

Sports

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Haydar back among AHL's top gunners

Recent tear has Admirals' veteran winger seventh in league scoring

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Darren Haydar may not have been named an American Hockey League all-star this season, but he's certainly playing like one these days.

Currently riding an eight-game point streak, the 26-year-old Milwaukee Admirals' assistant captain sits seventh in league scoring, having moved up another notch with a second-period assist in Tuesday's 4-2 home-ice loss to the San Antonio Rampage.

With 19 goals and 29 assists in 44 games, the offensively-reliable right winger is about to hit the 20-goal and 50-plateau for the fourth straight season since turning pro.

And with two-and-a-half months left in the season, he's got an excellent shot at surpassing the 29 goals and 75 points he amassed during his freshman campaign — which was highlighted with AHL Rookie of the Year honours.

"I can't put my finger on just what's going right personally, but we've gotten a few guys back from Nashville recently and that's really helped the team," remarked Haydar, whose Admirals sit third in the Western Conference at 28-12-3-1.

Despite his ongoing productivity, the five-foot-nine-inch, 166-pound Miltonian really hasn't been on the Predators' radar since re-signing to a one-year deal last summer.

Even after former Milwaukee teammate Simon Gamache was placed on waivers and picked up by the St. Louis Blues in late November, Haydar has had no dealings with the parent club — which just doesn't seem to have him in its plans.

"Nashville's got their players, and I'm not one of them," he admitted. "There's still half-a-season left and I'd like to think I've still got a



Darren Haydar — seen here in action at the Ricoh Coliseum against the now relocated Toronto Roadrunners — is a big reason why the Milwaukee Admirals are enjoying a successful January stretch.

File photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

chance to make their lineup, but I don't know. But then Nashville's doing great right now. It's a tough team to crack."

Since a rather quiet start to the season, Haydar has gradually been picking up steam and has 33 points in 26 games since the start of December.

That's particularly impressive since under line-shuffling-prone head coach Claude Noel, Milton's NHL hopeful finds himself playing with different teammates on almost a nightly basis.

"Sometimes it changes from shift to shift, but that's the nature of this level and you've got to learn to adjust," said Haydar, whose teammates this season include fellow former Milton Merchant Rich Peverley.

While not quite as deep as their Calder Cup championship squad of 2003/04, the Admirals have won seven of their last 10 games and look poised to distance themselves from last year's

disappointing playoff run — which ended with a seven-game first-round loss to the Cincinnati Mighty Ducks. "We're starting to play a simpler game and limit our turnovers," Haydar noted. "If we can continue this we've got a good chance at going far."

Milton fans have a couple of opportunities to see the veteran AHLer play close to home in the spring. Haydar and Milwaukee will visit Hamilton's Copps Coliseum March 22 to take on the Bulldogs and will wrap up a late-season swing through Canada March 26, when they battle the Toronto Marlies at the Ricoh Coliseum.

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