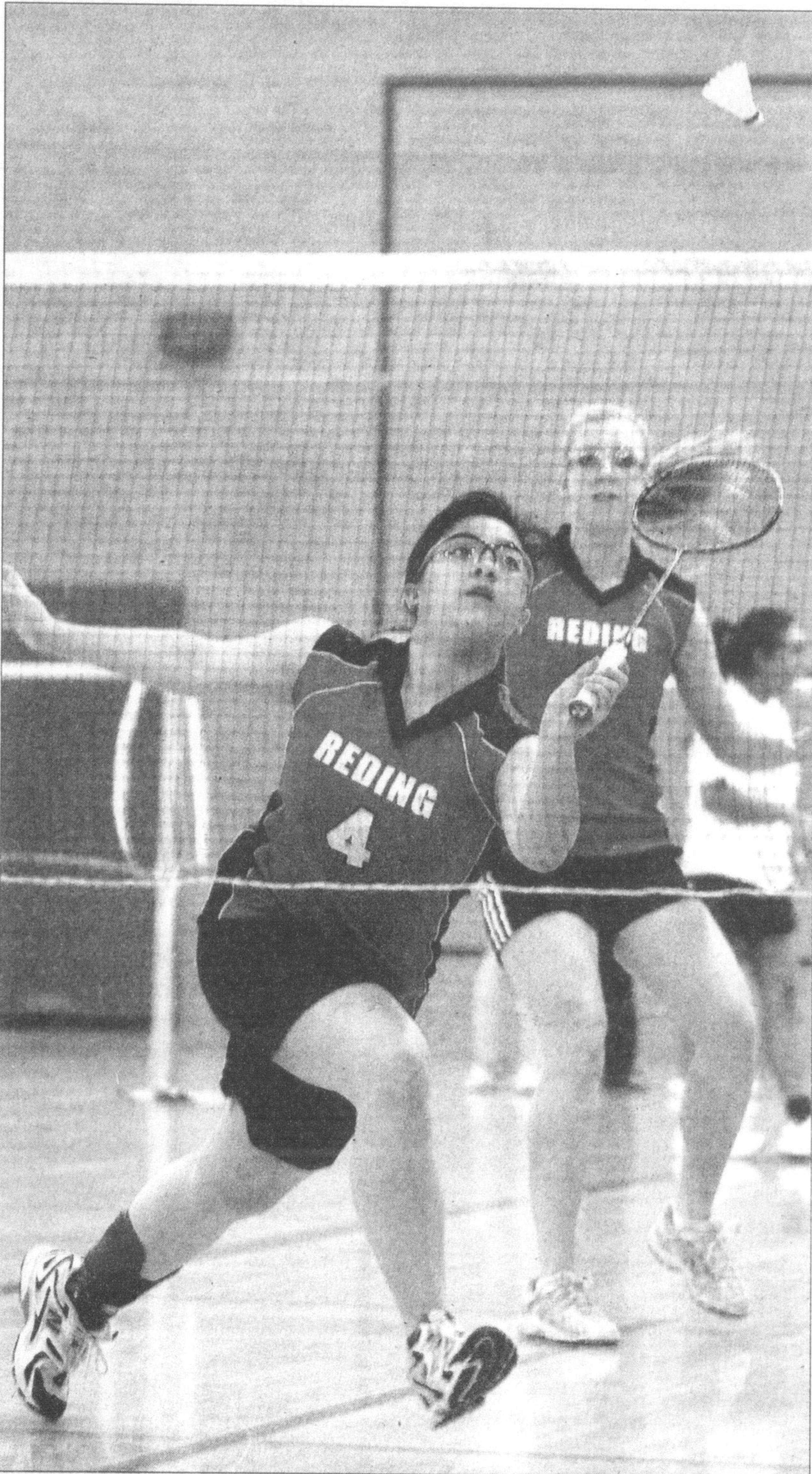


SPORTS

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DANIEL HO / SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

NET GAINS: Bishop Reding's Fiona To (at net) and Brooke Hartwick compete in GHAC badminton at E.C. Drury Thursday. The ladies doubles partners qualified for this week's OFSAA championship with a second-place finish. See story on page A21.

A golden experience

Under-18 Worlds tremendous learning opportunity: Brittain

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Shortly before first intermission the reality hit Josh Brittain. And boy was it ever sweet.

"We'd just gone up 4-0. We looked at each other on the bench there and suddenly thought 'Holy crap, we're going to walk away with a gold medal,'" recalled Milton's 18-year-old left winger, referring to Wednesday's 8-0 shellacking of the hosts in the final of the IIHF Under-18 Championships in Kazan, Russia. "We were just ecstatic."

Those tuning into TSN were no doubt stunned to see Canada simply lay waste to the Russians, who'd beaten them 4-2 in the round robin but were completely manhandled in the much-anticipated rematch.

Although certainly not expecting such a drastic reversal of fortune, Brittain wasn't too surprised that his Canucks were able to avenge their only loss of the tournament — and grab their first gold since 2003.

"We didn't bring our best game to that 4-2 loss, and we knew it," explained six-foot-four-inch, 210-pound Brittain, one of 22 players on the championship squad that eked out one-goal decisions in the quarterfinals and semis before capping their gold-medal drive with an embarrassment of riches. "We all came so focused and ready to go for the rematch."

That was evident even after Canada put an early hammerlock on its hosts — with five first-period goals — and had pretty much cemented the victory long before the final frame rolled around.

"At second intermission we said 'Let's play like it's nothing-nothing instead of 7-0' and I think that showed," said the big winger, who was recently ranked 114th for the NHL Entry Draft in June. "We kept up the defensive pressure and didn't give them many chances. We just never let up."

A standout sophomore with the Kingston Frontenacs this past season, Brittain was essentially the 13th forward in Russia — but didn't seem the least bit discouraged by his limited role.

But then it's not too often one wins world gold, or gets a chance to play under an NHL-level coach like Pat Quinn.

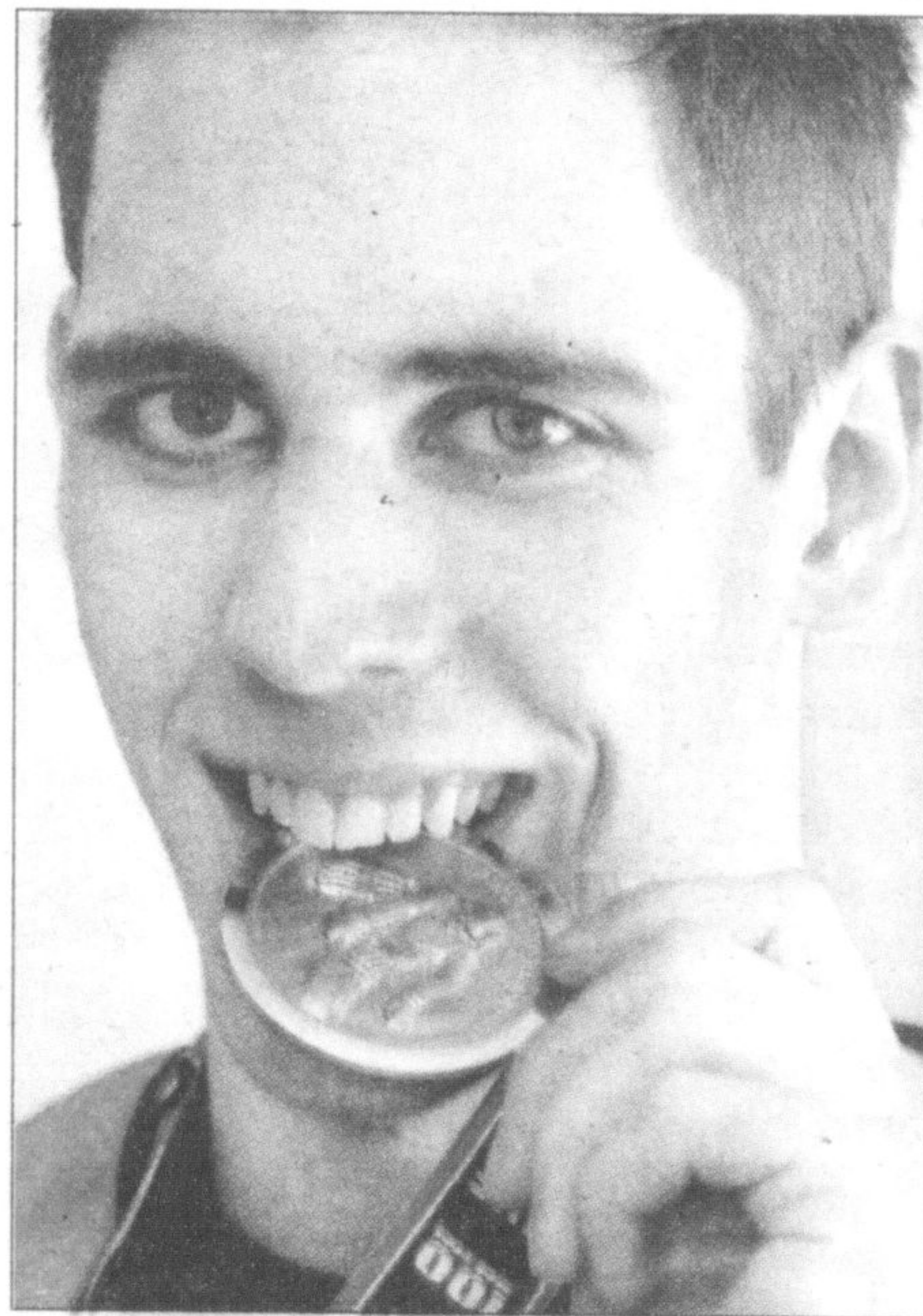
"When I first got the call from him that I'd been picked for the team I was pretty nervous, but I learned so much over the 16 days, including how just staying positive can help the team, even when you're not on the ice."

Judging by the late stages of Wednesday's game, it would seem the local OHLer earned his way into Quinn's good graces during the tournament.

The ex-Leafs skipper gave him the nod to stay on the ice following a questionable slashing penalty late in the third period. Brittain would make a quick return to the box with a huge hit that was called for charging, and then got a similar wave by Quinn to stay out once that infraction expired.

He was further rewarded with a last-minute powerplay shift.

"That was really cool (of him). I think it showed the benefits of just having the right attitude. Overall it was such an amazing experience — just something else."



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

SWEET TASTE OF VICTORY: Josh Brittain bites into the gold medal he won with Team Canada last week in Russia.

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