



TWO FOR THE DRAFT

BY PAUL EDMONDS

Photos by James Carey Lauder and Danny Truong

THEY ARE TWO PLAYERS WHO NEED NO INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN HOCKEY LEAGUE SCOUTS IN THE PROVINCE. IN FACT, TYDEN LAFOURNAISE AND PRABH BHATHAL ARE ASSUREDLY ATOP OF EACH EVALUATORS LIST.

You'll also find them leading their respective teams in scoring and battling each other for the Manitoba U15 AAA Hockey League's scoring lead.

As 14-year-old standouts at their age level, it's expected both players will have their names called at the 2024 WHL Prospects Draft, May 9.

It is also further understood that both will be first-round picks when the selection process commences next spring.

It's an exciting time for each player, but also a period in their careers where the spotlight has narrowed and every move, on-and-off the ice, is being monitored.

However, as captains of

their respective teams – Lafournaise on the Winnipeg Bruins Gold and Bhathal on the Winnipeg Thrashers White – each young man seems well poised for what's ahead.

"I have never coached a player like Tyden in AAA hockey," says Bruins Gold head coach Chris McColm. "I think he's the best player I've ever had. His skill level is off the charts and his skating and shooting are something I haven't seen in the league in a long time. He's beyond his years in development and maturity."

A Grade 9 student at Churchill High School, Lafournaise has developed into the full package, gifted with size (5'11, 168 pounds), skill and vision.

In addition, his work ethic on the ice (both in practice and games), leadership and conditioning are just some of the characteristics McColm says will serve him well in advancing to the higher levels of the game.

And his offensive prowess is another asset, as Lafournaise will finish this season with significantly more goals and points than games played and potentially could smash some U15 provincial scoring records.

"He's got strength and pull-away speed," says McColm. "He's getting better and better every week. But that doesn't mean it's come easy. He's one of the most conditioned players on our team. And he wants to make

kids on our team better, too. He's a special player."

But for all that orbits around the centreman regarding expectations and as a possible blue-chip WHL draft pick, Lafournaise remains extremely grounded.

"I'm sure there's a little bit extra this year with it being the draft year," he says. "But every year is important. If I keep playing the way I am that's certainly a possibility."

"There are always expectations. The expectations for me though are to lead this team by example."

On an equal plane is Bhathal, a highly skilled, offensive, powerhouse centreman with a keen focus and fantastic demeanor.



PRABH BHATHAL



TYDEN LAFOURNAISE

The Grade 9 student at St. John's-Ravenscourt School is also turning heads and catching eyes across major junior hockey.

"We have quite possibly a generational player at the Manitoba level," says Thrashers White head coach Vince Hourie. "He's got everything: size, skating, skills, mindset."

"He's very much driven and humble as they come. I have never coached another player like him or a player that projects like he does."

At six-foot-two and 183 pounds, Bhathal is also putting points up at a NASCAR pace and his ability to share the puck and make those around him better has been on full display dating back to last season as a first-year U15 player.

"I consider this season to be pretty important," says Bhathal. "Last year was a good set-up and this is the execution season."

Hourie says what separates Bhathal from others is his recognition to improve his game, understand he'll be the focal point of every opposing team and avoid being a one-way player.

It's those traits that isolate him from almost everyone else in the U15 provincial league.

"I have seen only one player like Prabh at 14 over my career," adds Hourie. "But that player didn't have the emotional control that Prabh has."

"He's a pure goal scorer, but he's having to learn to play a different game. Teams are starting to lock him up. He's going to score goals, but he can't be one dimensional."

Both Bhathal and Lafournaise are eager to play in the WHL when the time warrants.

However, it might not be very long before either ends up in one of its 22 cities, perhaps as early as two seasons from now when they're both 16.

In the interim the two U15 phenoms understand there's plenty of work ahead and another step in their progression to take, including setting the goal of make their respective area U18 teams next season as 15-year-olds.

Both players have already received call-ups to U17 AAA this season and Bhathal has also suited up with the U18 Thrashers as well.

Meanwhile, they'll continue to set the tempo for their teams this season in pursuit of a league championship and await that day in May when the WHL comes officially calling.

The question is, which party is more anxious? The two players or the mob of WHL scouts and their teams?

"I've never had scouts reach out to me this early before," says McColm.

"It's been more than a half dozen before Xmas alone."

As such, when it comes to both Prabh Bhathal and Tyden Lafournaise and their WHL draft stock, no introduction is required.



MANITOBA U15 AAAHL PLAYERS TO WATCH

GAME ON Magazine solicited the opinions of several local area Western Hockey League scouts to contribute to the creation of a Players To Watch list in advance of the 2024 WHL Prospects Draft scheduled for May 9, 2024.

The list is comprised of Manitoba U15 AAA Hockey League players only and is in no particular order.

PRABH BHATHAL

WINNIPEG THRASHERS WHITE

Age: 14 Ht: 6'2 Wt: 183

Position: C Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: Great size. Elite shot. Plays heavy game. Good hands. Wins battles and makes plays. Scores multiple ways. Shares the puck. Strong centreman.

TYDEN LAFOURNAISE

WINNIPEG BRUINS GOLD

Age: 14 Ht: 5'11 Wt: 168

Position: F Shoots: Right

SCOUTING REPORT: Excellent vision. Playmaker. High-end speed. Sets-up teammates. Workhorse. Excellent shot. Work ethic separates him from a lot of players. All-around player.

SETH HOOPER

EASTMAN SELECTS

Age: 14 Ht: 6'0 Wt: 160

Position: F Shoots: Right

SCOUTING REPORT: Power forward. Wins battles. Uses size and reach to protect puck. Physical edge. Net front presence. Good foot speed. Energy guy. Plays solid overall game.

URIJAH MOOSETAIL

BRANDON WHEAT KINGS

Age: 14 Ht: 6'0 Wt: 175

Position: G Shoots: Right

SCOUTING REPORT: Tracks well. Excellent rebound control. Athletic, agile and quick. Good glove. Best U15 goalie in Manitoba. Always looks prepared. Good size. Very focused.

LUDOVIC PERREULT

WINNIPEG BRUINS BROWN

Age: 14 Ht: 5'8 Wt: 148

Position: C Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: Extremely fast. Goal scorer's shot. Makes plays. Plays at both ends of the ice. Possesses skill to play at higher levels. Fluid skater. Distributes the puck well. Dynamic offensively.

CALUM BROWNLEE

WINNIPEG BRUINS BLACK

Age: 14 Ht: 5'10 Wt: 166

Position: D Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: Strong skater. Good mobility. Escapes pressure. Plays with pace. Offensive skill set but solid defensively. Good vision to make first pass.

ERIC BERGER

SOUTHWEST COUGARS

Age: 14 Ht: 6'1 Wt: 156

Position: F Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: Natural scorer. High-end shot. Excellent hands. Pounces on opportunities. Good size. A player that shoots the puck to score.

WILLIAM PICKLYK

EASTMAN SELECTS

Age: 14 Ht: 5'9 Wt: 140

Position: C Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: Works hard every shift. Physical edge. Shows skill and playmaking at speed. Dangerous around net. Great work ethic. Offensive skilled.

TAYLOR LOCKHART

SOUTHWEST COUGARS

Age: 14 Ht: 5'10 Wt: 146

Position: F Shoots: Right

SCOUTING REPORT: Tenacious. Plays with an edge. Smart in all facets. Can score from hard areas.

ASHER GINGRAS

EASTMAN SELECTS

Age: 14 Ht: 6'0 Wt: 155

Position: C Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: Power forward. Good shot. Works hard. Uses size to create space and chances. Highly skilled. Potential to be a dominant player. Physical.

COLE SECORD

PEMBINA VALLEY HAWKS

Age: 14 Ht: 5'9 Wt: 155

Position: F Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: High velocity shot; quick release. Solid overall skills. Physical. Excellent skater. Protects the puck.

NOAH ALEXANDER

WINNIPEG WILD RED

Age: 14 Ht: 5'10 Wt: 155

Position: F Shoots: Left

SCOUTING REPORT: Great speed. Hard working player. Energetic player. Explosive skater. Solid shot.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS: Ryland Moore (Winnipeg Bruins Brown). Will Van Norman (Wpg Wild Red), Crew Elder (Brandon Wheat Kings), Jaxston Hansen-Young (Southwest Cougars), Tyson Pethybridge (Pembina Valley Hawks).