

Express forward Byfield first overall in OHL priority selection draft



By Jake Courtepatte

Early, and often.

The York-Simcoe Express moniker was on the lips of many of the general managers at Saturday's OHL priority selection draft, where for the first time ever two members of the AAA organization went back-to-back in the first two selections.

Quinton Byfield, tabbed as a consensus first overall pick before even the midpoint of the 2017-18 season, was named the winner of the Jack Ferguson Trophy as the top choice by the Sudbury Wolves.

The six-foot-four, 200 lb. centreman has gained a reputation as the right combination of speed and skill, captaining the Minor Midget Express to an OHL Cup in March while leading the team in scoring with 92 points.

Wolves General Manager Rob Papineau called selecting Byfield "a great thing for the Sudbury Wolves and our city" in a statement. "For him to commit to the Sudbury Wolves and the OHL is tremendous for our hockey team and for our fans. He is a special player who is equally as impressive off the ice as he is on it. We are very happy and excited that he will be in the lineup and part of our community this upcoming season."

A hockey town through and through, Sudbury hosted Byfield and his family one day prior to the draft, leaving no surprise as to who they would choose with the prized pick.

"It was a great experience, I met a lot of people there, it's a great fan base," said Byfield. "Overall, I think it's going to be a great fit for me."

He called walking around the Wolves Sudbury Community Arena "a surreal feeling."

"It's an old barn, there are a lot of great memories there?it's going to be a great place."

The 15-year old St. Max Kolbe student added 12 points in the Express' playoff run, cementing his position atop the OHL's most wanted list.

"There were a lot of ups and downs," said Byfield, reflecting on the Minor Midget season. "But we finished strong, won a few tournaments?all in all I think it was a great season."

Humbled by the experience, he gives credit to his parents for helping him reach the next step in achieving his hockey goals.

"Definitely my mom, she's always making me food, getting me to the rink on time, waking up early?just always there for me."

With his eyes remaining on the online board after the first selection, Byfield saw Express teammate Evan Vierling go second overall to the Flint Firebirds, a first for the Express organization.

The centreman was second in scoring behind Byfield on the Express this season, putting up 63 points in 33 games.

"Quinton and Evan got stronger and stronger as the season progressed and they are very deserving of this honour," said Minor Midget head coach Ilir Mehmeti. "They are everything that an OHL team would want on draft day: unselfish, always looking to get better and they always step up in the big moments."

"We are all very proud of their accomplishments and wish them every success as they move on to the next step in their careers."

Cameron Butler and Ty Collins, both Express right wingers, were each taken in the second round of the draft by the Peterborough

Petes and Guelph Storm respectively.

Defenseman Jack Bar was taken in the third round by the Petes, while fellow D-man Ian Lemieux rounded out the Express draftees as a sixth round pick of the Saginaw Spirit.