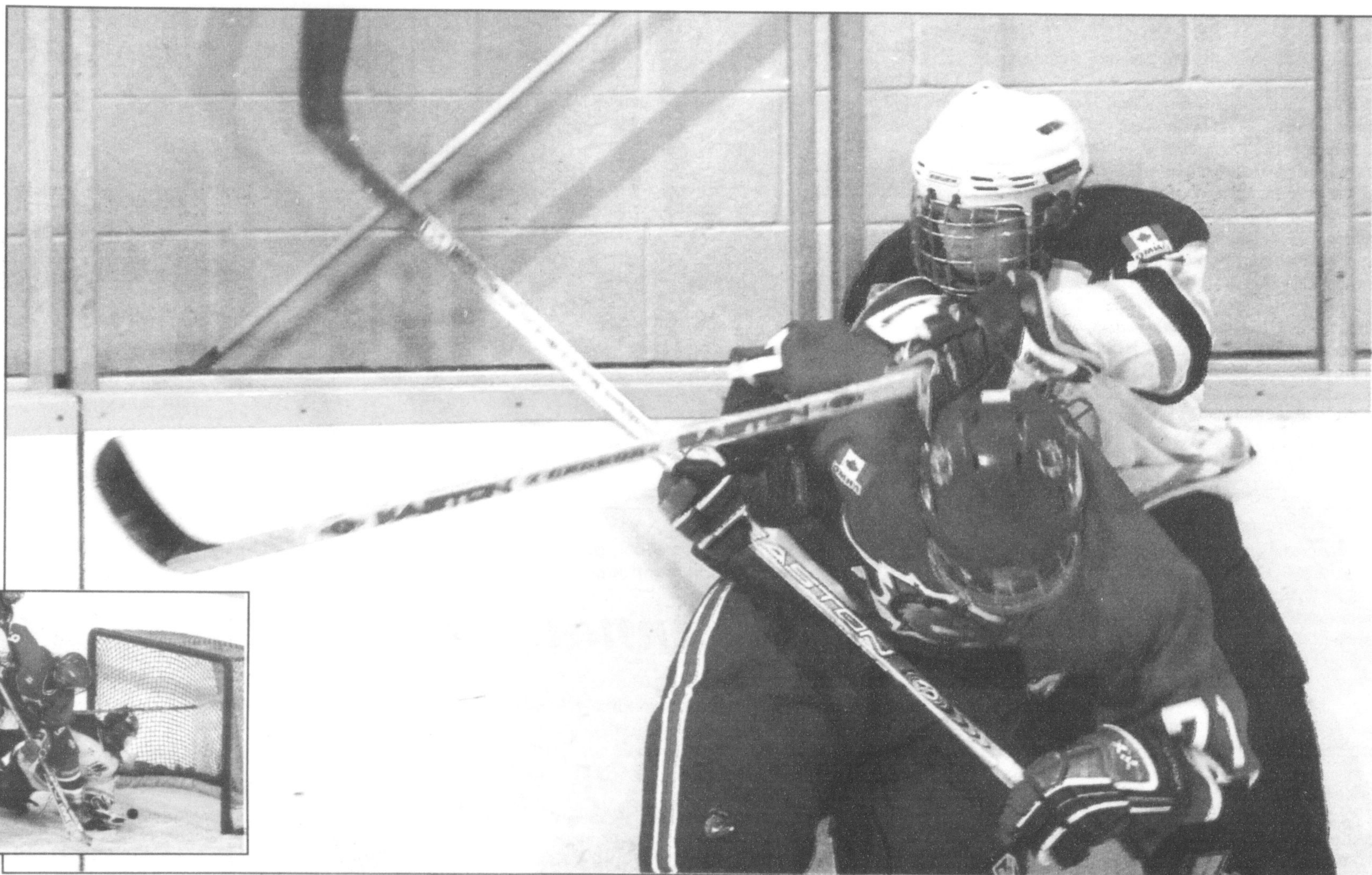


Sports

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At right, minor midget Hurricane forward Scott Stover ties up a Hamilton opponent in Saturday afternoon play at Memorial Arena. Below inset, goaltender Ryan Williams tries to snare a loose puck to no avail, as Hamilton scores on the play despite the best efforts of Halton defenders. The Hurricanes lost 3-1 but are off to another strong start this year in the SCTA — sitting at 4-1-1.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE



Hurricane minor midgets loaded with locals

Most Milton-area talent in recent memory

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

IceHawk fans hoping to see a little more homegrown talent in the lineup within the next few years have cause for optimism.

That's because Halton's 'AAA' minor midgets currently sport seven Milton-area players — the most in recent memory.

"I've only been with the Hurricanes for four years now, but I'm sure there hasn't been this much local talent at this level in quite some time," said Mike Kalapaca, who coached for more than a decade at the Tier 2 Jr. A level with three teams, including Milton — then known as the Merchants. "It's nice to see so many local guys this year."

Goalie Ryan Williams, defencemen Matt Clark and Jeremy Price and forwards Bradley Hoy and Scott Stover were among those part of Halton's

2004/05 squad that finished first in the SCTA division with a record of 32-2-4 and went to claim OMHA silver.

Jumping up from the 'AA' ranks this year to join their fellow local Hurricanes are forwards Brayden Abraham and James Woodcroft, who've made fairly credible transitions thus far.

But then that's not too surprising, since both were regular call-ups last season.

While an overall lack of size might keep the Hurricanes' Milton-area players from going high in next spring's OHL Entry Draft, some strong showings this season could very well peak the interest of area Jr. A clubs.

"Honestly I think all seven of these guys have a real shot at playing at least Tier 2 Jr. A — hopefully some with the IceHawks," said Kalapaca.

Sitting at 4-1-1 after a 3-1 setback to the Hamilton Jr. Bulldogs Saturday afternoon, the minor midget Hurricanes will no doubt benefit from playing under a coach with plenty of expe-

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MIKE KALAPACA

rience at the level they now aspire to. Assisting Kalapaca this year is Dan Sales, another longtime hockey coach who knows all about the Tier 2 Jr. A ranks — where tenacity can be as big an asset as talent.

"One of our mottoes is that we're gritty, not pretty," quipped Sales, a longtime instructor with the highly-regarded Pro Bound Development Program whom many area junior fans will remember as an assistant coach with the Merchants' All-Ontario championship drive

of 1998. "This team works hard and because of that we're capable of beating anyone on any given day."

With 14 players back from last year's team, the Hurricanes definitely have the ingredients for another successful run this season.

But for Kalapaca, that's only half the challenge. "It's great to win and all, but my job is to try and get these guys to the next level," he explained.

Stover and Woodcroft are among Halton's top producers right now with seven and six points respectively, while Price was recently out for a practice with the IceHawks — much like older brother Matt did en route to making the team last year and now enjoying a standout sophomore campaign.

The Hurricanes will look to make a quick return to the win column tonight in Burlington. Their next home game is Sunday at 7:30 p.m. at Milton Sports Centre against the Grey-Bruce Highlanders.



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