

Couture blows high school eligibility

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By JEFF PASQUALE

The E.C. Drury hockey team has suffered a blow which will probably cost them any shot at winning a playoff game.

Their top player, Mark Couture, has made himself ineligible for high school action thanks to suiting up for a Jr. B Hockey League game with Grimsby Peach Kings, says Drury coach Barrie Elliott. What makes it worse is Couture used an assumed name, under the advice of the owner of the Peach Kings, Dan Pope.

The move couldn't have come at a worse time for the Spartans, who before this happened, still entertained thoughts of moving up in the standings. Now they will be happy with holding onto the final playoff spot.

Plays under an assumed name in Grimsby

"Mark signed a contract with Grimsby last week, which is fine, as long as he doesn't play in a game. We discussed it and he knew he could only practise with them until the high school season is over," said Elliott.

Couture followed that until Sunday, when he went to St. Catharines to watch his prospective team play a league game.

"According to what I've heard, Couture had no intention of playing in the game. He didn't even take his equipment with him. The team owner Dan Pope, the coach and the captain all got together and talked him into playing, but they would use an assumed name

so his high school eligibility wouldn't be in jeopardy."

When Elliott found out about the game, he was furious. Couture thought he would still be able to play because he didn't use his name.

"I told Mark that there was no way I was going to put the school's, the team's or my reputation at stake for him. We run a clean program."

"For the last two years, I've done so much for Mark. This really upsets me."

As far as the Grimsby squad goes, the Ontario Hockey League president Brent Ladds, has been notified of the situation and action

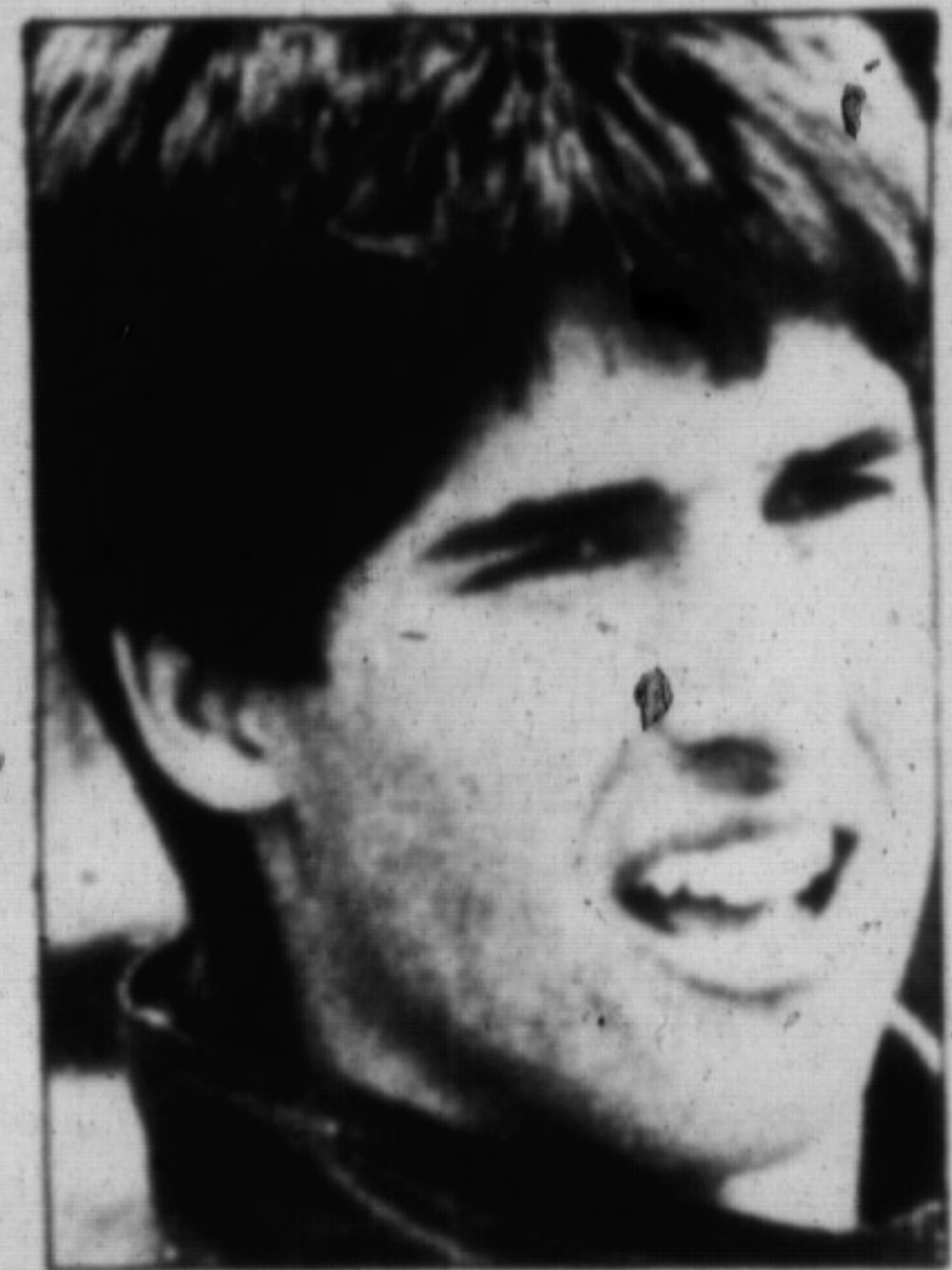
is pending. The loss of Couture leaves the Spartans shorthanded for their final three games of the season.

"We're down to eight forwards and three defencemen the rest of the way," said Elliott.

Fatigue could well come into the picture as Drury travelled to Georgetown last night, host the same squad at John Tonelli Sports Centre, today, and host T.A. Blakelock of Oakville tomorrow.

As for how his team will react, Elliott had some definite feelings.

"I hope they get damn mad. Maybe we can get this thing to work for us," said Elliott, who has already announced his retirement.



MARK COUTURE

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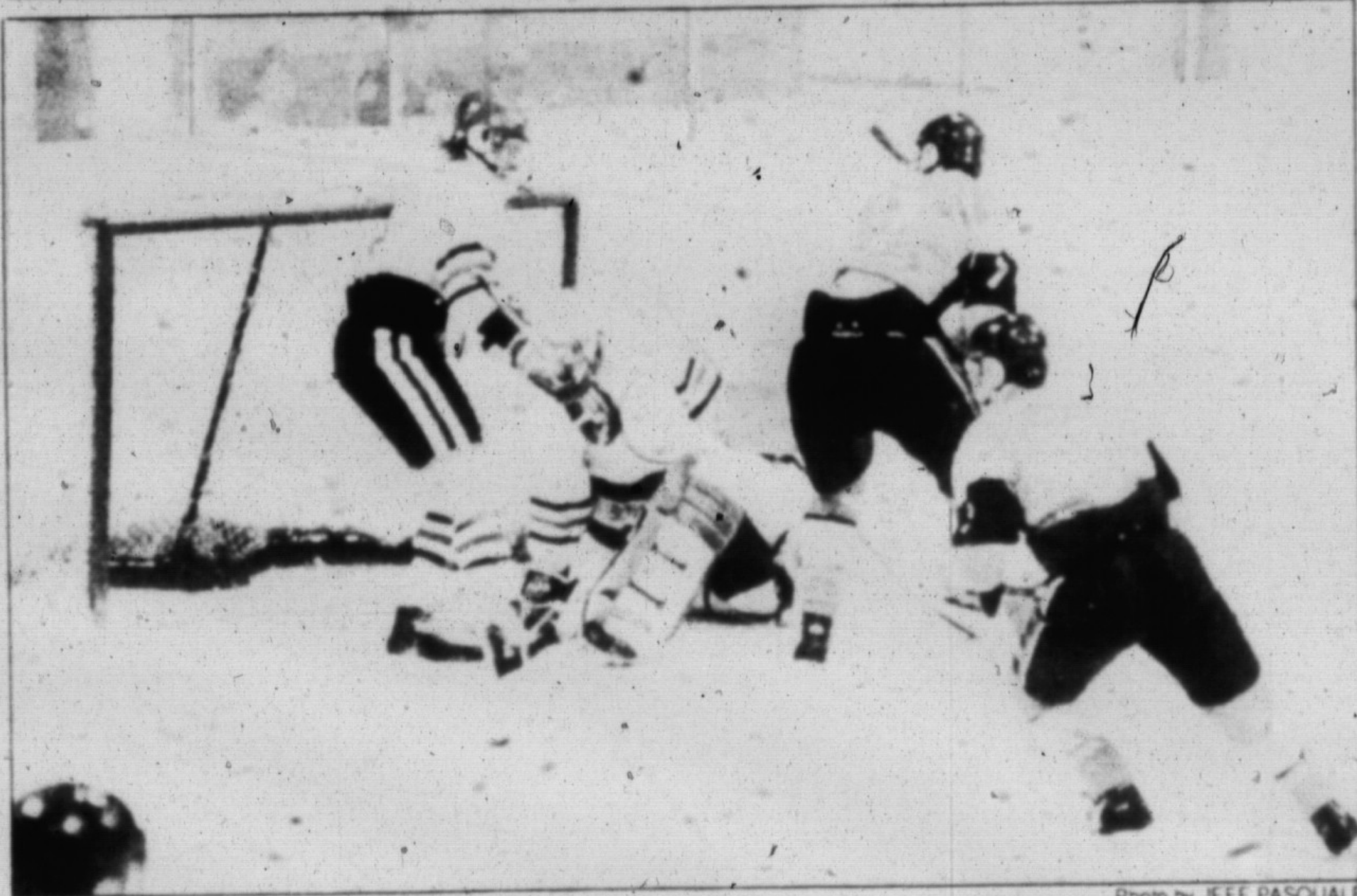


Photo by JEFF PASQUALE

It was a tough loss for the Milton Merchants Friday night as they gave up the losing goal to the Streetsville Derbys with only one second left in the game to lose 5-4. Here Darryl Taylor is about to pounce on the loose puck and put it by Milton goalie Chad Muldoon as defenceman Brian Haringa looks on.

42-game exhibition season ends, playoffs finally start

By JEFF PASQUALE

Well, so much for the 42-game exhibition season the Central Ontario Jr. B Hockey League has the audacity to pass off as the regular season.

What's so regular about a 147-game schedule which sees none of the seven teams in the West division eliminated from post-season play. Even the NHL knocks off five of their 21 teams.

Oh well, that doesn't matter now that the second season is underway.

Milton got the team they least wanted to play in the first round, Burlington Cougars.

As has been well documented, the Merchants are a perfect seven for seven with Burlington this season, seven losses in seven tries. They have been outscored by a total of 58-20.

"Anything can happen," is how coach Gary Ford remained optimistic. "If the law of averages comes into this at all, maybe we're due for a couple of wins."

Brad Grant, the owner of the team, is thinking along the same lines.

"I'm a little disappointed we didn't get past Mimico into the sixth place. Burlington did beat up

on us pretty good this year but if we'd gotten a couple of breaks the last time we hosted them, it would have been a different story," he said.

Grant is also thinking it's Milton's turn to take a game from the Cougars.

"Hopefully we're due for four wins."

Grant, although disappointed with the length of time it took to get the team playing well, is happy with their performance of late.

"I'm very happy with all of my coaches. They are getting along with the players and it's really started to show in the last month or so."

Grant refused to talk about hiring a new general manager for next year, the possible fate of the coaching staff or whether the team is up for sale, saying it was too early to talk about it. He'd prefer to wait until the season is over.

"As far as doing well in the playoffs goes, Ford has an idea of what it will take."

"We're going to need a hot goaltender and the defence on top of their game. Experience means a hell of a lot but so does desire and drive," things Ford hopes his team has in abundance.

The playoffs got underway last night in Burlington and the second game is Friday at 8 p.m. at Milton Memorial Arena. It's back in Burlington Sunday for game three and Milton Tuesday for the fourth game.

The final three games, if necessary, go next Friday and Sunday in Burlington with games five and seven and Saturday in Milton for sixth contest. Grant hopes to see something past game four.

Local skiers win two of three

The Milton Heights Ski Club won two of their races over their weekend, including the red team which remained undefeated.

The red team was in a four-team event with Caledon, Osler and Alpine at Alpine. Milton took first with 271 points, Caledon second with 264, Osler third with 262 and Alpine fourth with 141.

Marc Hoewing was the top male skier with a fourth-place finish while Kevin Smith was fifth and John McElhone of Campbellville was seventh. On the girls side, Maryanne Doyle was fourth, Holly Bamber was fifth and Jennifer Quinn was eighth.

The MHSC white team beat London Silver at London Ski Club 104-79. Natalie Clarke of Milton led the way with a first-place finish, Alison Sterling was second and Yvonne Martin of Campbellville was third. For the boys, Brent Garrell was third, Marc Binkley was fourth and Fraser Bonner was fifth.

The only loss of the weekend was suffered by the blue team when they travelled to Chedoke and lost to Chicopee 119-55. David Metvedt was the best MHSC skier with a fourth, Stewart Green of Campbellville was fifth and Allan Gordon was sixth.

Last second loss puts Merchants in basement

By JEFF PASQUALE

Think about one second for a moment.

It probably took you about that long to read the above sentence, or to take a sip of coffee. It was just that long which turned a 4-4 tie into a 5-4 loss for Milton Merchants against Streetsville Derbys Friday night at Memorial Arena.

Let's set the stage. Milton needs at least a tie to retain their hopes of escaping the Central Ontario Jr. B West division's basement while the Derbys can clinch third place with a win.

The score has been tied at 4-4 since the 6:28 mark of the third period when Brian Haringa tied the score with a blast from the point. Streetsville put intense pressure on the Milton net for the final two-and-a-half minutes of the game with the Merchant defence scrambling and goalie Chad Muldoon doing everything but standing on his head to keep the puck out of his net.

With five seconds to go, there was a faceoff to the left of Muldoon. Randy Stephenson of Streetsville beat Scott Gale cleanly on the draw and slid the puck in front of the net. Dave Brown got the puck on his stick and fired a quick shot from 15 feet in front of the net which beat Muldoon cleanly between the legs.

The loss, combined with the Mimico Marquis's 6-4 defeat of Burlington the same night, resigned Milton to the basement, and a first-round match up with Burlington Cougars, one they had hoped to avoid.

Coach Gary Ford was actually happy with the effort his team gave.

"It's tough to play that long in your own end of the rink," said

Ford referring to the final three minutes of the contest. "It should never have gotten to that point. We missed a lot of opportunities in the first period."

As has become their habit this season, Merchants fell behind early and had to fight their way back into the game. Mike Miller and Darryl Taylor both scored in the first five minutes of the game to stake the visitors to a 2-0 lead.

Milton cut the lead in half with just 24 seconds left in the first period when a harmless looking slapshot from the blue line by Graham Taylor beat Steve Wiwezaryk.

Streetsville opened the lead to 3-1 halfway through the second period on a goal by Cam Cuthbert. Milton had been caught on a line change and the Derbys had a rare three-man breakthrough.

Scott Gale got the goal back on a power play at 14:54. Chris Reier took a shot from the point which missed the net by about five feet. Gale picked up the ricochet in front of the net and fired it home.

The Derbys received a gift on their next goal. At 15:07 of the second period, Steve Scannell was given an elbowing penalty. From the bench Jason Caccamo cursed the referee loud enough for the entire arena to hear and earned himself a two-minute bench minor. Scannell then started jawing with the ref and earned another 10 minutes in the sin-bin.

Streetsville, never a team to look a gift horse in the mouth, took advantage of their two-minute, two-man power play, scoring four seconds before the penalties ended. The game went into the third period with Streetsville holding a 4-2 advantage.

Milton, though, wasn't about to give up. They came out in the third period like a house on fire. Ford claims he didn't say anything in the dressing room to fire them up.

"The boys really wanted this. They got themselves up," he said. "Reier cut the deficit in half at 5:42 while on a power play and Haringa's tying goal came 46 seconds later. That set up the heart break at the end of the game."

Merchants closed their season with a meaningless 4-3 win in Mimico Saturday night.

Gale led the way with a pair of goals while singles went to Mark Zebedee and Shawn Healey, who had the winner.

Milton opened the playoffs in Burlington last night and return home to Memorial Arena Friday night at 8 p.m. for game two.