

Milton boxer ready for jump to the pros

Welterweight's debut likely to be in spring

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Matt Hart Jr. is set to leave the nest. That's how the local pugilist describes his imminent jump to the professional ranks. Having pretty much exhausted all amateur competition over the past two years — and beaten most of his top opponents — the outspoken welterweight feels the time has come to go pro.

"I'm ready for the challenge," stressed Hart Jr., who ends his amateur career with seven knockouts and an overall record of 17-4. "All I've got left is to get a CAT scan. I should have my licence sometime in March."

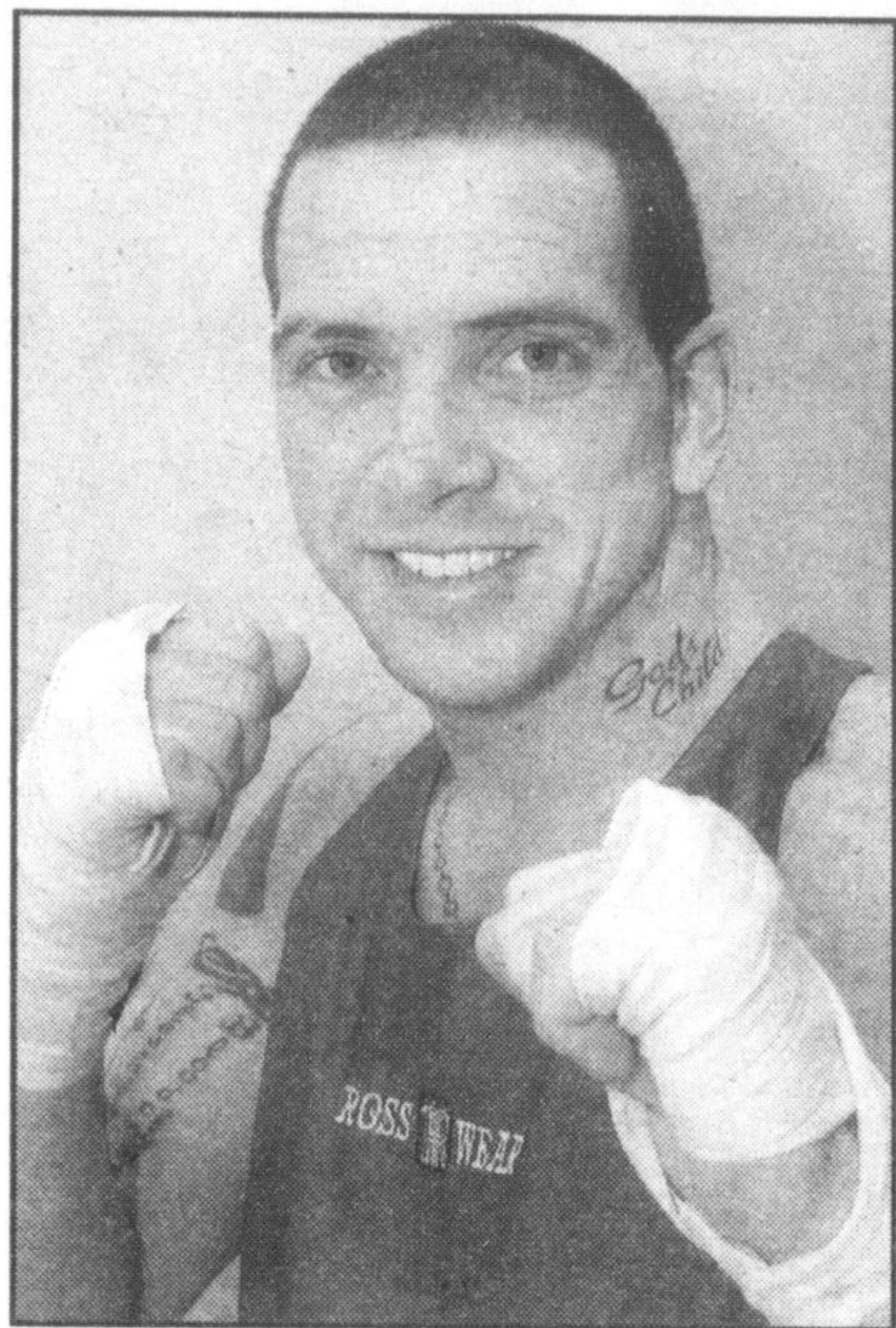
The 26-year-old boxer — who's recently signed on with Brampton manager Joe Melich — believes he has nothing left to prove at the amateur level, and coach Billie Martin agrees.

"After an absolutely awesome performance at the provincials last fall, we felt he was ready (to turn pro)," said the Brampton trainer, who'll continue working with his Milton protégé following the move. "There's not much more he can achieve in amateur, and with Matt there's the age factor."

Without a points system at the pro level, Hart Jr. will now have to focus on punch quality rather than quantity.

Noted Martin, "In amateur it's more about volume. Now we've got to get Matt to relax on his punches — throw maybe five good ones instead of 10 quick ones. That's what the judges like to see."

With rounds lasting three minutes at the pros, compared to two in amateur, conditioning will be a key factor as well. But then with a strict training regiment and plenty of sparring work with seasoned vet-



Matt Hart Jr.

erans like Brian Mackie and Buzz Grant, Hart Jr. feels his stamina is more than up to par.

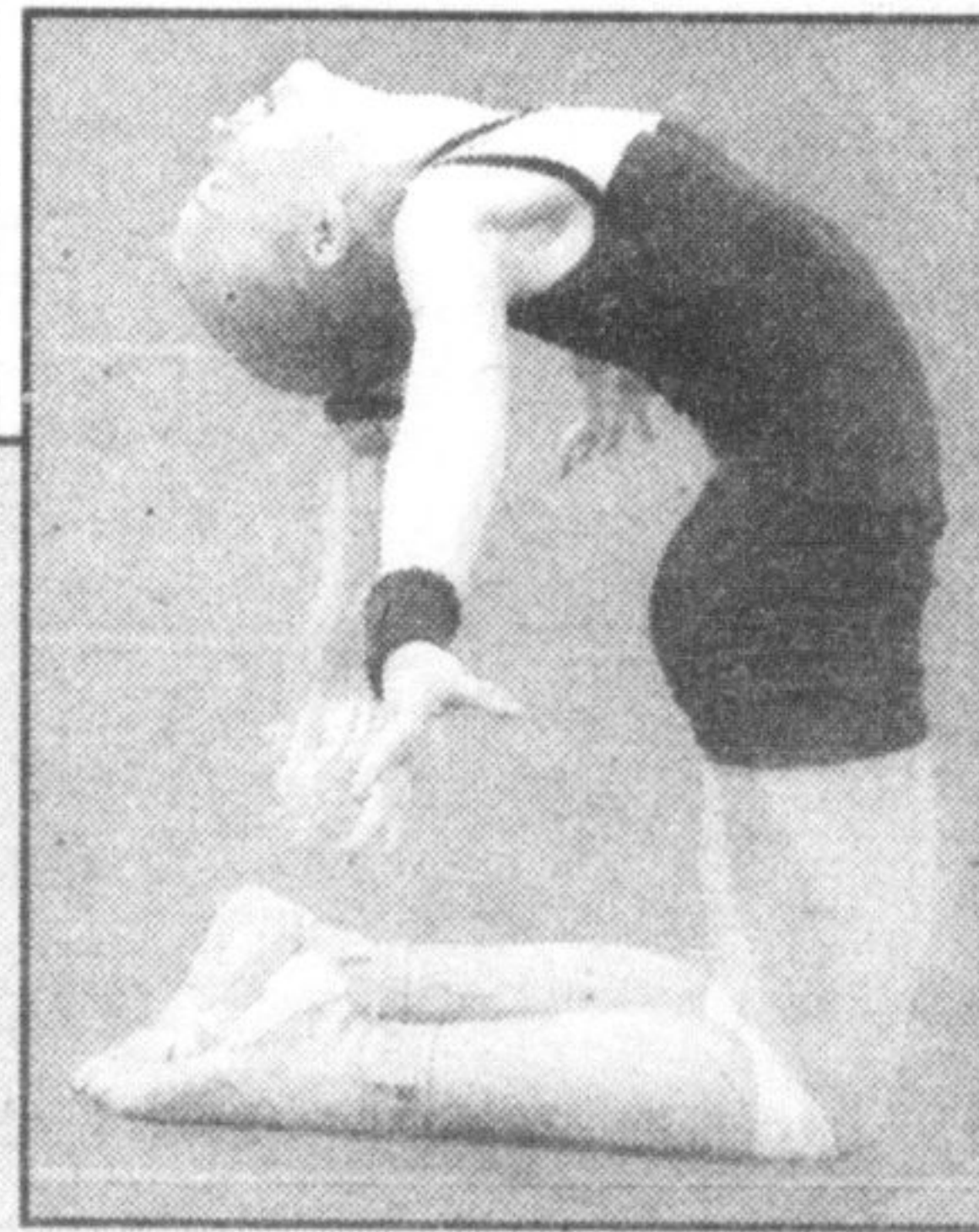
"Those guys don't take it easy on me in there," he quipped. "I've got to thank them for getting me ready. Now it's time to showcase myself all over again. At the pros it's kill or be killed."

Added Martin, "I've been training Matt like a pro for a while now and feel confident he can make the adjustments necessary to be successful."

While Mississauga's Hershey Centre is slated to host a card in mid-April, Martin said he expects his Milton fighter's pro debut to come somewhere in New York or Michigan this spring.

But a 2004 Canadian appearance isn't out of the question.

Said Hart Jr., "I'd love to compete in Canada soon, especially around Brampton because that's like my home."



Milton Springers Gymnastics Club member April Chappell (above and at left) shows off the skills that earned her high marks on both bars and floor routine during a recent provincial qualifying meet in Brantford. She and her four competitive teammates have all qualified for the Ontario championships.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

Springers shine in Brantford

Delivering an impressive kick-off to I Love Gymnastics Week, the Milton Springers showed strongly during their second provincial qualifying meet recently in Brantford.

As a result, all five members of the competitive team have now earned a berth to the Ontario championships in April.

Starting the team off on the right foot was nine-year-old Josan Pineau-Levman. The Argo 1 competitor placed fourth overall, due in large part to a silver-medal performance on the vault.

She finished fourth on bars, while her floor routine was good enough for sixth.

A Springer trio of 10-year-olds were also up to the challenge. Maddy Bannock scored 37 of 40 possible points to place fifth overall — securing silver on vault and bronze on floor along the way. She also took sixth on beam and seventh on bars.

Teammates April Chappell and Brittany Schrader were close behind in the all-around standings — coming seventh and eighth respectively.

Chappell's best efforts were reserved for the bars, on which she struck silver. She was fifth on floor, sixth on beam and eighth on the vault.

Springers Notes



Schrader's campaign also included a silver-medal showing — on the beam — plus a fourth on floor and seventh on both bars and the vault.

Not to be outdone by her younger Springers, Open 2 level gymnast Litsa Sotiriou claimed the club's only gold of the weekend — with a stellar 9.7 out of 10 performance on bars.

A fourth on beam, sixth on floor and eighth on the vault afforded her an overall placing of seventh.

Having already qualified for provincials, the local gymnasts aren't required to compete at next month's final qualifier in Muskoka. While they weigh their options, the recreational Springers are slated to hold their own in-house meet from February 21 to 27.

Locals help power Hurricanes

Halton's AAA minor peewees went undefeated this year — thanks in large part to a Milton-based foursome.

Jack Davis, Brandon Denham, Scott Dermott and Michael Sgarbossa all averaged at least a point a game during the Hurricanes' incredible 29-0-2 campaign.

The Milton connection showed strongly through the final weekend

of the regular season, which began with Dermott and Sgarbossa denting the twine in a 8-2 rout of Niagara Falls. Dermott's marker was the 200th for the team in league play.

From there Denham scored in a 2-0 whitewash of Oakville, while he and Davis contributed singles to a 3-1 season-ending decision over Welland.

In addition to dominating league

play, the Hurricanes won four of six tournaments — reaching the semifinals and quarterfinals in the other two.

A 1.2 goals-against average through regular-season play also speaks volumes about the team's OMHA championship potential. The minor peewees are currently enjoying a brief hiatus and will begin the playoffs at the end of the month.

For more local sports, please see page 29.



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