

NHL free agent playing waiting game

*'Slow process ... part of business':
Stouffville's Michael Del Zotto*

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In a perfect world, Michael Del Zotto would have signed a contract with a National Hockey League team shortly after the free agency period began July 1.

But these days, the 24-year-old Stouffville resident is still waiting to see where he will be playing after the Nashville Predators did not extend a qualifying offer to him.

While Del Zotto is unhappy no NHL team has come up with an ideal offer yet, it's a situation the unrestricted free agent fully accepts.

"Sure it's a bit of a slow process. But it's part of the business," the former Predators and New York Rangers defenceman said Monday. "The NHL season is still two months away and there's no rush yet."

While the six-foot, 193-pound Del Zotto is still awaiting what his playing future holds, he's not just sitting around and waiting for that elusive call from his agent.

Del Zotto been working out on and off the ice with the hope of regaining the form that made him a coveted first-round pick of the New York Rangers in the 2008 NHL draft.

'WASN'T THE YEAR I WANTED'

He acknowledges last season, which saw him begin the season with the Rangers where he had two goals and nine assists in 42 regular season games before being dealt to Nashville where he played in 25 tilts and had a goal and four assists, was disappointing by his standards.

Del Zotto felt he lost confidence early on and couldn't recover from that free fall.

"It definitely wasn't the year that I wanted," he said. "But it's part of the game."

"It was unfortunate. Right now I just want to move forward. I've been training hard, skating and trying to prepare myself mentally and physically."

Along with trying to get his game back to a level where it once was, Del Zotto has remained in the GTA and has made some appearances in the name of worthwhile causes.

That will include his on-ice appearance at the fourth annual Hockey Night in Stouffville event at the Stouffville Arena Aug. 21.

For Del Zotto, it will mark his debut at this event, which is hosted by Oak Ridges-Markham MP Paul Calandra with proceeds earmarked for Markham Stouffville Hospital and the Stouffville Markham Girls Hockey Association.

Del Zotto is looking forward to returning to his old stomping grounds, in the rink he first played in. He was a five-year-old on the CUPE house league team in the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association back then.

"I haven't been around Stouffville for the last three events but I will be around this year. It should be a great event," he said.

At the same time, Del Zotto is hoping by then, he will find a place of employment with some NHL club.



TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO

Michael Del Zotto was traded this year from the New York Rangers to the Nashville Predators who did not retain him. The 24-year-old, who first played in the Stouffville minor hockey house league, is waiting to sign a free-agent contract with another NHL team.

NHLERS HERE FOR MP'S CHARITY GAME

Current and former National Hockey League players along with a bevy of local sports celebrities will have some fun on the Stouffville Arena ice Aug. 21.

It's all for a good cause when the fourth annual Hockey Night in Stouffville takes place with the puck to drop at 7 p.m.

Hosted by MP Paul Calandra, proceeds from this year's event will go to Markham Stouffville Hospital and the Stouffville Markham Girls Hockey Association.

Those scheduled to appear include NHLers Stephen Weiss (Detroit); Will Acton (Edmonton) and Michael Del Zotto.

Tickets are \$10 from 905-640-1125.

For further event information, go to www.paulcalandra.com/hnis

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