

Giffin's stellar season comes to a humbling end

But goaltender pleased with rookie campaign at Canisius College

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Dan Giffin set yet another goaltending record for Canisius College Saturday night, but would have gladly traded it in to prolong his freshman season just one more game.

Milton's NCAA Division 1 puckstopper made 38 saves against the Mercyhurst Lakers in Atlantic Hockey quarterfinal action, the most for a post-season game in Canisius hockey history.

Unfortunately that didn't even come close to equaling victory, as the offensively-stacked Lakers amassed four third-period goals — the last into an empty net — to topple the Golden Griffins 7-2.

"Yeah that was a tough one alright," said Giffin, who turns 22 tomorrow and now plays alongside former Milton Merchant David Ovcjak with Canisius. "Mercyhurst has a lot of firepower and they just kept coming."

While still smarting from the weekend defeat, Canisius' rookie cager has an awful lot to feel good about this season. The Golden Griffins may have only finished seventh in the conference and been a meager 10-23-2 overall, but any success they did have was due largely to Giffin.

Building on a rock-solid junior career, he secured Atlantic Hockey Rookie of the Week honours a whopping six times — twice as much as any other Canisius freshmen ever has.

Particularly impressive after Christmas — following an early-season stretch that included a concussion and irregular work between the pipes — Giffin had a 12-game span that saw him register a goals-against average of 1.68 and .952 save percentage.

That stretch included back-to-back perfect games against Army and Connecticut to become the only Golden Griffin to earn consecutive shutouts. And last month he'd tie the school record for overall shutouts at three with a whitewash of American International.

"At certain points in the season even

I was wondering how I was making saves," remarked the former Tier 2 Jr. A goalie — who backstopped the 2003/04 Oakville Blades to a Western Conference championship. "I've got a great (goaltending) instructor here in Chris Bernard and have learned so much this season in terms of movement and positioning skills."

On most nights Giffin put those lessons into full effect, keeping the Golden Griffins in a number of games over more talented opponents and finishing top three in the conference for both goals-against average (2.73) and save percentage (.920).

With single-game quarterfinals in

the Atlantic division as opposed to a best-of-three series in most other conferences, Giffin knew if he got hot Saturday Canisius stood a very real chance of upsetting the Lakers — having kept pace with them in two narrow losses earlier this month.

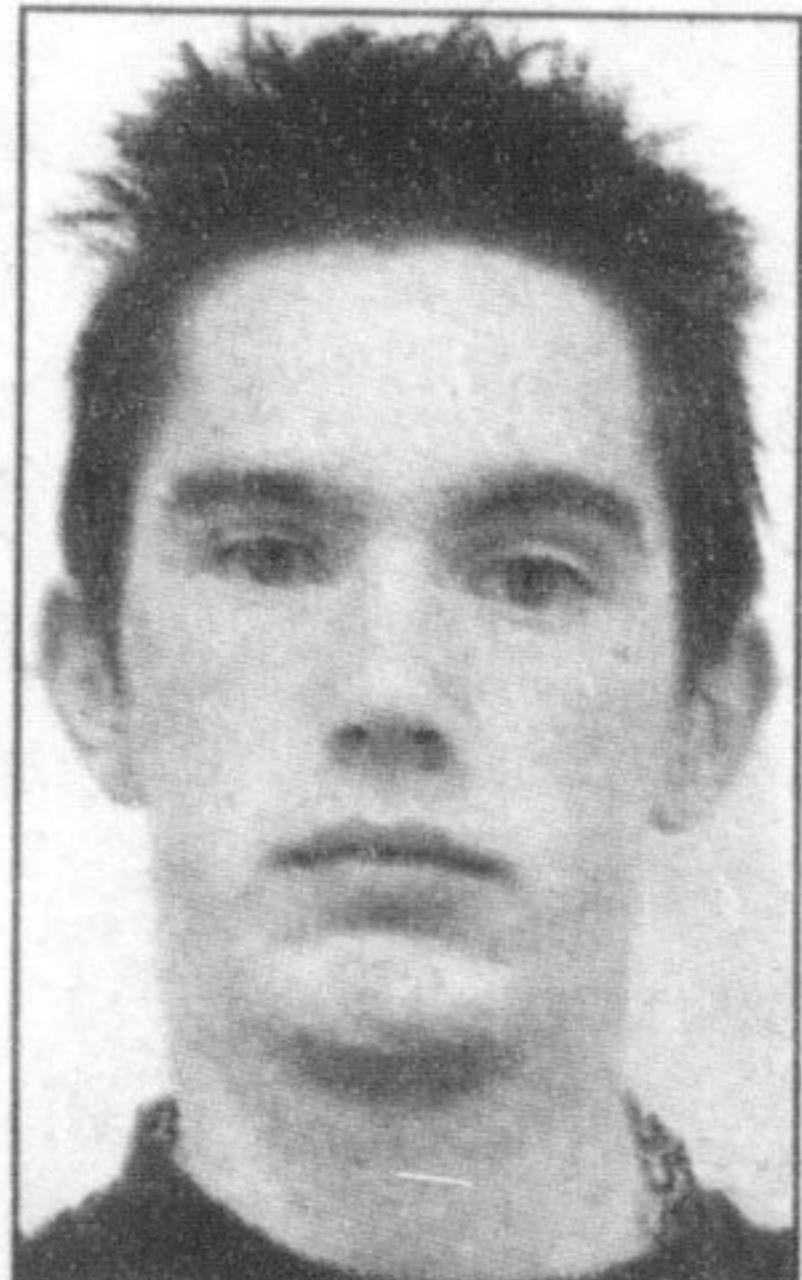
"When it's just one game, anything can happen. But Mercyhurst is a high-scoring team and was just two strong. But I'm trying to look at it from a positive standpoint. It's a big lesson and already I'm looking forward to next year and continuing to get better."

Part of the Mercyhurst team that eliminated Giffin and company was ex-Milton IceHawk Brett Robinson, who's

at the tail-end of his freshmen year with the Lakers.

In other Division 1 action this past weekend, fellow Miltonian Jon Glead and his Cornell Big Red advanced to the ECAC semifinals with back-to-back double overtime wins against Clarkson in best-of-three quarterfinal play.

A seventh-round pick of the Montreal Canadiens in the 2004 NHL Entry Draft, Glead is now a senior defenceman and assistant captain with the Big Red, who are ranked seventh nationally and sport an overall 20-7-4 record heading into this coming Friday's ECAC semifinals against Colgate.



Dan Giffin

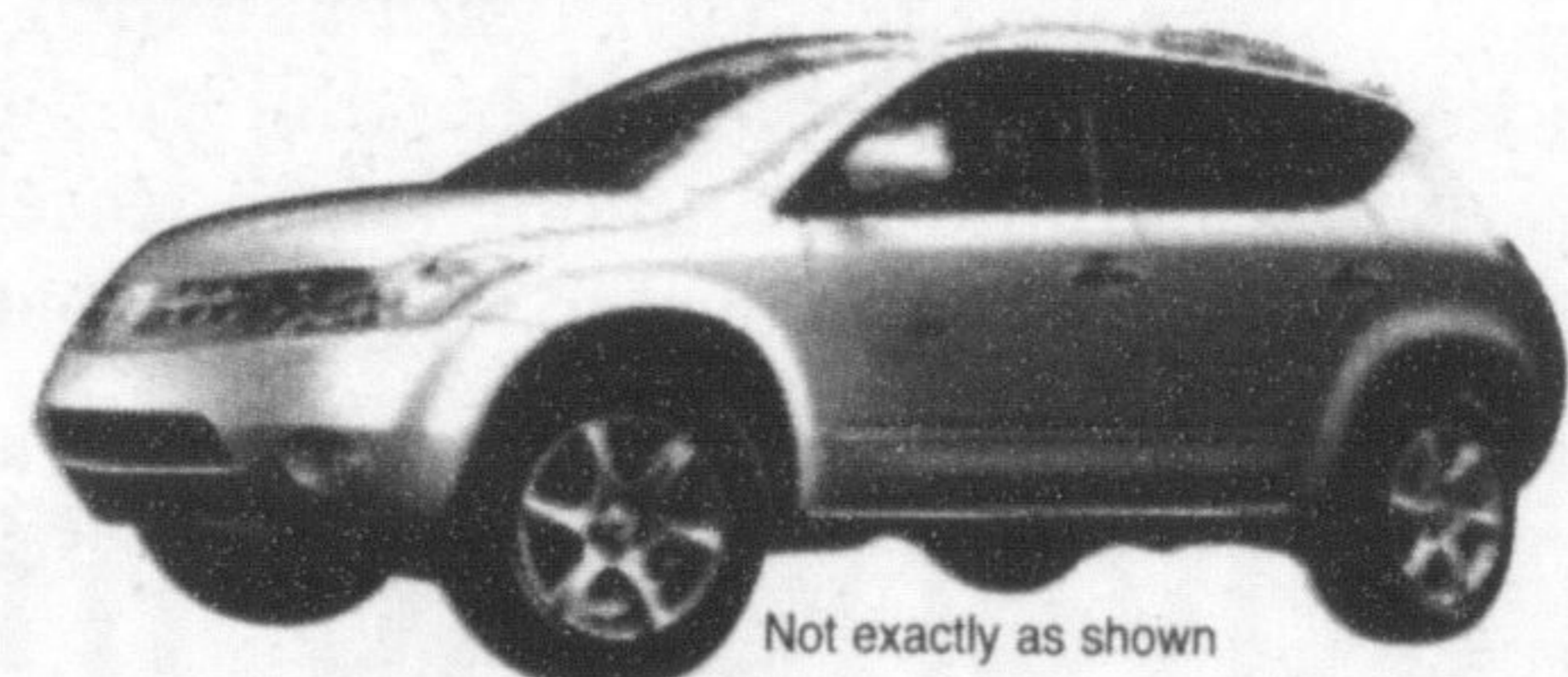
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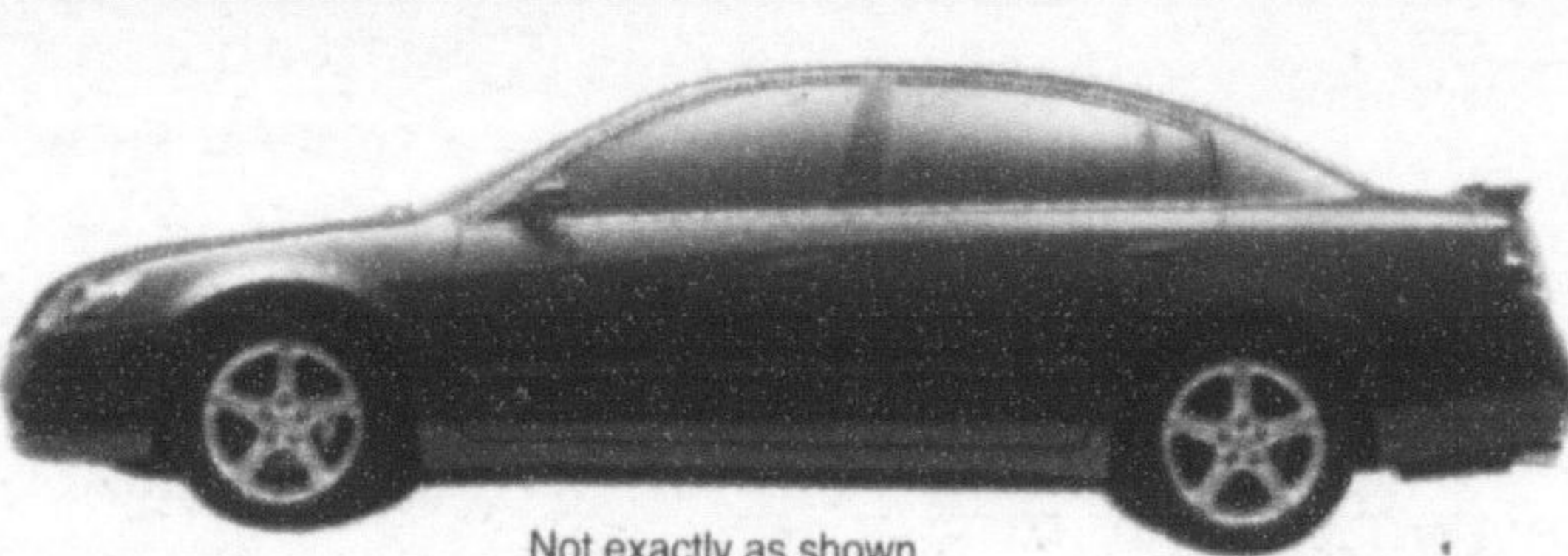
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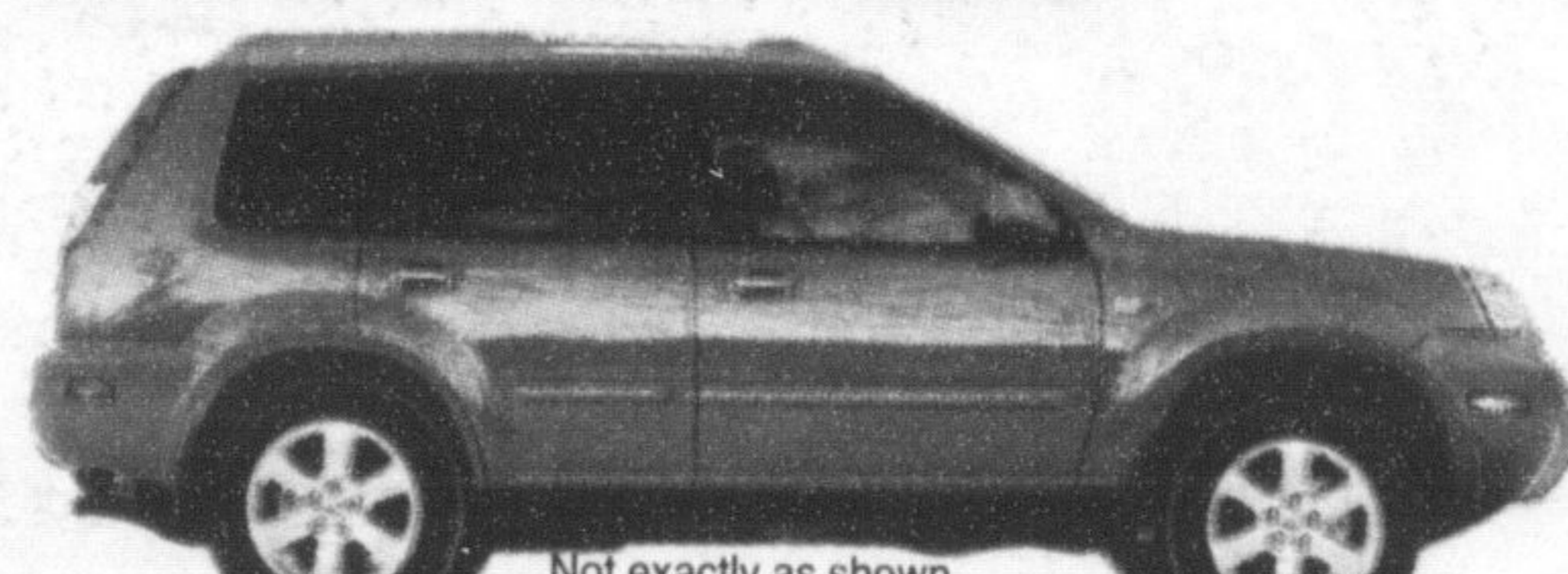
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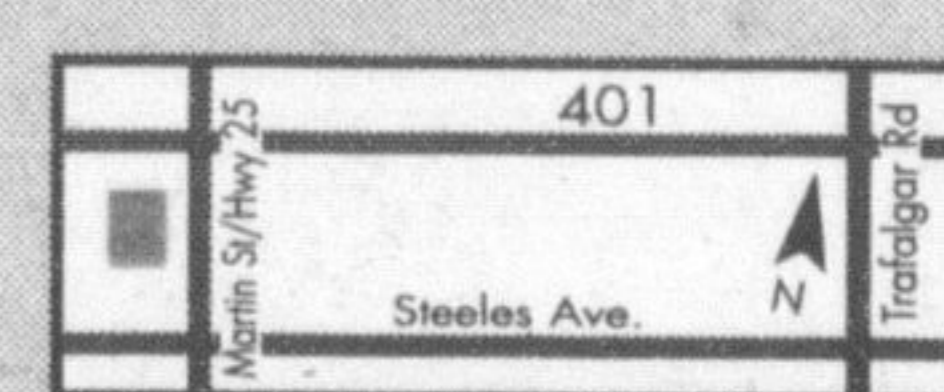
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