

SPORTS

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GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

TAKING AIM: Milton's Darren Haydar fires a shot on net during Sunday's American Hockey League skills competition at the Ricoh Coliseum in Toronto. The next night Haydar scored a goal in the all-star game, the latest highlight in his best professional season that has him on pace to break the AHL single-season points record. Haydar and his Chicago Wolves teammates will be playing four games locally next week — Feb. 5 and 10 in Toronto and Feb. 7 and 9 in Hamilton, where he'll face another Miltonian, Jon Gleed, who was recently recalled by the Bulldogs. Discounted tickets can be purchased in a special Milton section for the Hamilton games by calling Andrew Staios at (905) 546-8182.

Haydar earns respect from his AHL peers

...but will the NHL give him another shot?

By Herb Garbutt
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It looked as though Darren Haydar had just written a storybook ending.

With just 8:45 to play in Monday's American Hockey League All-Star Classic in Toronto, the Milton native redirected a pass from Martin St. Pierre by Marek Schwarz to give Canada a 6-5 lead. It would have been a fitting end given that Haydar was the only player from the Greater Toronto Area playing in the annual minor-league showcase and had as many as 100 friends and family on hand at the Ricoh Coliseum to cheer him on.

Instead, it took just 15 seconds for the PlanetUSA team to tie the game, which it would eventually win 7-6 on Ryan Callahan's goal with three seconds to play.

Of course, if Haydar and storybook endings went hand-in-hand, he probably wouldn't have even been playing in the game. Even though the NHL's crackdown on obstruction has opened the door for many smaller players, the 5-foot-9, 170-pound winger remains in the AHL despite putting up mindboggling numbers with the Chicago Wolves.

With 89 points in 49 games, Haydar is on pace to obliterate the AHL single-season record (138) and leads St. Pierre by 22 points in the AHL scoring race. His 59 assists alone would rank him fourth in the league. And earlier this year he tallied points in 39 consecutive games, an AHL record and the fifth longest streak in professional hockey history, trailing only the likes of Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux.

Although Haydar's Chicago teammate Brett Sterling already lost one line-mate when Jason Krog was recalled ear-

lier this year, he's not sure why he hasn't lost another.

"I'm one of those guys who thinks he should be up (in the NHL). Hopefully, he's going to get a shot soon. I don't know what more he can prove. Hopefully he gets a shot and I'll be rooting him on."

Sterling, who was the all-star game MVP with two goals and an assist for the victorious PlanetUSA, said Haydar has played a big part in his league-leading 39-goal rookie season.

"He's an unbelievable player — his vision, he can shoot the puck, which is something you don't always see out of a passer, like he is. Having a guy like that with you every game makes life easy when you're just starting out."

Bridgport all-star goalie Wade Dubielewicz can relate to Haydar's plight. In four pro seasons, he's played

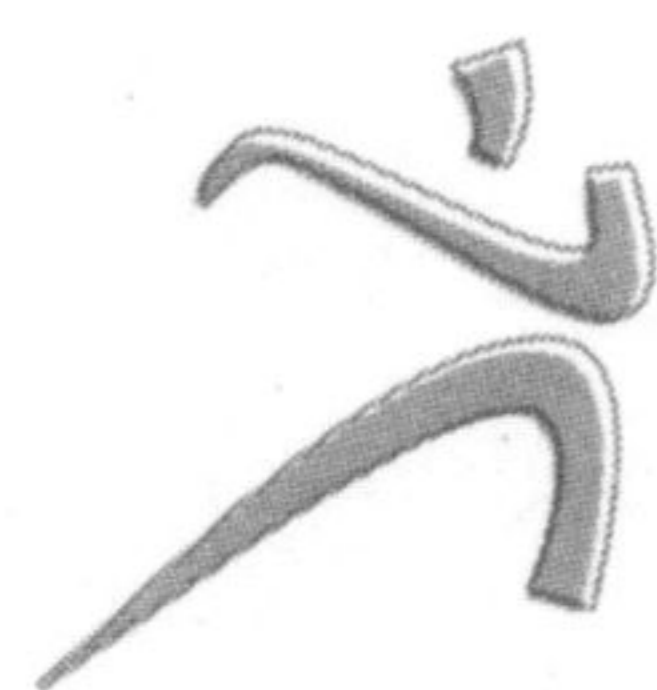
nine NHL games, despite some gaudy numbers, such as a 1.38 average and .946 save percentage in 33 AHL games in 2004.

"What he's done in this league is incredible," said the 28-year-old New York Islander farmhand. "But he's like me. We're smaller guys, unassuming. We don't look like hockey players. It's a tough battle, we just need the opportunity. If he were six-foot and 200 pounds, he'd be in the NHL, no question."

After Monday's game, Haydar took some time to discuss his future, making it to the Hockey Hall of Fame, and life on the road in the AHL. And considering his current place in the game, it's not surprising that on Sunday Haydar will be cheering for an offensive star to prove himself on his sport's biggest stage.

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WADE DUBIELEWICZ



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