



Chris Christoforou

Christoforou dominates at Mohawk; finishes as 2014's top driver

Chris Christoforou spent much of the 2014 Mohawk campaign in victory lane — and wasn't about to stop for the season finale. The Campbellville driver picked up two more wins Monday for a total of 117 — which handily gave him to top driver title for the year.

He finishes 22 wins ahead of his nearest rivals, Randy Waples and James MacDonald. Approaching 6,000 career victories and \$100 in earnings, Christoforou finished the meet as the top-earning reinsman with more than \$3 million bank during the five-month season.

He was presented with the top driver sign and his Movado watch following the evening's second race. Among his biggest wins of the year was Saturday's Ontario Sires Stakes Super Final for two-year-old pacing colts with Reverend Hanover, who stayed unbeaten on the year with a convincing 1:52.1 victory.

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'Big Mike' gets big assist in bid for hockey return

Former west-coast junior defenceman comes through with donation of size 15 skates

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

During a casual chat in geography class, Michael Gencel sparked a hearty laugh upon revealing that he often had to go to the U.S. to find shoes for his size 15 feet.

But for Milton District High School teacher Sandra Miller, the conversation quickly lost its light-hearted tone.

"I asked him what he did for skates and he said 'I don't,'" recalled Miller, referring to the fact that Gencel had searched high and low for skates his size but was simply informed none were available in stock and that a custom job would run him a whopping \$1,500. "I hated the idea that he couldn't play hockey because of this."

"I wanted to get back into hockey a couple of years ago, but I had a good sense I'd have trouble finding skates," admitted Gencel, who after competing in the house-league ranks for a few years had stopped playing at about 11 or 12, but hoped to get back into the game to be part of his high school Mustangs. "When I walked into the (sporting goods) store and

they brought out the measuring thing, they were like 'I don't know if we can do anything for you.' It was frustrating."

Eager to rectify this, Miller sent out a late-night Tweet to the NHL, NHLPA, Sauce Hockey and Maple Leafs about Gencel's dilemma — simply hoping to gather some information and get the search wheels rolling.

So much for modest expectations. "Early the next morning my husband said 'Your phone's been going off like crazy... ping, ping, ping.'"

Among those messages — coming in within a couple of hours — was one from Vancouver-area commercial broker and investor Callaghan O'Connor, a former junior defenceman who had some much welcomed news.

"@sandyleigh14 @SauceHockey @NHL @NHLPA @MapleLeafs I've got a pair. Where you need them sent to?" Tweeted O'Connor. His immediate response was one of three offers that came in, setting off a mini-viral exchange of support for all concerned on Twitter that weekend.

It also had Miller frantically — but gratefully — sending out instructions to O'Connor and trying to reach Gencel while she was at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport about to head out on vacation.

Friends of Gencel's mom actually heard about the offer on Twitter before he did, and within two weeks the 6-foot-6, 240-pounder had his new skates — a perfect fit.

Plus a surprising bonus.

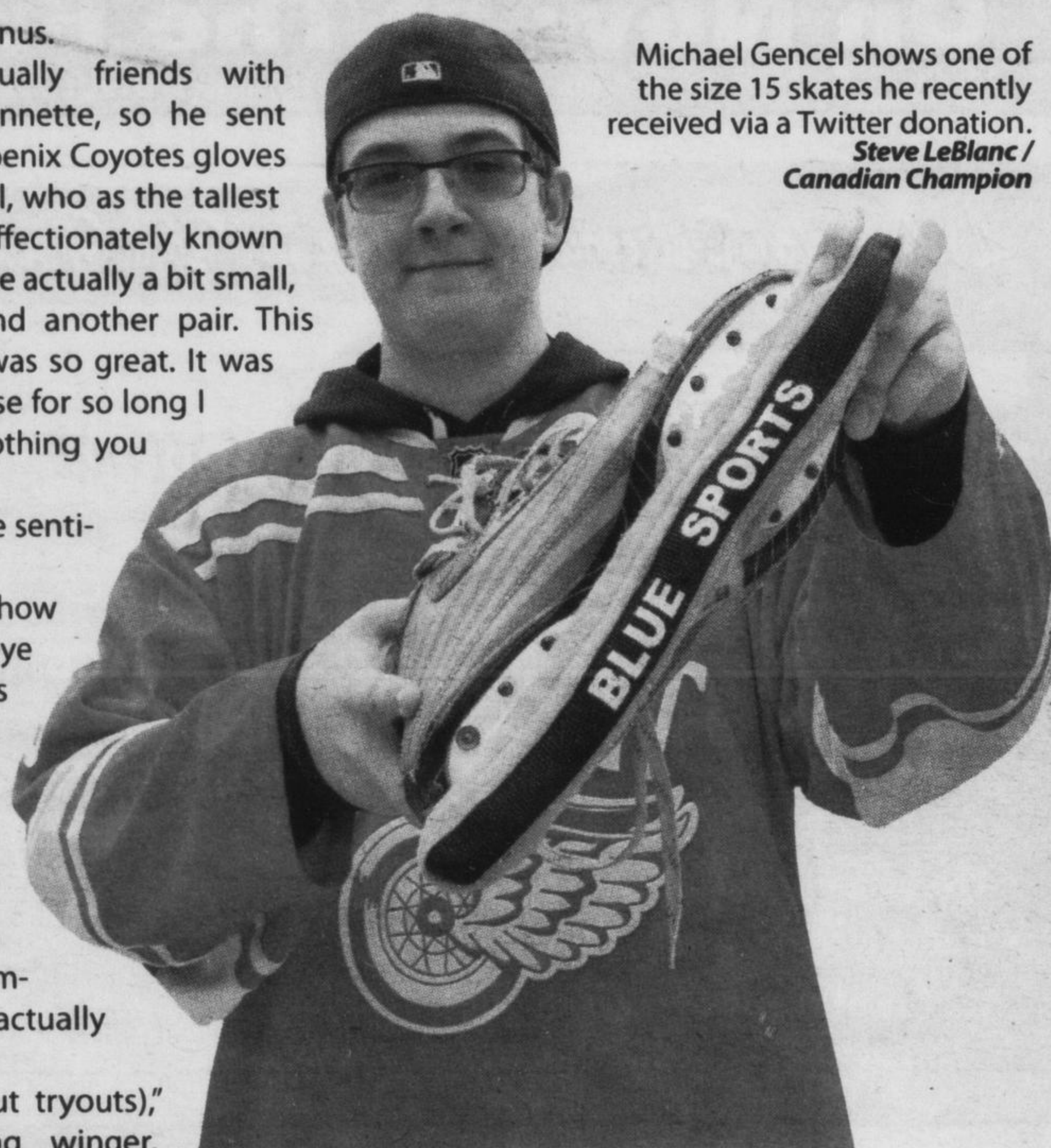
"Callaghan is actually friends with (NHLer) Paul Bissonnette, so he sent me a pair of his Phoenix Coyotes gloves as well," said Gencel, who as the tallest student at MD is affectionately known as 'Big Mike.' "They're actually a bit small, so I'll probably find another pair. This (skates donation) was so great. It was such a relief because for so long I was told there's nothing you can do."

Miller echoed those sentiments.

"It was awesome how in the blink of an eye this happened. This type of thing says a lot about the hockey community."

Now Gencel's only obstacle to high school hockey competition this fall is actually making the cut.

"I feel good (about tryouts)," said the towering winger, who'll also be playing house-league midget hockey this season. "I hadn't skated for about five years, but when I first got back out there it probably only took 20 minutes for it (skating) to come back to me."



Michael Gencel shows one of the size 15 skates he recently received via a Twitter donation. Steve LeBlanc / Canadian Champion

Steve LeBlanc can be reached at sleblanc@miltoncanadianchampion.com or on Twitter @MiltonOnSports.

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