

Former OJHL player wins SPHL MVP

Former Villanova Knight (now the Brampton Admirals) in the OJHL Mason Baptista has taken home the Southern Professional Hockey League MVP award.

Baptista says this is a great award; however, winning the final game of the season would have been nice to go along with it.

'I was honestly so upset after losing the final so it wasn't something I was thinking about until two or three days before. I thought Logan Nelson, a buddy of mine, he finished with the most points,' Baptista said.

'Realistically it's a nice award. It's a great award to get. But at the end of the day we didn't win the last game of the year and I thought that was more important. It is a nice recognition of all the work we did during the season.'

Baptista joined the SPHL Macon Mayhem during the year from the Rapid City Rush in the ECHL.

'I picked up the Rapid City gig because they needed that veteran spot. But when it didn't work out, I came home and regrouped. I knew the coach, Kevin Kerr, I was a player coach with him. He said, 'Hey man, just come down. There's only five teams; there's a lot of east coast guys playing down here.'

'I was hesitant, but then I said this was the right opportunity. Otherwise I'm not going to be playing.'

Baptista recorded 43 points (17G, 26A) in 38 games played with the club. The Mayhem lost to the Pensacola Ice Flyers 4-2 and 4-1 in the finals.

Next season, Baptista is expected to join the Worcester Railers as a player coach.

Since he was 16-years-old, Baptista has always been an advocate for coaching the sport. He would join hockey camps as a coach in the summer to help people improve their game.

Around the same age, he began making his mark with the Vaughan Vipers in the OJHL and then the Villanova Knights. As captain in 2010-2011, Baptista recorded 84 points (25 G, 59 A). He went on to play at St. Norbert College Div. 3 program before entering the ECHL afterwards.

Now, running his own business with his wife called BapsHockey, his intention is to educate others and prevent other players from making the same mistakes that he did.

'I personally think I would have had a lot more success at the junior level if I wasn't so busy comparing myself to others. It will happen. It's a tendency I didn't even notice and I look back on that and that's what BapsHockey embodies is trying to get players to avoid making the same mistakes that I've done and try to give them the best chance to get them that division one or division three scholarship.'

Baptista and his wife, who are spending the summer in Green Bay, WI, will be hosting a lot of online classes. The program he sets up provides players the skills to think and react with speeds at an NHL level.

To get a hold of the North York native, head to Bapshockey.com for more information.

By Robert Belardi