

Catching Up With The Rabbit

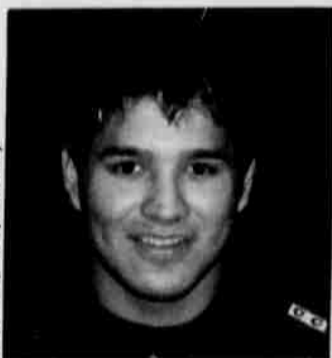
■ Native hockey star sits down with *Smoke Signals* for interview.

By Toby McClary

Blackfeet Tribal member Wacey Rabbit has recently been drafted to the National Hockey League (NHL). Rabbit currently plays Center for the Saskatoon Blades out of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

In round five of the NHL draft, Rabbit was selected 154th overall by the Boston Bruins. Rabbit, 19, has played hockey since he was about 5, but he moved to Calgary, Alberta, Canada when he was 12 so he could "chase a dream."

Smoke Signals' recently caught up with Rabbit, prior to a game against the Portland Winter Hawks on Sunday, October 16, to inquire about growing up on a reservation, being drafted and who he looks to for inspiration.



Photos by Toby McClary

Wacey Rabbit

Smoke Signals: Did you grow up on a Reservation?

W.R.: Yeah, I did. I grew up on the blood reserve until I was 12, then I moved off of the reserve to play hockey and I've lived in Calgary ever since.

S.S.: What was it like to grow up on a Reservation?

W.R.: It felt normal. It was just normal to me, it's what I do and then when I went off on to living in a white community, I kind of seen how I was different. It was good and it wasn't because I got to be with my family and my friends, but at the same time I was chasing a dream, and that

was something I had to do. I got used to it and I always go back to visit, so it's good.

S.S.: When you mentioned that you were chasing a dream, what's the dream?

W.R.: The NHL. I think any player that is playing in this league right now wants to play in the NHL, so that's the big dream and it's obviously a future goal.

S.S.: I heard that you were drafted.

W.R.: Yep. To the Boston Bruins. I went 154th overall.

S.S.: Wow. That has to be nice. How do you feel about that?

W.R.: It was a really good feeling actually. On draft day, we were sitting by a computer watching it and then I had to go to work, so I didn't really know what was going on until about 9 p.m. when I was drafted at 4 p.m. I was working at a pow-wow and there was no signal out there, so I didn't know what was going on. I couldn't call or get a hold of anyone. It was stressful day, but at the same time, it was really, really fun.

S.S.: What influence, if any, does your Tribal background have on you?

W.R.: I think mostly just the pride. Being proud of where you're from. You don't know where you are going until you know where you have been. Obviously I'm a first Nations person and I'm proud of that. I have to take in stride that everyone comes from a different background. I am a first Nations person and I'm trying to open doors for the other first Nations people.

S.S.: So you're not only wanting to be in the NHL, but you're wanting to be a role model also?

W.R.: Yeah, there have been a lot of Native guys that have had the opportunity to play some junior hockey, but either got homesick because they have never been off the reserve or they just had no motivation or no role models, so with that, even if you're doing good on a reserve whether it's academic-wise or sports-wise, I can be looked upon as a role model, so I just act upon it as a good role model and try to do the right thing.

S.S.: While you were growing up, how did hockey fit into your life?

W.R.: I played school hockey my whole life growing up, since I was about five or six. If I quit hockey right now, I wouldn't know what to do. I have school to

fall back on, but my whole life is hockey. My summer time is just based on working out for the winter time. Everything is hockey-oriented.

S.S.: How did you make it to the Western Hockey League?

W.R.: I was drafted 41st overall by the Saskatoon Blades. I couldn't play that year, so I got to play AAA and then the next year they (Saskatoon) signed me and I've been playing games ever since.

S.S.: Is it everything you thought it would be?

W.R.: I think it's everything and more. People always say that junior hockey is the best time in your life. I've met friends over the past four years that I'll never forget. We're just traveling around having a good time and playing the sport we love. It's really exceeded my expectations.

S.S.: Who, in hockey or out of hockey, has inspired you the most in your life?

W.R.: My parents. They have been overly, overly inspirational. Also, guys like Ted Nolan, who won the Jack Adams Award with the Buffalo Sabres, and Jonathan Cheechoo (Cree Nation Tribal member currently playing with the San Jose Sharks) because they have been there and walked the exact same steps I'm walking now. And because they have been there, there is that motivation that I can do it too.

S.S.: What are your future ambitions?

W.R.: Obviously to play in the NHL, but if that doesn't work out, then maybe something in sports medicine. I have a five year scholarship to fall back on, but hockey is all I want to do.

The Blades went on to defeat the Winter Hawks that evening, 6-2.

Rabbit has consistently been in the top 15 in league scoring this year and posted the fastest lap in a skating competition with a time of 13.95 seconds. He was the only player to eclipse the 14 second mark.

At *Smoke Signals*' press time, the Saskatoon Blades had a record of 5-5-1-1 and the Portland Winter Hawks were 5-5. ■



Speed Skater — Center for the Saskatoon Blades and Blackfeet Tribal member Wacey Rabbit skates over the Tribal logo in a game against the Portland Winter Hawks on Sunday, October 16. This year, Rabbit posted the fastest lap in a skating competition with a time of 13.95 seconds.

Sale Raises Money For Church



Photo by Toby McClary

Bake Sale — St. Michael church members held a bake sale in the Governance building on Friday, October 14 to help benefit church functions.

New Database Software Classes



Photo by Toby McClary

New Skills — Julie Jackson, (far left) Technical Consultant for Ultipro, the Tribe's new data base software, instructed members of the Human Resources, Benefits and Payroll departments on the week of October 11-14.