

Passed over by Fort Wayne, goalie finds home in Texas

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

Dan McWhinney absorbed lessons of what life is like as a professional hockey player when he made his debut last season with the Fort Wayne Komets of the United Hockey League.

On the ice, the 22-year-old former Stouffville Spirit netminder acquired valuable pointers.

Off the ice, McWhinney learned first-hand how players can be treated like pawns on a chessboard.

After anticipating a return to the Komets, the Sault Ste. Marie native was informed about 10 days ago his services would no longer be required by the Indiana team.

He finished last season with a 9-3-1 won-loss record and a 3.11 goals against average, one shutout and goalie of the week honours while playing a backup role.

Saddened at first with the rejection, McWhinney is singing a happy tune these days.

McWhinney and his agent Dan Maciuk of Mentor Sports Group worked out a deal where he is scheduled to report to Texas in October



DAN MCWHINNEY: Ex-Spirit goaltender signs with Amarillo of Central Hockey League.

to play for the Amarillo Gorillas of the Central Hockey League.

"It's crazy how hockey works," McWhinney said. "My girlfriend and I were expecting to go back to Fort Wayne. But they (Fort Wayne) were waiting to hear what another goalie was going to do and he elected to join them and they called my agent and said they were going in another direction."

"I'm a little bitter since they strung me out for about a month before they heard

from the other goalie who they wanted. But I learned a lesson in that you can't put all of your eggs in one basket. Things have panned out. This (going to Amarillo) is a good deal for me."

Not only is McWhinney excited about playing in a warmer city, he has a good chance to be the starting netminder for the team coached by a fellow Sault Ste. Marie native Jim Wiley.

McWhinney has spent much of the summer in Stouffville, working out and preparing.

He was a fan favourite backstopping the Spirit to the Provincial Junior A Hockey League final and North and North-West championships in the 2005-06 campaign.

He gained further notoriety for his performance in the hockey reality TV series Making the Cut: Last Man Standing.

McWhinney is confident he can assert himself in the starting role after apprenticing last season behind starting goalie Kevin St. Pierre, who ironically, will be with Tulsa this year and will be the Gorillas' first opponent when the new season begins.

"Kevin (St. Pierre) was amazing," McWhinney said. "He helped me out a lot and that's what you want as a first-year pro."

Reflecting on his rookie year, McWhinney acknowledged there were adjustments he was forced to make. The biggest, he said, was to take an even-keel approach.

"It's quite an experience to play in front of a lot of fans who can get a little more excited than usual and then to have 200 to 300 fans waiting for your autograph. It feels cool. But you need to take things in stride and not get a swelled head and don't overreact to things," he said.

His agent has been talking with the Chicago Wolves of the American Hockey League about a possible audition.

For now though, McWhinney is setting his sights on Amarillo and putting up some good numbers in helping the Gorillas win a trophy, just as he did in Spiritland.

"I just want to play as many games as possible, get wins and good stats and put myself up next year. If you can win the league title you're set up for the next year to move up," he said.

Softball players wrapping up season

The Whitchurch Stouffville Softball Association is conducting its year-end softball house league tournaments starting this weekend at the Memorial Park ball diamonds.

The action begins today and will involve the five-pitch novice and five-pitch advanced and bantam/midget boys and girls.

The games are slated to begin at 9 a.m. today and Sunday.

A year-end house league tournament for mites and squirts boys and girls will take place the weekend after Labour Day.

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