

Robert Powers excited to be behind the Tigers' bench

When an athlete retires, you wouldn't be at fault of envisioning an athlete pushing 40 making an emotional farewell. After all, Peyton Manning retired in tears in 2016, following an illustrious 18-year career in pro football.

For athletes, it's unimaginable to leave the sport they love. For others, the prospect of an early retirement is a harsh reality. But, there's always a reason to retire, most of the time due to injury.

In a rare case, 25-year-old and former ECHL defenceman for the Newfoundland Growlers, Robert Powers just knew it was his time.

"There were certain, little details that just led me to believe that, it's my time," says Powers, the incoming assistant coach for the Aurora Tigers. "It's a little easier knowing that I'm coaching and that I'm in the game still."

Powers felt he had reached the apex of his hockey career. The Ajax native, has seemingly wanted to coach for some time.

Powers is no stranger to the Ontario Junior Hockey League, his four-year career awash in multiple championships.

He won the Frank L. Buckland Cup in 2011-2012 with the Stouffville Spirit and won the Buckland Cup again and the Dudley Hewitt Cup with the Toronto Lakeshore Patriots in the 2013-2014 season.

"I think there is definitely an advantage of having played in the league, especially, offering advice to players. I've been in their shoes, I've been in the league. I've been in the same division even.

"I want to give these players knowledge that I have now that I wish I had in junior."

Powers acknowledges this is a transition. This is going to be something new and he is willing to learn every aspect of what it means to be a coach. The league is different now than when he used to play.

When he called head coach Jim Wells Jr. and candidly spoke of his coaching aspirations, Wells was left ecstatic. He wanted a young coach and he got one. The young coach is incredibly thankful for the opportunity.

But why the Tigers? Of all teams to enter the league as a coach, Powers says the Tigers is one of the premier organizations in the league.

'They've always been one of the premier organizations in the league,' he says. 'They still are. Everyone has an off year. You're not going to judge a whole organization by the number of wins from last year's season. I know, from when I was in the league, it was a really tough place to play.'

The Aurora Tigers finished 22nd in goals against last year. Powers will be handling the defensive side of the puck and will be looking to change that.

He says, he wants to nurture mobile, puck-moving defencemen. He says you have got to be able to make plays because the more you do, the more scouts and coaches will eye you.

Having been down the route from the OJHL to the NCAA, Powers went off to Robert Morris University to play hockey. Many players have the same aspirations as he does and he knows what coaches look for in players. He can teach his team what it takes to reach that level of scholarship and playing at a highly-competitive level with one simple notion to abide by.

'Take what you do well and do it better than everybody else on the ice, because that's what's going to get you somewhere,' he said.

Off of the ice, Powers is a man who prides himself on helping others and giving back. At Robert Morris University, he began food drive programs and helped raise money to purchase extra school supplies. He helped minor hockey teams in the area raise money and offer free tickets to university games.

He is a huge sports fan, especially now that he is older. He loves to play golf and be active in his local community. Sports is his passion ? as well as currently, raising two, five-month old puppies with his girlfriend Amanda.

He believes in setting an example. It's what he wants to show the players. Being looked up to and setting a prestigious image off the ice is just as important as on the ice. He's going to bring everything he has to the Aurora Tigers.

By Robert Belardi