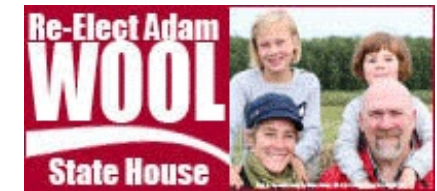




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Former UAF icer to officiate this NHL season



Tim O'Donnell Todonnell@newsminer.com Sep 5, 2015 (0)

FAIRBANKS—Brandon Gawryletz began officiating at one of the lowest levels of hockey. Now, he's at the top.



The former Alaska Nanooks defenseman will be a linesman for the NHL this season after beginning his officiating career in an adult league in Arizona.

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“Guys that I grew up with and playing with at UAF, our dream was always to make the NHL as a player,” Gawryletz said by cellphone on Thursday. “But to be able to be out there and be involved in the greatest league in the world, it’s definitely a honor and something I’m looking forward to.”

Gawryletz said this season, he is going to work part time in the NHL and part time in the American Hockey League, where he spent last season.

“It’s going to be a neat experience to finally step on the ice in the National Hockey League,” Gawryletz said. “I grew up in British Columbia, Canada. That’s all any of us ever dreamt about growing up was being in the NHL. It’s definitely going to be a game I’ll never forget.”

But being an official wasn’t always part of the plan for Gawryletz.

“I would yell at refs sometimes when I was playing. I had no idea what was involved in their jobs,” Gawryletz said. “When I first started officiating, it was definitely an eye-opener to that side of the game. I know growing up, I had thought I’d be doing anything in my life other than officiating.”

Last season, there were just two NHL officials registered with the NHL Officials Association who played college hockey.

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Referee Tony Sericolo was a defenseman from 1989-1991 for American International College when the Yellow Jackets were a NCAA Division III program in the Eastern College Athletic Conference East.

Linesman Wes McCauley was a defenseman from 1989-1993 for Michigan State in the Central Collegiate Hockey Association.

Getting into officiating wasn't something the native of Trail, British Columbia, set out to do. Gawryletz said he just "fell into it."

"I had a friend who was doing it. He just kind of asked me to help out one day. It was an adult league game and I helped out," Gawryletz said. "I enjoyed it so much I started doing a little bit of research and getting to know people on the officiating side of the game and away I went."

"As soon as I tried it out, I fell in love with it," Gawryletz said. "Ever since, it's been my goal to make it to the NHL."

Along with the AHL, Gawryletz spent time as a linesman in the Central Hockey League and ECHL as he worked his way to the NHL. He was assigned to work the 2013 and 2014 CHL Ray Miron President's Cup Finals.

According to Gawryletz, the way to become an official in the



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NHL is just to get experience and officiated lots of games.

“The more games you do, the more times the NHL supervisors are able to watch you and kind of decide whether or not you have what it takes,” Gawryletz said.

The stops in the minor leagues have given Gawryletz the opportunity to officiate games that former Nanooks have played in. That includes two Chicago Wolves games last season when Colton Parayko played.

“I’ve run into a handful of guys that I’ve played with at UAF or played at UAF after I graduated,” Gawryletz said. “It’s always really neat to see your friends about there or other Nanooks. It’s pretty neat. It’s a tight-knit group here of guys that played hockey up here.”

Gawryletz played for the Nanooks from 2004-08, appearing in 130 games. He scored three goals and five assists for eight points. Gawryletz thinks his experience of playing NCAA Division I hockey has benefitted him once he made the switch to officiating.

“When you’re able to play at a high level of the game and you learn how top-end players think the game and see the game, it really helped me,” Gawryletz said. “I think because of the fact that I played at UAF, people in the officiating world maybe, they

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maybe gave me the benefit of the doubt that I had the understanding of the game the players do at a high level.”

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



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