

York-Simcoe captain Hillis drafted by NHL's Canadiens



By Jake Courtepatte

Cam Hillis is used to wearing a 'C' on his chest: he did so during the most important season of his minor hockey career, while with the York-Simcoe Minor Midget Express in 2015-16.

Following Saturday's NHL Entry Draft, Hillis will now get the opportunity to don another form of a 'C': the time-honoured logo of the Montreal Canadiens.

Drafted early in the third round, 66th overall in the 2018 NHL Entry Draft, it was his tenacity that attracted top scout Trevor Timmins to the NHL's most storied franchise.

'He's five-foot-ten, but he plays like he's six-foot-four,' said Timmins in a media scrum following the draft. 'He is as physical as (Canadiens right winger) Brendan Gallagher, but he's just as determined.'

During the midpoint of the 2015-16 Express season, Hillis had committed to a scholarship at Providence College in the NCAA's top division, a common route these days for elite Canadian athletes.

It was after putting up an astonishing 72 points in just 33 games with the Minor Midget AAA Express that he put his academic goals on hold to follow his dream, going the traditional route in joining the Guelph Storm of the OHL.

A highly-successful following season with the St. Andrew's College Saints in Aurora, leading the varsity program in scoring, landed him a full-time role with the Storm.

59 points in 60 games as a 17-year old was all Montreal needed to see to put a jersey on the 5'10" centreman.

When reached after the draft, Hillis said it was 'very special' to have his dream come true, adding it was his abilities as a playmaker that piqued the interest of several NHL squads.

'I think I rely on my hockey sense, and my compete level every night,' said Hillis. 'Seeing the ice, and making those little plays because I'm not the biggest player out there, I kind of have to rely on making the game a little faster and play a lot harder.'

Pulling on an NHL sweater for the first time was made even sweeter for Hillis, by the fact that he was able to celebrate his eighteenth birthday just one day after the draft.

'I think I may still be able to put on a couple more inches, and I've definitely got to fill out a little more if I want to play at that next level. But this is definitely a nice birthday present for me.'

Just one year after three St. Andrews Saints were picked in the NHL Draft, Hillis joins fellow alumnus Kody Clark as this year's crop of Saints draftees, with the son of ex-NHLer Wendel Clark going 47th overall to the Washington Capitals.