

Mittelstadt on upward trajectory

Early on this season, Casey Mittelstadt led the United States Hockey League in rookie scoring.

He may have even had a shot to lead the entire USHL in scoring had he not left the Green Bay Gamblers earlier this month to return to his Eden Prairie High School team back home in Minnesota.

Either way, Mittelstadt will certainly be scouted throughout the season and has aspirations to bag two championships this year – a Clark Cup title in the USHL (he'll rejoin the Gamblers once his high school season ends) and a Minnesota state high school championship.

"I am very competitive and there is nothing I hate more than losing," said Mittelstadt, who turns 18 on Nov. 22. "I

offensive threat every shift. I expect him to be the hardest worker. When your top players work the hardest, everyone improves. I expect him to be a focal point of every team's game plan, so he will need to stay focused. He makes his teammates better and his coaches better, too.

"It is very special to coach someone like Casey. He is a dynamic person on and off the ice. I am proud that he decided to come back with his friends and coaches. That shows how unselfish he is as a person and player. I love every time I call No. 11 to hit the ice. It is a nightly highlight show."

High school hockey in Minnesota is similar to high school football in Texas – it's the biggest game in town. And Mittelstadt is being touted as a likely first-round NHL draft

Mittelstadt Report Card

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

fell in love with it right away," remembered Mittelstadt. "My dad always built a rink in my backyard and my friends and I would be out there until around 2 a.m. on some nights."

Back in September, Mittelstadt played in the USA Hockey All-American Prospects Game in Philadelphia and potted a pair of goals en route to being named the game's MVP, despite playing on the losing team.

"It was great," Mittelstadt said.

"Obviously, going to play against the top kids in America is an honour, but also getting to catch up with some old buddies of mine like Ryan Poehling and Jake Oettinger made it even better."

With the NHL Draft being held in Chicago next June, it's also fitting who Smith compares Mittelstadt to.

"I have coached a lot of talented players, but what makes Casey unique is his lateral speed with the puck and his high hockey IQ," said Smith. "The player he reminds me the most of is Patrick Kane. Casey's skill set resembles that of Patrick's. He is a threat every time he hits the rink. Casey has improved because he has grown and become stronger. He has become a better shooter and plays 200 feet much better than as a tenth grader. He is a warrior for his teammates. They follow his lead."

With NHL scouts and general managers watching his every move, Mittelstadt takes that all in stride.

"I try not to think about it too much," said Mittelstadt. "Most of the time, if our team ends up getting the win and I play my game, then I am happy with it. I try not to think about it too much because I don't want the book to end here. I hope that this is just the beginning and that I will be able to play this game for a long time.

"For the draft, obviously, I want to go as early as I can, but I will be happy with anywhere because my dreams are far beyond getting drafted."

Casey Mittelstadt File

- ◆ **Ht/Wt:** 5-11/190
- ◆ **Position:** Centre
- ◆ **Shoots:** Left
- ◆ **Birthdate:** November 22, 1998
- ◆ **Team:** Eden Prairie H.S.
- ◆ **Scouting Report:** He's a heart-'n-soul, team leader who also happens to be the most skilled player on any club he plays for. Has the vision and instincts to make players around him better, and can also generate and finish off chances for himself. His hockey sense and puckhandling are outstanding, and he's an ultra-competitive battler. Has worked hard on improving his play away from the puck and has become a sound two-way player. Not many weaknesses in his game.

also think it would be pretty cool to win two championships in one year."

Committed to NCAA powerhouse Minnesota, Mittelstadt had the option of fast-tracking his senior year and going to college this season.

"Obviously, being a Gopher is my dream, but my friends in Eden Prairie are one of the main reasons I fell in love with the game of hockey and I owe it to them to go back and have one more chance to win a title," said Mittelstadt. "That said, I love it [in Green Bay]. The coaches are great and all the guys are awesome. It is a lot of fun getting up and going to the rink every day."

Mittelstadt scored two goals in a USHL game with the U.S. NTDP Under-18 Team at the end of last season and then helped the Team USA squad to a bronze medal at the World Under-18 Championship in Grand Forks, N.D.

Lee Smith, Eden Prairie's coach, said he expects Mittelstadt to be a leader in every sense once he arrives back in town.

"I expect him to lead us on and off the ice," Smith said. "I expect him to be an

prospect.

"First of all, Minnesota high school hockey is a wonderful place for players to develop mentally and physically," explained Smith. "It is a great place to develop because players get four practices a week and two high-level games. They get to live at home, so they get good discipline. Talented players are allowed to make plays because the coaches aren't solely judged on wins and losses. In saying that, players like Casey don't come around often. He is the total package as a player. I can't wait to coach and watch him this year. He will be a marked man, but that seems to really bring out the best in him."

Last season, Eden Prairie finished as the Minnesota Class AA state runner-up after falling to Wayzata at the Xcel Energy Center in March. Mittelstadt posted 33 goals and 80 points overall as a junior and was the USA Today high school player of the year.

But it all started for him many years ago.

"My dad took me out to a neighbourhood rink when I was two or three and I