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UAF skater Justin Woods returns to the ice after long absence

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Justin Woods carries the puck during the Alaska Nanooks Blue-Gold Game at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Patty Cen Saturday, September 26, 2015.

ERIN CORNELIUSSEN/FAIRBANKS DAILY NEWS-MINER

FAIRBANKS—Saturday night at the Patty Center marked the return of two things. The first was the return of the Alaska Nanooks hockey team with their annual Blue-Gold game.

The other was the return of defenseman Justin Woods, who was skating in front of Nanooks fans for the first time since March 2014.

Woods, a junior from Fairbanks, missed last season while undergoing treatments for Ewing's Sarcoma in Seattle.

Ewing's Sarcoma is a rare form of bone cancer.

"It was amazing," Woods said of returning to the ice. "I felt so blessed to be out here."

Woods last appeared in a Nanooks jersey on March 15, 2014. He had an assist in the Nanooks' 5-4 loss to Alaska Anchorage in Game 3 of the best-of-three Western Collegiate Hockey Association first round playoff series at the Carlson Center.

Woods, a former West Valley and Fairbanks Ice Dogs skater, received a loud ovation during player introductions before game and gave a stick salute to the fans.

"It means more than I could even put into words. It was just amazing," Woods said of the ovation. "Amazing feeling to be back out there."

"It was awesome. Just so much support from the fans, so much love. I couldn't have done it without them," Woods added.

Woods was credited with two shots on goal in his return, both of which came in the first period.

"I'm still working out some kinks obviously, but I feel good on the ice. Feel healthy," Woods said. "I'm just going to keep working hard and hopefully I'll make an impact this year."

Woods had six points on one goal and five assists in 33 games his freshman season.

Woods' Gold Team fell 2-0 to the Blue Team. Both of the Blue Team's goals came during the first 25-minute half.

Freshman left wing John Mullally opened the scoring with just less than five minutes into the game, beating John Keeney with a bad angle shot from below the left faceoff circle.

"The puck was bouncing in the middle there. Hopped over JD (Peterson)'s stick," Mullally said, "I got around him there and just closed my eyes and shot it. It just happened to go in."

Nolan Huysmans, a senior right wing, doubled the lead with 12:05 left in the first half. Huysmans raced to a loose puck in the right faceoff circle before beating Keeney with a shot off the far post and in.

Former Nanook Jordan Hendry was a guest coach for the Gold Team. Hendry won the Stanley Cup in 2010 with the Chicago Blackhawks.

Earlier on Saturday, the Nanooks inducted four new members into their hall of fame. Former men's basketball player Bart LeBon, former women's basketball player Cathy Cox-Graves, former hockey head coach Ric Schafer and former men's basketball coach Al Sevvingson were all inducted at the Westmark Hotel.

The four were introduced before the game.

Skills

competition

Huysmans won the hardest shot competition with a shot of 105 mph. Huysmans hit 100 mph on his other two attempts.

Zach Frye finished second with a 99 mph shot while Alec Hajdukovich and Tyler Morley each hit 96 mph.

Hajdukovich won the fastest skater contest after narrowly beating Austin Vieth in the final.

Davis Jones won the shootout after making six saves on seven shooters. Jesse Jenks made five saves and Keeney stopped four.

Pro Nooks

Former Nanooks goalie Chad Johnson made 30 saves in the Buffalo Sabres 6-4 win over the Ottawa Senators on Saturday in Ottawa.

Johnson faced 34 shots and allowed two goals in the first period and one in each the second and third periods.

The Sabres scored three times in the first, once in the second and twice in the third.

Colton Parayko saw 20:20 of ice time in the St. Louis Blues 3-1 loss to the Chicago Blackhawks in Chicago. The defenseman fired three shots on net.

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