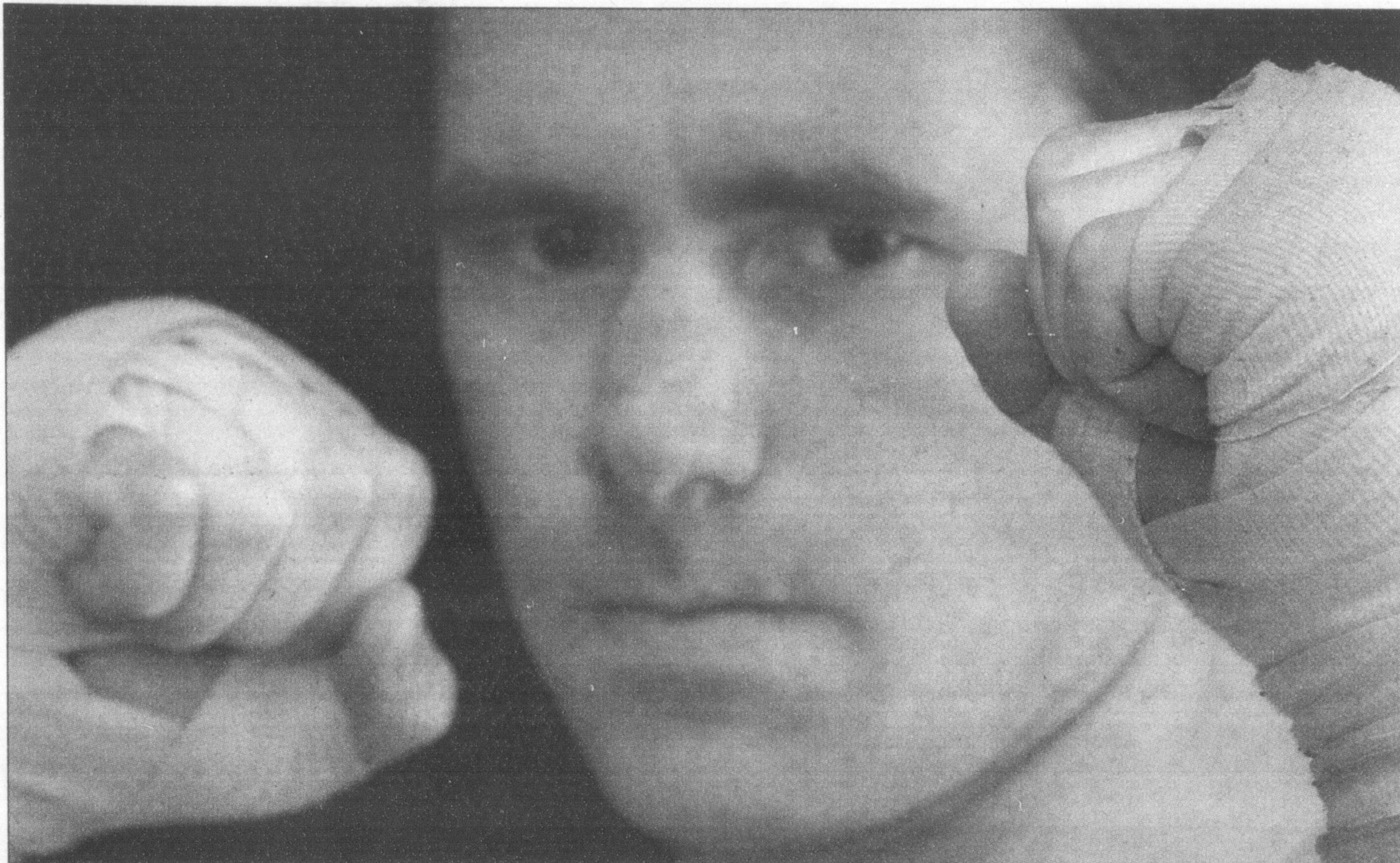


SPORTS

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GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

READY FOR BATTLE: Craig 'Cyclone' Cyr made a triumphant return to martial arts competition recently in Michigan. For full results, see page A20.

'Hawks sold

Duo assume ownership

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It's official — the IceHawks have been sold.

Bringing an end to several weeks of rumours, Rick Heinz confirmed Friday morning — via e-mail — that he has handed Milton's Jr. A hockey club over to Dean Piett and Rob DeVincentis.

The two are longtime friends and past business partners who'd been looking to buy a junior team for some time.



"Unfortunately, due to other pressing business obligations, I have made the decision to sell the team. It was a real pleasure to own this great franchise," said Heinz, a former NHL goalie and prominent hockey school operator who owned the team for just over nine months.

Contrary to a number of pre-sale reports, Keith Pandovski will not be staying on as general manager. Piett said finding a new GM and head coach are top priorities, as the IceHawks' annual rookie camp — at Etobicoke's Westwood Arena — is just a couple of weeks away.

"We want to make the right decisions, not hurried ones, barring in mind that time is of the essence," said the Burlington resident, who in commercial real estate and expects to be the more 'public face' of the ownership duo.

Hailing from Ancaster, DeVincentis — who owns a construction business — said he's thoroughly excited about taking over the IceHawks, adding, "This is a great opportunity to be part of a community with great support for its hockey."

While still needing to put some major pieces of the puzzle in place in terms of a GM and coaching staff, the new owners come into a far more favourable position than Heinz did last summer — when he took over a club without a single returning player, and a mere six weeks before training camp.

Milton has more than a dozen players eligible to return, including 65-point centre David Vallorani, from the team that finished eighth in the Western Conference this season and was eliminated in five games in opening-round play.

As far as a team philosophy goes, Piett said he hopes to continue developing local talent, but at the same time wants to ice the best team possible.

"It's going to be a balancing act."

He said he has no immediate plans for significant change to the club, other than to perhaps switch alternate home games from Tuesday nights back to Sunday afternoons — which was originally established under the Forigione era.

Haydar garners AHL's MVP award

Friday the American Hockey League confirmed what many fans and experts already believed to be a given.

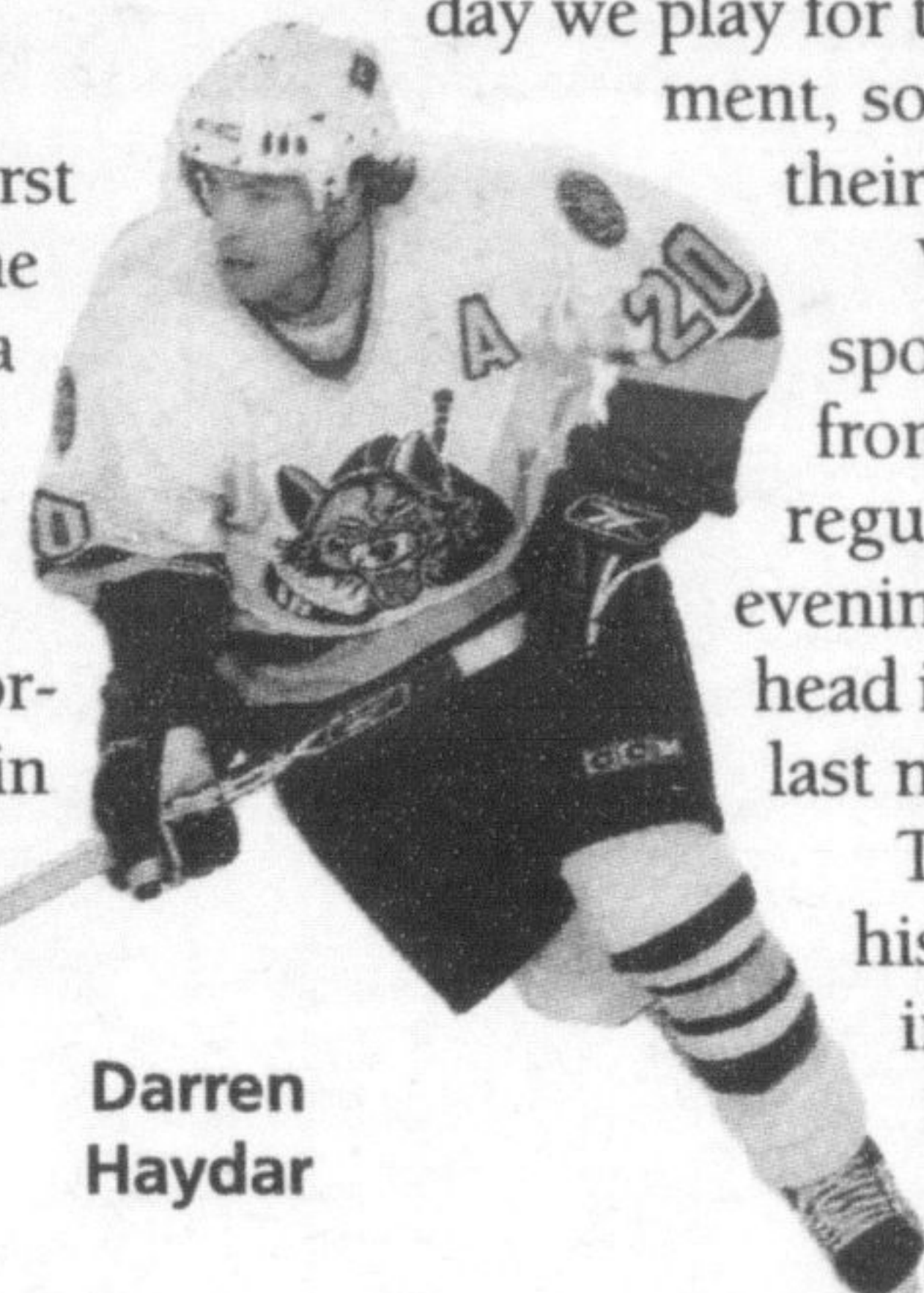
Namely, that Darren Haydar was this year's MVP.

The 27-year-old Miltonian is the Chicago Wolves' first player to ever win the Les Cunningham Award as the league's most valuable player — highlighting what's been a monumental season. The engine driving the league's most high-octane offence all year long, the five-foot-nine-inch, 170-pound right winger amassed 41 goals and 81 assists in 73 games — handily winning the league scoring race and finishing with more points than anyone in North American pro hockey.

His 124-point total — 14 shy of the AHL single-season record — included at least one point in 64 of 73 games, and 37 multi-point outings.

"It's a real honour (to be named MVP). I'm real proud of it and hopefully it's another step toward my ultimate goal of playing in the NHL," said Haydar, who put up 32 more points than last season with the Milwaukee Admirals and set a league record with at least one

point in his first 39 games this year. "But at the end of the day we play for team success, not individual achievement, so I've got to thank my teammates for their contribution to this award."



Darren Haydar

While missing a chance to steal top spot in the Western Conference away from the Omaha Ak-Sar-Ben Knights in regular season-ending play Sunday evening — losing 4-2 — Haydar's Wolves head into the playoffs having won six of its last nine games.

Two of those victories came against his former Admirals, whom they'll face in first-round play, starting Friday. That certainly provides some incentive for the 2004 Calder Cup champion, as does the memory of getting so close to another league

title last spring — losing in the finals to the Hershey Bears. "Yeah, I've definitely got that redemption factor going for me and I feel I've still got a lot left (for the playoffs)."

AUCTION ADVANTAGE

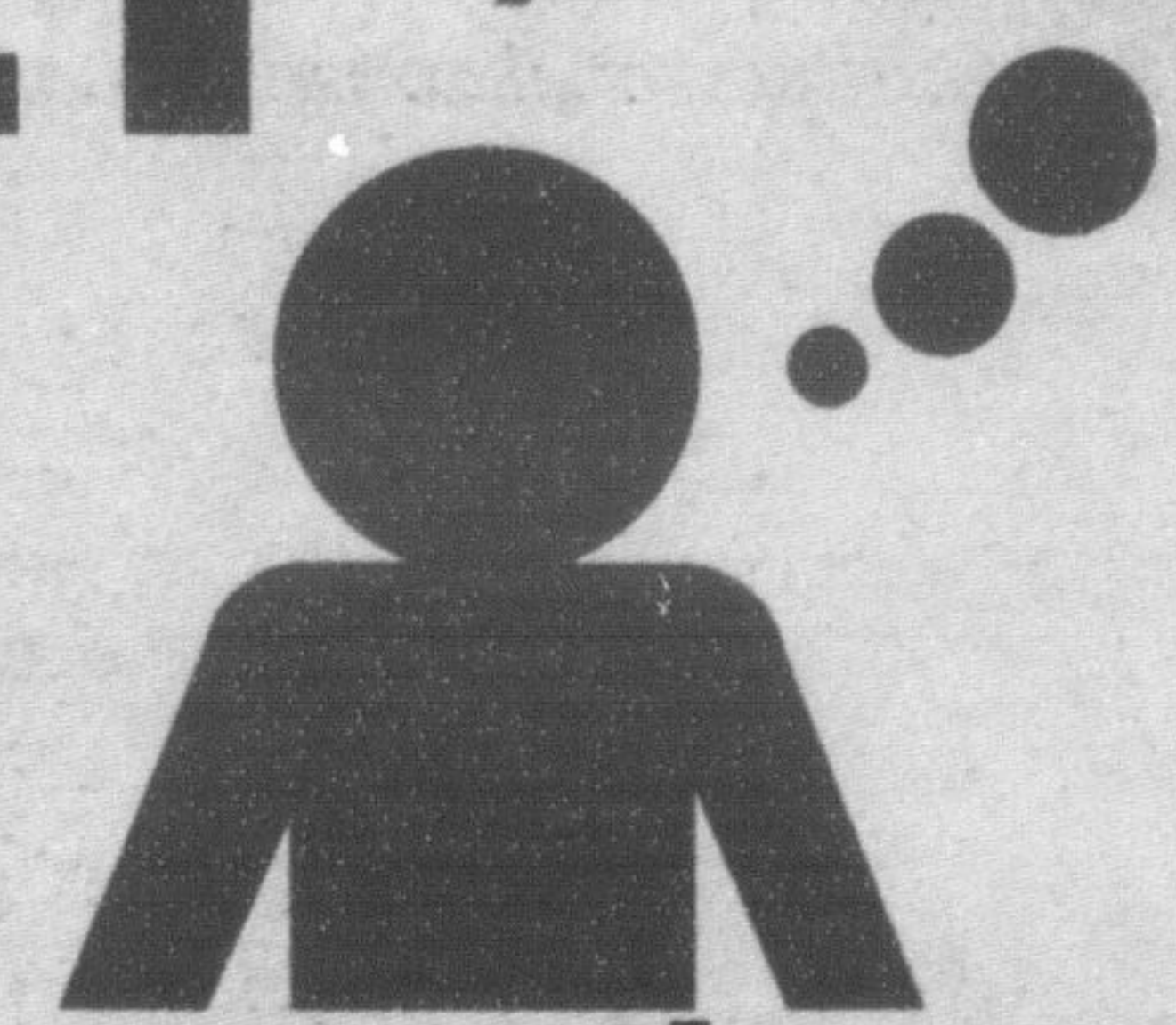
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