

SPORTS

SPORTS EDITOR: STEVE LeBLANC e-mail sleblanc@miltoncanadianchampion.com



ON THE FORECHECK: Grand Rapids Griffins captain Darren Haydar (#20) presses Hamilton Bulldogs defenceman Dan Jancevski during American Hockey League play at Copps Coliseum last Wednesday. The 29-year-old Miltonian had two assists, both on second period powerplay tallies, in Grand Rapids' 3-1 win. He sits with 16 goals and 19 assists in 42 games this season.

LIESA KORTMANN / METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

Bantam Twisters' prosperity continues

A jump to A-level tournament play hasn't interrupted the bantam Twisters' dominance.

Recently promoted from the BB ranks due to its season-long tear, North Halton has been part of two tournaments since the holidays — reaching the finals each time and reigning supreme in its most recent outing.

That came in Scarborough, where led by captain and Miltonian Megan Wain the Twisters surrendered just two measly goals in a 5-0 run — punctuated with a 2-0 whitewash of the North Bay Ice Boltz.

About as reliable offensively as any North Halton player in recent memory, Wain scored in the championship to highlight a five-goal weekend.

Of course she wasn't the only Milton-area player to factor into the gold-medal drive.

Vanessa Hartwick had a goal and two assists — including one in a 2-1 semifinal squeaker over the

Etobicoke Dolphins — while fellow assistant captain Sarah DiGiallonardo drew a helper in a 3-0 first-round victory over the Markham-Stouffville Stars.

Meanwhile, Alyssa Dodson — the lone defenceman of the Twisters' Milton-foursome — was part of a blueline unit that helped suffocate the opposition.

North Halton's defensive prowess was nearly as high the previous weekend in Guelph, where just five goals were given up — including a pair in a 2-1 championship defeat to the Stratford Aces. The local players combined for seven points overall, which represented about half of the team's overall production.

Along with two golds and two silvers in six tournament appearances this season, the Twisters are perched firmly atop the Lower Lakes Female Hockey League at 15-0-1 — having been scored on just seven times.



All-star chapter added to career

Mark French now assistant coach with AHL-leading Hershey Bears

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

You don't have to sell Mark French on the idea that 'everything happens for a reason.'

The latest chapter in his professional coaching career is testament to that age-old adage.

Rewind 13 months and the native Miltonian was at a crossroads, having just been axed as head coach/director of hockey operations of the Wichita Thunder after two-and-a-half seasons with the Central Hockey League club.

"It was just before Christmas and I found myself without a job," said the 37-year-old, who spent a season with his hometown Jr. B team (then called the Merchants). "It was a pretty brutal time."

Had he known how short his unemployment run would last, French wouldn't have worried.

Around the same time in Pennsylvania, the American Hockey League's Hershey Bears were in dire need of an assistant — with head coach Bob Woods on his own for a while since taking over for Bruce Boudreau, who assumed the Washington Capitals' mantle not long into the 2007/08 season.

Though quick to apply for the

post, French didn't have a real 'in' with the perennial contender — beyond sending a few players up from the Thunder — and thus wasn't exactly optimistic about his chances.

However, within two weeks the longtime coach found himself with a new job — and at a much higher level to boot.

"On New Year's Day I was on a bus bound for Worcester, Massachusetts where we played the next night. The Capitals were in Boston at the same time, so when I got there I met with Bruce and George McPhere (Capitals' GM). It was pretty nerve-wracking."

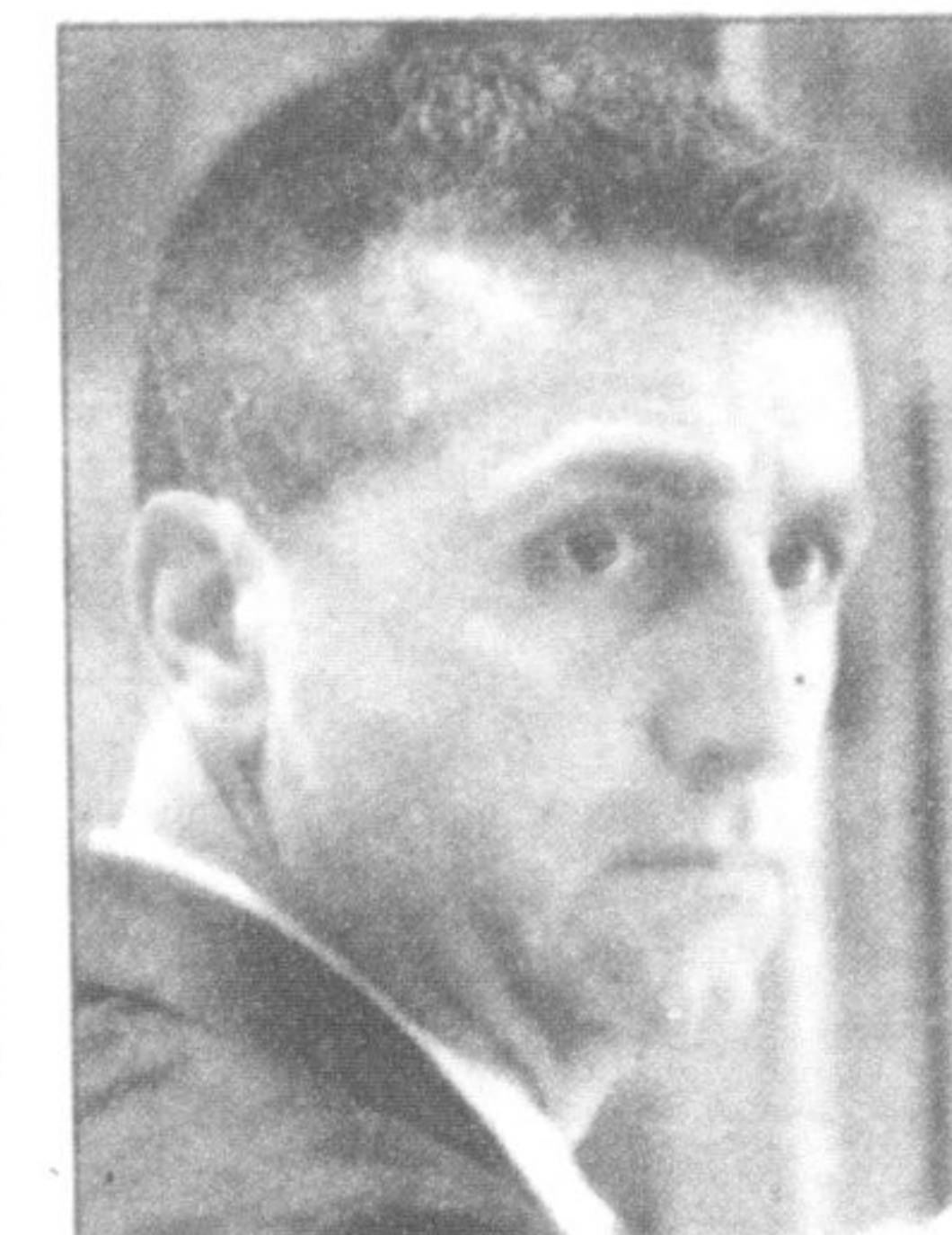
Hershey would lose to the Sharks that night, but if that served as any kind of bad omen, the AHL's newest assistant coach has done an awfully good job exorcising it over the past year.

He now finds himself with a team that's enjoying a penthouse view of the AHL. As a

result, he and Woods will be behind the bench for the Canadian squad for the upcoming all-star showcase, set for Sunday and Monday in Worcester.

"It should be a good experience, and a nice tribute to Washington," said French, whose wife Kimberly will give birth to their second child — a boy to join two-year-old Ellie — next month. "It's amazing how I went from a really low point in my career to a high one in such a short time. I never thought I'd land on my feet so quickly, but it's just been so great here in Hershey. This is a great organization with such a

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Mark French

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