

# 'Let the games begin.' Wilfert on Liberal leadership race

BY ROGER VARLEY  
Staff Writer

Oak Ridges Liberal MP Bryan Wilfert has a pragmatic take on the events that unfolded last week at the Liberal caucus meeting in Quebec.

"For those who want to seek the leadership, let the games begin," he said on his return to Richmond Hill Thursday.

"I think now there will be an open leadership contest," Mr. Wilfert said of Prime Minister Jean Chretien's surprise announcement he would step down in February 2004.

"I think at least the internal situation has been clearly answered. I would think the national executive won't hold a leadership review now."

Mr. Wilfert — whose riding includes Whitchurch-Stouffville and northern Markham — said he left the three-day caucus meeting in Chicoutimi early because, after Mr. Chretien's announcement, it was "anti-climactic".

He said the prime minister will be remembered for eliminating the national deficit and his referendum legislation.

"I wish him the best," he added.

Mr. Wilfert would not say what he thought of the 18-month period leading up to the prime minister's retirement.

"It's not up to me to say if he is right or wrong," he said. "My own perspective is looking forward to a busy fall agenda, going on the assumption of a fall budg-

et. It's time to get on with the business of governing."

However, Michael Jolliffe, president of the Oak Ridges riding association, offered it likely is too long a wait, particularly because several cabinet ministers will be in the running to succeed Mr. Chretien.

"Obviously, it's all very recent," he said. "We, as an association, haven't talked about it yet, but I think they'd like to see (Mr. Chretien step down) sooner than later. Eighteen months is a long time and it's important the government of Canada pay attention to what the people elected them to do."

"If you were to ask the people of

Richmond Hill, they think it should be earlier." He said he is not sure it will take 18 months to choose a new leader.

Mr. Jolliffe sidestepped the question of who should replace Mr. Chretien.

"There is an obvious front-runner, but the association won't take an official position of support," he said.

He explained each riding association will send 16 delegates to the leadership convention, when it is eventually held. Each riding's set of delegates will proportionately represent each leadership candidate's support within the riding association.



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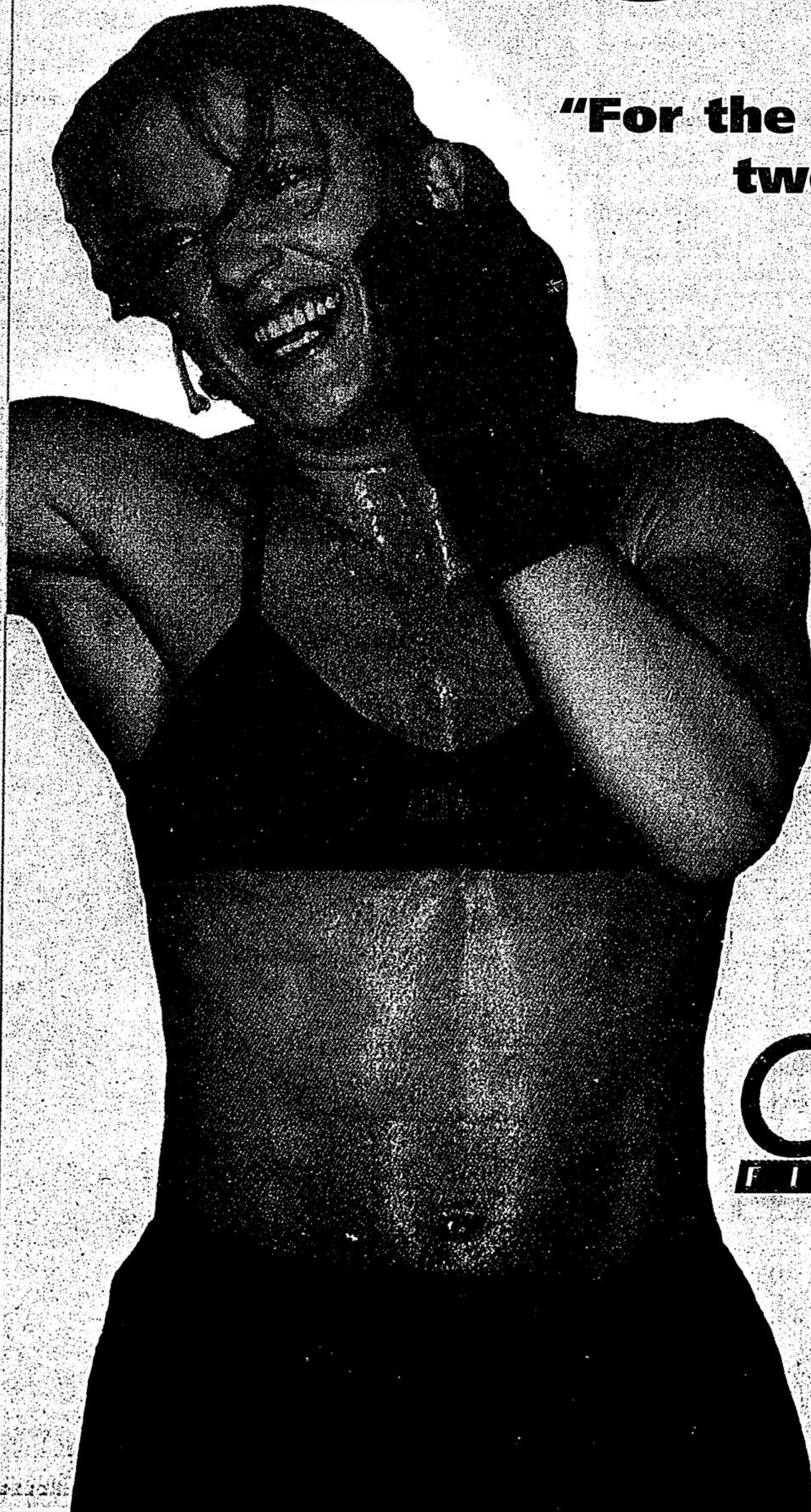
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