



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Haydar begins pre-season tilts with Nashville tonight

Predators' hopeful kicks things off against Chicago

By JON KUIPERIJ
The Champion

NHl pre-season games usually draw lukewarm interest from the average hockey fan.

However, a series of exhibition contests that begin this weekend is critically important for Nashville Predators hopeful Darren Haydar.

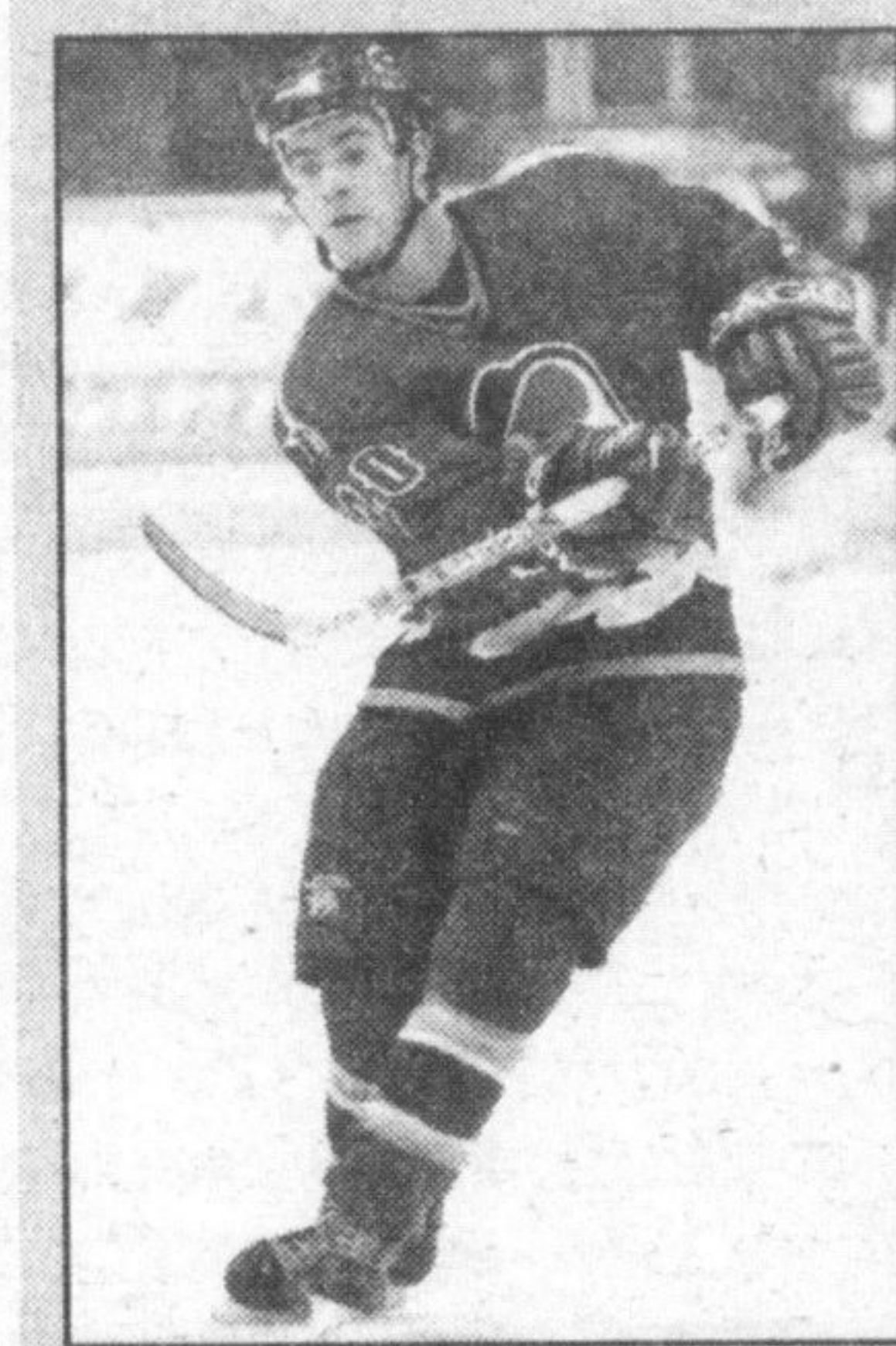
As of Wednesday, Milton's most prolific sniper had survived several roster cuts as the Predators trimmed their training camp ranks from 51 to 44 players.

The 23-year-old winger said he has felt good during camp scrimmages, but knows his opportunity to really shine will come in pre-season play. Nashville takes on the Chicago Blackhawks tonight and tomorrow before traveling to Columbus Sunday for a date with the Blue Jackets.

"It all depends on how I do in the exhibition games this weekend, if I get the opportunity to play," said Haydar, who's battling with about seven other players for three available forward positions. "The three players playing the best this weekend may get to move on."

Nashville has told its prospects it plans to fill the fourth line with players on two-way contracts, thus allowing the club to send down underachieving talent and promote its minor leaguers more easily.

As he vies for a spot on the big club along with more well-known prospects like Scottie Upshall and Jordan Tootoo — two main cogs on the Canadian world junior team last winter — Haydar believes his chances have never been better.



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DARREN HAYDAR

"It's good for me because it gives the opportunity for someone playing in Milwaukee (Nashville's AHL affiliate) to jump up and play in Nashville," he said. "It's positive for someone in my situation."

Haydar had a couple sniffs of NHL action last season, appearing in games against Chicago and the Tampa Bay Lightning. Admitting he was almost just "happy to be there", Haydar stressed that he'll be much hungrier this season to produce the way he has at every other level.

If unable to crack the Predators' starting lineup this fall, Haydar will return to Milwaukee and work at earning another shot at the NHL.

"All my career I've had my critics and people telling me I couldn't do it," said Haydar. "That's not necessarily going to end right now. I'm going to hit some walls and bumps but I've just got to find a way to get by them and over them. If I go down to Milwaukee with a positive attitude, that will tell management here I'm not just one of those guys who thinks about himself."

High flyin'

BMX 'AA' pro racer Bob Rowley clears a jump at Milton's Track 2000 in preparation for 'Dash for Cash' competition at last weekend's Ontario BMX championships. Fellow Miltonians Chris DaSilva and Kyle Molner won the 14-year-old novice and 10/11 year-old rookie divisions respectively.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

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