

Mustang sniper 'excited' about trip to Turkey

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer



Georgetown resident Kevin Baker of the University of Western Ontario Mustangs is in Turkey this week as a member of the Canadian men's hockey team competing at the World University Games. *Submitted photo*

He's played alongside future NHL stars such as John Tavares, Bobby Ryan and Marc Staal, one of his hockey sticks is in the Hockey Hall of Fame and he'll represent Canada at an upcoming world championship tournament.

Yet most local-area residents probably haven't heard of Kevin Baker.

The 23-year-old Brampton native moved with his family to Georgetown South five years ago, just as his five-year Ontario Hockey League career was getting started, which included a stint as captain of the Sudbury Wolves, along with stops in Owen Sound and Oshawa, finishing up with 109 goals and 119 assists in 324 games.

Baker had opportunities to play professionally after his OHL days were over, but instead used the league's scholarship program to have his education paid for while playing varsity hockey at the University of Western Ontario, where he's in the third year of business management courses.

And he hasn't ruled out playing for a paycheck somewhere like Europe after he's graduated from Western.

"I did consider turning pro, but after talking with a few people, it seemed like my best option was to take advantage of school while you still can, get that out of the way and then see what doors open for me after that. If I'd gone straight to pro, I would have lost that," said Baker, who graduated from Sudbury's LaSalle Secondary School.

As the leading scorer for the first-place Mustangs with 11 goals and 20 assists in 22 games this season, the 6-foot, 185-pound centre was selected to wear the red and white at the World University Games, set to start Thursday in the hockey haven of Erzurum, Turkey.

"I've heard it's not too bad over there," he added. "They built a nice 3,000-seat arena for this tournament and I've checked out some of the stuff on the Internet that

we'll need to know. It should be a great experience."

This year's Canadian entry for the University Games is an all-star team consisting of players from the Ontario University Athletics conference and it's no shocker that no fewer than seven members of the 17-1-4 Mustangs were initially selected, and Western head coach Clarke Singer will be Canada's bench boss in Turkey.

Mustang forward Aaron Snow had to be replaced on the 22-man roster for the tourney due to a season-ending knee injury.

Canada, which lost 4-2 to Russia in the final of the 2009 World University Games in China, is grouped in a preliminary pool with Slovenia, Belarus and Japan this time around. The championship game is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 6.

"We're pretty excited about the team we'll have over there," he said.

"I know most of the guys on the team, either from Western or playing against them at some point, so it's not like everyone will be new to each other. The guys from Western, I don't usually play with

them, so we'll see what the coach decides."

It won't be the first time that Baker has sported the red and white at an international tournament, having scored the game-winning goal for Team Ontario at the World Under-17 Challenge in 2004 at St. John's Nfld.

The stick he used to score the clinching marker is currently on display at the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto.

Upon returning from Turkey, Baker and the Mustangs will be focused on trying to erase the memories of last March, when they were prevented from earning a spot in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport national championship tournament after a heartbreaking 5-4 loss to the UQTR Patriotes in the qualifying game.

"We were one game away from going to nationals and we collapsed— (UQTR) scored three goals in 30 seconds with two minutes left in the third period to win it," he recalled.

"We've got a lot of returning players this year and we've definitely got the talent to make it to the nationals this time."

Raiders' grip on home-ice is loosening

The Georgetown Raiders could find themselves beginning the Ontario Jr. Hockey League playoffs on the road if they're unable to make up some ground over the final half-dozen games of the regular season.

Even with a 6-1 home victory over the Mississauga Chargers Saturday night, the 29-12-3 Raiders still slipped to sixth place in the North/West Conference standings as rival Oakville and Stouffville have leapfrogged past Georgetown in the race for home-ice advantage in the conference quarter-finals.

This year's playoff format sees the top six teams in the conference receiving first-round byes, while seventh plays 10th and eighth faces ninth in a best-of-3 miniseries to determine the eight quarterfinalists.

The Raiders were slated to face the Chargers again in Mississauga Monday evening before entertaining the Buffalo Jr. Sabres Saturday at the Alcott Arena starting at 7:30 p.m.

On Sunday afternoon, they'll visit the West Division-leading Burlington Cougars, who have not lost in regulation time over the past 22 games.

The Raiders will face the Blades in Oakville Feb. 4 and host Stouffville Feb. 5, then finish up the regular schedule with a home date against Mississauga Feb. 12.

Scoring for Georgetown Saturday against the Chargers were Josh Burnell (2), Nathan Domagala, Evan Rodrigues, David Friedmann and Nick Marinac, with rookie netminder Michael Stiliadis having his shutout bid spoiled on a Mississauga goal with just one second left in the third period.



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