

# Sports

sleblanc@haltonsearch.com

## Gooding's Golden Hawks soar to national title



*Sophomore centre's face-off and defensive prowess plays key role in Laurier's championship-rich season*

By **STEVE LeBLANC**  
*The Champion*

It's tough to figure what's more noteworthy — winning a national championship or beating a perennial powerhouse with a 110-game undefeated streak.

For Milton's Nicole Gooding, there was no real need to decide, since her Wilfrid Laurier Golden Hawks did both in Montreal Sunday evening, with a 4-1 decision over the seemingly unstoppable Alberta Pandas to clinch the CIS title.

"It's pretty hard to put into words just how great this feels," said the sophomore centre, who helped Laurier earn its seventh national banner and first in women's hockey.

Sunday's win was pay-back for a 5-2 loss to the Pandas in the 2002 national final. Alberta was gunning for a fourth straight championship, and no doubt had built up a psychological edge over many teams with an unbeaten streak that had recently stretched into triple-digit domain.

But Gooding said she and her fellow Golden Hawks refused to let all of hype get to them.

"We had a chance to go see their last game before the finals, but I choose not to go," said the local teen, who's overcome quite a lot in her 19 years, including a serious car accident when she was 10 and the loss of her father to stomach cancer in 1998. "I figured it could be intimidating (watching Alberta play), so I decided to stay away and just concentrate on what an

**"When we needed to play that almost perfect defensive game, she'd (Gooding) answer the call."**

**LAURIER COACH RICK OSBOURNE**

incredible team we had."

The strategy obviously worked, as Laurier built up a 3-0 second period lead and was pretty much in control the rest of the way.

"I was pleased and impressed with our performance," said head coach Rick Osborne, whom local fans will recall as an assistant with the Merchants' 1997/98 All-Ontario championship squad. "Like all season, our approach was to win, not 'not to lose'."

Contributing to the championship win at both ends of the ice, Gooding helped shut down a thoroughly-potent Alberta attack and set up goal number three by Jessica Judges late in the second.

"I won the face-off cleanly and Jessica had it in the net before I even realized what happened," she recalled. "It was a hard low shot that didn't give their goalie any time to react."

However, Gooding's defensive prowess is what's boosted her stock considerably since joining the team as a walk-on hopeful last season.

"Nicole really worked hard last summer and came into camp as one of the best conditioned players. When we needed to play that almost perfect defensive game, she'd answer the call," said Osborne.

Added Gooding, "Last summer was the first since I was five that I didn't play baseball. I decided to focus just on hockey, and I think it paid off."

She admits that preventing goals rather than helping score them wasn't always her forte — although you won't catch her complaining about the switch.

"It's a role I've gotten comfortable with and am quite proud of."

It's one she's become awfully effective at as well, having helped Laurier to an incredible 0.82 goals-against average through regular season play — which ended with a 17-2-2-1 record.

From there, the Golden Hawks delivered back-to-back championship Sundays, first defending their OUA title with a 3-0 whitewash of the Toronto Varsity Blues and then securing the crowning jewel against Alberta.

Laurier kicked off the nationals with a 6-0 blanking of the University of Manitoba — its 17th shutout of the season — and reached the finals with a 3-2 squeaker over Concordia.

"We had so much depth this year and just a great bunch of girls," said Gooding.

**Nicole Gooding shows off the matching provincial and national gold medals she won with the Golden Hawks this past season.**

Photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

## Parker and Preds eyeing Eastern title

Kevin Parker barely won at all last season, but is now in position to win a championship.

As of last night, the 17-year-old Milton left winger and his Port Hope Predators were three victories away from capturing the Provincial Jr. A League's Eastern Conference title — after blanking Wellington 3-0 Sunday evening to tie the series at one win apiece.

Picked up by the Predators after gaining their interest during camp with

the OHL's Oshawa Generals, Parker is part of an up-from-the-ashes team that won the regular-season conference championship with a 38-5-3-3 record and reached the East finals with sweeps of Lindsay and Trenton.

That's a far cry from his 2003/04 campaign, which alongside fellow Miltonian Matt Chuchmach was spent with the last-place Jr. B Orangeville Thunder.

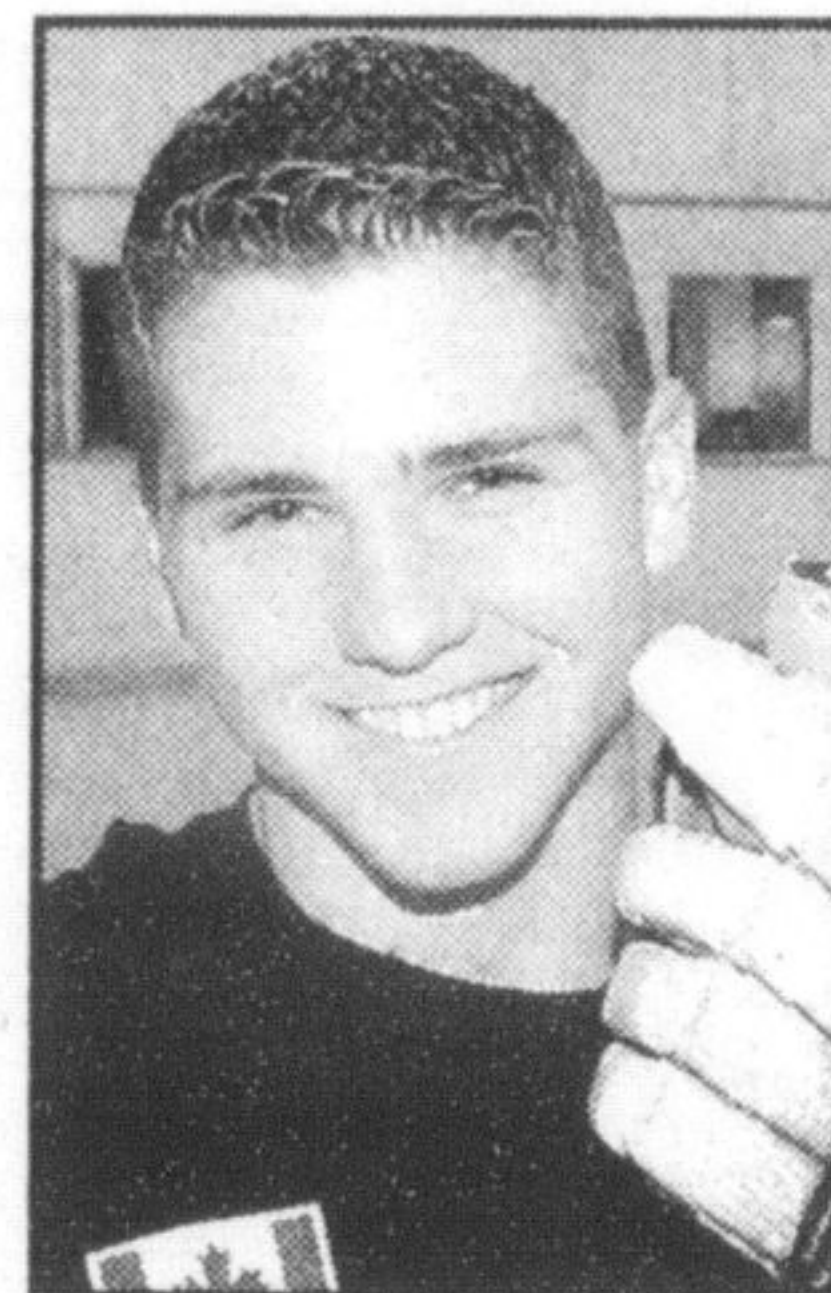
"Yeah, it's definitely a nice change," said the 6'2", 202-pounder.

Parker had six goals and 15 total points in 48 games this year and has added five more helpers through play-off action, including one in last Friday's 4-2 loss to the Dukers.

Port Hope would regroup in convincing fashion two nights later to even things up.

Stressed Parker, "We've got a lot of heart and character on this team."

The series continues tonight in Wellington, while game five is set for Sunday evening in Port Hope.



**Kevin Parker**

**WRIGHT'S CORNERS RESTAURANT**  
- OPEN DAILY 9am-10pm 364 Days of the year!  
**905-875-1559**  
55 Ontario St. S. in Milton Mall

**WRIGHT'S WEEKLY LINE UP! WRIGHT'S WEEKLY LINE UP! WRIGHT'S WEEKLY LINE UP!**

**Saturday!**  
**10 oz. NEW YORK STEAK**  
includes:  
• Vegetables  
• Your choice of potato  
only **\$10.99**

**Monday night**  
**ALL YOU CAN EAT Chicken Wings!**  
only **\$6.99**

**Tuesday!**  
**KIDS EAT FOR FREE!**  
Must be under 12. One child per adult

**Wednesday!**  
**FAJITAS FOR 2**  
only **\$13.95**

this **Easter Weekend!**  
**WE ARE OPEN...**  
**GOOD FRIDAY 9am-10pm**  
**Saturday 9am-10pm**  
**EASTER SUNDAY 9am-10pm**

**BREAKFAST SERVED DAILY! 9AM-12NOON (UNTIL 1PM ON SUNDAY'S & HOLIDAYS)**