

York Simcoe Express alumni debuts with OHL's Knights



By Jake Courtepatte

Barely sixteen years old, centreman Robert Thomas already has London Knights head coach Dale Hunter smiling.

"I'm very happy to have a centreman with his speed," said Hunter in a press conference in April. "The game has changed and it's guys like him that will flourish."

At just 5'9", 165 lbs, the Aurora native doesn't dominate physically. However, his natural goal scoring ability has Hunter, and others in the junior hockey community, already making comparisons to guys like Sam Gagner and Patrick Kane.

"He's got the ability to make something out of nothing."

Thomas was the Knights' second round selection (26th overall) in this year's OHL entry draft. He impressed the Knights brass late this summer in training camp, even notching a goal in pre-season action against the Erie Otters a few weeks ago. So far, it's been enough to warrant him a spot on the regular season roster.

"I just have to keep working hard and playing the game I know I can play," said Thomas. "The hockey is so intense, I think it just motivates you to really play your best."

"There's always lots of pressure but you try and use it positively," he said. "I just really want to develop myself and get used to the playing style in the OHL because it's a lot faster and bigger. It's up to me to really decide how much I really want it. I think if I work hard I can accomplish my goal."

He was a key cog last year with the York-Simcoe Express minor midget AAA team, notching 45 points in only 38 games. With the Express, he won OMHA bronze in 2009, OMHA gold in 2013, and OMHA silver in 2014.

Locally, Thomas has been a multi-sport athlete at St. Andrew's College, lettering in varsity volleyball, lacrosse and golf as well as the touted U16 hockey program.

He gives credit to these other endeavors in helping him hone his unique hockey skills.

"Something like lacrosse really helps with your hand-eye coordination, or golf, and you can translate it from one sport to another. It's all relevant."

Thomas will be eligible for the 2017 NHL Draft.

?That's every hockey player's goal, and I'm hoping to get there.?