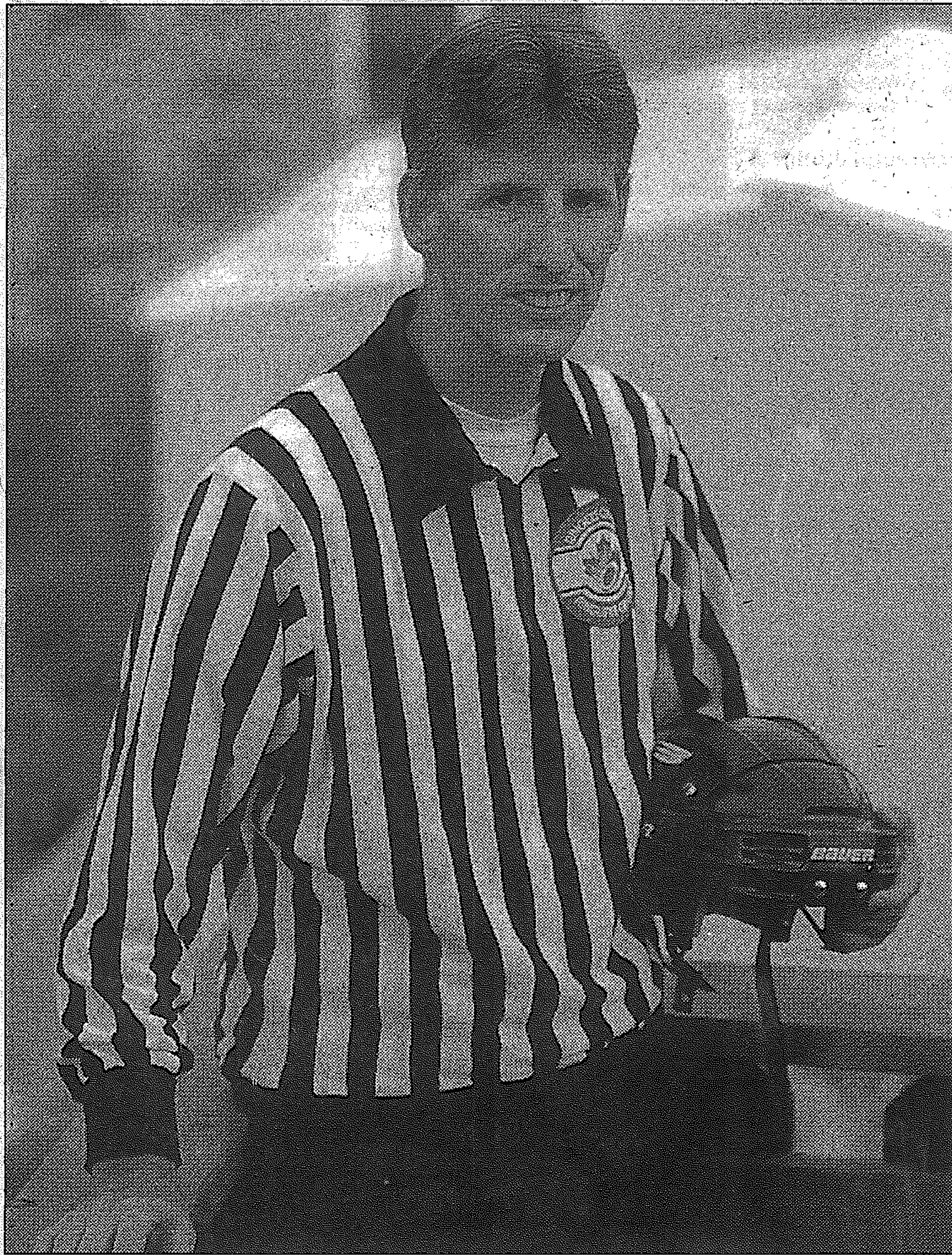


Ringette referee to work world championship



DAVE POLLARD, GUELPH MERCURY

Stephen Blacklock of Guelph, a 25-year veteran referee, was selected by Ringette Canada to officiate at the world championships in Stockholm, Sweden later this year.

BY DAVE POLLARD
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When Ringette Canada called to tell Steven Blacklock he had been selected to referee in the world championships, he almost turned down the assignment.

A veteran of 25 years refereeing ringette, the 41-year-old Guelphite thought someone else might get more out of working at the world event, which is to be held in Stockholm, Sweden, in late November. After all, Blacklock had already been there, done that, after refereeing at the 1994 world championship.

"This time I wasn't expecting it at all and I even considered not taking it at all," Blacklock said. "I figured it would be great for somebody else to have the experience. But Ringette Canada really encouraged me.

"We've taken a very proactive role with (developing ringette) here in Canada. There is a conscious effort to get the best people at the big events."

Blacklock is one of the best in the business, a Level 5 referee who has worn the black and white stripes in 15 Canadian championship tournaments and every Canada Winter Games since 1991.

"Steven has been a great leader and evaluator of officials across Canada for many years," Ringette Canada vice-president of officiating Stephen Blackman said. "His dedication to the game and his ability to pass on his considerable knowledge made him an excellent selection as our representative."

A chartered accountant by trade, Blacklock has been involved with offi-

ciating ringette since his teens, turning his back on hockey for a game that had only been around for 20 years. When a friend of his sister Sue mentioned that she was going to try refereeing, it prompted Steven's parents to suggest he try it as well.

In 1984, Blacklock refereed his first provincial championship. He's worked every one since then. The biggest event to work, he says, is the Canada Games. It's bigger than the world championships simply because the calibre of play in Canada is so much higher than in most other countries.

When it comes to producing ringette players and officials, Canada is way ahead of the rest of the world, Blacklock says. Canada is the defending world champ, having won the title at the 2002 event in Edmonton.

"I've been to worlds before (in Minnesota) and at the time it was just a developing thing. I was of the opinion anyone from Canada could go and do a credible job (refereeing)," Blacklock said, adding that the calibre of referee at the world event has improved in the past 12 years.

Nearly a quarter of a decade after he started in the game, Blacklock is still at it and has risen to the top of his profession. But it's still a hobby and it's still a great deal of fun.

"I have no disillusion, I'm not going to make money at this," he said. "You're not going to make any (money) so just enjoy what you can get from it. I have a terrific number of friends in the game. I've gone from one end of the country to the other. I still enjoy it and I still feel I have something to contribute to the game.

"But when I stop having fun, I'll be gone."

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