

SPORTS

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A peek into Raiders' future

Only age restriction holding back first-round draft pick Mark McNeill

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How good is Mark McNeill?

Well, that depends on who you ask.

Ask Prince Albert Raiders head scout Dave O'Brien and he'll tell you the club's first-round pick in the 2008 bantam draft is "as well-rounded a player as I've ever been involved with. He doesn't have a shortcoming."

Ask McNeill's former bantam coach Dwayne Inglehart (who also coached Kyle Chipchura) and he'll say McNeill has more raw talent and offensive upside than the former standout Raider centre.

And if you ask Bruno Campese, he'll tell you what everybody in attendance at Raider training camp already knows.

"He's really aware on the ice," said the head coach and general manager. "He's a very gifted player."

So gifted, in fact, that Campese says McNeill would be in the Raider lineup this season if not for one thing - his age.

As a 15-year-old, McNeill is not eligible to play in the Western Hockey League full time until next season. He knew this coming into training camp, so the goal he set for himself was a simple one.

"I just wanted to come out here and prove myself," said the six-foot, 172-pound centre from Edmonton.

And prove himself he has.

In three scrimmages, McNeill has scored three goals and added a handful of assists playing while alongside 2008 import draft pick Igor Revenko - with whom he seems to have found some serious chemistry.

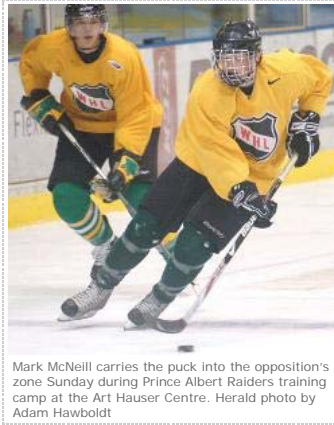
However, McNeill has been more than just a guy who puts numbers on the board.

He's also shown he's a player who can make something out of nothing, a player with speed, agility, a nose for the net, natural playmaking instincts and - perhaps best of all - a great understanding of the game.

However, if you ask McNeill about his play at Raider training camp - a performance that has turned a lot of heads - the humble centre doesn't have much to say.

"I'm just trying to do my best," he said.

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Mark McNeill carries the puck into the opposition's zone Sunday during Prince Albert Raiders training camp at the Art Hauser Centre. Herald photo by Adam Hawboldt

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