

Aurora's Mizzi signs pro contract with Utah Grizzlies

By Jake Courtepatte

The Ontario Junior Hockey League's top scorer is turning pro.

Joseph Mizzi left the Aurora Tigers organization last week to sign a contract with the ECHL's Utah Grizzlies, jumping straight from the Junior A level to the professional ranks in an extremely rare feat.

"Joseph hands down was the closest to turning pro from our league," said Aurora Tigers owner Jim Thomson, who picked up Mizzi at the start of the 2017-18 season after a stint with the OHL's Windsor Spitfires.

"His skating and shooting is at a pro level."

After posting a 42-point season in 28 games in his first season with the Tigers, Mizzi earned the title of assistant captain in Aurora this year before leading the OJHL in scoring, putting up a whopping 32 goals and 33 assists in 45 games while being scouted for the pros.

All in all, Mizzi leaves the junior ranks with 158 points in 150 games, also spending stints with the North York Rangers and the Newmarket Hurricanes of the OJHL, the Cape Breton Screaming Eagles of the QMJHL, and the Hamilton Bulldogs of the OHL.

An ex-pro himself, having played in 115 NHL games between 1986 - 1994, Thomson sees longstanding potential in his former top asset. Though it may take some time for the star right winger to find his game in the ECHL, posting four minutes in penalties and a minus-two rating through his first three professional games.

"Joseph will need to figure out the pro speed and the reaction time."

Hardly the first OJHL graduate to reach the professional level, less than a handful of players over the last decade can boast a transition straight from the Junior A level. Other ex-OJHLers employed by the Grizzlies include Wellington Duke grad Jake Marchment, as well as former Georgetown Raider Josh Dickinson, who went the OHL and NCAA routes respectively before signing in the ECHL.

He joins another former player to pull on the Tigers black and gold, albeit briefly: left winger Travis Barron spent five games with Aurora in the 2013-14 season, before moving to the OHL and landing with the Grizzlies organization last season.

Thomson said Mizzi's success is "a real testimonial for our league and the Aurora Tigers organization."

"It's a big loss for us but that's why we do this is to move kids on to the next level.

"We will miss him big time but we are cheering for him in his new journey."