

Working his way up

Inuvik teen plays defence for Junior A hockey team in New Brunswick



James Williams in action with the Miramichi Timberwolves this season.

photo courtesy of Tom Williams

by Andrew Rankin
Northern News Services

James Williams won't deny he's thrilled about his growth as a hockey player over the last few years, but he's especially proud of being from Inuvik.

"I love getting to play the sport I really love, but I love representing the North and proving to everyone that it's not all about being from down South, there's also a lot of great players in the North."

At the age of 17, the rugged defenceman who stands five feet, 11 inches tall and weighs in at 195 pounds, is proving to be a fine role model.

A product of tireless training, he already has a wealth of hockey experience under his belt. He left Inuvik at age 14 to play Triple A hockey in Alberta. Last year he lived in Summerside, P.E.I., where he graduated from high school while playing for both a Junior A and Junior B hockey team.

This year's he's a top D-man for the Junior A Miramichi Timberwolves in New Brunswick. He's on the ice every day of the week and he's doing everything in his power of fulfilling his dream of making the NHL.

"I've been training all summer, working really hard and it paid off," said Williams. "I'm playing on the starting lineup and it feels great."

The second youngest player on the squad, Williams is already being used in virtually all game situations whether it's the power play or penalty kill. He's focusing on ensuring he remains a core player.

"He's played about seven games to this point and we really like what he brings to our hockey club," said his coach Bill McGuigan. "He's a big kid, he's strong and physical and he's fitting in really well with our team. He's one of our top five D-men and he can play forward as well."

Snatched up

McGuigan had his eye on Williams for over a year after he was told about the talented player by a friend. But because the squad already had a strong roster of defencemen last year, it wasn't a good fit for the 16-year-old. But within 24 hours of being released by the Summerside Capitals last summer, McGuigan snatched him up.

"He's a very coachable young man," said McGuigan. "You usually have to tell him something only once and he catches on and does it. Off ice, he's a very quiet, very reserved young fella. He's just a good all round kid."

As for making the show, McGuigan said he wouldn't rule it out.

"I think the sky's the limit for him. Here in Miramichi, he's on the ice every single day of the week. I definitely think with his athletic ability and his



TOM WILLIAMS: James' dad said his son provides an excellent lead for youth living in the North.

skill set that he has right now, I see some doors opening for him in the next few years."

His father Tom Williams couldn't be more proud. After coaching James in almost every competitive league, including the Canada Winter Games and Arctic Winter Games, he said James deserves his latest break.

"He knows what he wants and he knows what he has to do to achieve it," said Tom. "He did the conditioning, getting in shape. It's a full time commitment to stay in shape. He did it."

Tom said his son has excelled at virtually every sport he's tried. But what makes him a special athlete he said is his maturity, discipline and confidence. He's especially proud that his son has stayed away from alcohol and drugs.

"He's good role model for other kids," he said. "He wasn't into the extra-curricular activities like drinking and smoking. He was a true athlete and multi-sport athlete. He has a lot of maturity for his age. He's an excellent role model for kids to look up to."

He is among eight male and female athletes from Inuvik, Paulatuk, Tuktoyaktuk and Yellowknife chosen to showcase Inuit traditional games throughout the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games starting in February.

The next step for James will be to join a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) hockey team in the U.S. Plenty of NHL scouts attend NCAA games, plus he said he'll be aiming for a solid education to fall back on if he doesn't make the big leagues.

He said he still misses the people and "peacefulness" of Inuvik and credits his minor hockey coaches, including his dad as well as Mike Gravel and Ken Jacobson for making a great contribution to his development.

He's hoping to continue on developing and maybe provide an example for some along the way.

"I just want to show that hard work really pays off in the end. If you put your mind to it you can do it, you just need that will power to do it."

SPORTS CARD HOCKEY

AGE: 9

GRADE: 4

Deena appreciates that the game of hockey is our national sport which is one of the reasons he loves it so much. But he says he would rather play in an arena than on a pond. He's hoping to notch 20 goals this year. He said his favourite coach thus far is Les Skinner for no other reason than he's just a good coach, he said. Deena's favourite NHL player is Sidney Crosby.



DEENA ALLUM