

Stephens to make WHL debut, netted first goal in Edmonton Oil Kings exhibition

By Jonathan Russell on September 17, 2010 at 2:00 pm

Whitehorse's David Stephens is following in his older brother Ted's footsteps by recently making the jump to major junior hockey.

Ted, 20, made that jump three years ago, becoming the first Yukoner to play in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League when he was signed to the Moncton Wildcats.

David, 17, made the jump last month after landing a spot on the Western Hockey League's Edmonton Oil Kings.

The younger Stephens was called for fitness tests and the main camp in August, when the club chose the top 40 guys to come back for inter-squad games.

"I was obviously excited; all the hard work in the summer paid off," Stephens said.

"All my friends back home were pretty excited for me too."

The 5'10", 179-pound centre has played four of the Oil Kings exhibition games.

"I had some butterflies," Stephens said of his first game. "Now I'm more comfortable."

The Oil Kings lost their opener in a pre-season invitational 5-4 against the Swift Current Broncos, and lost again 3-2 against the Medicine Hat Tigers the following game.

But the Oil Kings bounced back with back-to-back road wins over the Prince George Cougars, 5-1 the first game and 6-1 the second.

Stephens sniped his first goal with the Oil Kings during a decisive second period in the first game which saw the Edmonton club pull away after leading by one goal after the first.

The goal was made sweeter because Stephens had played last season with the Prince George Cariboo Cougars in the BC Major Midget League (BCMML).

"I had a couple of people watching from last year's team, so that was good," he said.

Stephens was scouted for the WHL team after a stellar season in the BCMML, finishing fifth in league scoring.

"I had a strong year last year. That helped a lot," he said.

But the tempo of the WHL is much faster than the BCMML, he noted.

"It's a pretty big step up actually from last year, they're a lot faster, move the puck a lot quicker and they're a lot bigger and stronger, but as I go on I'll get used to it more and fit right in," Stephens said.

"I'm just going to have to work hard. This year, I won't see that much ice; I have to work my way up as years go on. But I'll try this year to contribute to the team."

Stephens has had to adjust to more than the tempo of the new league and the size of the players.

The grade 12 student is also getting used to his new surroundings in Edmonton, including going to a new high school.

"Once you get comfortable with the guys, it's not too bad, but it's still kind of different, going to a different school, new teachers, new people, but once you get to know people it's pretty easy," he said.

The Oil Kings returned to Edmonton last week for practices before heading to Lacombe today to take on the Red Deer Rebels in their final preseason test.

The two teams will clash again on Sept. 24 at Rexall Place in Red Deer to open the WHL regular season.