

Sports

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Minor atom Winterhawks advance

Above, Winterhawk 'AA' minor atom Jack Goncz collides with a Caledon player while (at left) Milton captain Tyler Ganly and goaltender Mack Mindenhall celebrate the team's 2-0 shutout win in the fifth and deciding game of first-round OMHA play at Milton Sports Centre Saturday afternoon. Joshua Bensusan sank both goals in the clincher, while Drew McMillen, Colin Maltby and Adam Poirier scored two days earlier in Caledon for a 3-0 win that forced the do-or-die tilt back at home. The minor atoms will now battle Flamborough. For more rep playoff action, see page 24.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

IceHawks reclaim into fourth

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

So the IceHawks could have home-ice advantage after all.

Hopes of snagging that extra game at Memorial Arena for first-round play against Burlington looked rather bleak just a week ago.

But three straight wins — highlighted by a 4-1 decision at Hamilton's Mountain Arena — have propelled Milton into fourth, and put the pressure squarely on the

Cougars.

Should the IceHawks upset Georgetown Friday night in regular-season ending play, Burlington will have to win its three remaining games in order to reclaim fourth — or take two of three should Milton come up short.

The IceHawks would win a tiebreaker by virtue of their 3-2 series win over Burlington.

Regardless of who gets home-ice advantage, the series promises to be the most competitive in opening-round Western Conference playoff action, with three of the five games between Milton and Burlington this season decided by a single goal, and two of them going to overtime.

Milton pushed its current win streak to six games by outdistancing lowly Streetsville 8-5 Friday at Memorial.

A few shaky moments by goalie Tom Fenton aside, the hosts gave a fairly credible performance — holding the Derbys to a mere 14 shots, just one more than during a 7-0 whitewash over them 10 days earlier.

Milton broke things open with four second-period goals and had a handful of players with multi-point efforts, including two goals and an assist each from enforcer Chris Bain and Brett Robinson — who's lit

the lamp 11 times in his last six outings.

One night earlier at Brampton Memorial Arena, the IceHawks hung tough through an evening-long seesaw clash to eclipse the gritty Capitals 4-3.

Jason Dopaco provided the heroics with 3:52 left to play, depositing an absolute rocket into the top right corner. In a much sharper showing than he'd end the week

with, Fenton turned back three dozen shots to outduel Capitals starter David Wilson — highlighting his efforts with an incredible

upside down pad save in the dying moments of play.

The winning week pushed Milton to 29-17-1-1.

With just one game remaining, the IceHawks sit tied with their 1997/98 predecessors for the fewest goals allowed (127) in a single season. That's largely the result of five shutouts and a string of lopsided victories against the West's basement dwellers.

Last week's wins came with a shortened lineup, as Adam Pileggi and Matt Price continue to nurse minor injuries and Jesse Jenish was called up to the IceDogs.

Best-of-seven first round play against Burlington will likely start a week from Friday.

Novak named West's top coach

The Brampton Capitals may not have the best team, but they do have the best coach.

At least that's the case this season, as Milton's Randy Novak was recently named the 2004/05 Western Conference Coach of the Year — and for good reason.

Taking over the then basement-dwelling Capitals just over a year ago, Novak helped them win four of their last seven games and has moved them up four places in the standings this season with a 22-18-4-1 record. Brampton beat powerhouse Oakville twice this season and up until this past weekend was chal-

lenging for fifth spot.

"The guys have really bought into the system, and I'd say we've actually over-achieved a little this year," said Novak.

For his part, the second-year Capitals bench boss feels he's done a good job assessing the needs of both his offense and defense. And it's hard to argue against Brampton being one of the harder working teams in the conference.

"We're not the most talented club, but we come to play," added Novak. "We're headed in the right direction, and with about a dozen young guys back next season there's certainly more room for improvement."



Randy Novak

