

Spurned by OHL teams, Keene's Erik Brown earns NCAA Division 1 scholarship



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Keene native Erik Brown, seen in action with the Kemptville 73's tier II junior A hockey team, has verbally committed to attend the Rochester Institute of Technology on a hockey scholarship in 2015. CINDY NICHOLS/SPECIAL TO THE PETERBOROUGH EXAMINER/QMI AGENCY

Keene's Erik Brown is proving to be a classic late bloomer.

As an undersized minor midget, OHL teams bypassed Brown in his draft year. Fast forward three years and a growth spurt later and the six-foot-two, 190-pound power forward has garnered an NCAA Division I scholarship from the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) after a 31-goal season with the Kemptville 73's.

The 18-year-old has one season left with the Central Canadian Hockey League's 73's, owned and coached by former Petes assistant coach and NHL veteran Ron Tugnutt, before joining RIT in 2015.

Brown, who started with the Otonabee Wolves before joining the AAA Petes system in major atom, was seen by CCHL scouts at a major midget tournament in Prescott in 2012. The Brockville Braves invited him to a tryout and he recorded nine goals, 16 points and 45 penalty minutes in 56 games as a rookie. When it appeared the next season the Braves weren't going to give him the playing time he wanted, he got his release and joined the 73's. He flourished last season with 31 goals, 51 points in 50 games and 28 PIMs.

"It was a pretty good decision," Brown, son of Chris and Donna Brown, said. He was a year younger than Tugnutt's oldest boy Jacob and a year older than Matty who had played on Brown's AAA team as a call-up on occasion. "It was a good fit."

"He was a steal for us," Ron Tugnutt said. "We were in need of a player we felt could elevate and I'd always liked him. Now that the offensive side has joined the rest of his game, we have a hell of a player who led our team in goals last year."

Brown said he always had to work harder than others because he was small but he was confident he'd grow since his father is nearly six-foot-three and more than 200 pounds.

"My coaches would always say 'He's small but he plays big,'" Brown said.

When size met his work ethic his production exploded and college recruiters took notice.

"When (RIT) first noticed me they were actually coming to watch another player on my team," Brown said. "It kind of gets the message across that you never know who is watching.

"After that, they kept coming back."

It was a dream come true when RIT offered him a scholarship.

"I knew at a younger age I wasn't going to be ready for the OHL," he said. "So I kind of made it my goal that NCAA was the way I was going to go."

Tugnutt said he'd always liked the way Brown played growing up.

"I knew what he was capable of," said Tugnutt. "I liked him as a winger along the wall who, for whatever reason, won every battle. It started with that. I started watching closer and thought he had good hands and some skill."

Tugnutt says Brown is a hard working and dedicated player who has potential to succeed at higher levels.

"With his dedication and effort you might hear about him at a later time after some good years in school," Tugnutt said.