

Top prospect is keeping cool

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

While defenseman Adam Burt keeps a watch on wayward forwards in front of the North Bay net, the real eye is on him.

Burt, 17, who is from Westland and went to Redford Catholic Central, is under the microscope. He's projected to go high in the National Hockey League June draft — very likely the first round.

So the scouts, with one hand cupped on their chins and the other busy scribbling notes, gauge every move he makes. And Burt, who looks calm in the midst of the storm in front of him, gives them plenty to doodle about.

HE SCORED the first goal in first-place North Bay's 3-2 win over the Windsor Compuware Spitfires recently in an Ontario Hockey League game at Windsor.

He also killed penalties and helped prevent the Spitfires from tying the game during a flurry in the last three minutes. Yet the scouts remain guarded as a Brinks' truck in their praise.

They know trying to judge future talent for the NHL can be a crapshoot at best.

"They draft these kids so young," said Don Murdoch, former player with the New York Rangers and Detroit Red Wings and now a scout for the Rangers. "I really don't agree with the draft the way it is set up now."

"When I was playing, they had a chance to look at me when I was 16,

hockey

17 and 18. By the time I was 19, they knew I could play in the NHL."

Now, with 18-year-olds available for the NHL draft, players like Burt who have just graduated from high school find themselves in NHL training camps.

SOME, LIKE AL Infante of Livonia, can handle the transition. Others, like Joe Murphy of the Detroit Red Wings, have had difficulty.

Young players can have their confidence shattered with a bad training camp, or they can get hurt because they're still developing physically.

For Burt, just being a highly rated prospect has its own pressures.

"People might say otherwise, but it's always in your head," said Burt. "You're always thinking about it."

"It's tough. It can hurt you. Last season, my teammate Darren Turcotte was rated high, but he didn't go until the seventh round. You have to try to not let it affect your confidence."

Burt hasn't.

THIS SEASON, he's anchoring the Centennials' backline with exceptional poise. As a team, North Bay has the fewest goals against in the OHL's Emma Division.

"He's playing real well for us," said North Bay coach Bert Templeton. "He's very good defensively,

he's a good skater and he's strong physically."

"He's a helluva skater," added Murdoch. "He moves the puck really well."

One blemish, and Burt concurs, is the defenseman's offensive output in terms of goals. In 29 games, Burt has 2 goals and 15 assists for 17 points.

"My statistics speak for themselves," said Burt, who scored his first goal only a few weeks ago. "My playmaking has been OK, but I'd like to pick up my goal scoring."

But Murdoch puts it into perspective: "There are very few Bobby Orrs and Paul Coffeys (high-scoring defensemen)."

THE GOAL Burt scored against Windsor shows he can shoot. After taking a pass from teammate Dave McLain, Burt drilled the puck

from the blue line which went between the Spitfire goaltender's pads.

More importantly than how hard he shoots, though, is how hard he hits. Burt does when he has to as 84 penalty minutes (tops on the team) would attest.

Against Windsor, he also displayed some of the guile associated with the game's finest defenseman like Borje Salming and Rod Langway.

Occasionally, Burt would tie up a Spitfire forward off the play by discreetly grabbing the player's stick or jersey, without attracting the referee's attention. It's the little things that make a good defenseman.

And it's the little things that Burt has picked up in only his second year of playing Major Junior A hockey. The first year, in a remote northern Canadian city like North Bay, is an adjustment.

the week ahead

BOYS BASKETBALL

Tuesday, Dec. 16
Liv. Stevenson at Northville, 7:30 p.m.
N. Farmington at Liv. Church, 7:30 p.m.
Farmington at Liv. Franklin, 7:30 p.m.
Farm. Harrison at W.L. John, 7:30 p.m.
W.L. Western at Liv. Salem, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Church at W.L. Central, 7:30 p.m.
Garden City at Wayne Memorial, 7:30 p.m.
Trenton at Redford Union, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Clarenceville at Novi, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Christian at Lutheran N. West, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Dec. 18
Liv. Stevenson at Liv. Salem, 7:30 p.m.
W.L. John at N. Farmington, 7:30 p.m.
W.L. Central at Farmington, 7:30 p.m.
Northville at Farm. Harrison, 7:30 p.m.
Wayne Memorial at Lincoln Park, 7:30 p.m.
Redford Union at Edsel Ford, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 19
Liv. Franklin at W.L. Western, 7:30 p.m.

Liv. Church at Liv. Church, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Church at Liv. Church, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Church at Liv. Church, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Church at Liv. Church, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Church at Liv. Church, 7:30 p.m.

PREP HOCKEY

Wednesday, Dec. 17
Liv. Franklin vs. Southfield-Lathrup, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Church vs. Bloomfield-Lathrup, 7:30 p.m.
Liv. Church vs. Liv. Church, 8 p.m.
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Novi sinks Farmington

The Farmington boys swim team opened its dual meet season with a 101-71 loss against Novi last Tuesday.

The Falcons won just three events.

G.T. Meili won the 500-yard freestyle (5:25.50), Jim Vik won the 100 backstroke (1:02.24) and David Slack won the diving competition (130.95 points).

Novi is 2-0 on the season.

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