

## Stephens adapting to pace of Blue Jackets' rookie camp

By Jonathan Russell on September 15, 2010 at 2:02 pm



### Photo submitted

Whitehorse's Ted Stephens is getting his shot.

The Moncton Wildcats forward, who in 2007 became the first Yukoner to play in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL), got the call last June to attend the Columbus Blue Jackets rookie camp, Sept. 9-15.

Last week, Stephens made the trek to Traverse City, Michigan for the camp, which included an NHL Prospect Tournament at Centre Ice Arena.

The Blue Jackets' rookies faced off against and lost to the Carolina Hurricanes, New York Rangers and Minnesota Wild rookies, and were playing against the St. Louis Blues' rookies during press time.

Stephens, one of 29 players vying for a call up to the Blue Jackets' main camp next week, played in the games against the Rangers and the Wild. More important than wins at this tourney, however, was making a good impression.

"My first game, I was a little bit nervous and wasn't used to the pace, but as the game went on I got more comfortable," Stephens told the Star yesterday. "My second game I played a lot better."

Players enter these camps with a lot of nerves, but Stephens said the coaching staff has helped alleviate some of the pressure.

"Everyone's first camp they don't know what to expect, there's definitely some nerves, but once you get used to it it's just like playing another game of hockey," Stephens said.

"They're all good coaches and they talk to all the guys, give them pointers; I think they just try to make everybody feel comfortable right off the bat by talking to them, seeing how they're doing."

The 20-year old has not been without disappointment leading up to this opportunity.

Last year, Stephens learned that a clerical error kept him from attending a 2009 rookie camp hosted by the Montreal Canadiens.

The six foot, 180 lbs. centre followed that disappointment with his highest scoring season with the Wildcats, netting 23 goals and 16 assists in 50 games, on his club's way to winning the league and competing for the Memorial Cup.

But even compared to that level, this year's rookie camp is much faster, Stephens said.

"It's definitely a lot quicker and faster, guys are a lot bigger. It's way faster, that's the biggest thing," he said.

Stephens will find out this week if he'll get the call to the main camp with the NHLers, draft picks and a few American Hockey League players, or head back to Moncton to play his fourth season with the Wildcats.

Stephens was shocked when he learned that he was invited to the camp, but the news acted as a motivator during off-season training, he said.

"It definitely motivated me a lot more, for my training, and gave me something to shoot for; I definitely ramped it up a little bit after hearing it," he said, adding that, like all young hockey players, he's dreamed of reaching the highest level.

"It's always been kind of on my mind, but I guess never really thought that I would get to the Columbus Blue Jackets rookie camp when I was playing hockey in Whitehorse, so I'm definitely thrilled to be here."