

Bowers blazing his own path

The QMJHL's loss was the USHL's gain when Shane Bowers left his native Nova Scotia for Iowa and the Waterloo Black Hawks in what should culminate in a first round selection at the 2017 NHL Entry Draft in Chicago.

The fourth overall selection of the Cape Breton Eagles (his rights are now owned by Saint John) in the 2015 Quebec League midget draft wanted to go the college hockey route and declined to play major junior, spending last season in Waterloo. This year the skilled playmaking centre appears to be on the verge of breaking out in a big way after making the USHL's Second All-Rookie team a year ago.

"Last year was awesome for me," Bowers told *Red Line* recently. "As a young

the 2016-17 campaign.

"I think my skating and hockey IQ are my best attributes," said Bowers. "My skating helps me get to spots on the ice whether it's the o-zone or the d-zone and my hockey IQ - I think I see plays a couple of steps before they happen, and I know where I'm going with the puck when I get it. So I think that, along with my offensive ability, are my biggest strengths."

It isn't just the offence that grabbed the attention of NHL scouts and NCAA coaches in attendance at the USHL Fall Classic last month: Bowers showed a willingness to play an effective 200-foot game while pressuring opposing players with and without the puck. Rather than standing around and watching the play, Bowers

Shane Bowers File

- ◆ **Ht/Wt:** 6-1/176
- ◆ **Position:** Centre
- ◆ **Shoots:** Left
- ◆ **Birthdate:** July 30, 1999
- ◆ **Team:** Waterloo Black Hawks
- ◆ **Scouting Report:** A very mature kid off the ice who plays a mature game on the ice. He's an excellent skater with some serious hockey smarts. Aggressive in puck pursuit and causes problems for defenders on the forecheck. Though he's an unselfish player who generally looks to pass first, we consider him more a sniper and goal scorer than a playmaker. Has a strong work ethic and is well grounded. Makes a legitimate effort in defensive end and can help his team win in a variety of ways.

guy to be able to come in and get the quality ice that I did was great for me as a player and for my development. It helped me not only as a player, but as a person, too. Moving away from home, it was a good adjustment and I really matured."

Like many younger players competing in junior leagues, there were challenges in making the transition to skating against bigger, stronger, and faster players, but Bowers had a strong second half and his confidence grew by leaps and bounds.

"This year I think it will be a little easier because you already have a year under your belt," he said. "You're coming in a little more comfortable and a little more confident with the puck and a little more poised, so I'm really looking forward to it."

Bowers has impressed early in the USHL's regular schedule with NHL habits. He's not an electrifying offensive presence who brings people out of their seats, but makes smart and simple plays in all zones to help his team win games. That maturity and natural poise bodes well for him to keep riding the wave of progression throughout

went after the puck, often gaining and maintaining possession in the offensive zone or kick-starting his club's attack by forcing turnovers.

"I think I've improved at both ends of the ice - backcheck, forecheck, whatever it is," he said. "All over the ice and the small details of my game, I pride myself in that I really work at it."

Bowers generated some controversy in his native Canada when he declined to report to Cape Breton, though he hasn't completely closed the door on the QMJHL at some point in the future.

"It wasn't so much one versus the other, but it was kind of the best spot for me," Bowers said of the decision to play in the USHL and pursue the NCAA route over major junior. "At the time of the Quebec draft we weren't really sure if it was going to be school or major junior for me and it turned out that we decided to come down here. The option is still open to go back to major junior but for right now, I'm definitely set on college."

Bowers Report Card

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|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Size/Strength | B |
| Skating | A- |
| Shot/Scoring ability | B |
| Puckhandling | B+ |
| Hockey Sense | A |
| Competitiveness | B |
| Physical play | C+ |
| Composure/Poise | B |
| Defence | B- |

As of October 1st, Bowers had not yet announced his college destination, but he talked about several good visits he had with Boston University and Boston College. As a Halifax product, playing in Boston would likely appeal to him and his family to be closer to home than he's been over the last several years.

"The transition has been great," he said of living in the midwestern United States. "I'm living a little farther away from home than I would have been in the Quebec League, but it's a sacrifice and one I'm willing to make - it's been a lot of fun."

That's not to say Bowers hasn't found living in Waterloo, Iowa, to be quite different from what he was used to growing up in the Maritimes.

"I would definitely say water," Bowers said. "You can't find much water in Iowa, and living in Halifax and being right on the ocean it's nice to be around. There's not too much water to find here."

As for the NHL draft, Bowers is trying not to get caught up in the buzz and hype, but admitted to feeling some excitement to get closer to realizing his childhood dream of a professional hockey career.

"I rooted for the Ottawa Senators when I was real young, but switched to the Blackhawks when I got older, around 2009," he said. "My favourite player is Jonathan Toews, and I've been cheering for them ever since."

Does Bowers look to his hockey idol for inspiration as he plays for a team with the same name and shares similar attributes and values?

"One hundred percent," he said of the way Toews plays the game and how he tries to pattern his own style after the Chicago captain. "I like watching clips of [Toews] and highlights of him and definitely try to do as much as I can the way he does. He's a huge role model for me."