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Dear nephew, is trip worth it?

I'm debating whether to make a 10-hour trip tomorrow, five hours each way.

The last time my brother and I made the boring drive to Ottawa to watch my nephew's Jr. A hockey game, it didn't work out too well.

My nephew spent most of the first period in the penalty box. And then, even though he was the team's top scorer, he got benched in the second for the dumb penalties he took in the first, and then got benched in the third for letting the coach know he wasn't happy about being benched in the second.

There was only so much food I could put away while waiting for him to get on the ice. Although the snack bar did have those Beaver Tails indigenous to Ottawa, which are sensational. It's those deep fried dough things with sugar and lemon sprinkled on top.

Incidentally, my nephew's name is Tyler Townsend, but isn't the same person who played on the IceHawks earlier this season.

Anyway, it's not the first time it's happened that I've gone to his game to watch him not play. Once I was walking up the stairs at an arena after an hour's drive, stuffing popcorn in my face, and before I got to the top, my nephew got kicked out for fighting. Back down the stairs I went.

Another time he took a bunch of penalties in a Junior A game in Cobourg and when his latest penalty was up, the coach told him to stay in the penalty box because he'd just end up back there again



with **MURRAY TOWNSEND**

On the loose

anyway. The referee told the coach that wasn't allowed, while trying not to laugh, but the coach said he wasn't coming back on the bench, so my nephew went to the dressing room and I went home.

I figure my nephew owes me about 10 game admissions. And some of those are from games in which I even called in advance and pleaded with him not to get kicked out in the first period.

Most of the time it's worth the drive, usually for the game, but sometimes for other reasons. At another game this year in Cornwall, my nephew was being harassed by a group of fans who do that behind the visitors bench. The better the player, the more they ride him, and the tougher the player the more they dislike him.

So, they're yelling things like, "Townsend, you suck! Townsend, you stink!" You know, imaginative stuff like that. Then they yelled, "Townsend, you're a loser!"

After a couple more of, "Townsend, you're a loser!" my nephew turned around and yelled back at them. "I'm a loser? You paid nine bucks to watch me play

hockey. Who's the loser?" That shut them up for about 20 seconds.

I used to get mad when adults would yell things at him, especially when he was much younger, and despite the fact he probably deserved it. At least until I almost got beat up one time when I told a big guy his mouth would be better off shut, then ran like a little sissy to my brother for protection.

Not that my brother was any better when he played. He played college and semi-pro hockey in the United States. At one game in the wilds of coal country in Illinois he was in a visiting arena that had mesh going from the boards to the roof. He found out why when he had a fight and had the misfortune to win it. Fans threw everything but their grandmothers at him.

My favourite story of his is the time he and a couple teammates went into the stands after some fans. Our parents happened to be at that game and as he went by them on the stairs, he said casually, "Hi Mom, Hi Dad." Then he proceeded to pummel the "unruly" fans. My mom refused to go to any more of his games.

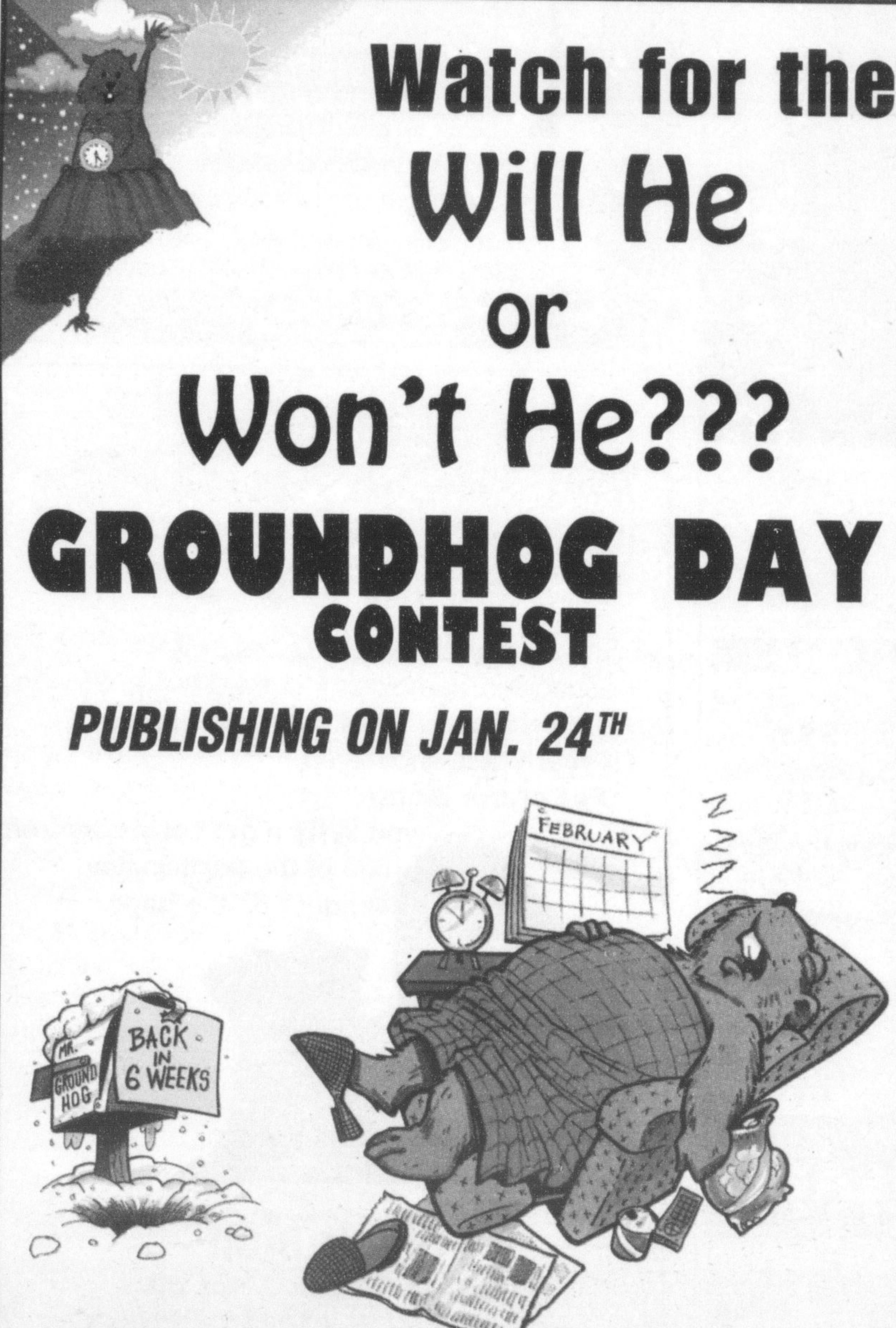
As for my nephew, since the game I went to that he didn't play in much, he's barely taken a penalty and has moved into the top five in league scoring.

Tomorrow he plays in the Central Jr. A all-star game in Hawkesbury. I don't think he'd get kicked out of that game. And even if he did, I've been dreaming of those Beaver Tails.

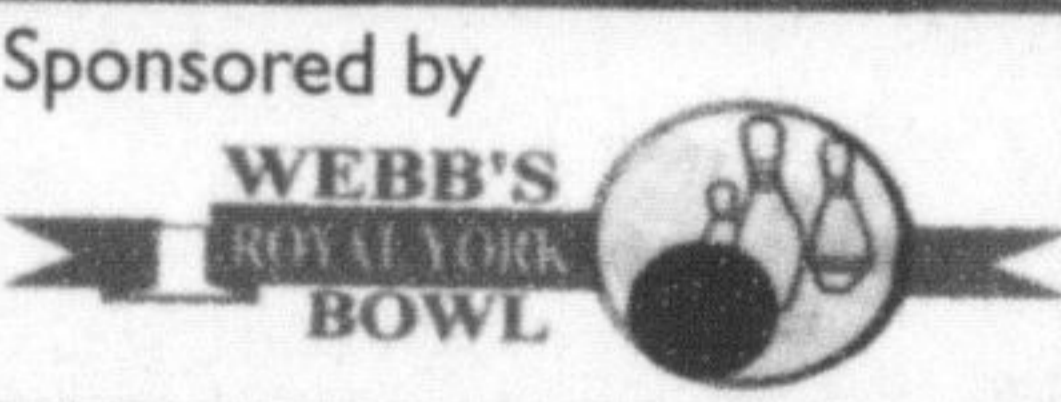
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