

Marauders' struggles continue

By Murray Townsend
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

It was the same old story for the Marauders Saturday afternoon at Milton District High School, as they fell 36-0 to the defending NFC champion Oshawa Hawkeyes.

Not just the result, but the texture of the game was similar to many of the rebuilding club's earlier defeats.

As usual, opposing teams start out trying to run against the Marauders, have little to no success, and then take to the air — where they are much more effective.

As usual, the only consistent offensive force was runningback George Baiden, and as usual two-time NFC defensive player-of-the-year Craig Davoren was a monster.

Not so usual is the fact that frustration appears to be reaching the boiling point.

"We have the talent here," said Davoren, who also serves as defensive co-ordinator. "On paper we're not an 0-5 team, but we don't play the game on paper. We've got to bring it out on game day."

So what do they need to do to improve?

"Defense is a unit, not like the offense where you can get individual performances at running back and other positions," said Davoren. "Right now we're not playing as a unit. We've got the talent, we've just got to get it together."

Teams that try to run on the Marauders are often stopped for short gains or losses, but Davoren wants to see more pressure on the quarterbacks when they start passing. They're getting far too much time and too many receivers are being left wide open.

Offensively, very little worked Saturday. Receivers can catch the ball when it's thrown to

them, but too often they'd be running one way and the ball would be thrown in a completely different direction.

Milton only threatened to score twice, once on a lengthy field goal attempt by Ryan Koistra — who's been reliable overall this season — that came up short. The other was on an uncharacteristic fumble by Baiden after the Marauders had driven to the Oshawa 15-yard line.

The only other bright spots for Milton were some fine returns by Shawn MacFarlane and a couple nice gains by Dave Van Alstyne.

The biggest positive for the Marauders right now is that incredibly enough they remain in the hunt for a post-season berth. Eight of the NFC's 10 teams make the playoffs, and three of the teams — including Milton — are winless.

The Toronto Maddogs and Quinte-Limestone Panthers are also looking for their first victory, with one of them set to find it this weekend when they clash.

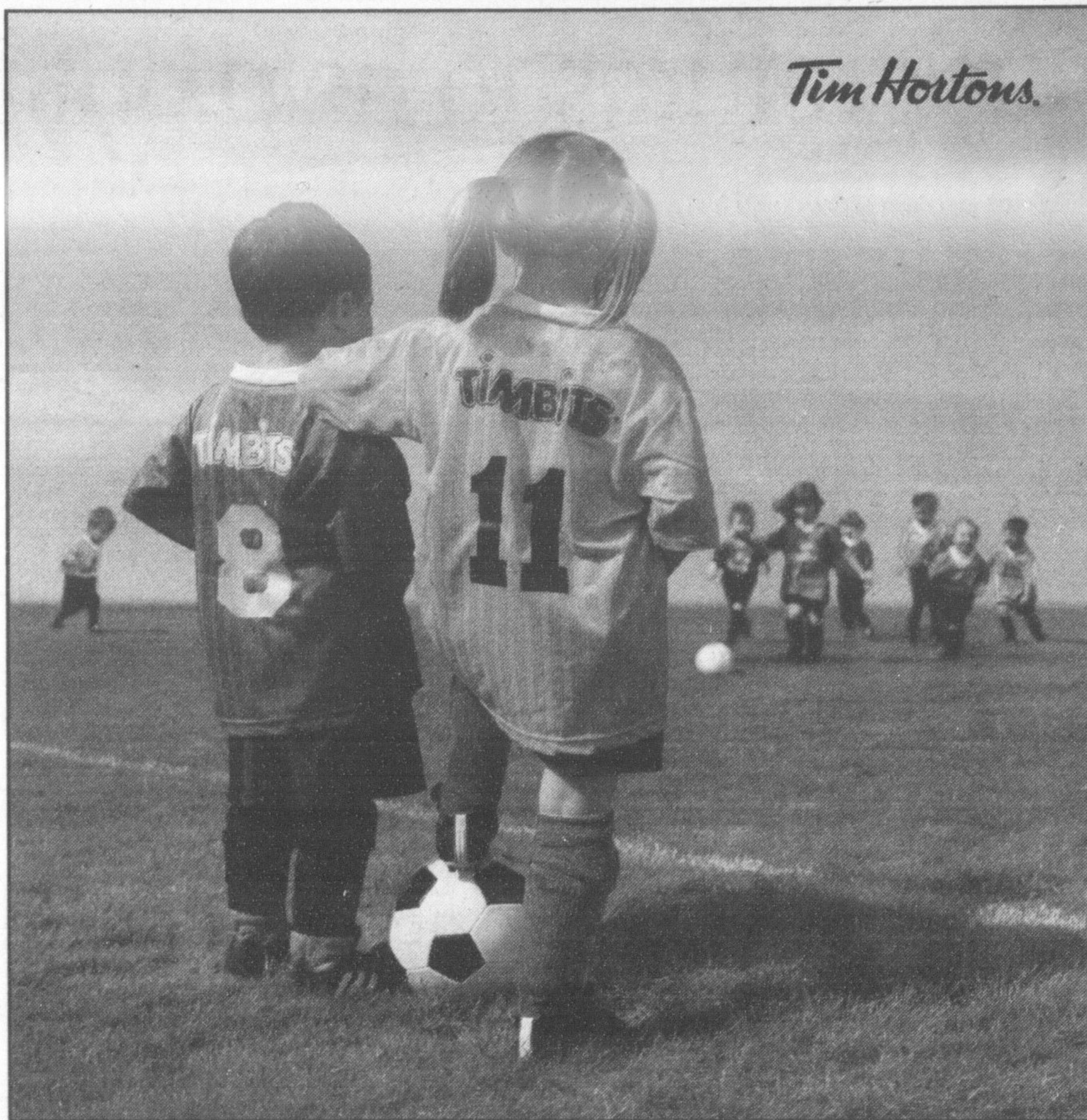
The Marauders host Sarnia tomorrow, then travel to Sault Ste. Marie before finishing off the regular season at Quinte.

Sarnia is a much improved team, with a record of 3-2, after going 0-8 as an expansion club last season, although they did get walloped 78-7 last weekend by the Soo.

In all likelihood, Milton will need to win two of its last three games to make the playoffs.

"We've got to get a win and be competitive before we start worrying about the playoffs," said head coach Ken Lashley, although he's hopeful in the upcoming game against Sarnia. "They're (Sarnia) a running team, so they're playing to our strength. We've got the best run defence in the league."

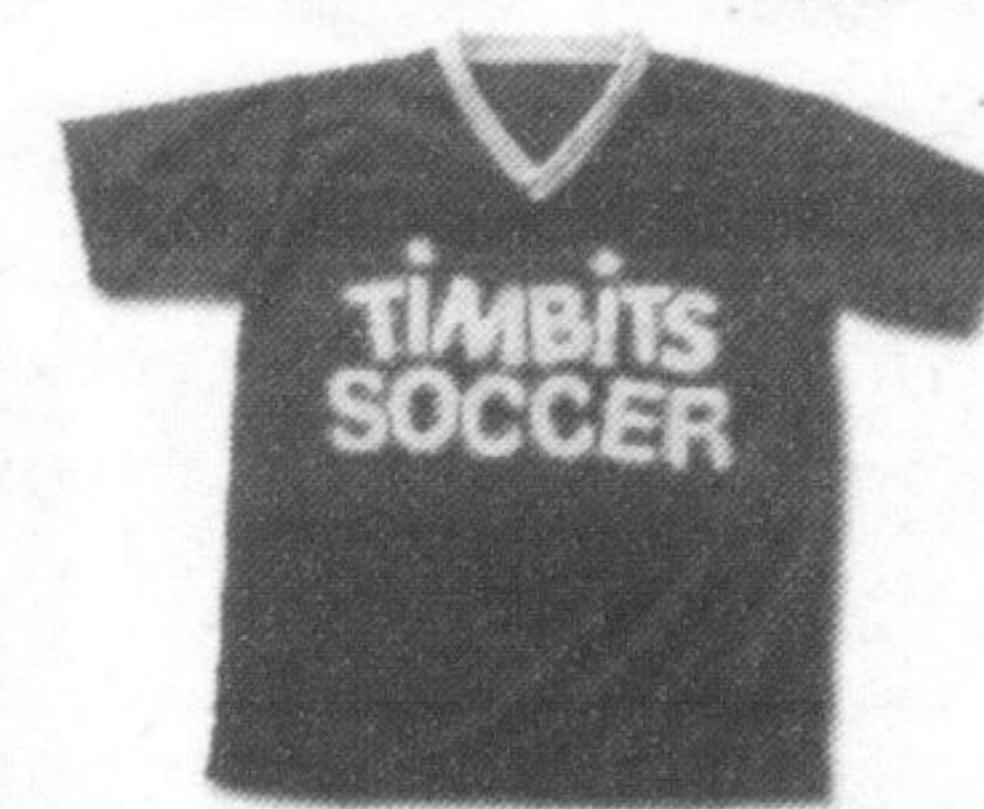
Tomorrow's game starts at 3 p.m.



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