

Aurora's Thomas wins junior gold, traded by Knights

By Jake Courtepatte

What a whirlwind week for Robert Thomas.

Just two days after helping Canada defeat Sweden 3 ? 1 in the WJHC championship game, Thomas was not swapping the red and white of Team Canada for the green and gold of the London Knights; instead, he will be joining the Hamilton Bulldogs in a blockbuster OHL trade.

?We are very excited to welcome Robert Thomas to the Bulldogs family,? said Bulldogs President& General Manager Steve Staios in a statement.

?He has a tremendous track record both in the Ontario Hockey League and at the international level, most recently winning a gold medal with Canada at the World Junior Hockey Championships.?

The 18-year old forward recorded one goal and five assists in the tournament, a tremendous effort that helped levy a healthy return for the Knights in the trade.

The captain was sent to the Bulldogs for rookie first-round pick Connor McMichael, as well as five total draft picks, as the Bulldogs prepare for a run to the Memorial Cup this year, the nation's top junior trophy.

Thomas' 46 points in 27 regular season games this year has him ranked second in the OHL in points-per-game. He was one of three Knights on the Team Canada roster at the World Juniors, including ex-Aurora Tiger Alex Formenton, who scored the tournament's final goal into an empty net to seal the victory for the Canadians.

The move comes among speculation from the league and scouts that Thomas may have the skill to make the jump to the NHL next season, acquired in the first round of the 2017 NHL Entry Draft by the St. Louis Blues.

The Knights, meanwhile, are headed the wrong way in the standings ad are worried to lose another key piece of the puzzle to the NHL, as they did with Team Canada teammate Victor Mete last season.

Knights GM Rob Simpson called it ?the hardest part of the business.?

These players become like family to you and you get to know their families and you get to watch them grow up and mature. It's never easy when you have to part ways. You want to be pushing for a championship each year.?

The Aurora native spent his minor seasons with the York Simcoe Express AAA program, and spent a short time with Aurora's St. Andrew's Saints prep program.