



Darren Haydar

Haydar named to Team Canada for holiday Spengler Cup

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Impressive as Darren Haydar's pro hockey career is, something has always been missing. The chance to wear the red and white.

As of today, that opportunity eludes him no more. Now playing for the EHC Munich Red Bulls of Germany's Deutsche Eishockey League, the 34-year-old Milton native will suit up for Team Canada in this year's Spengler Cup. "I'm very honoured to be named to Canada's Spen-

gler Cup team," Haydar told the *Champion* via email this morning. The 5-foot-9, 170-pound right winger was named to the roster last weekend and officially received permission to play from Munich yesterday afternoon. For those unfamiliar with Team Canada's long-standing involvement in the tournament —

Sports

Future bright for Blacker

Accolades keep coming for young 'Hawks goalie

By Herb Garbutt

METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

It wasn't much of a stretch, really. For years, Ben Blacker had watched his dad guard the net, so his interest in taking up residence in the blue ice shouldn't have come as a surprise.

"I was always kind of interested in playing net," said the Milton IceHawks goalie. "We had a big door and I'd stand in front of that wearing the mini-stick hockey pads and mom would take shots on me."

It didn't take long before Ben was asking his tyke coach if he could fill in when the team's goalie missed practice. His dad had reservations, though. He knew the pressure associated with being the last line of defence. But standing in front of pucks was in the Blacker blood. Eventually, the requests became so frequent that the coach told Ben's dad to give him a chance.



IceHawks goalie Ben Blacker jumps on a loose puck in recent action against the North York Rangers. Phillip Sutherland / OJHL Images

Following the season, Ted Blacker signed his son up for goaltending lessons and the next year, the transformation was complete. In just his second season, Ben backstopped the Oakville Rangers novice AA team to the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championship. It was the first of four titles he would win in Oakville, including two undefeated seasons and an Ontario Hockey Federation silver medal.

Blacker played in two more OMHA finals after moving to the Brampton minor hockey association in bantam and began attracting the

attention of Ontario Hockey League scouts. His play also earned him an invitation to the NHL Players' Association All-State Mentorship Camp in 2012 where he worked with recently retired goalie Marty Biron, who shared his experience and offered tips. Blacker also had the opportunity to face shots from his camp team's coach, Taylor Hall of the Edmonton Oilers.

"Words can't describe it," Blacker said. "To meet all those unbelievably talented players and be mentored by all those phenomenal coaches — it gives you a better idea of what

you need to do to prepare to be at your peak, and what you have to do to reach the next level."

While most of the graduates of that camp have moved on to the OHL, Blacker's parents wanted him to explore all of his options.

That same summer, he went on a trip to visit five U.S. colleges. The trip was designed to give players a taste of what college hockey would be like, affording them the opportunity to play some exhibition games in college rinks.

Blacker made an impression on Rob Facca, Western Michigan's associate head coach. Facca continued to follow the goalie's progress. Midway through Blacker's OHL draft year, Facca called to offer a full scholarship to Blacker, who was in Grade 10 at the time.

Those early goaltending sessions with his mom, Sabine, not only started Blacker on the path to being a goalie, they also began instilling the importance of an education at an early age. Each time she scored a goal on her son, Ben would have to spell a word from his workbook. (After Ben started allowing too few goals, it was changed to every five shots).

Ben called his dad, and for close to four hours, they discussed the pros and cons of the NCAA and the OHL. On January 4, Blacker committed to Western Michigan.

"It was very humbling," the Garth Webb student said. "It took a while to sink in, but it gave me more motivation to be better at everything."

If there were any concerns of complacency, Blacker put them to rest quickly. Three



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