

Petrash has seen NHL fever first-hand

Written by Jim Ecker

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Corey Petrash might have a better chance of playing for the Winnipeg Jets in the National Hockey League some day than actually purchasing season tickets for their games.

Petrash, who plays for the Cedar Rapids RoughRiders, is from East St. Paul in Manitoba, Canada - just an easy five-minute drive from Winnipeg. He loves the home-town Winnipeg Jets, but so do a lot of people in hockey-mad Canada.

"It's tough to get season tickets," Petrash said. "They're sold out for the next couple of years. There's an 8,000-person waiting list for season tickets. There would have been more on the waiting list, but they had to cut it off somewhere."

Petrash has attended Jets games with friends who have season tickets. One friend is part of a "host family" for some younger Jets players, so he's had a chance to spend time with guys who actually play in the NHL.

"I've always been a Jets fan," he said.

This is the second time the NHL has put a franchise in Winnipeg. The first team left for Phoenix in 1996, but Winnipeg got another chance when the team from Atlanta moved to town prior to the 2011-12 campaign.

"It was big news when they came back," said Petrash. "There was a big celebration."

Petrash, 19, would love to play in the NHL himself some day and follow other RoughRiders who have reached the top. This is his second year in Cedar Rapids, and his next stop after this will be with the college team at Bemidji State in Minnesota.

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Bemidji State is about a 4 1/2-hour drive from his home, so he's looking forward to the next stop in his career next year.

"It's nice and close to home," he said. "It's right on a lake, too."

Petrash loves the outdoors and has gone fishing a couple of times in the Cedar Rapids area with some of his teammates. Unfortunately, he was not able to bring his fishing gear with him to town.

"I didn't have enough room to bring everything down," he said. "It didn't fit in my little car."

Petrash, 5-foot-9, 176-pound forward, collected 10 goals and 12 assists for the RoughRiders last season. He's helped the RoughRiders get off to a 2-1 start heading into Saturday night's home game against Dubuque at 7:05 p.m. at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena.

Like a lot of second-year guys in the USHL, Petrash wanted to improve as a player this season before embarking on college.

"I think it was a lot better to come back here and get another year of development under my belt," he said. "Just getting stronger around the net and stuff like that. Getting my shot off, getting more offensive."

"The offseason is big on gaining weight, eating right, lifting lots of weights, trying to get better in the weight room."

Coach Mark Carlson is happy to have him back on the team. "He works hard," said Carlson. "He's a good team-first player."

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Carlson thinks Petrash has improved as a player. "He's a little stronger, a little quicker, a little more mature," the coach said.

The RoughRiders missed the USHL playoffs last year, but Petrash thinks this season will have a happier ending.

"We have a good corps here and we should be able to get a lot done," he said.