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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thunderbirds fans,

On behalf of our entire organization, I am once again so pleased to welcome you back for the seventh season of Springfield Thunderbirds hockey.

After an unforgettable run to the Calder Cup Finals in 2022, we saw firsthand just how much that impacted our city in such a spectacular way last season. Including the postseason, each of you had a hand in allowing us to reach an incredible milestone of 15 sellout crowds over just 37 games. Almost 40% of our games were played without a single seat unaccounted for, and our players made it known to all of us just how big a lift you provide them.

While we were as bummed out as all of you when our playoff run came to a much earlier end, it did not diminish what was another memory-making season. We saw players reach heights never before seen for the T-Birds as Joel Hofer became the first player in our history to be named to the season-ending AHL All-Star team, while Martin Frk became just the second player to reach 30 goals in a single T-Birds season.

In the stands and in a charitable sense, all of you played a monumental role there as well. Our specialty jersey nights brought not only new looks for the team on the ice, but immense generosity in the form of donations to causes benefiting our military and celebrating the courage of our local breast cancer survivors, just to name a few.

Having now seen Calder Cup playoff action inside the MassMutual Center for two consecutive seasons, the St. Louis Blues have continued to put an emphasis on putting a winning product on the ice while laying the groundwork for the next era of NHL stars in the Gateway to the West. We are excited for all of you to see new talents blossom in the Pioneer Valley.

As for what you will see in the stands and inside the Thunderdome, as we have done in years past, we are exponentially increasing our efforts to provide something for fans from ages 3 to 93. Your favorite traditions will be back once again, sprinkled in with some new themes and appearances that are sure to satisfy your entertainment appetite.

Lifelong memories for our fans and a Calder Cup championship on the ice remain the ultimate goals for the T-Birds, and we know that each and every one of you will be behind us every step of the way. Welcome back to the 413, and let your voices be heard, Springfield hockey fans!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nathan Costa'.



NATHAN COSTA
PRESIDENT,
SPRINGFIELD THUNDERBIRDS





SPRINGFIELD THUNDERBIRDS 2023-2024 SEASON SCHEDULE

OCTOBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
01	02	03	04 HFD 7:00pm	05	06 PRO 7:05pm	07 PRO 7:05pm
08	09	10	11	12	13	14 HFD 7:05pm
15 PRO 3:05pm	16	17	18	19	20 LV 7:05pm	21 WBS 6:05pm
22 LV 3:05pm	23	24	25	26	27 HFD 7:00pm	28 PRO 7:05pm
29 PRO 3:05pm	30	31				

NOVEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			01	02	03 BEL 7:05pm	04 LV 7:05pm
05 BRI 3:00pm	06	07	08 LV 10:35am	09	10 PRO 7:05pm	11 BRI 7:00pm
12	13	14	15 HFD 11:00am	16	17 UTC 7:05pm	18
19	20	21	22 BRI 7:05pm	23	24 HFD 7:05pm	25 UTC 7:05pm
26	27	28	29	30		

DECEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					01 WBS 7:05pm	02 WBS 6:05pm
03	04	05	06	07	08	09 BRI 7:05pm
10	11	12	13 ROC 7:05pm	14	15	16 LV 7:05pm
17 HER 5:00pm	18	19	20	21	22 HER 7:05pm	23 BRI 7:05pm
24	25	26	27 HFD 7:05pm	28	29 BRI 7:05pm	30 PRO 7:05pm
31						

JANUARY

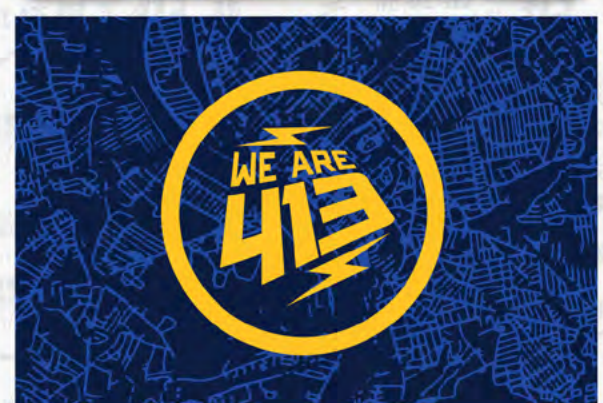
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	01	02	03	04	05 WBS 7:05pm	06 PRO 7:05pm
07 PRO 3:05pm	08	09	10 BRI 7:00pm	11	12 SYR 7:00pm	13 UTC 5:00pm
14	15 WBS 3:05pm	16	17	18	19	20 ROC 5:05pm
21 WBS 3:05pm	22	23	24 HER 7:00pm	25	26 CLT 7:05pm	27 CLT 7:05pm
28	29	30	31 BRI 7:00pm			

FEBRUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				01	02 BRI 7:00pm	03 HFD 7:00pm
04	05	06	07	08	09	10 HER 7:05pm
11	12	13	14	15	16	17 CLT 4:00pm
18 CLT 4:00pm	19	20	21	22	23 HFD 7:05pm	24 PRO 7:05pm
25 BRI 3:00pm	26	27	28	29		

MARCH

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					01 PRO 7:05pm	02 LAV 7:05pm
03 BRI 3:05pm	04	05	06	07	08 BRI 7:05pm	09 TOR 7:05pm
10 PRO 3:05pm	11	12	13	14	15	16 CLT 4:00pm
17 CLT 3:05pm	18	19	20 LV 7:05pm	21	22 CLT 7:05pm	23 SYR 7:05pm
24	25	26	27	28	29 HFD 7:00pm	30 UTC 5:00pm
31						



APRIL

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	01	02	03 TOR 11:00am	04	05 BEL 7:00pm	06 LAV 3:00pm
07	08	09	10	11	12 HFD 7:00pm	13 CLT 7:05pm
14 PRO 3:05pm	15	16	17	18	19 PRO 7:05pm	20 HFD 7:05pm
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				



- HOME
- AWAY
- PRESEASON

- ATLANTIC**
- BRIDGEPORT ISLANDERS
 - CHARLOTTE CHECKERS
 - HARTFORD WOLF PACK
 - HERSHEY BEARS
 - LEHIGH VALLEY PHANTOMS
 - PROVIDENCE BRUINS
 - WILKES-BARRE/SCRANTON PENGUINS
- NORTH**
- BELLEVILLE SENATORS
 - CLEVELAND MONSTERS
 - LAVAL ROCKET
 - ROCHESTER AMERICANS
 - SYRACUSE CRUNCH
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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Fans,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2023-24 American Hockey League season, as we continue a tradition of excellence that can be traced back to our league's founding nearly nine decades ago.

The AHL is as proud as ever of its role in developing nearly all of the players, coaches, executives, trainers, broadcasters and officials who you see throughout the National Hockey League today. Generations of our great fans have cheered on future superstars, Stanley Cup champions and Hockey Hall of Famers as they have come through the AHL.

This season is sure to be another memorable one, from the excitement of opening night to the pageantry of the AHL All-Star Classic in San Jose to the thrills and emotion of the Calder Cup Playoffs.

On behalf of all of our teams, thank you for your continuing support of the AHL.

Sincerely,

Scott Howson
President & CEO | American Hockey League



SCOTT HOWSON

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
AMERICAN HOCKEY LEAGUE



HOCKEY OPERATIONS STAFF



KEVIN MAXWELL - GENERAL MANAGER

KEVIN MAXWELL WAS NAMED THE GENERAL MANAGER OF THE SPRINGFIELD THUNDERBIRDS ON AUGUST 1, 2022. HE JOINS THE BLUES ORGANIZATION FOLLOWING 14 SEASONS IN THE SCOUTING DEPARTMENT WITH THE NEW YORK RANGERS. SINCE 2011, MAXWELL HAD SERVED AS THE RANGERS' DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL SCOUTING. NEW YORK REACHED THE STANLEY CUP PLAYOFFS IN 10 OF MAXWELL'S 14 SEASONS IN THE ORGANIZATION, INCLUDING A TRIP TO THE EASTERN CONFERENCE FINALS LAST SEASON. MAXWELL SKATED IN EIGHT PROFESSIONAL SEASONS, INCLUDING 66 NHL GAMES WITH THE NORTH STARS, COLORADO ROCKIES, AND NEW JERSEY DEVILS. IN HIS AHL PLAYING CAREER, MAXWELL WAS A MEMBER OF TWO CALDER CUP WINNERS WITH THE MAINE MARINERS IN 1984 AND THE HERSHEY BEARS IN HIS FINAL PLAYING SEASON IN 1988.



DREW BANNISTER - HEAD COACH

DREW BANNISTER WAS NAMED HEAD COACH OF THE ST. LOUIS BLUES' AHL AFFILIATE IN 2018. THE SUDBURY, ONTARIO NATIVE SPENT THE PREVIOUS THREE SEASONS AS HEAD COACH OF THE SAULT STE. MARIE GREYHOUNDS OF THE OHL. IN 2017-18, BANNISTER LED THE GREYHOUNDS TO FRANCHISE RECORDS IN BOTH WINS (55-7-6) AND POINTS (116) EN ROUTE TO CAPTURING THE FRANCHISE'S FIFTH HAMILTON SPECTATOR TROPHY AS THE OHL REGULAR SEASON CHAMPION. BANNISTER WAS A SECOND-ROUND DRAFT PICK OF THE TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING IN 1992. HE ENJOYED A SIX-YEAR NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE (NHL) CAREER, INCLUDING STINTS WITH TAMPA BAY, EDMONTON, ANAHEIM AND NEW YORK (RANGERS). OVERALL, HE COLLECTED 30 POINTS IN 164 CAREER NHL REGULAR SEASON GAMES. HE ALSO SPENT FOUR SEASONS IN THE AMERICAN HOCKEY LEAGUE (AHL), INCLUDING 1999-2000, WHEN HE CAPTURED THE CALDER CUP CHAMPIONSHIP WITH THE HARTFORD WOLF PACK.



DANIEL TKACZUK - ASSISTANT COACH

TKACZUK JOINED THE ST. LOUIS BLUES ORGANIZATION IN 2016 AS AN ASSISTANT COACH WITH THE CLUB'S AHL AFFILIATE, THE CHICAGO WOLVES. AFTER SPENDING THE 2017-18 SEASON AS A SKILLS COACH WITH THE BLUES, HE REJOINED THE AHL AFFILIATE AS AN ASSISTANT COACH UNDER DREW BANNISTER IN 2018, A ROLE HE HAS HELD EVER SINCE. THE TORONTO, ONTARIO NATIVE BEGAN HIS COACHING CAREER IN THE OHL AS AN ASSISTANT COACH WITH THE OWEN SOUND ATTACK FROM 2011-15 BEFORE SPENDING THE 2015-16 SEASON WITH THE KITCHENER RANGERS. TKACZUK AND BANNISTER WERE CO-ASSISTANT COACHES WITH OWEN SOUND FROM 2012-15. TKACZUK WAS THE SIXTH OVERALL DRAFT PICK IN THE 1997 NHL DRAFT BY THE CALGARY FLAMES WHO PLAYED 12 PROFESSIONAL SEASONS IN BOTH NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE. AS A MEMBER OF THE SAINT JOHN FLAMES, TKACZUK CAPTURED A CALDER CUP CHAMPIONSHIP IN 2000-01. IN 286 AHL GAMES WITH SAINT JOHN, THE WORCESTER ICECATS, BRIDGEPORT SOUND TIGERS, CHARLOTTE, SYRACUSE, ROCHESTER, AND HARTFORD, TKACZUK POSTED 59 GOALS AND 109 ASSISTS FOR 168 POINTS. HE WAS A CAREER POINT-PER-GAME PERFORMER IN THE PLAYOFFS, SCORING 14 GOALS AND ADDING 17 ASSISTS IN 29 CAREER CALDER CUP PLAYOFF CONTESTS.



JORDAN SMITH - ASSISTANT COACH

JORDAN SMITH WAS HIRED AS THE THUNDERBIRDS ASSISTANT COACH ON AUGUST 8, 2022. SMITH, 36, SPENT THE LAST FIVE YEARS IN THE ONTARIO HOCKEY LEAGUE AS AN ASSOCIATE COACH WITH THE SUDBURY WOLVES (2017-18) AND SOO GREYHOUNDS (2018-22). HE WAS ON THE SAME COACHING STAFF AS CURRENT THUNDERBIRDS GOALIE COACH DAN STEWART WITH THE GREYHOUNDS FROM 2018-20. SMITH REACHED THE POSTSEASON WITH THE SOO IN 2019 AND 2022. IN HIS PLAYING CAREER, SMITH WAS A SECOND-ROUND SELECTION BY THE ANAHEIM DUCKS IN 2004 BUT WAS FORCED TO RETIRE FROM PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY DUE TO INJURY AFTER TWO AHL SEASONS WITH THE CINCINNATI MIGHTY DUCKS AND PORTLAND PIRATES. HE ALSO SKATED FOR THE GREYHOUNDS FROM 2001-05, PUTTING UP 68 POINTS (13G, 55A) IN 211 GAMES IN THE OHL.



JEFF JORDAN - MANAGER OF HOCKEY OPERATIONS

JORDAN JOINED THE ST. LOUIS BLUES ORGANIZATION AS A VIDEO COACH FOR AHL'S SAN ANTONIO RAMPAGE IN 2019. ORIGINALLY FROM OTTAWA, JORDAN HAS HELD MULTIPLE COACHING POSITIONS THROUGHOUT THE OHL AND CCHL. STARTING IN 2014, HE HELD THE ASSISTANT COACH POSITION FOR THE OHL'S OTTAWA 67'S, THEN MOVED TO THE CCHL'S KANATA LASERS IN 2016 AS HEAD COACH. IN THE LAST 2018 SEASON, HE WAS NAMED HEAD COACH OF THE CCHL'S KEMPTVILLE 73'S. JORDAN ALSO COACHED TEAM ONTARIO IN THE CANADA WINTER GAMES IN 2019.



DAN STEWART - GOALTENDING COACH

STEWART JOINS THE THUNDERBIRDS FOR HIS THIRD SEASON WITH THE TEAM. PREVIOUSLY, HE WAS A GOALTENDING COACH FOR THE OJHL'S COBURG COUGARS IN 2011, WHERE HE PLAYED WITH THE TEAM FROM 1992-94. THE TORONTO NATIVE ALSO HELD THE SAME POSITION WITH THE OHL'S SOO GREYHOUNDS AND USPORTS UNIVERSITY OF ONTARIO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY FROM 2016 TO 2020.



KORYD LAVIMONIERE - ATHLETIC TRAINER

THE DARTMOUTH, MA NATIVE IS IN HIS 6TH YEAR WITH THE BLUES ORGANIZATION AFTER SPENDING 3 SEASONS WITH THE SAN ANTONIO RAMPAGE. PRIOR TO THAT, LAVIMONIERE WAS THE ATHLETIC TRAINER FOR THE ECHL'S NORFOLK ADMIRALS FOR 2 YEARS, AS WELL AS THE SPHL'S LOUISIANA ICEGATORS. HE GRADUATED FROM WESTFIELD STATE IN 2012 AND RECEIVED HIS MASTERS IN 2015 FROM SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY.



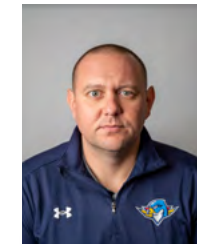
JULIA SNOW - ASSISTANT ATHLETIC TRAINER

JULIA SNOW WAS NAMED THE ASSISTANT ATHLETIC TRAINER FOR THE THUNDERBIRDS ON AUGUST 3, 2022. SHE BECOMES THE THIRD FEMALE HIRED TO WORK AS AN ATHLETIC TRAINER IN THE AHL. SNOW SPENT LAST SEASON AS HEAD ATHLETIC TRAINER FOR THE ECHL'S WORCESTER RAILERS, AND HER EXPERIENCE SPANS A VARIETY OF DIVISION I SPORTS, INDOOR ARENA FOOTBALL, AND AMATEUR BASEBALL.



ABE EDSON - STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH

EDSON IS WITH THIS 6TH YEAR WITH THE BLUES ORGANIZATION AFTER STARTING THE SAN ANTONIO RAMPAGE IN 2018. THE PENN STATE ALUM SPENT SOME TIME WITH AHL'S BAKERSFIELD CONDORS AS WELL. EDSON RECEIVED HIS MASTER'S DEGREE FROM THE CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA IN 2019 IN EXERCISE SCIENCE.



STEVE PASSINEAU - EQUIPMENT MANAGER

A NATIVE OF ALBANY, PASSINEAU STARTED HIS PROFESSIONAL CAREER WITH THE AHL'S ALBANY RIVER RATS IN 2006 AS AN ASSISTANT EQUIPMENT MANAGER. HE SPENT ONE SEASON WITH THE ECHL'S FLORIDA EVERBLADES IN 2010, THEN MOVED TO THE AHL'S SAN ANTONIO RAMPAGE AS EQUIPMENT MANAGER UNTIL THE TEAM'S MOVE IN 2020. PASSINEAU REACHED HIS 1,000TH CAREER GAME IN JANUARY 2020.



CASEY BARILE - ASSISTANT EQUIPMENT MANAGER

BARILE RETURNS TO THE THUNDERBIRDS STAFF IN HIS THIRD YEAR. BARILE GRADUATED FROM KENT STATE IN 2017, AFTER PLAYING FORWARD FOR THREE YEARS FOR THE KENT STATE GOLDEN FLASHES MEN'S ICE HOCKEY TEAM.

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A TRADITION OF

EXCELLENCE

THE BEGINNINGS

Embarking on its 88th season of play in 2023-24, the American Hockey League is continuing a tradition of excellence that began in 1936 when the Canadian-American Hockey League joined with the International Hockey League to form what is today known as the AHL. Eight teams hit the ice that first season, representing Buffalo, Cleveland, New

Haven, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Providence, Springfield and Syracuse.

Frank Calder, the National Hockey League's president at the time, was instrumental in the forming of this new league, and his name would be given to its championship trophy. **The first Calder Cup was won by the Syracuse Stars in 1937; the Hershey Bears captured their league-**

best 12th championship last spring.

From those roots, the American Hockey League has grown into a 32-team, coast-to-coast league that provides fans with exciting, high-level professional hockey while preparing thousands of players, coaches, officials, executives, trainers, broadcasters and more for careers in the NHL.

BY THE NUMBERS

87.2%

Percentage of all NHL players in 2022-23 who were graduates of the AHL

924

Former AHL players who skated in the NHL last season

375

AHL players who also played in the NHL in 2022-23

238

Former 1st- and 2nd-round NHL draft picks who skated in the AHL in 2022-23

THE PLAYERS

In today's National Hockey League nearly 90 percent of the players are AHL alumni, including 2022-23 Vezina Trophy winner **Linus Ullmark**, Norris Trophy recipient **Erik Karlsson** and Selke Trophy winner **Patrice Bergeron**. The 2023 Stanley Cup champion Vegas Golden Knights were stocked with AHL graduates including captain **Mark Stone**, goaltender **Adin Hill** and three-time AHL All-Star and Conn Smythe Trophy winner **Jonathan Marchessault**.

During the 2022-23 season, a total of 924 AHL alumni played in the National Hockey League. There were 375 players who skated in both leagues last year alone, and 238 former first- and second-round NHL draft picks developed their skills in the AHL last season, including **Simon Nemeč**, **David Jiricek**, **Jiri Kulich**, **Lukas Reichel**, **William Eklund**, **Jesper Wallstedt**, **Thomas Harley** and Calder Cup champions **Connor McMichael** and **Hendrix Lapierre**.

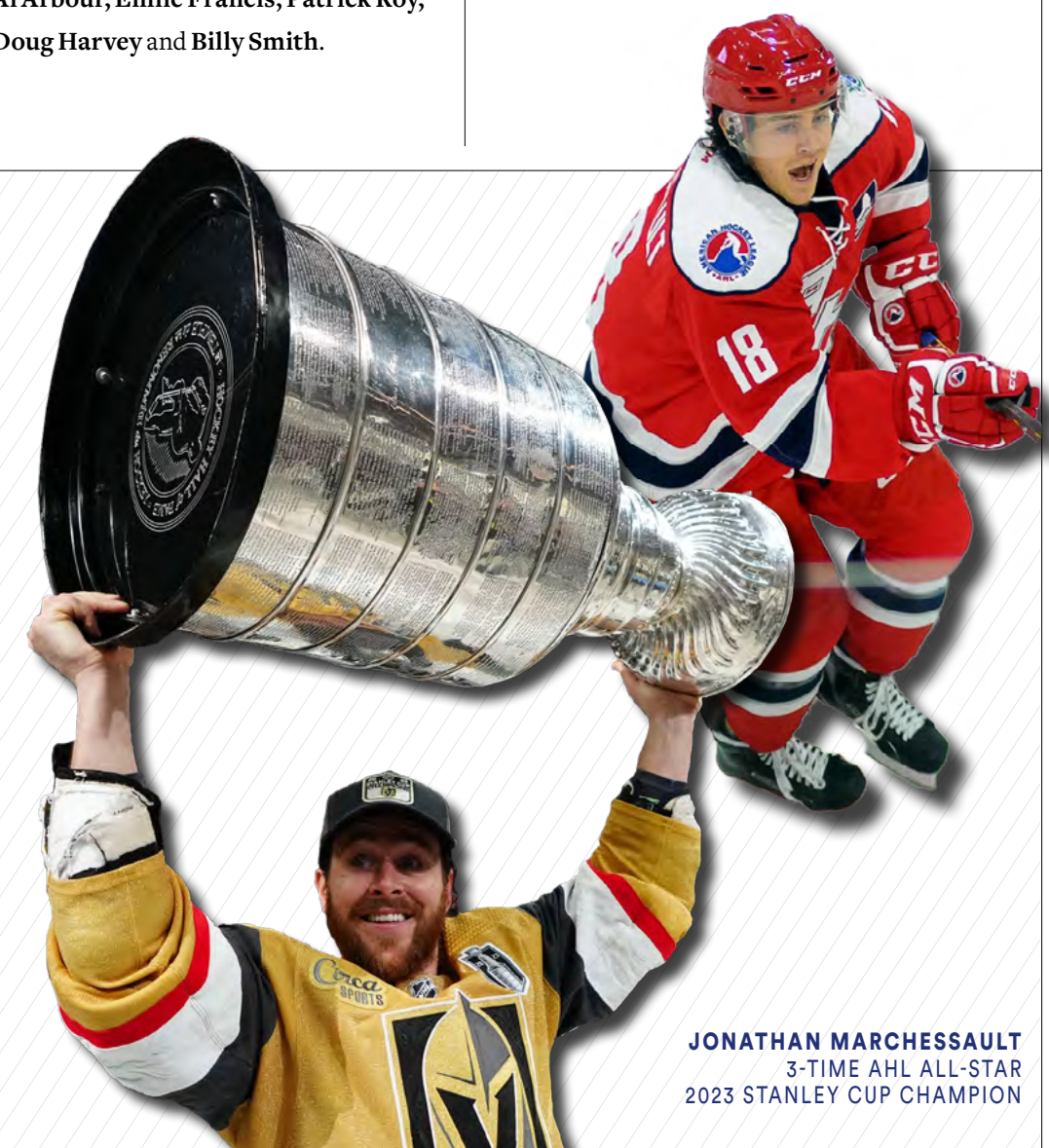
THE LEGENDS

For nearly nine decades, the American Hockey League has been home to some of the greatest players in the history of our sport. In fact, **there are 130 honored members of the Hockey Hall of Fame who have been affiliated with the AHL during their careers.** All-time greats from **Milt Schmidt** and **Gump Worsley** to **Roberto Luongo** and **Martin St. Louis** came through the AHL ranks and now find themselves enshrined in Toronto, and the coveted Calder Cup is inscribed with the names of legendary AHL alumni like **Johnny Bower**, **Larry Robinson**, **Gerry Cheevers**, **Andy Bathgate**, **Tim Horton**, **Al Arbour**, **Emile Francis**, **Patrick Roy**, **Doug Harvey** and **Billy Smith**.

THE COACHES

At the start of the 2023-24 season, the National Hockey League featured **22 head coaches who were former AHL bench bosses**, including **Bruce Cassidy** of the 2023 Stanley Cup champion Vegas Golden Knights and newcomers **Greg Cronin** of the Anaheim Ducks, **Ryan Huska** of the Calgary Flames and **Spencer Carbery** of the Washington Capitals.

Tampa Bay's **Jon Cooper**, Toronto's **Sheldon Keefe**, Minnesota's **Dean Evason**, Edmonton's **Jay Woodcroft** and Detroit's **Derek Lalonde** are also among the current NHL coaches who spent time in the American Hockey League before making the jump.



JONATHAN MARCHESSAULT
3-TIME AHL ALL-STAR
2023 STANLEY CUP CHAMPION

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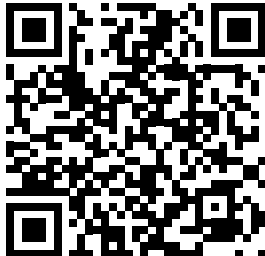
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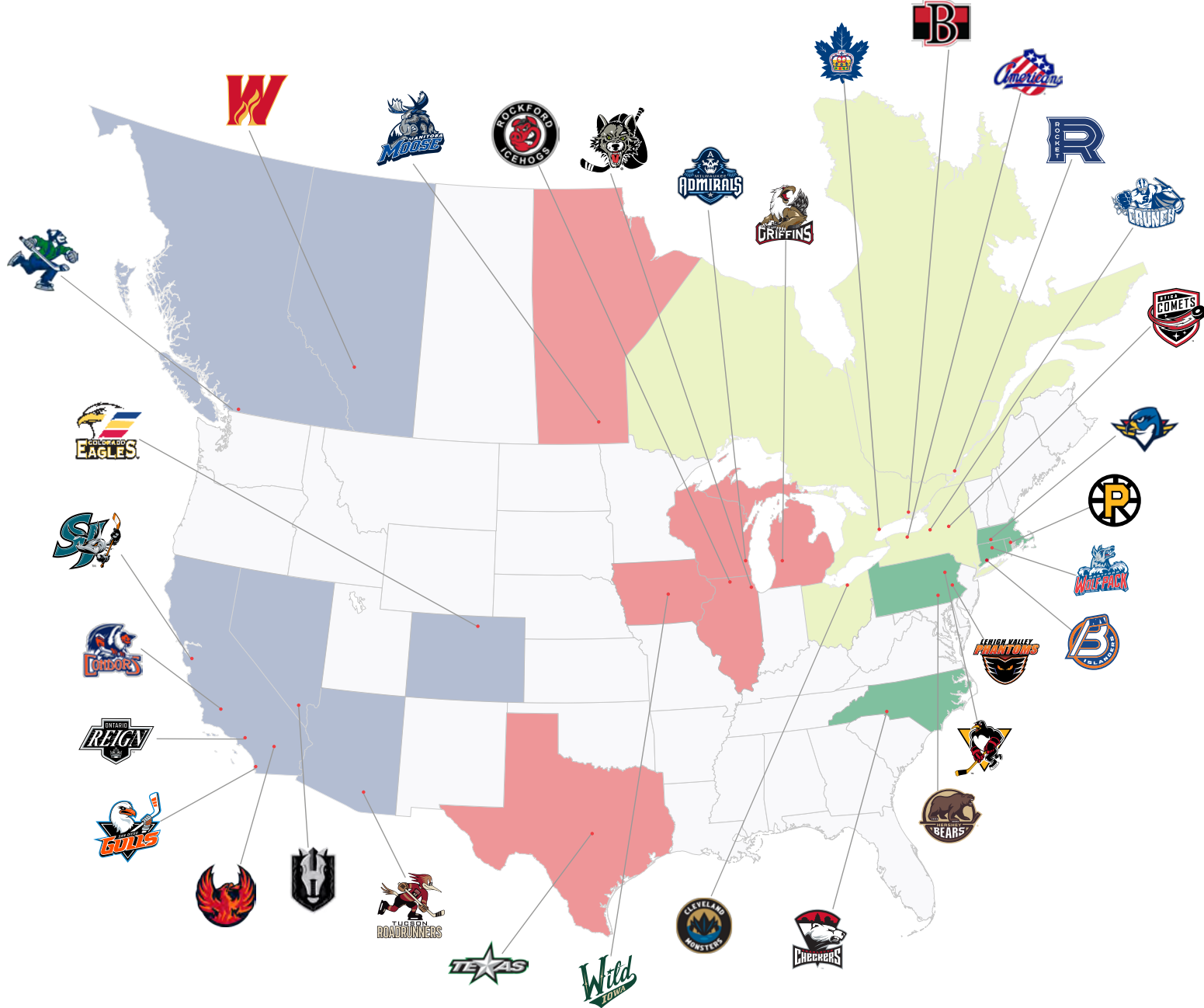


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2023-24 AHL TEAM MAP



- Abbotsford Canucks • Bakersfield Condors • Belleville Senators • Bridgeport Islanders • Calgary Wranglers • Charlotte Checkers • Chicago Wolves • Cleveland Monsters • Coachella Valley Firebirds • Colorado Eagles • Grand Rapids Griffins • Hartford Wolf Pack • Henderson Silver Knights • Hershey Bears • Iowa Wild • Laval Rocket • Lehigh Valley Phantoms • Manitoba Moose • Milwaukee Admirals • Ontario Reign • Providence Bruins • Rochester Americans • Rockford IceHogs • San Diego Gulls • San Jose Barracuda • Springfield Thunderbirds • Syracuse Crunch • Texas Stars • Toronto Marlies • Tucson Roadrunners • Utica Comets • Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins

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Remembering Jay Denver

A Springfield Hockey Lifer

By Ryan Smith

I vividly remember stepping inside the MassMutual Center for the first time on a summer day in 2016, ready to embark on my own professional hockey journey. I was equal parts excited, nervous, and eager.

Bruce Landon – who by now is rightfully seen as a legend of hockey in Springfield – was instrumental in getting me up to speed on so many areas of the hockey operation. Among the various bits of insight he passed down to me, he encouraged me to touch base with the off-ice officials, starting with the supervisor of the group.

For those unfamiliar with a game night procedure, the off-ice officiating crew in each AHL market is made up of individuals who are often times making very modest wages, volunteering their free time on weekend evenings normally out of a love of sport and a level of integrity second to none. They track the goals, assists, penalties, run the penalty box doors, operate goal judge duties, and serve as an extra resource to the on-ice officials. Without them, smooth games would not be possible.



Left to Right: Chris Dion, Rick Marchese, Bruce Landon, Jay Denver, Jon Peloquin

These men and women may have grown up idolizing the team in their market, but when working on a game night, there is no fandom, no bias, no ulterior motives.

James Henry Denver, Jr. – or simply “Jay” as he was dubbed by all that knew him – was the epitome of a hockey lifer. His father, James H. Denver, Sr. (“Jim”) was a supervisor of off-ice officials for Springfield hockey, and in his 20s, Jay became a part of his father’s crew as a penalty box attendant in the Indians era of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Winter nights for the Denvers were often spent inside the walls of the Springfield Civic Center from the time of its opening in 1972.

Jim passed away in 2004, but the all-important leadership role stayed in the family, and Jay became the unquestioned and unparalleled captain of the off-ice officials.

Officiating was a year-round passion for Jay – outside of hockey duty, he umpired for USSSA (United States Specialty Sports Association) for more than four decades, culminating in a spot in the organization’s Hall of Fame. For an additional 20-plus years, he wore the stripes on high school football and basketball surfaces, for which he garnered countless praise and accolades.

His resume is unquestionably representative of a man who loved the integrity and competition of sport, but when I think of Jay, I remember something different.

Which brings me back to the late summer of 2016. Bruce had called Jay into the MassMutual Center to introduce us to one another and get ourselves acquainted to how we would be working together.

From the millisecond I met Jay Denver, it became abundantly clear to me that there would be no sugar-coating, no wasted breath, and a meticulous degree of detail. In the span of about 10 minutes, he had walked me through all hallways, elevators, and floors of the arena. Rosters were to be placed “here”, computers are to be set up “there”, lineups are to be given by warm-ups, and most importantly, all issues are to be reported to Jay.

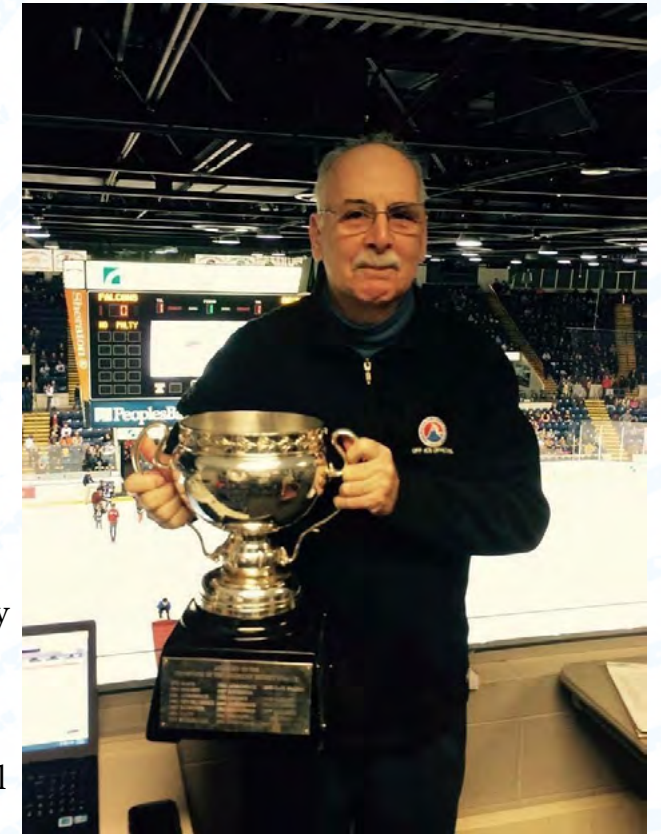
Jay commanded an unspoken but outward respect from the onset of our relationship, and I was instantly drawn to his professionalism. As a 24-year-old “rookie,” I knew I was a target, so to speak, if things broke down. However, Jay had, through no additional “rah-rah” speeches, taught me a wonderful lesson in what it meant to be in pro sports. For all elements of a franchise to be successful, an unwavering focus on your task is needed at all times, free of emotional biases and contempt.

I was not always perfect in that area, nor will I ever be in all likelihood, and as many can attest, Jay would quickly remind you of your responsibilities if you had a slip, sometimes in a louder fashion.

As seasons passed, I have learned to embrace and appreciate the little things in my day-to-day work. On game nights, one of my absolute favorite things is catching up with the wonderful people both at home and on the road. Whether it’s fellow broadcasters, camera operators, beat reporters, NHL scouts, hockey management, all the way down to elevator operators and janitorial staff, the trek to the broadcast booth allows you a unique chance to learn a lot about people.

Without fail, about 60-90 minutes before every game at the MassMutual Center, my booth door would squeak and creak open, and a familiar, matter-of-fact “Hello, how are you?” would be fired my way from Jay.

After the business-first sharing of lineups, our topics of conversation branched any of a number of directions. Sometimes, it was thinking back to a questionable call in a prior game and what Jay would have done in that situation. Other times, it would be a venting session for one or both of us, and I am not afraid to admit I was the victim of more than a couple ribbings from Jay.



Jay Denver with the Ricard F. Canning Trophy

But as I have learned in this industry, chirps and ribbings will 99% of the time equate to being a satirical show of appreciation and respect. I know that's how I felt when I would sometimes tell Jay he had done this for too long and would never actually retire.

I secretly hoped he would never retire, but when we lost Jay on August 31 of this summer, I was beyond heartbroken to be correct. He never did retire from the sport he was born into, and in that sense, I am grateful he had hockey as part of his life to his final days.

What I never did mention above is the fact that Jay had battled cancer, on-and-off, for the entire duration of our time together. That's probably because you simply never would have known. Like his work inside the walls of the rink, there was no excuse for giving less than 100% to whatever was in front of you.



Jay and daughter Kate

To me, one of the greatest tributes I can give to Jay is how many different team broadcasters and organization members reached out to me and the T-Birds to share their memories and recollections. In a position where you have to deal with emotionally-driven players, coaches, and officials, Jay found a way to maintain his fervent integrity while still having immense respect for everyone around him.



Jay with his granddaughter Lillian Elizabeth

Our hearts are hurting for the entire Denver family, but most notably for his granddaughter Lillian Elizabeth (LE), who was perhaps the one single person on this planet who could break down his tough exterior (at least, from my experience). The stories, the videos, and the photos she will get to see and hear as she grows up will make her so proud of where she came from.

As I am writing out my charts and broadcast notes in my booth all year, I will probably still be waiting for the sound of the creaking door and the arrival of the man with the white mustache. I am gutted that I will never again get to be on the business end of a Jay Denver chirp, but I know the best way to honor him is through staunch professionalism, unwavering integrity, and most of all, a complete love of this great game.

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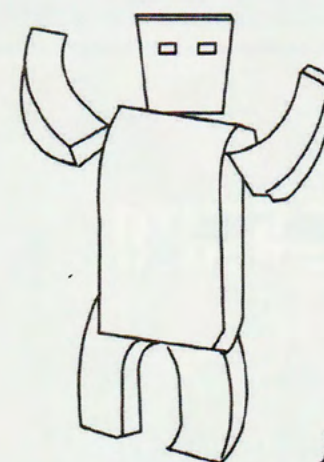
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CALLIN'S NHL EXHIBITION DEBUT WORTH THE WAIT

By Ryan Smith



A National Hockey League preseason game holds different importance to each and every player. For NHL veterans, it's a chance to knock off rust, tune up their skills, and reacquaint themselves with teammates. For young prospects, it's a chance to showcase abilities in hopes of making NHL dreams a reality.

In Drew Callin's case, its meaning is something quite unique. At 28 years of age, Callin has yet to play professionally on an NHL contract but don't let that take away from his full hockey story - one of tireless work, a team-first attitude, and a lesson in making the most of opportunity.

After four seasons at his alma mater, Bentley University in Waltham, Mass., the Middleton, Wis. native turned pro in the spring of 2019, joining the ECHL's Worcester Railers. From that spring to the fall of 2021, with the chaos of a global pandemic interrupting, Callin skated in 92 ECHL games and proved to be a reliable two-way commodity with 45 points in that time, including 14 goals in 54 games in 2019-20 prior to the COVID stoppage.

The 2021-22 Thunderbirds began their march toward an Eastern Conference championship with a flying start, starting 14-3-2-0 through the end of November.

That's where Callin's story kicks in. Springfield's impending trip to Rochester had to be postponed due to a COVID-19 outbreak within the Amerks' dressing room, and within the week, more than half a dozen T-Birds were also stricken with the virus, meaning that head coach Drew Bannister and then-general manager Kevin McDonald had to scramble to field a full lineup.

On the morning of December 9, just over 24 hours before Springfield's impending matchup on home ice against Toronto, Callin was summoned - out of equal parts necessity and reward - from the Railers and immediately pegged to make his AHL debut the following evening.



With no timetable on players getting out of COVID protocol, and therefore no semblance of knowing how long he could be staying in the AHL, Callin made it known instantaneously that this game was a chance he would not squander.

While Springfield would fall 4-2, it was Callin who shined brightest, leading all players on either team with six shots on goal and adding his first AHL goal late in the final period.

Callin would contribute 12 shots over

his first three games in addition to his goal while providing a much-needed right-hand face-off specialist for Bannister's lineup. His steady presence and responsible game did not go quietly on management, and just seven days after his debut, he inked an AHL contract, ensuring he would be staying with Springfield.

Since that day, Callin has skated in over 100 AHL games and has never been returned to the ECHL.

An undrafted player locking down an AHL roster spot is an accomplishment in and of itself, but the Blues took it upon themselves to give Callin an even bigger reward - an invite to training camp this fall. A camp invite does not always equate to getting into an exhibition game, but on Monday morning, Callin got the news every hockey-playing kid dreams about: he would be playing an NHL game the following night.

Callin's first reaction was to call his parents in Middleton.

"I told them right away, and my dad instantly canceled his work plans and my mom just said, 'Yup, we're coming.'"

To the average person, a preseason NHL game is hardly a monumental occasion, but for Callin, it was validation for years of effort and love for the game.

"I'm on the older side, so it's more rewarding for me. It's been a lot of work over the years and grinding since I've been with Springfield. (The Thunderbirds) have been so great to me. Being here with the big club is truly special."

Callin admitted there were jitters as he stepped onto the ice for pregame warmups, but was reassured by the advice of his veteran teammates.

"(They told me) to have fun, enjoy it, and play a simple game."

Callin more than held his own, playing just over 12 minutes and showing his penalty-killing prowess in St. Louis' 3-2 win before a well-populated Tuesday night crowd at Enterprise Center.

"(The crowd) was pretty crazy; the fans here are very loyal. For me, just going out of the tunnel and seeing the bright lights there - it's something you dream about when you're a little kid, even if it's preseason. It was a fun night and one I'll remember for sure."

So the question had to be asked - does the childhood dream match up with the reality of playing an NHL game?

"Absolutely. Guys are trying to earn spots out there. It's intense, it's high-paced, and it's everything I thought it would be."





Ryans RAMBLINGS



Voice of the Thunderbirds,
Broadcaster Ryan Smith

THE IMPORTANCE OF YEAR THREE

Numerous Blues prospects face important third years in the organization

It's hardly a secret that more than 80% of NHL players spent time in the AHL, but in many prime examples, it is within the first three AHL seasons that a player has solidified himself as someone who is ready to make the leap. In a results-driven business like professional sports, however, that often means that the NHL opportunity could slip down to other hungry prospects.

Springfield boasts a quartet of forwards who all will be entering their third T-Birds seasons, and while some have tasted the NHL and others are still very much on the youthful side, the 2023-24 season could prove to be pivotal in their career trajectories.

#11 Hugh McGing

While this will be McGing's third season with Springfield, he does already have 161 games of AHL experience under his belt coming into the new campaign, and the pesky winger has steadily improved with each passing season, seeing his goal, assist, and point totals all improve from 2021-22 to 2022-23. With Martin Frk and Matthew Highmore moving on from the organization, McGing will undoubtedly be heavily utilized in all situations, including the penalty kill, where he and Will Bitten combined to comprise one of the most explosive forward killing duos in the league.



McGing's steady, speed-first play was rewarded by St. Louis when he made his NHL debut late last season. Originally a fifth-round pick by the Blues in 2018, the Chicago native has shown remarkable durability despite his rugged play style and smaller 5-foot-8,

176-pound frame, missing only ten games in the last two years.

McGing plays a direct game that has seen like-minded players earn chances with Blues head coach Craig Berube, in particular Nathan Walker, who parlayed a similarly energetic style into a more permanent NHL roster spot dating back over the past two seasons. McGing hopes he can be a similar case study moving forward.

#18 Mathias Laferriere



Coming off a prolific major junior career that saw him post well over a point-per-game in his final two QMJHL seasons, Laferriere has undergone some trying moments in his pro career. Springfield's tremendous depth and good fortune with health in 2021-22 left Laferriere from seeing any playoff action, and a freak upper-body injury early last season curtailed what had been a terrific start to his sophomore campaign.

Even still, Laferriere took major steps forward by putting home 26 points in 50 games while making the tough transition from wing to center at times during the year. His puck skills and vision are some of his best attributes, and with more opportunity, he should have a chance to showcase more of that ability in the season ahead. The clock is ticking, though, as Laferriere enters the final year of his entry-level contract with perhaps more to prove than others on this list.

#27 Kean Washkurak

As a 20-year-old rookie in 2021-22, Washkurak was a revelation for T-Birds head coach Drew Bannister, going from a fringe player to a regular checking line contributor, and his 13 goals were proof of results despite not seeing the highest share of ice time. He became a reliable and gritty player who is never shy about taking a puck or some punches for the good of his teammates.

Unfortunately, nagging injuries limited Washkurak to just 45 games a season ago, and he could not regain his consistent form from his rookie year, netting just 13 points. As Springfield is likely to ice a younger lineup from top-to-bottom in 2023-24, Washkurak, at just 22 years of age, will be looked upon as more of a leader than the average 22-year-old player, and if his offensive output can match his high-flying motor, he could become an enticing option for St. Louis down the road.



#41 Will Bitten

The oldest player on this list, the 25-year-old Bitten is also the most tenured player profiled with four full AHL seasons plus the COVID-shortened 2020-21 campaign under his belt. Upon his arrival in Springfield in December of 2021, Bitten's development exploded. He posted 25 points in 45 regular season games before leading all Springfield skaters with 21 points during the T-Birds' run to the Eastern Conference title.



It was more of the same in 2022-23 for Bitten. Rewarded with a new two-year contract, he made good on his new deal, potting a career high 22 goals and 23 assists in 65 games. The only AHL games he missed were for good reason, as he earned his first NHL call-up (and a first game story for the ages) and a chance to be with the Blues for nearly a full month.

Arguably the most vocal and most abrasive Springfield forward, Bitten will get a unique boost as his younger brother Sam will also be jockeying for a roster spot with the T-Birds. Another strong AHL campaign for Will could mean more NHL time in his future, as his all-around style lends himself to being a reliable bottom-six call-up in the event of injuries in St. Louis.

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