

SPORTS

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Representing Canada helps Sewell prepare for next step in career

By Herb Garbutt

METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

In almost every sport, an elite player can look forward to the opportunity to wear their country's colours. They can work their way through provincial and national competitions and if they're lucky, and good, they'll one day walk on to the field of play with Canada written on their uniform.

Football is one exception. A largely American game, its appeal doesn't extend much beyond the United States' northern border, making a large-scale international event difficult.

Milton's Matt Sewell got that rare opportunity when the local offensive lineman suited up for Canada at the Junior World Championship of American Football in Canton, Ohio.

And while the result may not have been what Canada had hoped for — it lost 41-3 to the Americans in Sunday's gold medal game — Sewell was appreciative of the chance to play in the event.

"It was amazing," Sewell said. "To get to represent your country, especially in a sport like football where there's not much international stuff, it was quite an experience. It's probably something that will never happen again."

Canada was the number one seed heading into the eight-team tournament, but Sewell knew Canada would be in tough against their southern neighbours. Canada had been victorious at the previous three NFL Global Junior Championships, but in those events, the U.S. had only selected players from the host state. This time they selected players from across the country.

"It was a real Team USA," Sewell said. "They brought out the best and they weren't going to lose."

That only helped to improve the level of competition, which Sewell said was a benefit in helping him prepare for his first year of Canadian university football at McMaster in the fall. So too will the advice and tips he got from the Canadian coaching staff.

"The (offensive) line coach from Laval helped me. He cleaned up my stance and helped me with my first step," said the six-foot-seven, 350-pound lineman. "If I can work on my quickness off the ball, I'm a pretty big guy and if I can get the speed with that, it could make me a pretty dominant player."

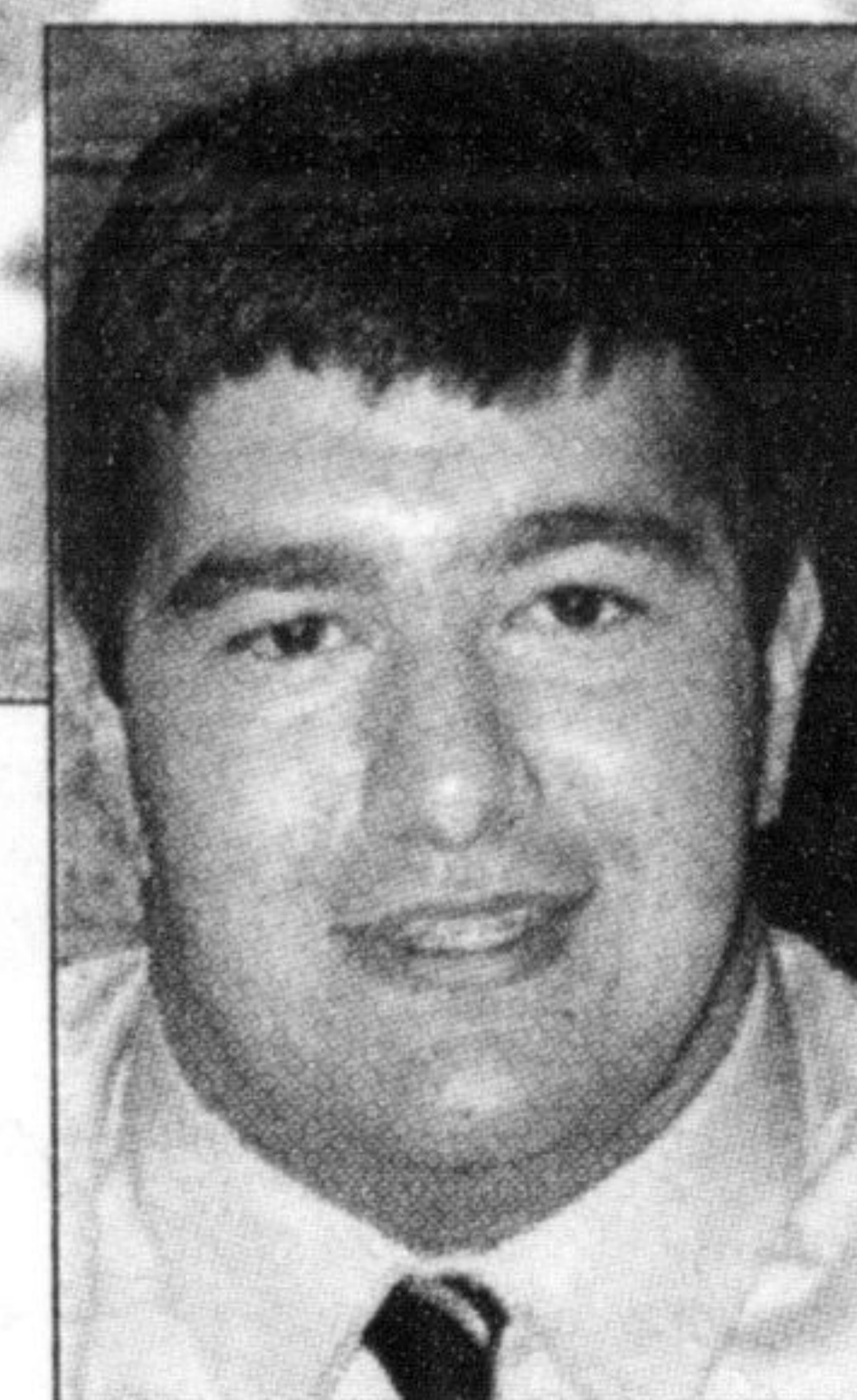
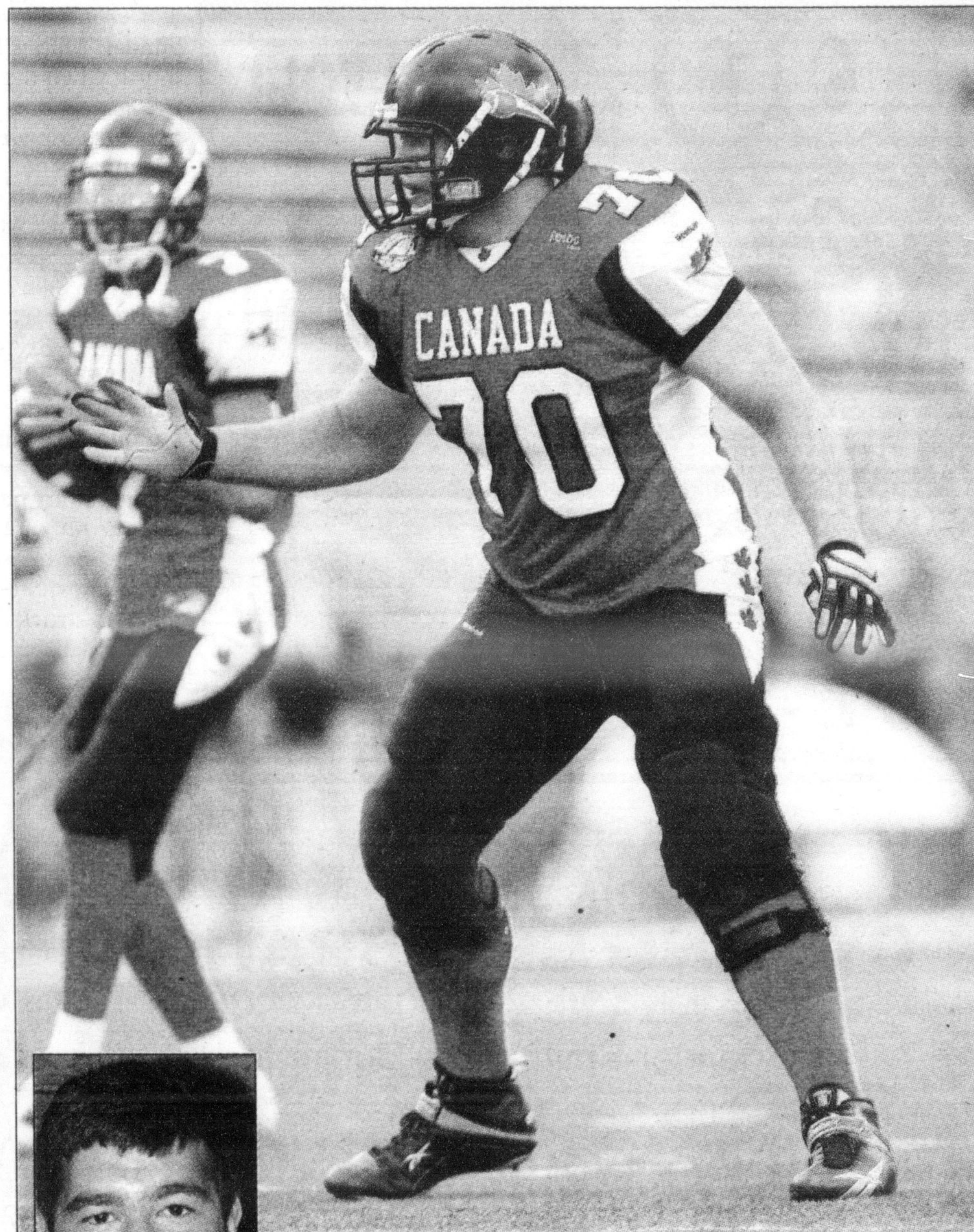
Canada dominated its first opponent, beating New Zealand 55-0, but got a scare in the semifinals when they had to rally in the final minute to beat Japan 38-35.

Canada led 28-14 in the third quarter but Japan came back to take the lead with 1:27 remaining in the game. Canada responded, though, marching the ball 64 yards and capping the drive with Alex Anthony's 33-yard touchdown catch with 16 seconds remaining.

"He made a big play, he dragged three Japanese players the last five yards into the end zone," said the former Bishop Reding student. "It was a huge relief."

Sewell said the Japanese team surprised them but gave them full credit for being well coached and running plays tailored to their strength — their speed.

The 19 year old will now spend the summer preparing for his debut with the McMaster Marauders but will go in with the knowledge that he can compete with the country's top players.



COURTESY OF SHAWN HUBBARD PHOTOGRAPHY

STANDING ON GUARD: Former Bishop Reding offensive lineman Matt Sewell represented Canada at the World Championship of American Football, helping the team claim a silver medal. He'll play for McMaster University in the fall.

"Just getting the chance to go against the guys from Team Canada in practice helped," he said.

"These are the guys who are going to be

the best in the CIS. These guys are the future stars so it was great to measure myself against those guys and see what I can do."

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