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Copley adjusting to business of NHL



Tim O'Donnell Todonnell@newsminer.com Jul 23, 2015 (0)

FAIRBANKS—Pheonix Copley was on a fishing trip when the Washington Capitals announced he had been part of the package traded to the St. Louis Blues for T.J. Oshie.



Because of the fishing trip, Copley didn't find out he had been traded until four days later.



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“Originally, I was shocked. But once the original shock wore off, it was really exciting,” the native of North Pole said following a practice at the Patty Center on Tuesday morning.

“New place and new opportunity, so I’m excited to get down there and get on the ice,” Copley said.

Copley is working out with Alaska Nanooks senior Alec Hajdukovich and junior Justin Woods as he gets ready for his second professional season and first in the Blues organization.

“It’s nice to be home,” Copley said. “It’s a nice area to kind of unwind and at the same time train and skate. Guys like Alec and Justin are coming out and helping. So are my brothers. A lot of guys help out. It’s fun to come back here.”

Copley, listed at 6-foot-4, 196 pounds, said he tries to stay away from being treated like a star and still has some competitions with his brothers when they practice together.

“We always give each other a hard time when I stop them or they score on me,” Copley said. “I think it adds to the competition.”

Copley, 23, went 17-4-3 with the Hershey (Pennsylvania) Bears last season in the American Hockey League. He posted 2.17 goals against average and a .925 save percentage in 26

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His performance with the Capitals AHL affiliate earned him a one-game call up to Washington, where he served as the backup to Braden Holtby and became the first Interior player to dress for an NHL game.

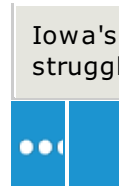
“It was my rookie season so I just went in and battled and tried to earn my ice time,” Copley said. “I just kind of told myself whatever happens, just work hard and do my job no matter where I’m at. I was fortunate enough to start out at Hershey and fortunate to play there the whole season and be able to play with a great job group of guys.”

While he was called up, sent back down and then traded all in his first pro season, Copley tries not to focus too much on the business side of hockey.

“You kind of have to stay away from all the stuff and not get caught up in it because it can be a roller coaster ride and will wear on you,” Copley said.

Copley said he will attend the Blues training camp in September.

The biggest difference between pro hockey and college hockey, according to Copley, wasn’t anything on the ice. It was off the ice.



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“In college, there’s a lot more structure. There’s not as many games so there’s a lot off-ice stuff going on in college,” Copley said. “In pro, they expect you to do the right thing. You’re a professional. You’re supposed to do the right things off the ice, so they kind of leave you alone off the ice.”

The trade to the Blues means Copley has a chance of playing with former Nanooks defenseman Colton Parayko, who signed with the Blues after his junior season in March.

The two played against each other during the 2013-14 season when the Nanooks and Michigan Tech met four times in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association.

“Once I got traded he messaged me and kind of was like ‘Welcome. Congrats,’” Copley said. “It’s nice to have someone familiar. Other than that, I don’t think I really know too many guys in the organization. It’s nice to have a familiar face.”

Parayko, who finished last season with the Chicago Wolves in the AHL, had four assists against Copley in the four games that season.

“Back when I was at Michigan Tech, I remember playing him and he was a tough guy to play against,” Copley said. “He’s got a really hard shot and big mobile defenseman. It’s good to have a guy like that to your side.”

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Copley spent two seasons at Michigan Tech before signing as a free agent with the Capitals. In 54 games with the Huskies, Copley went 18-28-7 with a 2.82 goals against average and .906 save percentage.

He also had four shutouts during his time in Houghton, Michigan.

While he doesn't know where he'll start next season yet, Copley does know what he wants to accomplish during his second professional season.

"I want to go in and work hard," Copley said. "I want to show them what I'm capable of doing. I want to handle adversity as best possible and play my best hockey."

Contact sports reporter Tim O'Donnell at 459-7583. Follow him on Twitter: @FDNMSportsGuy.



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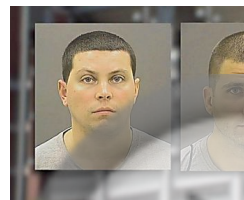
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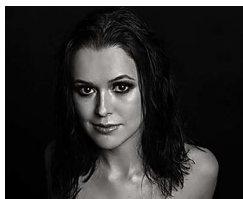
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