

Challenging year begins for rebuilding Marauders

But coach not deterred by major player overhaul

By Murray Townsend
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

It's a cold Tuesday night at practice prior to the Marauders' season opener. New quarterback Stuart Schiassi fires a frozen rope about 40 yards and hits a receiver on the dead run.

Not everything has gone so smoothly for the local Northern Football Conference (NFC) team during a tumultuous off-season. Several ownership changes, a new head coach and the defection of most players from last year's team means Milton is basically starting over from scratch.

But that hasn't deterred the optimism of new skipper Ken Lashley.

"A lot of people are expecting us to be bottom dwellers. We're looking to be competitive in every game, and I believe we're going to be one of the top tier teams."

The Marauders were on the verge of folding over the ownership ordeal, but Lashley stepped in along with former owner and Miltonian Andrew Todd, to save the franchise. Still, that has caused some problems for the on-field product.

"We're three or four weeks behind everyone because of the stability of the ownership," noted Lashley. "A lot of players had to make decisions on where to go and couldn't wait."

As a result, Milton has only a half-

dozen returnees. Nevertheless, Lashley likes the direction the team is heading in terms of athleticism. There's not the same experience the Marauders have enjoyed the last couple of seasons, he noted, or the quantity of players, but he likes the quality.

Joining Schiassi at pivot is Roger Hawkins, who has "a rocket arm." At running back, George Baiden — who fights for every inch on the field — returns from last year's team and will likely see considerably more playing time. Roger Tomlinson, who played at the University of Guelph, will split his time between fullback and tailback.

Jamie Radway and Damian Hannaford return at receiver, along with Kirshawn Thompson and newcomer Jason Burke at slotback.

The offensive line is headed up by Bill Hicks, who was with the NFC and Canadian championship Oshawa Hawkeyes last season, and will be joined by a couple of his teammates. Thomas Turnbull and Leroy Foster return from last year's team.

"Our defense is going to be very strong," said Lashley. "The front seven of ours will be very talented."

The linebacker corps features Craig Davoren, a two-time NFC defensive player of the year. He'll be joined by his brother, James Davoren, and Mark MacGillivray, who Lashley says is "the best pure linebacker I've ever seen."



June 9	vs. Tri-City	3:00 p.m.
June 16	@ Toronto	12:30 p.m.
June 23	vs. North Bay	3:00 p.m.
June 30	@ Oakville	7:00 p.m.
July 7	vs. Oshawa	3:00 p.m.
July 14	vs. Sarnia	3:00 p.m.
July 21	@ Sault SM	7:00 p.m.
July 28	@ Quinte	4:00 p.m.
• all home games at Milton District High School		

The defensive backfield returns last year's league interception leader, Antoine Bridge. Mike McLeod and Andre Clarke are also in the secondary. Kicking chores will be taken care of

by returnee John D'Ovidio.

"We've got a new offense, a new defense, and a lot of new people playing with each other," summarized Lashley, who knows it's going to take some time to gel.

In the meantime, "We're keeping it simple and letting the athletes play."

He added that the team has looked great in practice, but "realistically until the first game we won't know."

The Marauders received a bye in their first week and will have a tough test in their first game tomorrow at Milton District High School. They host the Tri-City Outlaws, who beat defending champion Oshawa last weekend. Game time is 3 p.m.



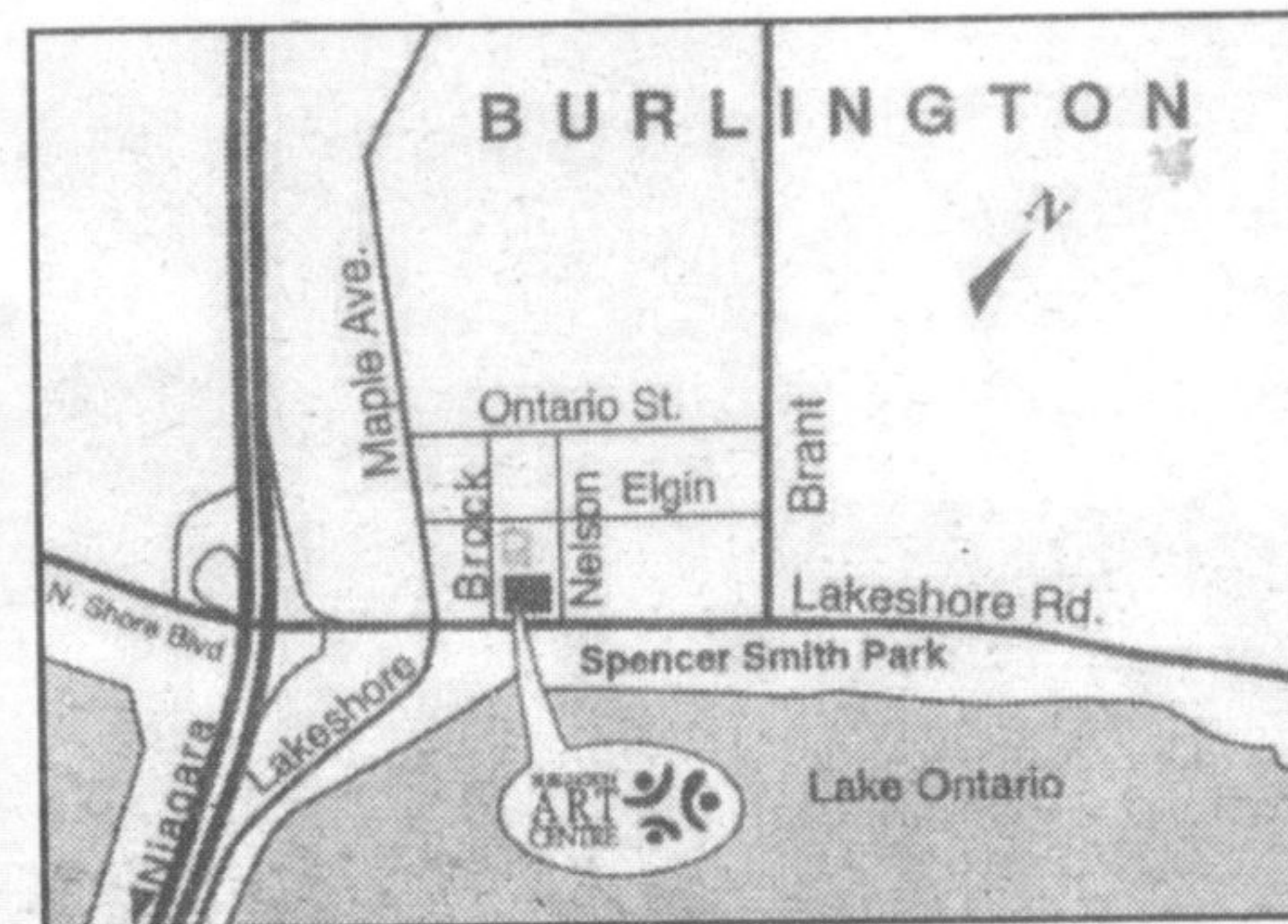
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