

SPORTS

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FANCY FOOTWORK: At left, a Wakefield Dental player (right) battles three Home Hardware and Building Centre opponents for possession in Under-12 girls championship play at Lions Sports Park Sunday during Milton Youth Soccer's house-league championship weekend. Above, Wakefield's Vanessa Buonugara (centre) chases down the ball. Home Hardware won 1-0 in sudden death. Other playoff champions included Rambourne Solutions (Under-14 girls), Subway Market Drive (Under-16 girls), C.J.'s Auto Sales and Services (Under-12 boys), Subway Maple Avenue (Under-14 boys) and Southview Dental Clinic (Under-16 boys).

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

Rebuilding IceHawks retool for '07/08

Real change needed to improve: Novak

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Randy Novak wouldn't go so far as to actually use the term 'addition by subtraction.'

However, the IceHawks' head coach knew at least a partial player overhaul was in order when he was re-hired shortly after the team's ownership change this past spring.

After all, bringing back all 15 eligible returnees from a 12-32-4-2 season wasn't exactly a recipe for marked improvement.

"We needed to make changes," said Novak, whose charges kick off the regular

season tonight against Streetsville and will be part of Sunday's Terry Fox Run at E.C. Drury High School. "We were eighth place (last year) for a reason."

Such a finish won't even be enough to make the playoffs this year, as the Provincial Jr. A League — along with adopting the shoot-out — has scaled back its post season to include only the top six clubs in each conference.

With that in mind — and the desire to start steering Milton back to its perennial contender status — Novak and company will have just seven players back from their 2006/07 contingent. An active spring and

summer of recruiting has filled the holes, and the IceHawks' coaching staff feel confident the changes made will pay significant dividends.

"We're still young, but there's definitely more skill here (than last year)," remarked Novak, whose club capped pre-season play with a credible showing at last weekend's Vaughan Tournament — losing in overtime to eventual champion Stouffville in the semifinals. "The new owners are gung-ho about developing the team and we're well on our way."

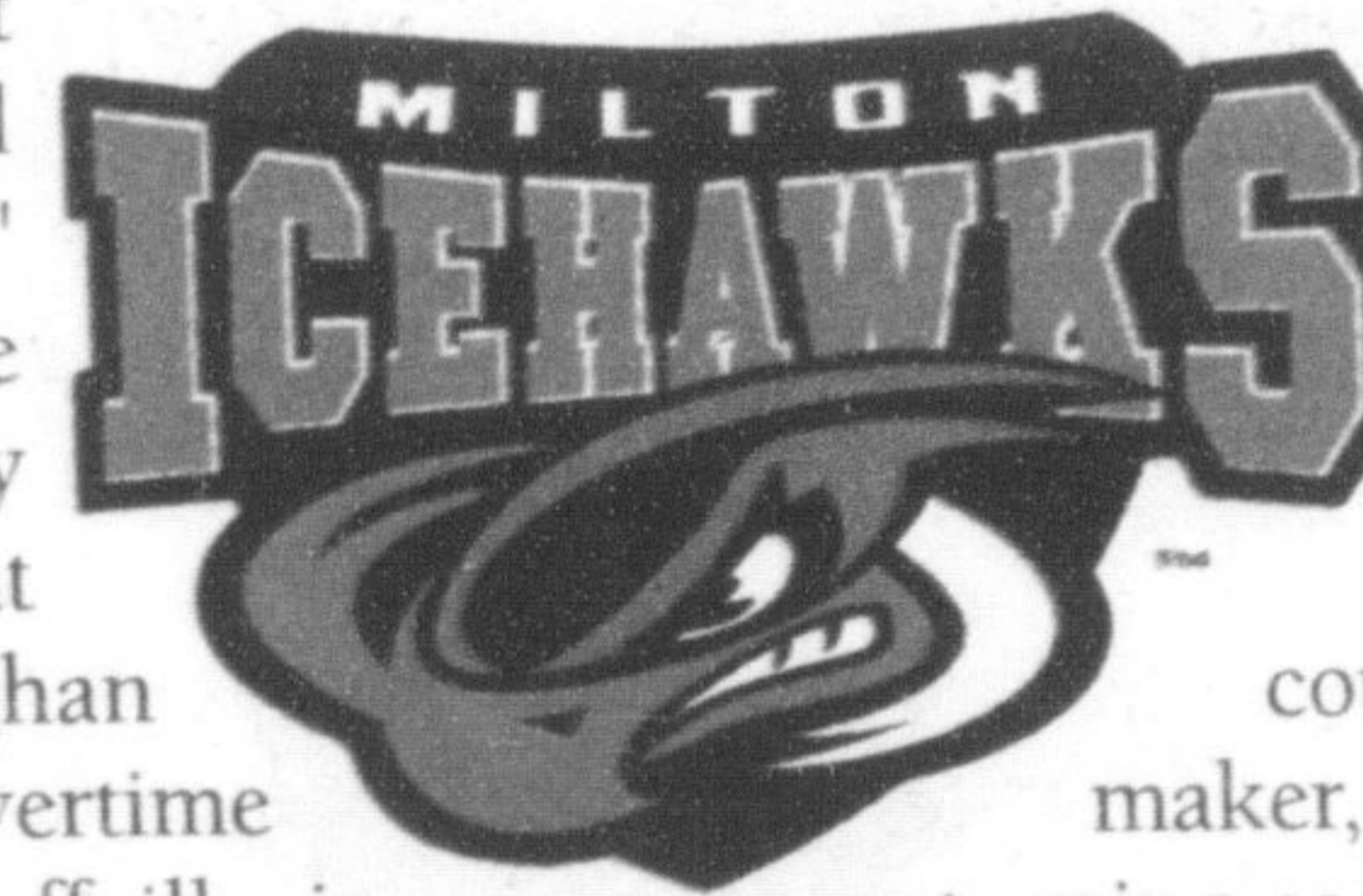
The bulk of that optimism revolves around what appears to be a more formida-

ble offence, which wasn't much of a threat to the West's upper echelon teams last year.

Along with scooping up some promising talent from the Halton Hurricanes and neighbouring Oakville, Novak is particularly encouraged by the recent addition of Justin Basso — a standout graduate with the Mississauga Rebels who could prove to be a reliable play-maker, and possible set up man for returning scoring leader David Vallorani.

The IceHawks have also been impressed with the work ethic of such incoming forwards as Scott Stover, Stephan Thorne and Kevin Caister — the younger brother of for-

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