

Gretzky takes back seat to Howard rink

by David Gravelle

The past week's Brier in Edmonton took over the sports pages of the local newspapers. Brian Orser's gold medal performance at the World Figure Skating Championships couldn't push Brier activity from the cover of the sports rag. Even the Edmonton Oilers trade prior to the National Hockey League's trading deadline had to take a second billing.

However, when you come to Edmonton the one person you have to see on the sports pages or in person is the "Great One", Wayne Gretzky. He did make one appearance at the Brier and was introduced in the ceremony prior to a night draw.

But, for the Russ Howard

rink from Ontario they wanted to meet Gretzky in person and perhaps take in a practice. Thanks to some connections in the Oiler dressing room their wishes became reality. As a matter of fact they shared their good fortune with many of us.

Last Wednesday morning the team and a group including myself, Bill and Barb Howard, Connie Maurice, Pop Gravelle, Pete Volett, and Annette Merkle visited Northlands Coliseum to meet Gretzky and his mates.

The trip was a smashing success as we all met the living hockey legend, coach Glen Sather, and some of the players. We watched the team go through a relaxed practice

prior to their evening game against the Detroit Red Wings. By the way, the Oilers won 6-3, Gretzky had four points.

The entire visit was organized by former Midland resident and now Edmonton Oilers' trainer Peter Millar. He gave us a tour, introduced us to players, and made us feel very welcome in this Western Canada city.

He even went so far as to offer the Oilers' facilities in case any of the players came down with minor injuries during the Brier week.

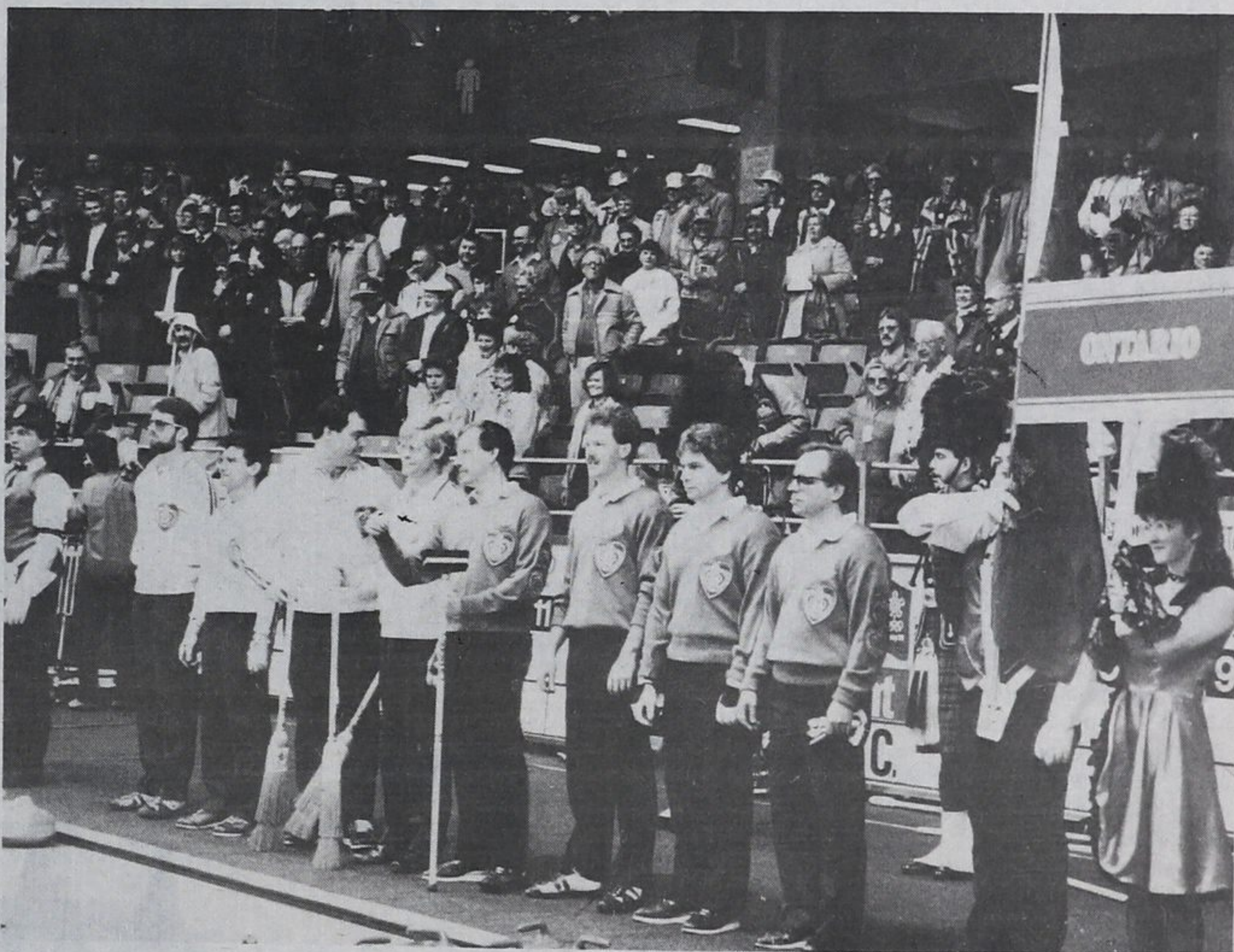
Meeting Gretzky and the Oilers was a pleasant surprise in our week at the Brier and the memories will stay with us for years to come.



Holding gold



We won!



Champion curlers



Playing to win

Photos by David Gravelle

Ontario has friends in Edmonton

by David Gravelle

Last week's Brier in Edmonton was a hectic one for all those involved, the organizing committee, the sponsor, the players, the officials and the media. But, at this level of competition, a busy schedule is expected. However, one group that always seems to be forgotten at these events are the wives, fiances, and girlfriends of the team members.

They have to put up with long days, meals on the run, ornery men if the team is losing, and spending about 12 days hustling from hotel to arena and to more than a week's worth of social functions.

For the Penetanguishene girls it was similar to a week last March in

Kitchener-Waterloo when their loves made it to the final game of the Brier only to lose to Ed Lukowich. Heading out west Wendy Howard, Christie Atkin, Ellen Belcourt, Helen Carstairs and Annette Merkle knew what to expect. Russ' wife, Wendy, knows her hubby well and said, following the win in the Brier final, the skip was more determined after last year's disappointing turn of events when Russ' shooter rolled out in the ninth end and he lost the Canadian title to Ed Lukowich.

"You have to lose it (the Brier) to know how to win it. You have to know that feeling. It (last year's loss) was the best growing ex-

perience they ever had," she said.

When the final stone was being thrown the crowd of 3900 took a deep breath...however, the Ontario girls seemed to be cool as cucumbers, at least on the outside. Wendy Howard said being there before helped. "No, I wasn't worried. Even though we were down I knew we were in control."

Although Ontario didn't have a partisan crowd behind them, the girls felt at home because of the Ontario people that came out to cheer the Penetanguishene rink on. They included Bill and Barb Howard, (Russ and Glenn's parents), Tim Lindsay, Omer Gravelle, Connie Maurice, Peter Volett, Bob

Merkley, and groups from Parry Sound, Muskoka, Wallaceburg, Chatham, and Ottawa.

Later on in the week more of the Merkle clan showed up from Calgary to cheer on the team. So, all in all, the girls had local company to make them feel at home and of course made friends with many of the other teams' wives.

Now, with Sunday's win over Bernie Sparkes, the five women have a new responsibility. They are not just the ambassadors of the Town of Penetanguishene, the province of Ontario but represent all the curlers in Canada. From this writers' viewpoint an all star team of women will be in Vancouver supporting their men and making us proud.