

YOUTHFUL BEDARD LIVING UP TO HOCKEY HYPE

Hey, hockey fans, there's another Connor Superstar lacing up his skates, ready to show up on your Hockey Night in Canada TV screens in oh, about four years.

This will be no shock to those who have more than a passing interest in hockey, but the occasional fan may have not yet heard of Connor Bedard, a 15-year-old from North Vancouver who is playing major junior this year with the Regina Pats.

Bedard is the first Western Hockey Leaguer given 'exceptional player' status, allowing him to play before the age of 16. And how is he doing so far? Well, in his first eight games, in which the Pats scored 26 goals, Bedard had a team-leading 13 points, six goals and seven assists. NHL scouts, who were drooling before, now carry a bucket whenever they observe Bedard in action.

Is he ready for the big time? Last season, as a 14-year-old playing in the under-20 Canadian Sports School Hockey League, Bedard was dominant, scoring 43 goals and 41 assists in 36 games to lead the league. One of his summer on-ice workout partners of late has been Matt Barzal of the New York Islanders.

John Paddock, the general manager and vice-president of the Pats, says Bedard, who won't turn 16 until this July, "can do a little bit of everything" — unable to isolate one aspect of Bedard's game as his most outstanding. Paddock, who played parts of five seasons in the NHL and was head- or assistant coach for three NHL teams during another eight campaigns, has seen a lot of hockey players in his day and says, if he has to pick a comparative player, Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos comes to mind, considering how he gets the one-timer blast away from the left circle.

Is Bedard your best player? A 15-year-old? Paddock demurs. "Well, we have a 19-year-old defenceman who would probably be our best player, but it's close," he said.

Paddock says he knows he'll have Bedard for only two seasons beyond the current COVID-19-truncated season before the NHL comes calling, and hopes he can build a winner around his young superstar during that period. "We're going to try," he said.

All the attention the 5-foot-9, 179-pound Bedard has garnered since being identified as a hockey prodigy around the age of 12 has not gone to his head, said Paddock. "He was really brought up the right way," he said. "He's one of those rare players who's been preparing for this his whole life. He's ready mentally."

Meanwhile, the NHL's best player, the Oilers' Connor McDavid, won't be the league's only Connor Superstar for long.

- Comedian **Argus Hamilton**, via Facebook, on the Rover's search for water on Mars: "They should've sent me there with my golf clubs. I'd have found water by my third tee shot."
- Colour commentator **Ray Hudson** of beIN Sports TV, after Barcelona's **Lionel Messi** put on a one-man show to score against SD Huesca: "He needs help like a shark needs a dentist."
- **Jack Finarelli**, from sportscurmudgeon.com, on one of five new sports at the Olympics in Japan this summer: "Sport Climbing: Athletes here will scale a vertical wall. I guess this is like the hundred-metre dash staged at right angles to one another."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "A New Yorker is selling an ultra-strong coffee called Death Wish, which carries the warning 'many sleepless nights'. Hey, it's cheaper than Jets tickets."
- Currie again: "A brawl reportedly broke out at a New Hampshire retirement centre during a bingo game. It looked like a hockey fight, except with more teeth."
- **Greg Cote** of the Miami Herald: "New Zealand defeated Italy in the final of America's Cup sailing in Auckland. Home-water advantage?"
- Posted on the Lethbridge Hurricanes' scoreboard during a fan-less hockey game: "Free beer for all in attendance."
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Ohio State safety **Marcus Hooker** was arrested on DUI charges after he passed out behind the wheel while waiting in a McDonald's drive-thru line. Defence lawyers can't decide whether to enter a plea of guilty, not guilty or 'I deserve a break today.'"
- Another one from **RJ Currie**, on marine biologists' claim that many sharks take a break each spring to focus on eating, mating and swimming in warm water: "If we're talking San Jose Sharks, add golf."
- Another one from Perry: "**Evander Holyfield**, 58, and **Mike Tyson**, 54, are scheduled to meet once again in the ring on May 29. Winner becomes the first boxer in history to boast all four belts — WBA, WBC, IBF and AARP."

- Troubled ex-big-leaguer **Lenny Dykstra**, via Twitter, not making anyone forget **Cal Ripken Jr.:** “Guess who hasn’t been arrested in now 34 consecutive months.”
Care to comment? Email brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca