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FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 1992

17—The Canadian Champion, Friday, April 3, 1992

## Central League Champions

*Huge crowd witnesses Merchants' dramatic win*

By BRAD REAUME  
The Champion

It's springtime in Aurora but winter for Milton and St. Catharines.

The western division title, Milton Merchants claimed the Central Ontario Junior B League championship Tuesday night at Memorial Arena, with a 4-2 win in game seven of their series with eastern division champion, Aurora.

Milton advances to the all-Ontario Junior B semifinal against the St. Catharines Falcons who captured Game Six of their Golden Horseshoe Junior B League final with Welland, 7-1. For another week at least, winter still haunts both Milton and St. Catharines.

A huge crowd spilled into the aisles, occupied Lion's Club Hall, filled stairways and stood three deep around the glass at ice level. Nobody left the building while the issue was in doubt. From a parking perspective it seemed that every vehicle registered in the Town of Milton was parked at the eastern edge of town.

"We gave everything we had," said Aurora coach Dana Shutt. "Milton is a deserving champion. They played all year for the right to hold the seventh game."

"I'm never satisfied losing," he added. "I'm not used to losing. Junior B hockey should be proud, it was hockey as it was meant to be."

Shutt, brother of former Montreal Canadiens great Steve Shutt, said that the series was particularly good in light of "the ugly, no-class affair" between Orillia and Oakville last season.

Shutt said the turning point of the series was an injury to Dave Sutchy who held a hot scoring touch, in Game Four. He never hit the ice after that.

### 'Collective affair'

"We had confidence all year long," said Milton coach and general manager Rick Bince. "With our attitude we were never out of it."

"It was a collective effort," said a happy Bince pointing out the contributions of a number of former players' fathers who have stuck with the team to help out. "People stayed around and stuck with us."

Milton got the home crowd involved right from the start. Jason Ritchie scored at 4:23 of the first when his slap shot, on a drop pass from Clancy Seymour, handcuffed Eagle goaltender Steve Thorpe.

Less than two minutes later Rick Emmett was triumphant when he scored a powerplay goal on a slap shot from the right point, for a 2-0 Milton lead. Aurora's Scott Harris



Rick Bince joins his Milton Merchant players moments after they captured the Central Ontario Junior B crown, capping a three games to one deficit with a 4-2 win the seventh and deciding game at Memorial Arena on Tuesday. Team captain Shawn Healey, a four year veteran, is directly underneath the trophy. Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

## Start tonight against St. Catharines

had been tagged for slashing.

An Aurora penalty for two many men on the ice suggested the Eagles were beginning to panic. However, a penalty to Danner Finn, for high sticking behind the play, nullified the Milton advantage and allowed Aurora a short powerplay.

The Eagles took advantage of the opportunity, getting a goal from Chris Stoner when he snapped a loose puck past Jason Chipman from the top of the left circle at 11:09. Milton had a number of chances to clear the puck from their zone on the play but failed.

Milton defenceman Mike Murray

raced back to cover a breakaway as the period wound down and Harris was sitting out a charging penalty giving Milton the man advantage. Murray dove and performed perfect surgery to stick check the Aurora player without knocking him over.

### Comeback

In the second frame Aurora's Paul Boddart scored on a snap shot from the point with Steve Rocco in the penalty box for hooking. The goal came at 4:47.

Only 30 seconds later, at 5:17 of the middle frame, Mickey Mitrovic popped a shot upstairs on Thorpe

from the right slot. Mike Cox worked the puck to Mitrovic from the corner.

With lapses, Milton carried the bulk of the play to Aurora. The Eagles had Milton running around the defensive zone on a couple occasions but they couldn't score.

In the third frame Rocco scored on a slap shot from the left point which found the top corner. Kelly Leroux and Jason Ritchie picked up assists.

After the two goal lead was restored Milton dropped into a defensive shell. Initially they were content to get the puck out of their zone and attack only if they were unchal-

lenged, but as time wore down they merely dumped the puck out of their zone and waited for the next flock of Eagles to bring it back.

Aurora pulled their goalie with 1:35 left to play. Repeated Milton attempts to score caused numerous icings but when Aurora iced the puck after a long lead pass went awry, Thorpe returned to the Aurora net with 11 seconds on the clock.

And the celebration began.

Fans chanted down the last few seconds and broke into sustained applause. Players executed a circuit of the ice with the league trophy, everyone wanting a piece of it.

Milton takes on St. Catharines beginning tonight (Friday) at 8 p.m. at Memorial Arena in Milton.

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