

SPORTS

NCAA champ weighs NHL options

For Drake Caggiula, taking to the ice as a member of the University of North Dakota Fighting Hawks in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Frozen Four men's hockey championship for a third time was definitely a charm.

After being part of a team that lost in the semifinals the last two seasons, the 21-year-old former Stouffville Spirit forward, who is in his senior year, went out a winner after the third-seeded University of North Dakota skated off with a 5-1 win over the top seed Quinnipiac University Bobcats from Connecticut in Tampa Saturday.

Serving as an assistant captain with North Dakota, Caggiula played a key role in the contest as he delivered two goals in the third period after his club held a slim 2-1 lead entering the final 20 minutes of regulation time.

In notching four goals and one assist in the semifinal and final, Caggiula was named the Frozen Four's Most Outstanding Player and was selected to the all-tournament team.

Reflecting on his club's accomplishment, Caggiula felt the key stemmed from their commitment.

"From start to finish we played a full 60 minutes," the Pickering native who lives in Whitby said in a postgame interview. "We executed our game plan."

At the same time, Caggiula was quick to note they had plenty of incentive in attempting to break the school's 16-year hex in not

winning an NCAA title.

"Sixteen years of not winning, we had it in the back of our minds," he said.

A member of the Spirit for two seasons including the 2011-12 campaign in which they won the Ontario Junior Hockey League championship and he was named as the league's playoff most valuable player, Caggiula was quick to deflect any personal glory in coming up big when it mattered most.

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"I was just in the right place at the right time," he said. "It was a hell of a job by everyone."

Undrafted in the NHL, Caggiula is a free agent and can sign with the organization of his choice now that the 2015-16 NCAA season is finished. He says he'll take his time.

The Vancouver Canucks have interest, announcer Jim Hughson said during their game on Hockey Night in Canada Saturday. During intermission, insider Elliotte Friedman added the Ottawa Senators and Chicago Blackhawks to the list.

Other rumoured destinations include Buffalo, Boston and Edmonton.

— Michael Hayakawa



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