

SAC Saints Captain Jonathan Castagna drafted in third round by the Arizona Coyotes

Understandably, Jonathan Castagna sounded a bit tired on the phone when we chatted Sunday evening.

The St. Andrew's College graduate who is bound for Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, in seven weeks, has had a whirlwind week in the USA.

It started in Nashville, TN, for Days 1 and 2 of the NHL Draft and continued in Scottsdale, AZ, at the Ice Den where the Arizona Coyotes are holding their development camp.

The weary Castagna flew into Scottsdale at 9 a.m. on Sunday and endured a full day of physical and medical testing before he hits the ice for workouts and scrimmages from July 3-7. Castagna who tallied 29 goals, 43 assists, and 72 points during the Saints' rigorous 50-game schedule -- is on the Coyotes' summer roster that features 26 forwards, 13 defensemen, and 7 goalies. The SAC Captain who wore #18 while skating for the Saints-- will be sporting # 42 for the Coyotes' five-day on-ice development event.

While Castagna was relishing the present moment in Arizona and looking forward to the recognition dinner the Coyotes were hosting on Sunday, he was still reeling from the incredible experience in Nashville on Thursday.

It was a surreal experience for two reasons.

One, Nashville is an amazing city it was such a fun time in a city that doesn't seem to sleep. However, there was a bit of anxiety connected to the draft that was always lurking in the background of the fun times. Two, it was incredible to hear my name called by the Coyotes.

The SAC Captain was moved by the moment when Arizona made him their first pick of the third round because he was able to share it with the Saints' Coaching Staff.

It was very special to have Coach Manning, Coach Brennagh, and Coach Gate and the whole staff in attendance. I was so happy that they were able to be there with me. They made me who I am today.

In addition to the thrill of sharing this big moment with his SAC Coaching Staff, Castagna was excited at a personal level to be selected by the Arizona Coyotes 70th overall in the 2023 Draft.

I was thrilled to be picked by Arizona. I had lots of conversations with them. It's exciting for me since the Coyotes are a club that has been through a lot in the last few years with all the talk about relocation and possibly a new arena, but they will be a club on the rise with so many new, good young players.

Despite being fully engaged in the development camp in Scottsdale, Castagna confirmed that he is committed to play NCAA Hockey at an Ivy League school in Ithaca this coming season.

I will be attending Cornell in the Fall. It's very rare for drafted players to get into the NHL right away. The Arizona management team knew I was going to attend a US College. They see me as a long-term investment.

As much as Castagna is looking forward to attending Cornell and competing for Big Red in 2023-24, stepping on the ice as an Arizona Coyotes' draft pick was something to which he was looking forward.

Suiting up in an NHL jersey is going to be cool. To throw on the Arizona gear will be the completion of a hockey dream come true.

One of the pleasant surprises of the Draft for Castagna was his rapid ascent from his #90 Pre-Draft ranking to being selected in the third round?20 places higher than anticipated.

The native of Etobicoke and former draft pick of the OHL London Knights explained the process behind his ascension in the ranks: ?It boiled down to how much a team wants you. There were numerous teams that had mentioned that they might pick me in the third round, as we found out in Nashville. Arizona had numerous third round picks this year so they used their first one to select me. They had the sixth pick and I was still available.?

When asked about what his third round selection said about the quality of the St. Andrew's College hockey program, Castagna expressed his appreciation for the Aurora independent school he has attended for the last two years.

?It's a testament to what kind of great hockey factory SAC is. It's the place to be to develop into a College player and be a well-rounded person.?

Castagna's authentic connection to SAC is evident in that the first exchange of words that took place after his name was called by the Coyotes was with Coach Manning and his staff: ?Everything around me stopped. The first thing I heard after the announcement was congratulations from the SAC Coaches. I had so much adrenaline. My life-long dream had come true and then I hugged my whole family. We had lots of tears of joy in the hotel room afterwards.?

At the end of our phone conversation, I asked the articulate SAC graduate ?What was the best part of hearing your name being called by the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday?? He paused, and then the stellar center offered a succinct summation of the moment.

?It was the most satisfying thing in the world. You put in so much work?lots of blood, sweat, and tears?to strive for one goal: to be selected in the NHL draft. It's was a perfect blend of exciting and satisfying.?

In the prologue to Raymond Z. Munro's autobiography *The Sky's No Limit*, the legendary Canadian adventurer alluded to a famous quote by O. Henry that sums up the road to fortune: ?Fortune is the prize to be won, adventure the road to it, and chance is what may lurk in the shadows.?

By all accounts, Jonathan Castagna is on an adventurous road filled with opportunity for the next few years and there will be prizes to be won for this distinguished and talented student-athlete who has starred for Saint Andrew's College the last two years.

For Captain Castagna, ?the sky's no limit? as his hockey and educational odyssey commences at Cornell this September.

By Jim Stewart