

SPORTS

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NIKKI WESLEY / METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

SQUEEZIN' THROUGH: Milton Winterhawk Gareth Marks tries to split Brampton Battalion's Ethan MacKinnon (left) and Mitchell Hussey during AA atom play at Milton Sports Centre Saturday evening. Brampton won 4-0, exacting revenge for a 2-1 loss to Milton at their Silver Stick Tournament just a week earlier.

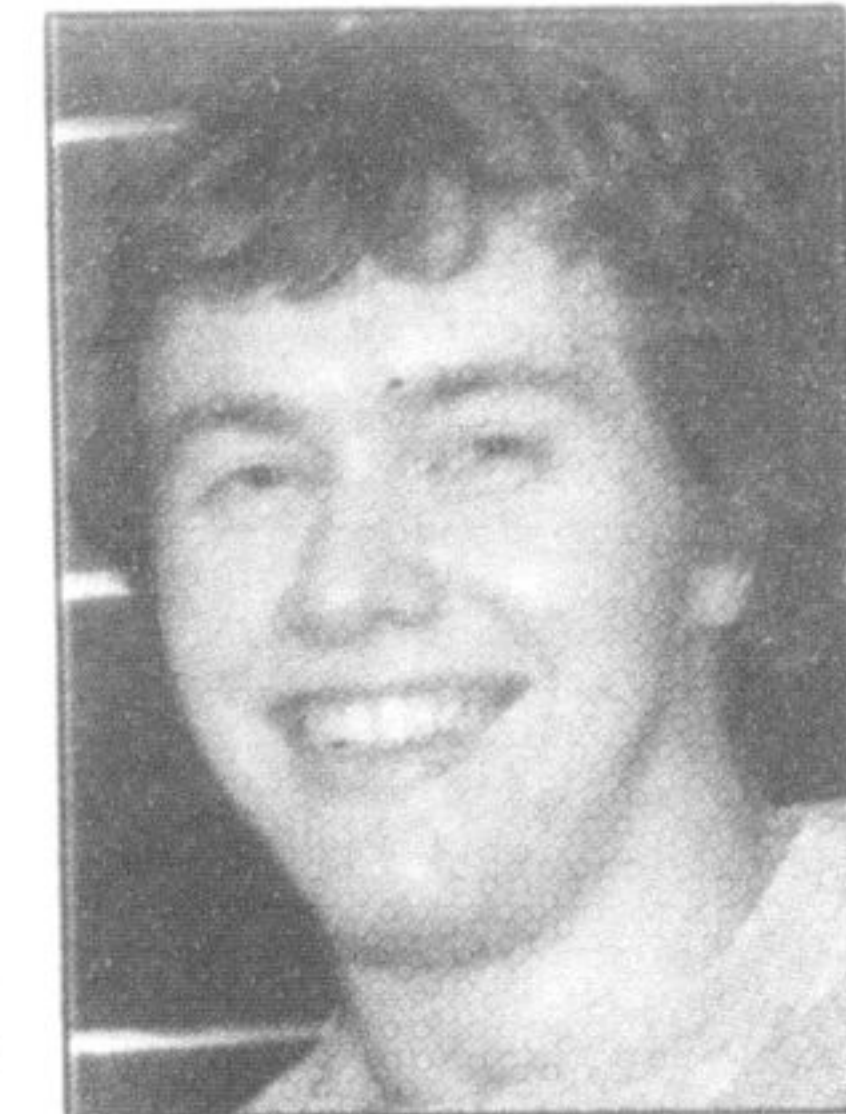
Hot streak comes at opportune time

December surge lands Konkle in Johnstown after Fresno folds

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

If Jarrett Konkle didn't already appreciate how important timing can be, he certainly does now.

Filling East Coast Hockey League (ECHL) nets throughout December, the 26-year-old Miltonian had his fill of offers over the holidays, which began pouring in just a few hours after his financially-ailing Fresno Falcons ceased operations.



Jarrett Konkle

The deals came in so fast that he didn't even hear about Fresno's folding directly.

"We (players) knew the team might be finished, but having gone home for the break I only found out officially when Wheeling called that Monday (December 22) with an offer," said the six-foot, 195-pound left winger. "It felt kind of weird to hear about it from a coach I'd never spoken to before."

Most of the league's northern teams would make a bid to land the third-year ECHLer, who'd gone into the Christmas break having amassed 10 goals and three assists over a 12-game stretch — lifting his team-leading season point total to 23 (15g, 8a).

"Yeah, I definitely caught fire at the right time," said Konkle, whose

'December to Remember' included two game-winning tallies and a hat-trick against Bakersfield.

The red-hot winger would eventually sign with Pennsylvania's Johnstown Chiefs (21-11-2-0, tied for second in American Conference), who not only afforded him the opportunity to remain in championship contention — since the Falcons led the Pacific Division at the time of their exit — but more exposure to American Hockey League scouts as well.

"There's far more (AHL) teams up here, so the chance of getting called up is a lot greater."

Reuniting with Chiefs' back-up Kris Mayotte — who played in Fresno last season — made the transition that much smoother, and Konkle no doubt endeared himself to his new teammates with a three-point debut in Reading December 30.

"It was sure nice to have that kind of a start," said the night's star, who notched the game winner with under three minutes to go after setting up Andy Contois in the first and third periods.

Added Johnstown head coach Ian Herbers, "We're excited to have Jarrett here. It's always great when you can pick up a guy like him midway through the season."

While Konkle had flashes of scoring success with last year's Falcons and — to a lesser extent — as a rookie with the South Carolina Stingrays, he's only now having the offensive consistency he enjoyed through a prosperous run at Elmira College and short-lived tenure with the United Hockey League's Elmira Jackals.

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Griffins enjoying clutch play from Haydar

Darren Haydar may not be dominating the score-sheet like he has in past years, but he's sure making a regular appearance on it when the pressure's on.

The latest example of that came Saturday night, when the American Hockey League (AHL) star delivered a clutch performance to lead his Grand Rapids Griffins to a 2-1 squeaker over the Manchester Monarchs.

The 29-year-old Miltonian — captain of the Griffins — scored early in the third period and then assisted on Mattias Ritola's last-minute game winner. His production came in an always-gratifying swing through the New Hampshire area, where he's



Darren Haydar

fondly remembered as a star of the UNH Wildcats.

Saturday marked the third time in eight days that the former AHL MVP and two-time Calder Cup champ factored into the deciding deposit in a low-scoring victory.

The previous Saturday he had a goal and an assist — just 1:04 apart — in a 2-0 whitewash of the Lake Erie Monsters, while three days later he netted the winner in a 3-1 decision over the Peoria Rivermen.

Haydar sits second in team scoring with 14 goals and 14 assists in 35 games, while his Griffins lead the Western Conference's North Division at 21-8-4-3.

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