

## Howard off to good start in Brier

The 1987 Edmonton Brier is off and running at the Northlands Agricom, next door to the Northlands Colliseum where Wayne Gretzky and the Edmonton Oilers play hockey.

The pride of Penetanguishene and area have been at the forefront of speculation prior to, and since Sunday's opening ceremonies. Russ Howard and his Ontario Tankard team of Glenn Howard, Tim Belcourt, Kent Carstairs, and Larry Merkley have been the talk of the town for knocking off two reputable curlers at the Ontario Championship, namely Ed Werenich and Paul Savage.

It seems the local people started a quiet rivalry between the Ontario team and their hometown favourites, the Ryan Express. It all goes back to this time last winter.

Of course nobody can forget the 1986 Brier in Kitchener-Waterloo when Ed Lukowich from this Western Canada city snatched the Canadian Men's Championship right from Russ' fingertips. This year four new faces are representing Alberta. Pat Ryan from the Ottewell Curling Club here in Edmonton, and his rink of Roy Hebert, Randy Ferby, and Don Walchuk are, of course, the crowd favourites. It will take some good curling to beat them this week.

In game one for Russ and crew it started badly and finished worse with the final score B.C. 8, Ontario 5. In the first end skip Russ missed on an outside takeout and allowed the master, Bernie Sparkes, here for his 12th Brier, a draw for two and early control of the opening match.

In the third, the front end made numerous freezes and allowed Russ, on his final rock, to draw for two and tie the game at two apiece.

For the moment it looked like the Penetanguishene foursome had control of the game as they forced Sparkes to take one in the fourth. But, in the fifth the tables turned and a frustrated Ontario rink gave up one on a steal. It's hard to say that was their demise but with the British Columbians sweeping with corn brooms the westerners could control their rocks better while creating havoc for Ontario.

In the sixth, Howard was forced to take one. The seventh saw Sparkes make a fantastic tap back to take a pair and literally put a cap on the game at 6-3.

A sweeping mistake in the eighth cost the team a single point as Russ' draw to the button landed a couple of inches short. Sparkes stole another.

The Ontario squad got a deuce back in the ninth but it was a little too late as Sparkes went on to win his first game of the event while Howard dropped to 0-1.

In the post game interview Russ talked freely to reporters saying losing the first one is no big deal but that you always want to get

that first win under your belt early.

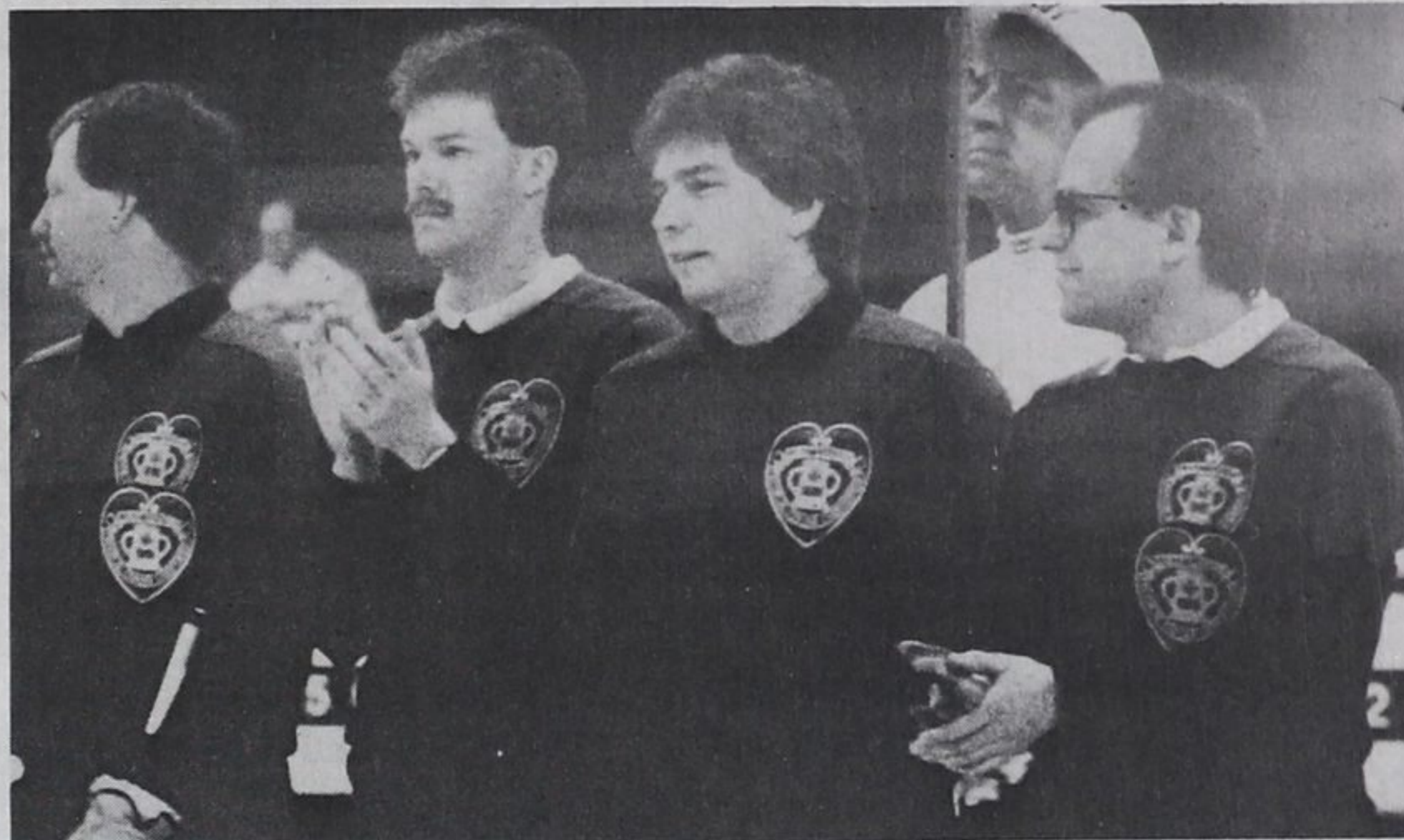
Little did he know that just a few hours later he'd be scoring an easy 10-5 eighth end win over provincial rivals, Larry Pineau of Northern Ontario. In that game things did not start well again as Pineau stole one in the first end. Russ then came back with a fury scoring a deuce in the second, stealing one in the third and taking six in the 5th. The most amazing feature of that big end was that the Howard team threw eight consecutive draws. Pineau missed them all.

On Monday morning following the North-South Ontario party the Howard team came out relaxed and surprised the then undefeated P.E.I. rink of Ted MacFayden 10-3 in only six ends. It was a close game early on but in the 6th Russ was left with a tap out for five when MacFayden missed on a pair of freezes.

If you've caught some of the Brier on the tube keep watching because the competitive play will definitely improve throughout the week. Good news from the Howard camp...after three games the local boys are

leading in percentages. Curling at an 84 per cent clip they are 3 percentage points ahead of their competition. But, statistics are deceiv-

ing. In the opening game against Sparkes the Howard rink outshot the BC team by 6 percent and still lost.



Howard foursome



Happy winners

Parkview Panthers won the Area III Basketball title, the Flat Tournament in Collingwood and the Monsignor Castex Cup all in the month of February. The girls are front

row, from left, Tina Sharpe, Rhonda Rawn, Aya Utahara, Gwen Hamelin, Stephanie Blow, Cheryl Kettle. Back row, from left, Mr.

Dunphy, coach, Melanie Brabant, Kate Gadd, Kristen Hacker, Shona Weldon, Emily Worts, Carole Reynolds.

## Orser in third after figures

After the compulsory figure competition at the World Figure Skating Championships in Cincinnati, Penetanguishene's Brian Orser is in third place.

Orser placed first in the third figure, the loop. His win represents the first time a Canadian has won a figure.

Orser placed third in the first figure and fourth in the second. He is trailing the Soviet Union's Alexander Fadeev who is in first place and Brian Boitano of the United States who is in second.

Orser, whose strength in competition is free-style, has done particularly well in the figures portion of the World's. Last year he stood fifth at this point in competition.

Elmvale's Larry Simpson, who is travelling with Orser, and who has followed his career from its beginning, says Orser is pleased with his performance.

"He is very excited and very, very pleased. Things went well for him in the figures," says Simpson. "If he free skates well he could end up in first."

## Larry Merkley: the unknown variable

by David Gravelle

When Russ Howard and his four-man-team won the Ontario Tankard in Chatham, their obvious choice for a fifth man for the Brier was Larry Merkley of Penetanguishene. The 43-year-old father of four knows his stuff when it comes to curling.

He played vice for Russ at the Calgary Brier in 1980 when they posted a 5 and 6 record. Since then he's been replaced by Russ' younger brother Glenn shooting third stones.

But when the Brier rolls around you know "Merk" as he's nicknamed will be in the press box scouting opposing teams and watching the little subtleties on the ice that Russ and Glenn might miss.

For example, against Larry Pineau of Northern Ontario Merkley noticed that the opposing skip had only been successful on 63 per cent of his out turn draws against Prince Edward Island in a previous game. Passing that message along to Russ provided dividends in the third end as Pineau racked on a guard, on guess what, an out turn draw.

The skip of the Ontario squad has labelled Merkley "the number one fifth man ever created." That statement demands a lot of responsibility. Therefore, Larry takes his role seriously. He could be called in to throw stones if someone turns sick or injures himself. And, he's there when the foursome needs encouragement.

Larry sits high above the ice surface with stopwatch in hand, and two pencils, one red and one blue, to mark opposing shots on a paper house in front of him. By knowing where each rock travelled Larry can detect if there are runs in the ice and can give an objective viewpoint as to strategy.

Another job of the fifth man is to meet with the team after five ends. Russ has repeatedly said "Merk" is a key to the team. Curling is no longer a four-man-team, it's as complex as baseball and involves just as many statistics. But, it takes the extraordinary analytical skills of a Larry Merkley to push a team over the top. And, this year that could be the key to making it to the Silver Broom.