

Stephanie was a golden girl for Marlins at York swim meet

Stephanie Sliemers made the biggest waves for the Milton Marlins recently at York University, collecting three gold medals and setting a new club record in the 100-metre freestyle at the Tait McKenzie Center.

Her efforts — in the 11 and 12-year-old age class — highlighted an extremely successful meet for the local swimmers, who collected 27

medals overall.

David Wassenrich set new standards in the 50m and 100m breast strokes en route to back-to-back gold medals in the 11 and 12-year-old boys division.

Jacqueline Clarke turned in the biggest medal haul among eight and under girls with two golds and a pair of silvers.

Kévin Winter struck gold for the eight and under boys, as did David Mondoux in the nine and 10-year-old class. He also took home a bronze. Kristen McIlroy earned gold and silver in the same age bracket.

Other multi-medal winners were Michelle Claessens, Jennifer Porenta and Lisa Trenes. Erynn Mayes, Cassandra Sliemers, Yvonne

Sliemers and Ashleigh Snow brought home hardware as well.

Kassandra earned silver while the others grabbed bronze medals.

Also competing were Jennifer Claessens, Matthew Couttie, Amy Danks, Andrew Prenter-Duff, Julie Dumencu, Derek Tellier and Hillary Wassenich.



SPORTS

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Merchants gun for best in west

By STEVE LeBLANC
Special to The Champion

The Milton Merchants finished first in the West over the regular season — but can they match that success in the playoffs?

The local Jr. A club will be looking to get back to the West Conference finals for the first time in four years. Their campaign begins tonight (Tuesday), with the start of their best-of-seven, opening-round series against the Streetsville Derbys.

And while their immediate future looks bright, one pressing question still remains. Will the Merchants repeat their mistakes of the past?

"I sure hope this is the year we get back (to the West Conference finals)," third-year centre Jeff Haydar said. "Discipline is going to be the key. We can't allow ourselves to get rattled when push comes to shove, especially in the later rounds of the playoffs."

His comments strike at the root of Milton's past problems. The last three seasons have seen them nosedive in the playoffs, due to rash penalties, untimely suspensions and a general lack of discipline.

"We can't allow our opponents more than four or five power-play opportunities a night, or it's going to hurt us," explained club president Gregg Carrigan, who sees Brampton as their main obstacle to the West Conference title. "I'm looking at a two-and-a-half to three goals-against average through the post season."

While the Merchants haven't been the most disciplined team this season, they do hold a number of advantages over last year — which should combine to take them farther than the second round. Topping that list is simple talent. Where Milton had few go-to guys last season, they now have two of the best lines in the Provincial Jr. A league.

Next — and certainly as important — is experience. Not only does Milton have a proven coaching staff in Marty Williamson and Carrigan — who led Caledon to back-to-back Centennial Cup appearances — they also have a number of players from past championship teams.

The most obvious of these is returning rightwinger Travis Riffin, part of the Merchants' 1991/92 crew that went all the way to the provincial finals. "The thing I remember most from that season was the chemistry. It got stronger and stronger as we went on, and by the end we were one big family."

"Hopefully that kind of togetherness will come out in this team."

Veteran centre Troy Walczak has tasted even more success. As a first-time player under Carrigan and Williamson three years ago, he helped Caledon win the Centennial Cup in their first trip to the national championship.

"We have the same coach, same systems and at least the same amount of talent here as in Caledon, so we're certainly capable of going far. We just need to play tough and stay disciplined. We don't want to be taking a lot of penalties, at least not selfish ones," said Walczak.

While discipline was Milton's Achilles heel last season, a lack of depth — both in talent and number of players — didn't help matters either. After the brawl with Bramalea, they had no one to put in place of Cory Holland, Phil James, Dave Dolecki and injured captain Steve Clarke.

Such will not be the case this time around, as the Merchants head into the post-season with three extra players. Stated Carrigan, "This team has more skill in terms of speed and scoring ability than any I've coached before. After last season, I knew we needed to carry 22 or 23 guys for this year's playoffs. We needed guys who we could insert at any given time, and I think we've got that."



Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

Driving for the finish

Bishop Reding's Beth Rutherford (above and inset) got in some practice at the Leisure Centre recently for the Halton Swimming championships tomorrow (Wednesday). The races will take place at the Etobicoke Olympium. She will compete in a medley and sprint competitions.

Bramalea sings blues in quest for first

By STEVE LeBLANC
Special to The Champion

It may have come down to the wire, but there was no arguing who deserved top spot in the West Conference after the regular season's final weekend.

The Milton Merchants sealed up first place with back-to-back wins for an impressive 37-9-5 record — and a five-point cushion over second-place Bramalea.

They were officially crowned regular season champions at approximately 10:30 p.m. Friday. Having edged the Vaughan Vipers 6-5 a half an hour earlier, the Merchants' entire coaching staff and many of its fans waited by the phone for results of the Bramalea-Hamilton game.

Nothing less than a win would keep the Blues in the hunt for first, and less is what their steeltown opponents offered in the form of a 6-6 draw. The Kilty Bees had doubled Bramalea 6-3 a week earlier for their first gift to Milton.

"It's a big accomplishment (to finish first)," said a jubilant, somewhat relieved head coach Marty Williamson.

Less than 48 hours later, his crew traveled to Victoria Park Arena and beat

Bramalea 4-3 for good measure in both teams' regular season finale. The hometown Blues had a full lineup while Milton — having already secured top spot — sat star forwards Matt Van Arkel and Travis Riffin as well as veteran defenceman Jeff White.

Despite a one-goal decision, Sunday's afternoon tilt held little excitement for playoff-anxious fans. Providing the only highlights were a feisty three-point output by right-winger Cory Holland and point number 100 for Milton's own Darren Haydar.

The rookie sensation hit the century mark at 11:43 of the second. Accompanied by Trevor Downey in front on a goal-mouth scramble, his close-range shot was left by Mike Bednarz for Downey, who tucked it in to give Milton a 3-2 lead.

Holland notched his team's winning goal — as well as their second — midway through the third while Jeremy Wenzel was in net for the victory. With the exception of 10-minute misconducts to Shane Sullivan and Bramalea enforcer Mike McDougall, there was no roughhousing between these two arch-rivals.

The Merchants' Friday night win fea-

tured two brutal periods of play before Riffin tucked in their game winner with under five minutes remaining.

Milton was completely unfocused and made numerous defensive mistakes against a vastly inferior, severely short-staffed Viper crew — who recorded all five goals against Lloyd LaFrance in the second frame.

With only 11 skaters and no backup goalie, Vaughan gave their hosts one of their toughest battles in weeks. Their efforts included a 2-for-2 power-play showing.

Returning rearguard Mark Cooper put his team ahead in the first while Holland, Riffin, Steve French and Doug Janjevich scored in the second.

Merchant notes: Recently signed forward Daryl Dam saw his first action in a Milton jersey this past weekend. The 19-year-old winger played two seasons with the Samia Junior Bs before the local Junior A crew acquired him just prior to the February 10 deadline Captain Steve Clarke is off the disabled list and could be back for the first round of the playoffs The Merchants will now battle Streetsville in the opening round.