

Milton's NLL rookie chasing down success with Rock



O'Connor serving as team's loose balls leader

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

John Lovell looks at the 100-plus loose balls snagged by his rookie Miltonian — good enough for seventh in the National Lacrosse League (NLL) rankings — and can't help but smile.

That grin gets a little wider when he reminds himself that Ethan O'Connor isn't even one of his top draw men.

"Of the nine or 10 guys with around 100 loose balls, seven of those are their teams' key faceoff guys. It's (loose balls) kind of a slanted statistic. If you're taking a lot of draws, is it getting a loose ball or (finishing) winning a faceoff? So for Ethan to have over 100 without taking that many draws is incredible," said the Rock's head coach of his 2013 first-round (ninth overall) draft pick. "He's getting them the way you're supposed to. He's got the speed and

hustle to get to those loose balls and that's been a real plus for us."

The Rock's loose balls leader — who sits with 107 — wasn't about to let that praise go to his head.

Not when one missed opportunity is still fresh in his memory.

Recalled O'Connor, "It was in the season opener on my first shift. I missed the ball, hit one of my teammates and took us both down. It was a train wreck."

Unfazed by that initial hiccup — figuring it's better to get that kind of humbling rookie moment out of the way early — the Rock freshmen went on to secure five loose balls plus two assists and an empty netter goal in a 16-11 win over Calgary. "Those first two games I had five and four loose balls. It wasn't bad, but I knew I could do better."

That's certainly been the case, as the speedy transition player has averaged over nine loose balls a game since then, topping out at 14 on two occasions.

"That's pretty much been my role (getting loose balls) throughout my career, whether at university, junior or now in the pros," said the six-foot-one, 185-pounder, who's made the occasional offensive...45

Ethan O'Connor (right) heads up the floor in recent play against Minnesota.
Photo courtesy of Toronto Rock

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