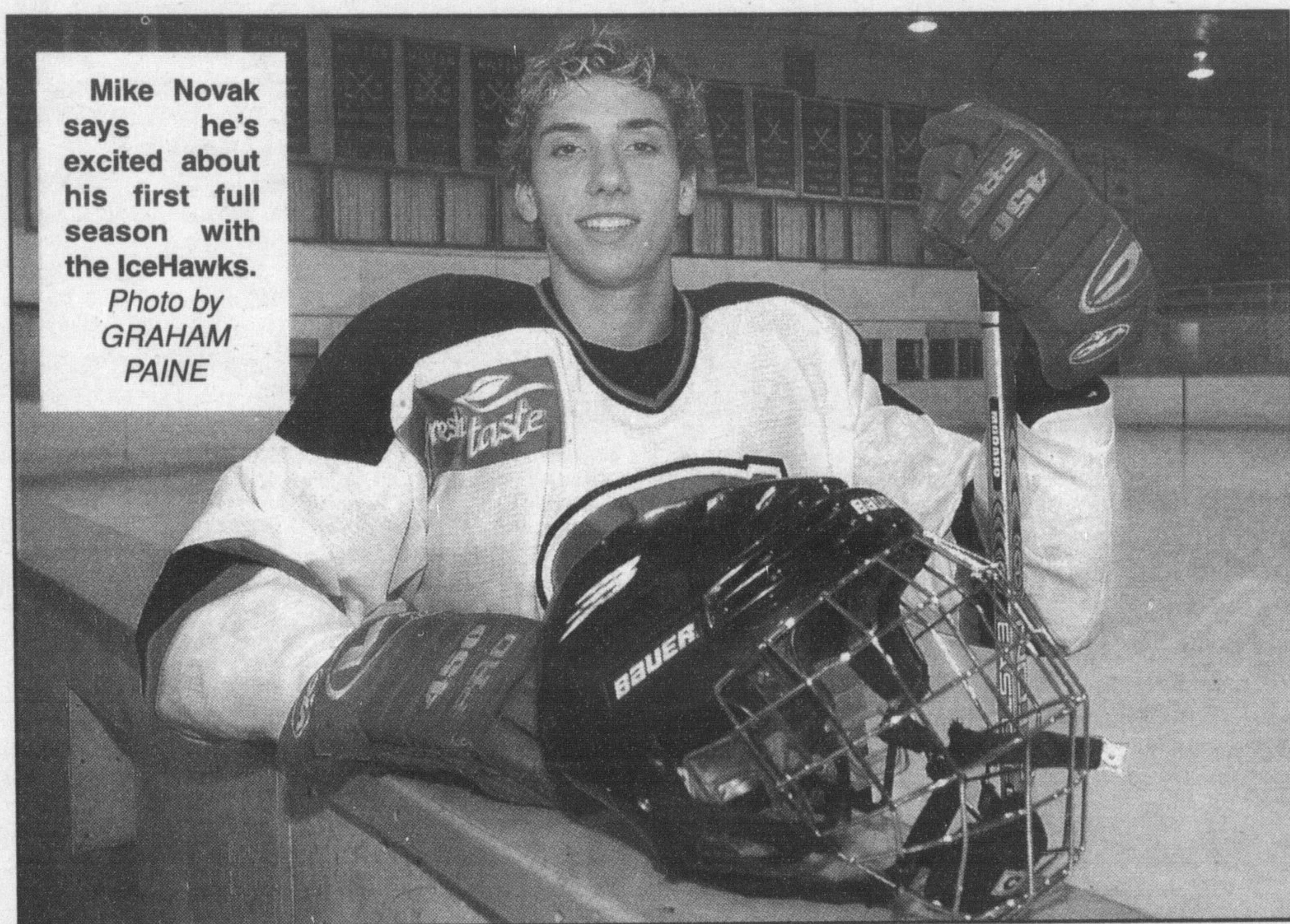
SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2003

Mike Novak says he's excited about his first full season with the IceHawks.

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Novak ready for challenge

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

Having enjoyed a small taste of Jr. A hockey as an occasional call-up with last year's IceHawks, Miltonian Mike Novak knows full well that size matters.

And starting tonight, he'll look to use every bit of his own for what he hopes will be a successful first full season with his hometown team.

"I think my size will be a big asset, especially since we're kind of a smaller team," said the 18-year-old, who at 6'3" and 190 lbs. is the club's biggest homegrown defenceman in recent memory.

Added defensive coach Tom McCarthy, "Naturally with his size, we'll look to Mike for some grit and to do some police work around the net."

Being the only local player on the 2003/04 IceHawks, Novak says he feels an added motivation to give a little something extra every night — since for the first time in several years he'll be competing in front of people he's grown up with.

Remarked the longtime Toronto Young Nats blueliner, "There's definitely an extra incentive to play hard every game and not to disappoint the

fans."

Novak has an awfully stiff challenge ahead if he hopes to measure up — impact wise — with such hometown defencemen as Mark McPhail and John Nadalin. But at least one member of his new team believes that's a possibility.

"Because of his age he's got some NCAA interest, but if he were to stick around (for two or three years) he'd definitely have the potential to fit in with those guys," suggested assistant GM Kevin Lachance. "Mike's a very effective defenceman who can take guys out along the wall. With his reach he does a good job wrapping guys up and has shown a willingness to stick up for teammates."

That last attribute will be particularly important over the next several weeks while blueline tough-guy Mike Jantzi recuperates from a broken ankle.

"Basically I'm an anything-for-the-team type of player who's very responsible in his own end," stressed Novak, who turned down a chance to join the OHL Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds in order to play for his hometown club and pursue a university scholarship.

While size is without question the Milton-bred

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IceHawks begin new year tonight

Open with big tilt against Raiders

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

Call it a painful trend, or a trendy pain in the butt.

Try as they might, the IceHawks just can't seem to escape September without one of their defencemen suffering serious injury. Six blueliners in as many years have made a trip to sickbay within the first month of the season.

Mike Jantzi now joins an unfortunate fraternity whose ranks include John Nadalin, Ken Robins, Chris Rook, Chris Krieg and B.J. Gallant. The former Buffalo Lightning tough-guy has the distinction of not even making it past exhibition play — as he went down with a broken ankle at last weekend's Vaughan Tournament.

Out for up to three months, his void could be the biggest felt to date — since the local juniors brought him aboard to bolster their physical presence, which last year was a definite weakness.

"He's certainly somebody who would have addressed that need," admitted head coach/GM George Dupont. "However, there's two ways a team can intimidate — either through toughness or speed and competitiveness. I think we probably fit the second part of that."

Jantzi's absence aside, the newly-appointed skipper — who'll be aided by returnee Jeff Battah, Rob Wilson and former NHLer Tom McCarthy this season — is visibly encouraged by his now nearly-finalized lineup.

In particular, he stressed, the IceHawks should have the most effective goaltending tandem in the conference with seasoned pick-ups Kain Tisi and Jamie Flury.

"I'm not sure we necessarily have the best goaltender in the division, but we've got the best goaltending situation," Dupont

said of his netminders, both of whom have played more than 70 games apiece at the Jr. A level. "I think these guys are really going to push each other. We don't have an established number one goalie... we've got two."

While they'll be hard-pressed to match last year's offensive numbers, the 2003/04 IceHawks may well surpass their predecessors in another crucial area.

Explained Battah, "I'd say we could be even stronger on the penalty kill, especially with guys like (Jon) Ornelas and (Dean) Strong back and Wes Clark having stepped up his defensive efforts as of late."

Led by captain Lee Swallow, Milton will look to veterans like Clark and recently-acquired Georgetown Raider Ryan Angelow to shoulder much of the offensive load.

That is, at least until potential future stars

• see COACH on page B2

ICEHAWKS
TONIGHT'S
TICKET

IceHawks vs. Georgetown

Game time: 7:30 p.m. at Memorial

Last meeting: First game of season

Who to watch: Each playing against their former club for the first time since a huge pre-season trade, IceHawk Ryan Angelow and Raider Phil Sbrocchi will no doubt be eager to make an immediate impact and begin building on big 2002/03 campaigns.

The skinny: Georgetown is as heavily stacked — or more — than last year, but the IceHawks have a knack for winning season openers, having done so the last six years. Expect a classic grudge match to start the new year.

Champion's pick: Milton by a goal.

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