

SPORTS

Johnston
goes pro
with FuryBY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

When the Stouffville Spirit's hockey season come to an end last season, it marked the end of Randy Johnston's era with the Provincial Jr. A Hockey League club.

The 21-year-old captain is one of only two players in the club's 13-year history to play five years with the organization. J.D. Smithson was the other.

While entertaining thoughts of playing university hockey this fall in Ontario, Johnston received a pro contract offer.

The Newmarket resident will play in Muskegon, Mich., as a member of the Muskegon Fury of the International Hockey League.

"It sure feels good; it definitely takes a load off of my shoulders knowing where I'm going to be playing," Johnston said.

Compiling 28 goals and 22 assists in just 33 games and battling a concussion last season, Johnston met a representative of the Fury a year ago.

That led to an invitation to a week-long camp the Fury held last month in Muskegon.

Head coach Bruce Ramsay was impressed.

CONFERENCE-WINNING GOAL IN 2006

"They liked what they saw of me, took me out for lunch when the camp ended said they would like to have me. About one week later, I signed a contract," Johnston said.

The contact is for one year and is based on a league salary cap. Terms of the deal were not revealed.

While the club has no affiliation with any National Hockey League teams, Johnston hopes to parlay his time with the Fury into something bigger and better down the road.

"I've got to get my feet wet somewhere," he said.

He said he's free of any concussion symptoms he experienced last year. Just as important, he's excited with the prospects of joining his new team.

IHL teams have to dress at least three rookies and can only use three forward lines.

"All I want to do is put up some good numbers and try to provide some leadership like I did when I was with the Spirit," he said.

Johnston, who played briefly with Ottawa and Barrie of the Ontario Hockey League during his junior days, scored the series-clinching goal in overtime to give the Spirit its only North Conference championship in 2006.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Graduating captain Randy Johnston (centre) gets a workout between Myles Gomes (left) and Darren Archibald at Stouffville Spirit training camp at the Stouffville Arena Tuesday. Johnston has signed a pro contract with a Michigan team, while Gomes has returned to the team.

Gomes back in Spiritland after Quebec adventure

Once a Stouffville Spirit, always a Stouffville Spirit.

In the case of Myles Gomes, who launched his tier two junior A hockey career as a defenceman with the Stouffville Spirit three seasons ago before going to the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League last season, he's come back full circle with the Provincial Jr. A Hockey League team where he started with.

In making his second tour of duty on the Spirit's blueline, the 20-year-old Whichchurch-Stouffville resident couldn't be any happier.

"It feels pretty good," he said. "I've skated with some of the guys on the team already and it should be a fun year."

The Spirit, which opened training camp Monday at the Stouffville Arena, plays the Markham Waxers in a pair of weekend exhibition games. The teams meet Friday at Angus Glen arena in Markham and Saturday in Stouffville. Both are 7:30 p.m. starts.

Gomes played for three clubs in the QMJHL beginning with the Moncton Wildcats before he was dealt at Christmas time to Baie-Comeau Drakkar and two weeks later shipped to Prince Edward Island Rocket.

"I was all over the map," he said with a laugh.

Teams are only allowed to carry three 20-

► Go to stouffvillespirit.com for more information including the pre-season schedule.

year-old players. The Rocket had their minds made up as to which three they wanted to retain. Gomes was the odd man out of their plans.

That turned out to be good news for the Spirit, who retained his tier two Junior A playing rights.

Despite leaving the Rocket, Gomes said his time in the QMJHL was a great learning experience.

"I wanted to make a jump (to the major junior A ranks). It was a good opportunity at that time. I don't regret the decision at all. I had a great time (in the QMJHL)," he said.

In comparing the QMJHL with the Provincial Jr. A Hockey League, Gomes noted there were adjustments he had to make. The biggest difference, he cited, was in the pace of the game along with the personal preparation required.

"The speed of the game in Quebec is a lot quicker and you've got to be in top physical shape to play because you're playing almost every day," he said.

Being three years older since his first tour of duty with the Spirit, Gomes is now considered one of the veteran players. He intends to pass on his wisdom to the younger players. In no way does he feel any added pressure exerted on him to carry the team on his shoulders.

"I look at it as a challenge. I like to help the younger guys out. Whatever needs to be done I'll do it," he said.

Mark Joslin, Spirit general manager, more than welcomed Gomes return to the club's roster. Especially in guiding the younger players.

"We're definitely looking for big things from him," he said. "We'll be looking for leadership from him and his on-ice play. He will definitely bring experience to the younger guys."

With one more season of junior A playing eligibility, Gomes hopes to make the most of it and continue his progression up the hockey ladder.

"I would like to go pro after this season. If not I'll go to school in Canada," he said.

The Spirit opens the 2008-09 regular season Sept. 11 at Stouffville Arena against the Newmarket Hurricanes.

—Mike Hayakawa

Terry Fox Run Sunday September 14th, 2008

Walk Run or Bike
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distances.

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Location: Old Unionville Library and Toogood Pond Paths

Intersection: Main St & Carlton Rd

Address: Old Unionville Library, 15 Library Rd., Unionville, ON

