

Speed skater conquers one-minute mark

Becomes club's first female competitor to do so

By Herb Garbutt
METROLAND WEST
MEDIA GROUP

Victoria Dodds is not one to set limits on herself, but even she couldn't foresee her recent entry into her club's record books.

Dodds not only became the Milton Speed Skating Club's first female skater to break the one-minute mark in the 500-metre, the 12-year-old became the club's youngest skater to ever accomplish the feat when she recently turned in a time of 59.32 seconds at an Ontario Cup competition in Gloucester.

"From a very early age, she's been very driven. She's a hard worker and she really pushes herself," said mom Margaret Kirkup. "She has a built-in confidence where she just won't allow herself to say 'I can't do it.'"

But even Dodds thought the minute mark was beyond her grasp when the season began. Her personal best time coming into this year was 1:16.

"I was looking more at cutting off seconds, not getting to :59 — especially not this season," she said.

But she quickly began shedding time and by the club's meet in December she was down to 1:05.03. Earlier this year she came agonizingly close — missing the mark by four one-hundredths of a second.

Knowing that it was in reach, Dodds said the hardest part was waiting two weeks for the next competition in Gloucester.

When that finally came she was forced to wait a little longer. On pace for a time of 58 seconds in the qualifying round, she fell in the final turn but got back up and still managed to qualify for the final.

This time she would not be denied.

"It was very exciting," Dodds said. "Especially being the first girl in the club to break one minute."

Added coach Mathew Scherer, "I knew with the level of competition she would be facing there that it would push her and she'd probably do it."

Scherer said there have been many factors in Dodds' rapid progress. Dodds growing and getting stronger has played a role as has improved technique.

"The lower your times get, technique

becomes more and more important," he said. "Getting that fine tuning that you need in order to improve your times."

Perhaps the biggest factor, though, is Dodds' dedication. Scherer said when coaches give skaters a break in practice, Dodds continues skating.

"People can't believe her energy level," said her mom. "She's the kind of kid that just goes until she drops."

It was that energy that got Kirkup thinking about speed skating when she saw a notice in the *Champion* four years ago about a clinic being put on by the local club.

Mother and daughter had watched Olympic speed skating together and Kirkup suggested it to her daughter.

Dodds went to the clinic and signed up for the following season.

"I liked it and now I've started to get more serious about it," said the Grade 7 student at Bruce Trail Public School.

With the one-minute barrier conquered, Dodds is already setting her sights on her next goal.

"There are a couple of guys in the club who do 57 (seconds) and one guy who does 53," Dodds said. "I'm going to be working more towards beating them."

AE minor bantams take lead in Tri County finals

Milton's additional entry minor bantams have drawn first blood in the Tri County championship finals.

Despite being short-staffed due to March Break vacations, the Winterhawks toppled the Oakville Rangers 3-1 Saturday night at Memorial Arena.

The only local Tri County finalists this year, the AE bantams have now held the opposition to a single goal in six of their last seven games — dating back to

the start of a perfect qualifying run.

Beaten only on a second-period penalty shot, Mack Mindenhall served as a major equalizer while the hosts battled through a thinned out lineup, and was especially sharp down the stretch as Oakville pressed for a comeback.

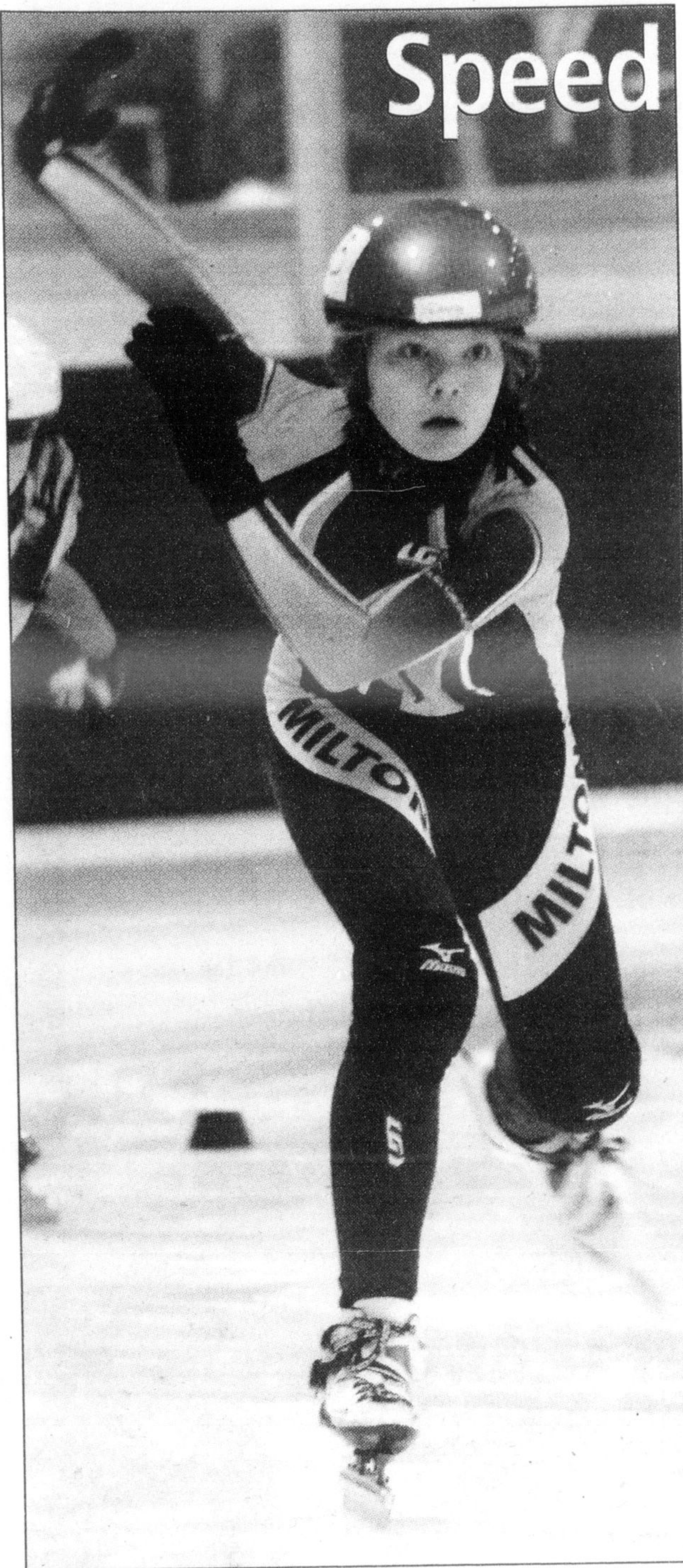
Robert Manning scored the game winner early in the third period on a thunderous slapshot just inside the blue-line that rang off both posts before find-

ing its way across the line.

Jack Gonz sealed the deal with a late insurance marker, while call-up James Elsley had the initial goal.

Adam Poirier assisted on the first and third goals.

The best-of-five series continues Tuesday in Oakville. If victorious, the Winterhawks can wrap things up at home next Wednesday, with a 6:30 p.m. start at Milton Sports Centre.



FILE PHOTO BY GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

ON THE EDGE: Victoria Dodds races to a first-place finish in recent competition at John Tonelli Sports Centre.

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