

COLLEGE HOCKEY'S NHL IMPACT RECEIVES TOP MARKS

THEY WOULD SAY HE HAD A 'CAREER YEAR' if college hockey was a player.

Consider calendar year 2010: the captain's honor of raising the Stanley Cup went to a former college player for the second time, the MVP, Best Goaltender, Best Forward and Best Defenseman at the Vancouver Olympics were all college alums, the NHL Awards in Las Vegas saw ex-collegians claim the Vezina, Norris, Lady Byng and Conn Smythe trophies, while nearly 250,000 fans will have attended just four big stage events, including the *NCAA Men's Frozen Four* in Detroit and the Dec. 11 *Big Chill at the Big House* at Michigan Stadium.

When USA won the gold medal at the World Junior Championships last winter, there were 11 college players on the roster, plus Jason Zucker, who is now playing college hockey at Denver.

"To me the growth of college hockey parallels the growth of hockey in the United States," said St. Louis Blues gen-

eral manager Doug Armstrong. "In places like Texas, California and Missouri players are now growing up thinking about NCAA hockey. That's how they think. I think college hockey is only going to grow from here."

Today, there are 11 top NHL executives with college hockey backgrounds: Toronto's Brian Burke (Providence), New Jersey's Lou Lamoriello (Providence), Atlanta's Don Waddell (Northern Michigan), Pittsburgh's Ray Shero (St. Lawrence), New York Islanders' Garth Snow (Maine), Nashville's David Poile (Northeastern), Washington's George McPhee (Bowling Green), Philadelphia's Paul Holmgren (Minnesota), Boston's Peter Chiarelli (Harvard), Los Angeles' Dean Lombardi (New Haven) and Dallas' Joe Nieuwendyk (Cornell).

"What we have (in that group) are some former players who put the business side at the forefront," Waddell said. "Today hockey has become such a big business, that helps."

According to NHL statistics, 27.5 percent of all NHL players today have college hockey backgrounds. By the end of the season that number could be closer to 29 percent because college players will join NHL teams after their seasons.

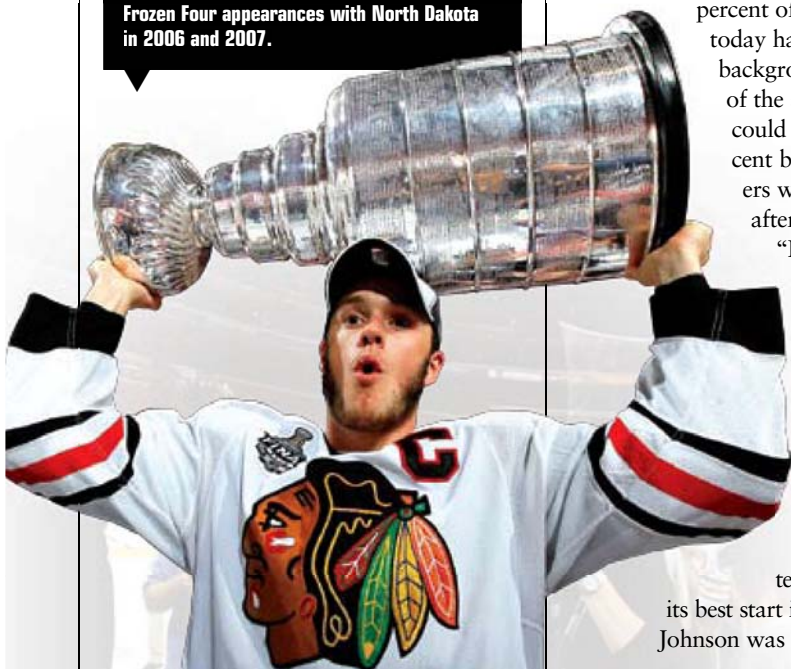
"I think what this means is that college hockey has become a more realistic option for playing in the NHL," said defenseman Jack Johnson, a key player on a Los Angeles Kings team that is enjoying its best start in 20 years.

Johnson was covered by junior



RYAN MILLER captured the Hobey Baker Memorial Award in 2000 as college hockey's most outstanding player with Michigan State.

JONATHAN TOEWS made back-to-back Frozen Four appearances with North Dakota in 2006 and 2007.



programs, but always had his mind made up that he would be a college player.

"Just in case hockey didn't work out, I wanted a plan B," Johnson said. "It is important in anything you do in life to have a Plan B, and a degree is a good Plan B."

Of course, Plan A also turned out just fine for former college players who were front and center onstage at the 2010 NHL Awards in Las Vegas. The Vezina (Ryan Miller/Michigan State), Conn Smythe (Jonathan Toews/North Dakota), Norris (Duncan Keith/Michigan State) and Lady Byng (Martin St. Louis/Vermont) were all won by college players. Toews also won Olympic gold with Canada and captained the Stanley Cup champion Chicago Blackhawks.

"For me (college hockey) was the stepping stone to the NHL," Toews said. "That was the ultimate goal, to find a place I could play and eventually become a professional hockey player. It worked out that North Dakota was a good place



GEORGE PARROS, with a Princeton economics degree, would be just as comfortable on Wall Street as the trenches of the NHL.

for that. I had a lot of fun playing in some big games – the Frozen Four, the World Juniors for Team Canada. It was a good two years there that really helped me to develop and get ready for this level.”

THIS SEASON, COLLEGE HOCKEY CONTINUES TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON A NIGHTLY BASIS AT THE NHL LEVEL:

OCT. 9: New York Rangers center Derek Stepan (Wisconsin), six months removed from playing in the Frozen Four, netted a hat trick in his first NHL game. He was the fourth player in NHL history to do so, and the first to accomplish the feat since Fabian Brunnstrom did it in 2008.

OCT. 18: Chicago’s Patrick Sharp (Vermont) scores the game-winning goal against St. Louis to give him five goals in three games. In early November, he was still second in the NHL scoring race.

OCT. 27: Former college players totaled 13 goals and 22 assists for 35 points in six NHL games. Among the highlights: Dany Heatley (Wisconsin) had a goal and three assists in San Jose’s 5-2 win against New Jersey, while Martin St. Louis (Vermont) had two goals and an assist in Tampa Bay’s 5-3 victory against Pittsburgh. Craig Adams (Harvard) was involved in every Penguins goal, contributing a goal and two assists. Duncan Keith (Michigan State) had two assists in Chicago’s 3-1 win against Los Angeles. On that same night, Chicago’s Marty Turco (Michigan) and Tampa Bay’s Dan Ellis (Nebraska-Omaha) both had victories in the net.

OCT. 30: Goalie Tim Thomas (Vermont) shuts out Ottawa to give him three shutouts in six games. His 6-0-0 start to the season is Boston’s best goaltending start since Tiny Thompson went 6-0-0 in 1937-38. At the time, Thomas led the NHL with an 0.50 goals-against average and .984 save percentage.

NOV. 2: Anaheim Ducks tough guy George Parros (Princeton) made news by shaving off hockey’s most famous moustache since Lanny McDonald’s handlebar, for charity.

“It was totally hard to do it,” Parros said, laughing. “If you read the e-mail chains, I said I would love to support my mustachioed brothers, but I didn’t want to shave it. At the end of the day, I did it because it was for a good cause, and I wouldn’t turn as many heads if I just supported the movement with my ‘stache.”

NOV. 4: St. Louis Blues center T.J. Oshie (North Dakota) picks up an

assist in a 2-0 win against San Jose. The Blues are off to one of the best starts in team history and Oshie was their leading scorer before suffering a fractured ankle on Nov. 10. Leading the team in minutes played is defenseman Erik Johnson (Minnesota).

“A lot more players are starting to go to college and a lot more Canadians are starting to go to college,” Johnson said. “It’s a great place to develop.”

Johnson wanted to turn pro, but the Blues convinced him he needed to go to college.

“I just grew up and matured,” Johnson said. “It’s not just how you develop on the ice. It’s how you develop as a person. I just got a broader perspective about life.”

It’s a perspective that many former collegians eventually channel for a career year or two of their own. ■

DEREK STEPAN, who led the 2010 World Juniors in scoring, fired a hat trick in his NHL debut.



COLLEGE HOCKEY BRINGS HOME HARDWARE

2010 MEN’S OLYMPIC HOCKEY

Most Valuable Player/Best Goaltender

Ryan Miller (Michigan State)

Best Defenseman

Brian Rafalski (Wisconsin)

Best Forward

Jonathan Toews (North Dakota)

Media All-Star

Zach Parise (North Dakota)

2010 NHL AWARDS

Vezina Trophy

Ryan Miller (Michigan State)

Norris Trophy

Duncan Keith (Michigan State)

Lady Byng Trophy

Martin St. Louis (Vermont)

Conn Smythe Trophy

Jonathan Toews (North Dakota)

NHL Foundation Player Award

Ryan Miller (Michigan State)

2010 IIHF WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONS

Jerry D’Amigo (Rensselaer)

Matt Donovan (Denver)

Jake Gardiner (Wisconsin)

Chris Kreider (Boston College)

Danny Kristo (North Dakota)

Mike Lee (St. Cloud)

Kyle Palmieri (Notre Dame)

John Ramage (Wisconsin)

Jordan Schroeder (Minnesota)

Derek Stepan (Wisconsin)

David Warsofsky (Boston University)

Jason Zucker (Denver)