Ex-Panther named NCAA goaltender of the month

By Jake Courtepatte

A transfer to one of the top hockey schools in the United States has paid off in spades for Melissa Black.

The Newmarket native was named last week as the NCAA Hockey East's Goaltender of the Month for December, in one of college hockey's most elite conferences. The sophomore combined for 49 saves in two wins over division rivals Northeastern, then ranked tenth in the entire NCAA.

She capped off her award-winning month on December 30 with a 21-save tie against Yale to earn the honour.

Black transferred to the University of Vermont in July after one season with Union College, where she was undoubtedly the top prospect on an otherwise rebuilding team.

On a team that failed to win a game all season, Black posted a sensational 2.74 goals-against-average while making 1,111 saves: the top in Union's respective NCAA division.

In contrast, Vermont gave up just 1,113 shots all season in 2015-16, just two more than Black made saves.

?After finishing my year at Union, I was presented with an opportunity with UVM that would be more financially reasonable for my family which influenced me to transfer,? Black wrote in an email. ?There is always frustration when losing, but that is not my reason for transferring.?

Since joining the Catamounts, Black has shared duties between the pipes with senior Madison Litchfield, who has been a staple for the Vermont team for the past four years. With her final season coming to a close, Black will take the reins for a team looking to crack the NCAA's top ten rankings.

While Litchfield's impressive .942 save percentage has the veteran goaltender in the top five statistically in the NCAA, Black has impressed in her first year with a .918 to go along with a 2.41 goals-against-average.

Black appeared in 21 games with the Aurora Jr. Panthers of the Provincial Women's Hockey League in the 2014-15 season, where she posted a league-best 1.70 goals-against-average and a .945 save percentage along with five shutouts. She led the Panthers back to the postseason for the first time in three years, after the team had won just seven games the previous season.