

Steelheads goaltender determined to finally advance past first round of OHL playoffs

In all likelihood, the 2014-15 season will be Spencer Martin's last in the Ontario Hockey League.

The Mississauga Steelheads goalie has his sights set on embarking on a professional career, beginning in the Colorado Avalanche's farm system.

But before the 19-year-old Oakville native does that, he hopes to graduate from the OHL on a positive note and make it past the opening round of the playoffs for the first time in his career.

"There's a million and one ways to get to the NHL, so I don't think of this as my last year (in the OHL) guaranteed, but I definitely have a goal of moving on to pro hockey next year," said Martin, who has made it to the past three playoffs, only to be eliminated in the first round each time.

"With three years of getting a taste of the playoffs, I can only imagine the second round is that much better ... Everyone who's been a part of (the past two) playoff series against Belleville and Oshawa is hungrier to get to the second round because we assume it's going to be pretty awesome."

Martin, who made 37 saves Monday in the Steelheads' 5-4 pre-season victory over the Guelph Storm, was drafted in the

first round of the 2011 OHL Priority Selection and has suited up for Mississauga in each season since.

In that time, the team has placed no better than sixth place and hasn't made it out of the Central Division basement. The past two seasons, the Steelheads made it into the playoffs by a single point.

There were times last year where Martin practically stood on his head to keep the team in playoff contention, such as a stretch in late October/early November in which he was named CHL goalie of the week. He finished last season with a 3.54 goals-against average and .899 save percentage.

Martin feels a rise up the rankings is imminent based on a young group of talented players like Sean Day and Oakville's Jesse Barwell having a year of experience under their belt, as well as the addition of 2014 first-round pick Mikey McLeod.

"In general, we're not losing many guys, so that obviously makes the expectations go up for everybody," Martin said.



Spencer Martin

"We've done a good job of developing guys. We had five rookie defencemen last year and six with (Stephen) Gibson coming in late, so we expect them to be really good and I'm sure they will be."

Last season, Martin played more than any other goalie in the OHL, appearing in 64 games and registering 3,562 minutes out of a maximum 4,080. He was in the Steelheads goal for 87 per cent of the season while rookies Dawson Carty and Chase Marchand split the other 13.

Carty and fellow 2012 draftee Cameron Zanussi are competing for the backup spot through training camp before the Steelheads open the season on Sept. 26.

Regardless of who earns the backup role, Martin is confident that goalie can take on more of the workload this season.

"I love having Dawson as a goaltending partner," Martin said. "We get along great, he's a hard worker and he's pretty talented, too. But having said that, we have a lot of depth in the organization for goalies and (goaltending coach) Kory Cooper does a great job of developing a lot of guys that we draft."

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