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COMMUNITY



Brandon Taylor/ OHL Images

Georgetown's MacKenzie Entwistle will play for Canada at the world junior hockey championships in Vancouver. The Hamilton Bulldogs captain is enjoying a strong two-way season in which he has already eclipsed his career high in goals.

ENTWISTLE LOOKING TO DEFEND CANADA'S WORLD JUNIOR GOLD

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MacKenzie Entwistle knows the world juniors are a big deal. He's been watching the tournament since he was a kid.

"It was a Christmas tradition in the Entwistle house," he says. "We've always watched it."

At least when he could. The challenge of being an elite hockey player is you spend a lot of time in arenas, so you don't always get to see the big games. But on Jan. 3, 2009, Entwistle and his teammates finished their game just in time to witness one of Canada's most magical moments in tournament history.

"The Jordan Eberle goal, that one sticks out," Entwistle says. "We were playing a game in Toronto with the Marlies. We were upstairs in the restaurant gathered around the TV."

Canada was playing Russia in the semifinals and looked to be on its way to a 5-4 loss when Eberle scored with 5.4 seconds left to tie the game. Canada went on to win in a shootout and two days later beat Sweden 5-1 to claim the gold medal.

Entwistle won't be home to watch the tournament this year either. He'll be playing it, hoping to duplicate what Eberle and Canada did nine years ago.

The 19-year-old is enjoying a career season with the Hamilton Bulldogs. Entwistle showed signs of an offensive breakthrough when he scored 10 goals in 21 playoff games as the Bulldogs won the Ontario Hockey League championship last year. He's carried that into this year. Not even half way through the season, the Bulldogs' captain already has a career-best 15 goals.

And while helping the Bulldogs succeed was his main goal, he said making Canada's junior team was also on his radar.

"It was a goal I started the year with. I wanted to come in and work hard and I knew if I could have a good start, I'd give myself a chance."

It won't be Entwistle's first time representing Canada. He's donned the maple leaf at the World Junior Challenge (Under-17) and at the Hlinka/Gretzky Cup (Under-18), but if he needed a reminder that this time will be a little dif-

ferent, that came Thursday.

"We had an open practice and there were 4,000 or 5,000 people there," he said. "That's pretty remarkable. It just shows how big it is."

Canada has won gold just twice in the nine years since Eberle sparked Canada's comeback. So even though Canada is the defending champion and playing at home in Vancouver and Victoria, it won't be easy.

Entwistle, who was drafted in the third round of the 2017 NHL draft by Arizona and later traded to Chicago, says the Canadians have a strong team. His two-way game gives him a variety of ways to contribute to Canada's bid to repeat.

"There's tons of pressure. They won gold last year and there are tons of fans who want the team to succeed," Entwistle said. "(Winning gold) would mean everything. It's what everyone is playing for. Growing up watching the tournament, that's what you dream about. Hopefully we can achieve it."

Canada opens the tournament on Boxing Day against Denmark.



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