

KYLE MACLEAN COMING INTO HIS OWN WITH GENERALS

SON OF FORMER GENS STAR JOHN MACLEAN IS A RELIABLE AND VERSATILE FORWARD

BRIAN MCNAIR
bmcnair@durhamregion.com



Ryan Pfeiffer/Metroland

Oshawa Generals' Kyle MacLean is having a tremendous season with the Oshawa Generals in his fourth year in the Ontario Hockey League.

OSHAWA - Heading off to play in the Ontario Hockey League at 16 is a daunting task for any player, but especially those who come from another country, as Kyle MacLean did in 2015.

MacLean, however, found a home away from home in Oshawa, where his dad was raised and his grandparents still reside, offering a level of support and comfort that few others in the league are able to enjoy.

It's a big part of the reason why MacLean chose the Generals, the team that drafted him in the fourth round, over the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the route taken by his older brother, John Jr.

"When I made the decision, I was very comfortable coming to Oshawa," said MacLean, who credited his grandparents for making the transition more smooth. "I thought it was the best place for me to develop and the best place to play as a 16-year-old and moving forward as well. I definitely thought about (the NCAA), but this is the route I chose."

MacLean's father, John, is arguably the best-ever home-grown product to play for the

Generals, helping lead the team to a championship in 1983 before being selected sixth overall by the New Jersey Devils and going on to a long and productive playing career in the NHL.

Kyle is too young to have seen his father play, but he did grow

up around the Devils when John coached there in the early 2000s, and quickly became addicted to the sport.

"It was definitely special," said MacLean, who tried to model his own game after that of his favourite player, Zach Parise. "I

learned a lot from my dad being a coach and being around that professional atmosphere."

MacLean is not quite following in the footsteps of his old man, and in fact was passed over altogether in his NHL draft year, in 2017.

But, the 19-year-old forward is very much coming into his own now, nearing a point-per-game average while providing leadership - he's been an alternate captain the past two years - and steady, reliable play in every facet of the game.

"He's a heart and soul guy," said Generals head coach Greg Walter. "He's a mucker, he works extremely hard, he hits, he's a complete 200-foot game player for us, and he's doing really well on our power play. He's winning loose-puck battles, and 50-50 pucks. He's one of the guys that just competes every day for us."

MacLean joined a rebuilding Generals team that was coming off a Memorial Cup championship in 2015, the team's second choice behind first-rounder and now captain Jack Studnicka in a pick-deleted draft.

After putting up only nine points in 47 games as a rookie and 13 in a full 68-game season the next, he started to turn a corner offensively last season with 28 points in an injury-shortened 44-game season.

Now, he's a key contributor with seven goals and 20 points through 25 games. He also notched a shootout winning tally over the league-leading Ottawa 67's last Wednesday.

"I think that's just being more comfortable," his said of the increased offence. "Confidence is a huge thing. I got to know the league my first couple of years and now I feel a lot better and am putting it all together a little bit more as well."

OPINION

WHEN YOUR BEST IS NOT ENOUGH

COLUMNIST DOUG SMITH'S MOTTO IS NEVER GIVE UP



DR. DOUGLAS SMITH
Column

Do you remember when sports were fun, enjoyable and something that made you feel good? Those were the good old days, right?

Unfortunately, we have now made sports a stressful job for many young athletes and their families.

Think of hockey, for example. Even in house league, there is a pressure to win every game and be No. 1 in the league. Of course, as players get better and improve their skills, they move up the ladder to higher levels of competition.

When youngsters move up to the next level, they fear they are no longer good enough to compete with the stars of the team. So, they work harder and worry constantly if they are going to be able to keep up with this elite group. Soon hockey is no longer

fun, but a daily grind to prove themselves worthy of being stars.

The higher one moves up the ladder in hockey, the pressure and stress accelerates; hockey, like many other sports, has increased the level of expectations for performance, such that kids are expected to perform, work and act like pros.

It's survival of the fittest. Only the strongest physically and mentally are able to adapt to the pressure to constantly improve, deal with criticism constructively and stay ahead of the pack. It's a dog-eat-dog world for young

athletes.

Unfortunately, very few kids possess the maturity, responsibility and desire to work like a Trojan, make sacrifices and push themselves beyond their limits. If you're thinking the system is going to change any time soon, you're wrong.

We can cry and get frustrated all we want with the unfairness of the system, but it's not going to do us any good. That's the way the world works today.

What should we do? Should we take the kids out of competitive sports and teach them to think that when the going gets tough, it's OK to quit? I don't think that will work.

When our kids feel their best efforts are not enough, we can teach them to understand that

this is a test to make them stronger, tougher and smarter.

Empathize with them, and let them express their discouragement and frustration - and love them.

Don't be afraid to reach out for help. There are mental sports experts, who are available to help make things a lot easier for young and older athletes.

My motto is: never give up. We can always improve and stretch our abilities using the power of our mind.

Dr. Douglas Smith is a licensed psychologist in Ontario, specializing in sport psychology since 1985. Contact him at 905-430-3538 or drdoug@promind.ca; website www.promind.ca.