

SPORTS

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No Calder Cup this time for Haydar

But AHL veteran finishes atop playoff scoring race for second time in three years

By Steve LeBlanc
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Darren Haydar added one more goal to his impressive post-season run Thursday night, but would have gladly given it up for just one more game. Milton's 26-year-old American Hockey League veteran struck on the powerplay early in the second period, but it wasn't anywhere near enough for his host Milwaukee Admirals to stave off elimination in game six of the Calder Cup final. The Hershey Bears already had a 4-0 cushion by the time Haydar lit the lamp — scoring three times in the first period — and went on to win 5-1.

Adding to the sting of championship defeat was the fact that the Admirals held a pair of one-game series leads early on, and headed in the finals on a nine-game winning streak — having swept both the Houston Aeros and Grand Rapids Griffins.

"It's disappointing, obviously," said Haydar Friday afternoon. "This is going to stick with me for a long time. It's a tough pill to swallow."

While the diminutive right winger can't really put his finger on just where the series got away from his Admirals, a lack of early jump was no doubt to blame for their championship demise.

Milwaukee gave up at least three first-period goals in all four of their losses.

"We didn't start well, but still felt we could win right up until the end — even when we fell behind 3-0 last night (Thursday)."

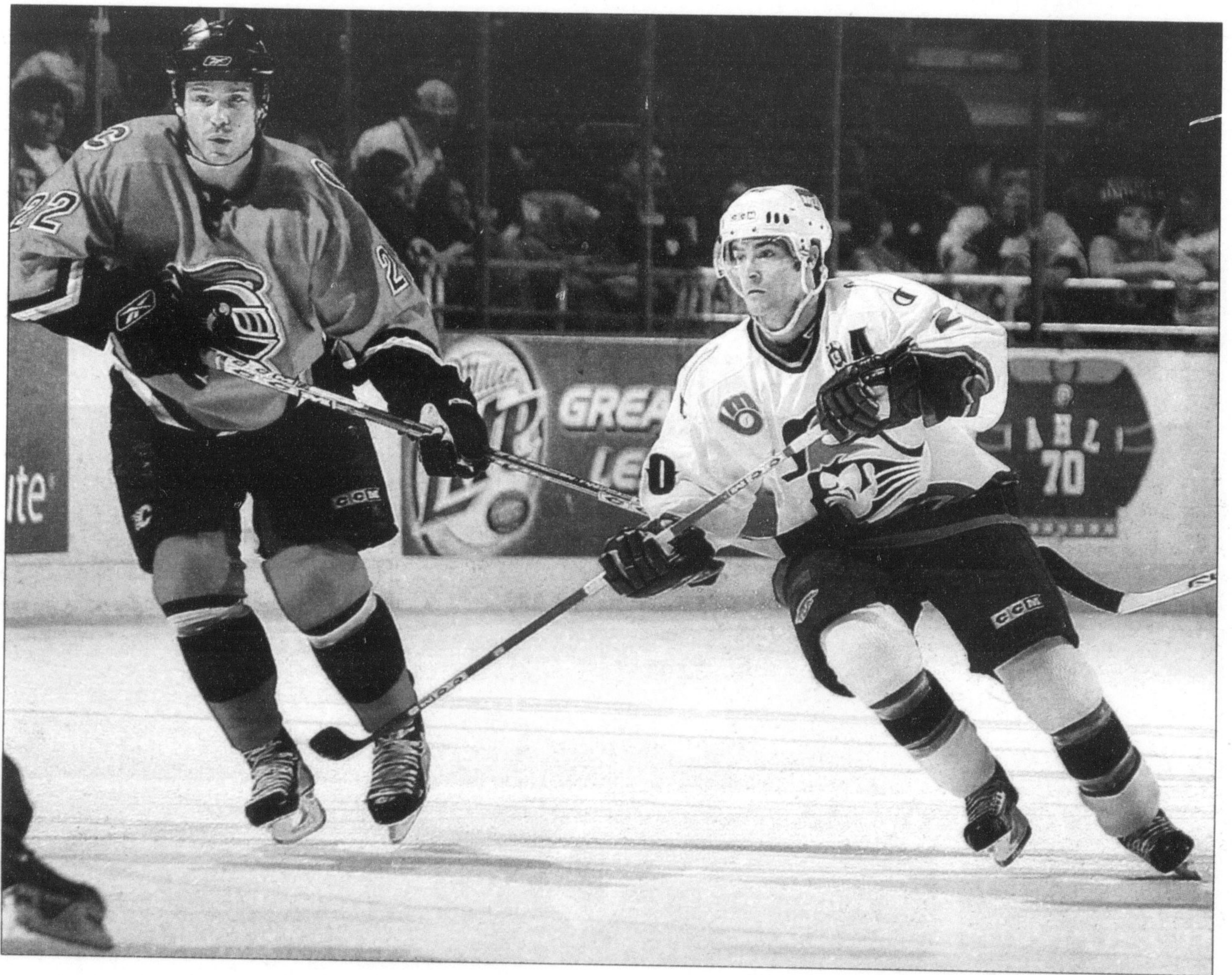
While the Admirals weren't quite able to recapture the Calder Cup — having won it two years ago — their talented Miltonian did reclaim his spot atop the AHL playoff scoring race.

In fact he collected nine more points than he did during the 2004 championship run, with Thursday's deposit marking his 18th goal and 35th point in 21 games.

Combine that with a 92-point (35G, 57A) regular season, and Haydar led overall scoring for the AHL's 2005/06 campaign.

Those numbers should no doubt bolster his options for next month, when he rejoins the free agent market.

"I've had some positive feedback, and hopefully some team out there wants my services at the NHL level."



Milwaukee Admirals' assistant captain Darren Haydar (right) — seen here in action earlier this season — had his hopes for a Calder Cup victory dashed Thursday night, when his Admirals fell 5-1 to Hershey in game six.

Just who that team is remains a question mark. But what seems fairly certain is that it's not the parent Nashville Predators, who with a number of gifted younger players in their organization just don't seem to have the former AHL Rookie of the Year on their radar.

However, with the NHL's new era of wide-open, obstruction-free hockey, Haydar remains cautiously optimistic about his chances of catching on somewhere.

"I think more teams are realizing that their third-line players need to be skilled — not just be able to skate and play defence. Europe is still an option, but my dream has always been to play in the NHL, and I'd really like to give it one more shot. Just on the shoot-out and special teams

alone, I should have a chance."

That's no hollow sentiment — at least when it comes to special-teams production.

Haydar amassed 17 powerplay points through the playoffs — seven of them goals — and scored three times while shorthanded.

"We (Admirals) were top three in penalty killing in the playoffs, and being part of that, I assume, will boost my stock," suggested the soon-to-be free agent, whose standout playoff run also included six game-winning goals and a 14-game point-scoring streak — just two shy of the AHL's post-season record.

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