

SPORTS & LEISURE

Cousens is turning heads while toiling for Penticton

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Staff Writer

When Georgetown's Deron Cousens packed up last year and headed for southern B.C. to play his junior hockey, he wasn't sorry to leave the northern Ontario winters in Huntsville behind in favour of the much warmer climate of the Okanagan Valley.

Currently in his second season with the Penticton Vees of the British Columbia Hockey League, the 19-year-old defender had decided in the summer of 2005 to move west to try to elevate his game after a promising campaign with the Huntsville Wildcats of the OHA Provincial Jr. A loop.

And while Cousens continues to accumulate impressive achievements for his resume, he and his Penticton teammates were reminded about the perils of bus travel for junior hockey teams no matter where they play as a rare snowstorm battered B.C. this past week.

On the way home early Monday from a grueling road trip to Vancouver Island, the Vees' bus was clipped by a tractor-trailer while cruising down the Cocahalla Highway. Fortunately, no one was injured and there was little damage to the bus.

"It's pretty unbelievable out here. It's kind of like the snow Ontario gets," said Cousens on Monday evening. "The people in B.C. aren't really used to it and the driving is crazy."

"Crazy" would be a term to describe the Georgetown District High School grad's ascension in the ranks over the past year. Already committed to Michigan Tech University next year on a full scholarship, the 6-foot, 190-pound Cousens is considered a late bloomer with an offensive upside that could tempt an NHL team to select him with a late-round draft pick next summer.

His dazzling talents were displayed on The Sports Network's national broadcast of the championship game from the inaugural six-team World Jr. A Hockey Challenge



Local native Deron Cousens poses with his head coach from the Penticton Vees, Bruno Campese, who served as an assistant with the gold-medalist Team Canada West entry at the recent World Jr. A Hockey Challenge in Saskatchewan. Cousens was named to the tournament all-star team for collecting two goals and five assists in four games, which was capped by a 4-3 victory against Team Canada East in the championship game.

Submitted photo

earlier this month in Yorkton, Sask., where he was chosen to the tournament all-star squad after earning seven points in all four of Team Canada West victories, including a 4-3 decision over Team Canada East in the final.

Cousens, who has also become a power-play specialist, helped give the West an early 2-0 first-period lead with a long stretch pass that caught the opposing defenders flat-footed and allowed teammate Jordie Johnson to score on a breakaway. Facing non-North American competition for the first time took a bit of adjustment, he added, but a quick transition game was already one of his strengths.

"I didn't want to go there and try to do too much or too little, just play

my game and try to adapt to the international style," he said. "It's nice to get a few points but it's also kind of unexpected because you don't go into tournaments like that looking for individual accolades. Any time you can represent Canada is a great honour and the only thing we were thinking about was getting the gold medal."

After getting back from Regina, it wasn't long until Cousens boarded the Vees' bus for a string of four games in five days, covering several hundred kilometres. Penticton began this season ranked third by the Canadian Junior A Hockey League after returning most of the roster, but has since slipped just out of the top 15.

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Rebels, Bearcats fall to consolation round at OFSAA

The Georgetown Rebels and Acton Bearcats made it to the consolation round of the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations' (OFSAA) senior boys' volleyball championships on the weekend before both were eliminated in tight matches.

Seeded eighth out of 20 teams at the OFSAA AAAA tournament in Barrie, the Rebels went 1-3 in their preliminary-round pool, with all three match losses requiring a third-and-deciding set.

Georgetown's seniors also swept Barrie Eastview to at least gain a berth in the tourney's consolation quarter-finals, where they defeated Sir John A. Macdonald of Toronto 25-16, 25-20.

In the semis, the Rebels faced their arch-rivals from Oakville-Trafalgar, and as was the case during their meetings at tournaments and in the Halton championships this fall, the Red Devils prevailed in the deciding game 15-13. O-T went on to claim the consolation title.

At Dryden, the Golden Horseshoe-champion Acton Bearcats also had a 1-3 mark in the preliminary pool of the OFSAA AA senior boys' tournament and were eliminated from further play in the consolation quarter-finals by Perth, 22-25, 25-21, 12-15.

Raiders drop pair

A couple of sound defeats this past weekend at the Georgetown Raiders' expense has widened the gap between them and the front-runners in the OHA Provincial Jr. A Hockey League's West Conference standings.

On Friday night, the second-place Oakville Blades earned their third straight win over the Raiders this season with a 6-2 triumph. Fifth-place Georgetown trailed just 3-2 in the late stages of the second period before the Blades took control. Matt Thomson and Kyle Schwende accounted for the Raiders' scoring, while goalie Keaton Hartigan was peppered with 45 Oakville shots.

Third-place Hamilton also outshot and outplayed the Raiders en route to a 5-1 win Saturday.

The guest Red Wings skated to a 3-0 lead by the midway point of the game and Schwende's power-play marker later in the second period was the only puck out of 24 Raider shots to get past Hamilton veteran Cameron Talbot. Newcomer Brian Mahoney-Wilson, making his home debut in goal for the 14-7-3-3 Raiders, faced 34 shots in taking the loss. Hamilton has lost just once in its last 13 outings.

Georgetown hosts the Buffalo Jr. Sabres this Saturday at the Alcott Arena beginning at 7:30 p.m., followed by a trip to Burlington to take on the fourth-place Cougars Sunday night.

The Raiders continue to make roster moves, sending rookie defender Keegan McFarlane to the Collingwood Jr. A Blues for cash as 20-year-old blueliner Ryan Lee made his return to the lineup after a stint in the Central Hockey League with Austin, Texas.



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TOYOTA**

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