

Sports

sleblanc@haltonsearch.com

The Price is right for IceHawks

Rookie enjoying strong start with hometown club

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Finally, a homegrown success story.

For the most part, Milton's Jr. A faithful have been deprived of this since defensive stalwart John Nadalin wrapped up a championship-rich tenure in 2001.

Enter rookie Matt Price — who barring any unforeseen circumstances will be the first native Miltonian in three years to play an entire season for the local juniors. However, that's likely to be the least of his accomplishments during a 2004/05 campaign that's already got fans and opponents alike sitting up and taking notice.

"He's exceeded my expectations of him and right now is a clear cut favourite for Rookie-of-the-Year in the West," said IceHawks assistant general manager Kevin Lachance, who's been high on Price since his bantam days.

Added team scoring leader Shandor Alphonso, "Matt's been doing great — really making an impact early. I don't think you could ask for much more out of him."

That last remark refers largely to a point-a-game pace that continued with a goal and an assist in Monday's 6-1 victory over Buffalo.

Currently second in team scoring with six goals and 13 helpers in 18 games — and sitting at an equally-impressive +11 — Price has been about as consistent as any Western Conference 16-year-old in recent memory, with his longest offensive drought lasting a mere two games.

"Scoring those two goals in the home opener was a big boost," said the NCAA Division 1-bound centre, who's exceptionally quick and reads the play as well as any hometown forward since Jr. A star turned NHL hopeful Darren Haydar. "It always helps to get it done right off the bat."

And having other highly-gifted freshman

forwards as teammates this season hasn't hurt either.

He noted, "I think there's some healthy competition among us. We push each other."

What's particularly encouraging about Price is that a good chunk of his production has come against the West's 'Big Three'. He counted two assists — including a nifty set-up on Jason Dopaco's overtime winner — in a huge 4-3 decision over Georgetown September 24, and notched a potential third-period winner in a heartbreaking 6-4 loss to Oakville October 17.

"Matt's relentless and has really shown up in the big games. Some of the veterans can learn from him," remarked head coach/general manager George Dupont.

Although Price has been impressing his new coaching staff since day one, a weekend of back-to-back overtime victories late last month spoke

volumes about their faith in him.

The former Oakville Rangers AAA star saw two shifts in both sudden death decisions and has been out for plenty of key situations ever since. "That was kind of an eye opener. You don't always get a lot of feedback from coaches, but that kind of showed the confidence they've got in me. It felt pretty good."

Noted Lachance, "With Matt's speed he's really suited to the four-on-four play of overtime, and with his early-season production it's really not that surprising George would trust him out there in those crucial situations."

Already being courted by several top Division 1 schools for 2006/07 play, the 11th grader is visiting Boston College today and will check out the University of Michigan next weekend. He expects to have a decision made on his post-secondary schooling within the next month or so.



Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

Seen here in action against Oakville and (inset right) in a more relaxed state, native Miltonian Matt Price has been quite impressive in his jump to Jr. A hockey.

'Hawks turn back Buffalo

Extending their unbeaten streak to four games across the border Monday night, the IceHawks amassed four second-period goals to sink Buffalo 6-1.

Half-a-dozen different Milton players lit the lamp, with recently-acquired Andrew Dias recording his third multi-point game inside a week with a goal and two helpers.

Back-up tender Parker Van Buskirk was between the pipes and has now given up just one goal in 84:50 minutes over two games.

Milton struck twice with the man-advantage and didn't really encounter the rough play that's traditionally come with trips to Buffalo. Monday marked the first time in 11 games that team scoring leader Shandor Alphonso failed to get at least a point.

Now 12-5-1 and in fourth place in the Western Conference — just a point behind third-place Hamilton — the IceHawks are off tonight but host a special exhibition tilt with St. Michael's tomorrow evening at Memorial Arena. Game time is 7:30 p.m.

Getting the flu shot has never been more important. Or easier.

We've all seen what can happen when serious infectious diseases invade our society. Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is an infectious disease that comes with new strains every year, some more deadly than others. But unlike some other infectious diseases, the flu is largely preventable. Just get your free flu shot. It's never been easier. Or more important. See your doctor, local pharmacist, employer or call for a clinic near you.

1-866-FLU-'N-YOU TTY 1-800-387-5559 www.health.gov.on.ca

Let's Beat the Flu!

Protecting your health.

