

Aurora's Galajda seeing what NHL is all about?

By Jake Courtepatte

Far off of any team's wishlist at the NHL Draft in 2016, goaltender Matthew Galajda finds himself this July sporting a Calgary Flames logo on his chest.

Posting the top save percentage in the entire NCAA in six seasons can do that.

Earning more honours in one rookie season than most keepers of the cage do in an entire collegiate career, including the NCAA All-American First Team, the ECAC's Goaltender of the Year, the ECAC's Rookie of the Year, and the Ivy League's Player of the Year, the Aurora native takes to the ice at the Scotiabank Saddledome this month for the Flames' NHL Development Camp.

Galajda led the Big Red to their first division title this season in thirteen years, his bygone-era-style save percentage of .940 opening the eyes of a handful of NHL teams.

"I didn't really know what to expect when I got there but everything turned out beyond what I could've ever imagined. I had a great team in front of me. We have a great defensive system."

"This is a kid that has just an unreal freshman college year," said Flames goaltending coach Jordan Sigalet, who said he followed Galajda when he played for the Victoria Grizzlies of the BCHL. "I used to play for Victoria, so I still follow the team and the league."

The first freshman goaltender ever to be shortlisted for the Hobey Baker, the NCAA's prestigious prize for Most Valuable Player, Galajda's nine shutouts led the league while posting consecutive shutouts three times.

An alumnus of two seasons with the St. Andrew's Saints, the six-foot goaltender also cut his teeth with the minor Aurora Tigers.

He won the CISAA championship with the Saints in both 2014 and 2015.

Despite consistently strong numbers throughout a young, but stellar career, Galajda was overlooked by teams in the NHL Draft who needed help in the goalie department, something Sigalet said could have just come down to his size.

"I think he's a guy that's always overlooked because of the size of the goalies in today's NHL," said Sigalet of the six-foot Galajda. Sigalet went on to name players like Anti Raanta, Philip Grubauer, and Carter Hutton, all keepers considered "undersized" in today's NHL, as helping to change the stigma.

"As long as they're smart, read the play well, know how to make themselves look big and play big, they can have success at the pro level."

For Galajda, however, it is players like Roberto Luongo and Marc-Andre Fleury that he tends to style his play after, lauding both for their attitudes and calm demeanour between the pipes.

He took that attitude to the big-league ice when he skated in camp for the first time on Friday, though in the short-term, it's back to the books for the 20-year old sophomore in the fall.

"It's nice, my first development camp; nice to see what the NHL is all about," said Galadja. "But going into the next year at Cornell, I still have to have the same mindset as I did a year ago."

Galajda studies hotel administration at the Ithaca, New York university, majoring in financial real-estate planning, though admits his end goal is similar to that of most of his teammates: to reach the professional leagues.