

Aurora's Thomas named OHL Playoff MVP



By Jake Courtepatte

Robert Thomas can add one more physical piece of evidence in cementing his name as a future NHL leader.

The 2017 first-round draft pick of the St. Louis Blues capped off an incredible Ontario Hockey League season as the leading scorer of the Hamilton Bulldogs, leading to hearing his name called as the league's Most Valuable Player following the Bulldogs championship title.

"It definitely feels really good," said Thomas. "When you get into that situation where a team trades for you, for that reason, it feels like your job to do it."

"When I came in I was welcomed with open arms by everyone, the management, all my teammates?it really made my job really easy."

Thomas was leading the OHL's London Knights in scoring when he was traded to the Bulldogs in a blockbuster in January, setting up Hamilton for their successful run.

Though the Bulldogs were forced to give up a promising prospect, four second round draft picks, and a third round pick to acquire the prized centreman, the Aurora native led his team the remainder of the season in putting up four goals and 25 assists in 22 games with his new club.

"The thing with us, is a lot of the guys didn't have a lot of playoff experience," said Thomas. "We just seemed to get better and better, and the further along we got we became closer and closer as a team, and I was happy to be a part of that."

The Bulldogs went on to take the J. Ross Robertson Cup over the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds in six games, with Thomas netting the go-ahead goal in the sixth game to clinch the title.

"It was pretty special," said Thomas. "It was an awesome goal for me to get, it was awesome. A lot of fun."

Named the "Wayne Gretzky 99 Award", Thomas is the second Blues prospect to win the league MVP title in five years, after current Blues mainstay Dante Fabbro won in 2013.

Finding themselves facing the best-of-the-best in Canadian junior hockey as the Ontario representatives in last week's Memorial Cup, the Bulldogs fell in the semifinal, though Blues Director of Player Development Tim Taylor was on-hand to keep tabs on his future star.

"He reminds me of Patrice Bergeron," Taylor told NHL.com, referencing the two-time Olympic gold medal winner. "He does everything on the ice. He's always in the right place at the right time."

Thomas spent the better part of three OHL seasons with the Knights, catching the eye of scouts after a successful stint in the York-Simcoe Express minor system.