

Express defenseman joins Team Ontario

By Jake Courtepatte

There are many reasons the Minor Midget York-Simcoe Express have shot up the UnderArmour OMHA rankings as of late, and Jacob Holmes is certainly one of them.

The talented blueliner was one of four players chosen from the OMHA to compete for Team Ontario at the upcoming 2019 Canada Winter Games, held in late February and only coming around once every four years.

Holmes is joined by fellow blueliner Connor Punnett and forwards Ethan Larmand and Cole Patey, all from the North Central Predators. They will represent the province at the Games in Red Deer, Alberta.

"We are proud of all of the players selected and wish Jacob, Connor, Ethan and Cole the best of luck as they represent the OMHA and Team Ontario at the Canada Winter Games," said Ian Taylor, Executive Director of the Ontario Minor Hockey Association.

Only 20 players from across the province are chosen for the roster, with the OMHA representatives joining those picked from Hockey Eastern Ontario, Hockey Northwestern Ontario, and the Ontario Hockey Federation.

"The Ontario Minor Hockey Association has a long and proud tradition of developing some of the top hockey talent in the world," said Taylor. "This event will be a step in identifying and developing the next crop of elite players in Ontario."

Described by his OMHA player page as "built strong and sturdy," the Express captain has impressed OHL scouts this season with his skating skills.

He will be eligible for the OHL Selection Draft in 2019, and the NHL Entry Draft in 2021.

Bringing a strong net-front presence to a team looking to repeat as gold medal winners, having defeated Team Alberta in Prince George, B.C. in 2015, Holmes will have the opportunity to showcase his talent along with best under-16 skaters in the nation.

And his chances are good: Team Ontario has earned five gold medals, one silver medal and two bronze medals in the last 13 Canada Winter Games.

Players will gather for a Pre-Tournament Camp February 11 to 14 at the Mastercard Centre for Hockey Excellence in Toronto as they begin preparations to defend the gold medal.

The Games themselves will be held from February 15 until March 3, 2019.

With scouts visiting major games and tournaments across Ontario since the season opened in September, Head of Ontario Hockey League Central Scouting, Darrell Woodley, thinks he has the right squad for the job.

"We are excited about the players we have named to Team Ontario. The selection process was extremely difficult, but I believe we have a team that is highly skilled and will push the pace at the Canada Winter Games," said Woodley

Holmes' Express home club sits top in their division in the OMHA, holding onto a record of 16-8-7.