A Capital challenge for IceHawks in first round

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The IceHawks may have handily turned back one Brampton-area team this week, but it'll be a whole different story when they tangle with the other one.

Punctuating regular season play with a fairly decisive 4-1 win over the dead-last Bramalea Blues Tuesday, Milton's rebuilding juniors now have the daunting task of facing the top-seated Brampton Capitals in first-round play.

Getting underway last night, the series not only features a bonafide David-vs.-Goliath showdown — despite a couple of competitive tilts between the neighbouring clubs in recent weeks — but an interesting side story as well.

The latter centres around IceHawks head coach Randy Novak, who spent three-and-a-half seasons taking the Capitals from basement dwellers to championship contenders before parting ways with them two-and-a-half months ago, following a showdown over the discipline of a player.

Add in the fact that Milton now sports a handful of players who began the year with Brampton — including hometown veterans Steve Ellison and Matt Lenardon — and the series has the potential to be quite emotional.

"It should be intriguing," said Novak, the 2004/05 Western Conference Coach of the Month, whose local charges finished out the season in eighth place at 12-32-4-2. "I look forward to the challenge."

And a challenge it will certainly be for the IceHawks, who now battle the most offensively potent and balanced club in the entire Provincial Jr. A League — which averaged just

under six goals a game and had a whopping nine players with a point-a-game or better.

With that in mind, it could be awfully tough deciding just

who to zero in on, especially with an inexperienced blueline that's closing out the year with just five defencemen. To that end, Novak stressed his IceHawks can't make things any more difficult on themselves than they already are.

"We've got to play disciplined on a whole-game basis, not just for a period or two," he said, referring to the dangers of allowing the league's fifth best powerplay unit to flex their proverbial scoring muscles. "We've got to stay out of the box."

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Making the opening round competitive will also require more offensive punch than the IceHawks have shown overall this season against Brampton. They averaged just two dozen shots on net in their six games with the regular season champs, and are a rather dismal 3-for-33 on the powerplay over the teams' last four meet-

ings.

Added Novak, "We're moving the puck around okay, but not really getting enough shots on net. Good things happen when you get the puck to the net and we're not doing that. We've got to penetrate more."

Even stealing a game at home could be a tall order for the IceHawks, since Brampton put together the best road record in the entire league this season—

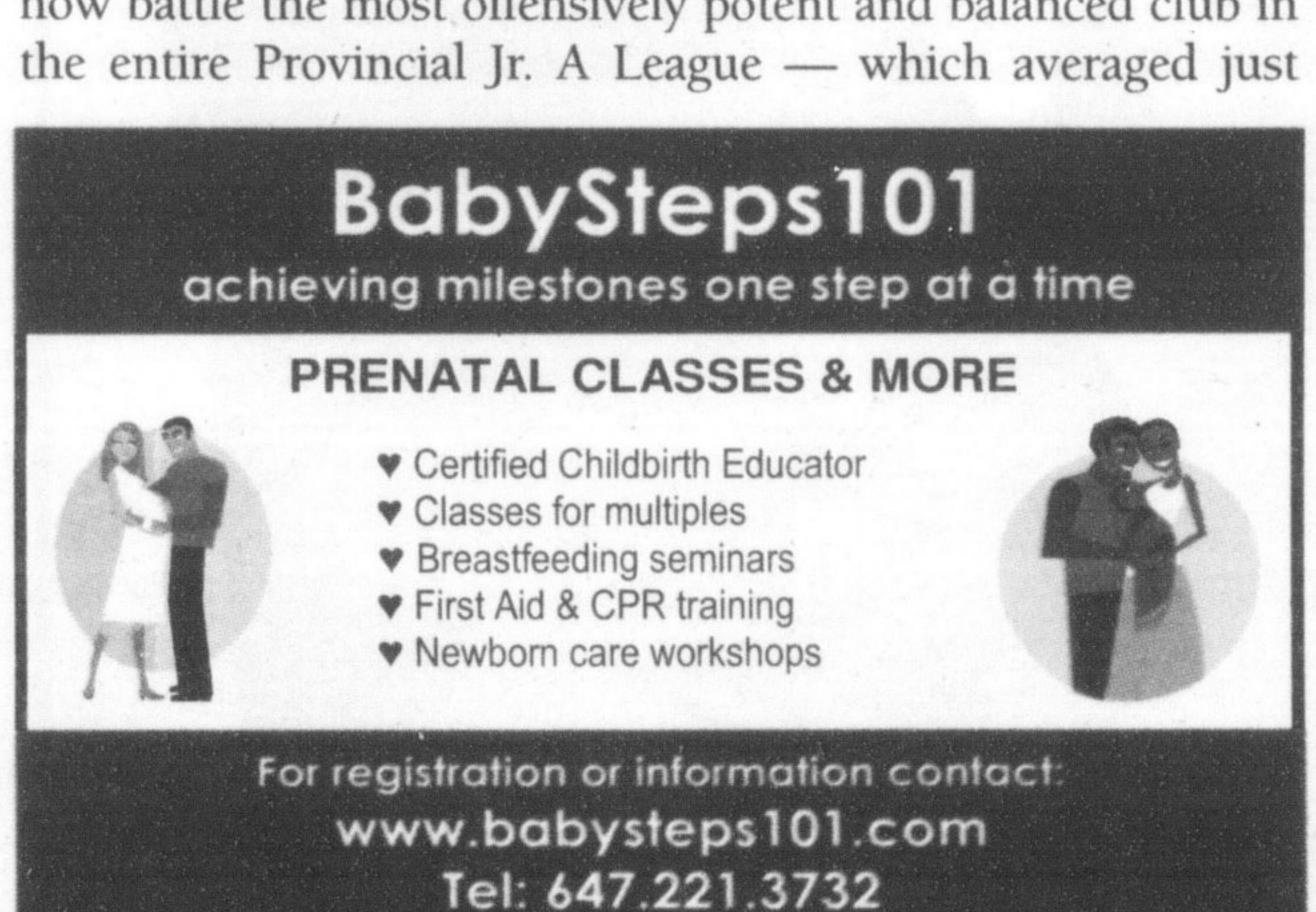
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losing just four times in hostile territory.

In other Western Conference opening round play, Oakville takes on Mississauga, Hamilton does battle with Streetsville and Georgetown squares off against Burlington.

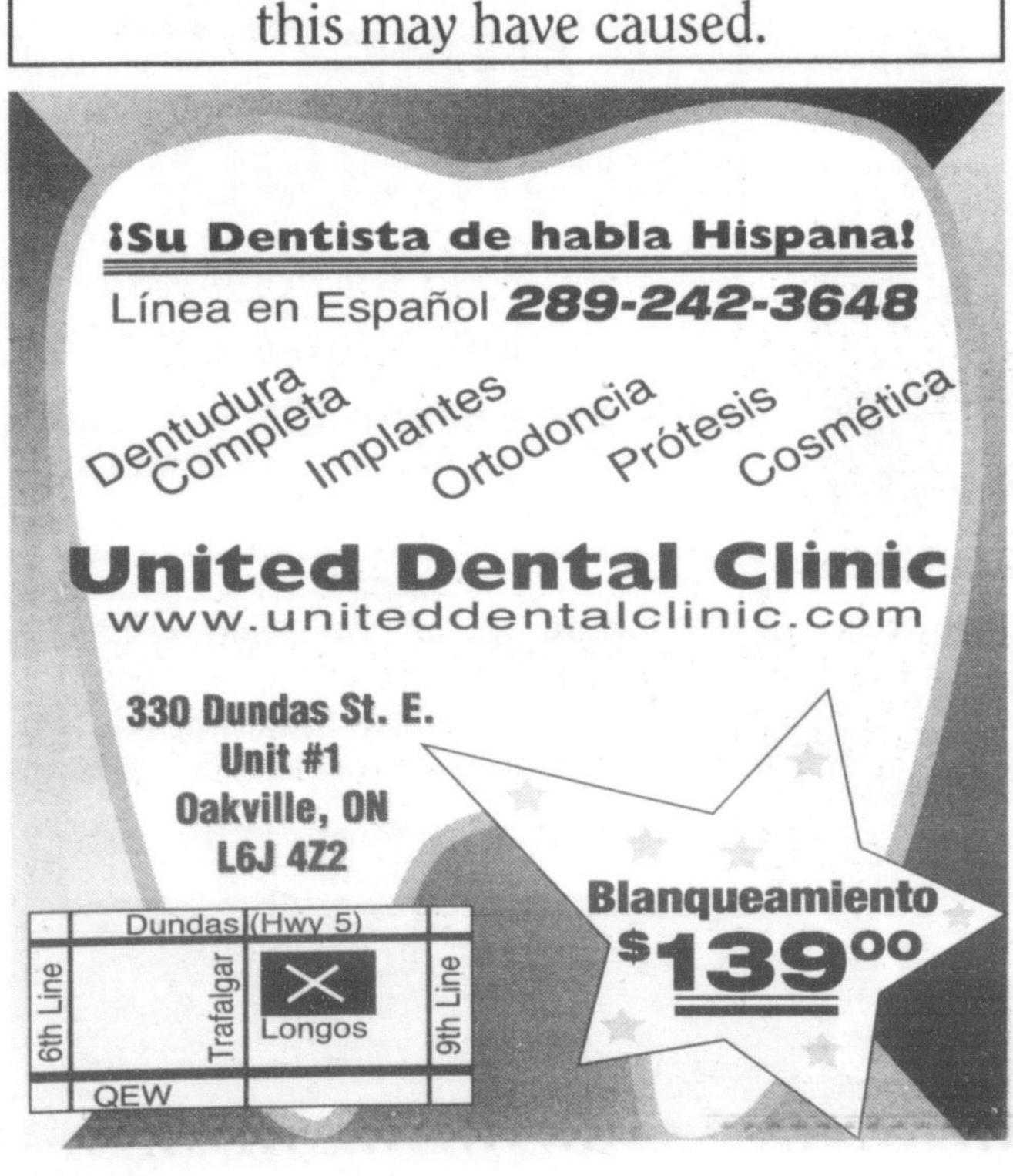


WAL-MART CORRECTION NOTICE

The Sims Life Stories advertised in our current flyer (expiring Feb. 9th) will be arriving late. It is expected to arrive at the end of the event.

The NBA Street Court video game advertised in our current flyer (expiring Feb. 9th) will not be available during the event. It will be available later in the month.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.





IceHawks vs. Capitals

(best of seven series)

Monday at Brampton

Tuesday at Memorial

Feb. 16 at Memorial

Feb. 17 at Brampton

Feb. 19 at Brampton

if necessary

•Game 6 Feb. 18 at Memorial

•Game 5

•Game 7

Last night at Brampton 7:30 p.m.

7:30 p.m.

7:30 p.m.

7:30 p.m.

7:30 p.m.

3:00 p.m.

7:30 p.m.