



Mike Modano (center) of Westland, a rookie with the Minnesota North Stars splits Red Wing checkers Sheldon Kennedy (left) and

Steve Chaleson during Sunday night's exhibition game at Joe Louis Arena.

JIM JAGGELD/staff photographer

Modano will adjust to regimen of NHL

HE'S THE CENTER of attention these days in a Minnesota North Stars uniform.

No. 9 covers the back of his jersey. It's an ordinary number handed out in the National Hockey League.

Big things are expected some day out of 19-year-old Michael Modano, the only son of Westland's Michael and Karen Modano.

It may take awhile before he realizes his vast potential, but Sunday night against the Red Wings in an exhibition game at Joe Louis Arena, you caught a glimpse of what he's capable of doing. You could see he has the tools.

Modano, at 6 feet, 3 inches, 190 pounds, swoops around the ice gracefully. He skates almost effortlessly. He handles the puck like there's a magnet attached.

To old-time hockey fans, Modano reminds some of Gilbert Perreault, the once graceful center of the Buffalo Sabres.

Modano's toughness will be questioned this season, but his playmaking will not.

AND ONCE HE LEARNS to park himself in front of the net, a Phil Esposito, Alex Delvecchio or Jean Ratelle, the former No. 1 pick (overall) in the 1988 NHL draft will be a force to be reckoned with.

The same people who criticized Mario Lemieux early in his career will do the same with Modano.

Through the first two exhibition games, Modano was held scoreless. But don't forget he's learning to play with new teammates. It's not the same guys he played with on the Prince Albert Raiders, the Junior A club way up in Saskatchewan in the Western Hockey League. (In 41 games last season, before breaking his wrist, Modano had 39 goals and 55 assists for 105 points.)

Modano's NHL experience is limited, a couple of exhibitions and two playoff games last season to be exact, but Page can already get a read on his young pup.

"There's no question about his ability," said North Stars head coach Florio Page after Sunday's 4-1 loss. "All I expect of him is to work hard."

"I CAN THINK of so many great



Brad Emond

players that didn't make it because they didn't work hard. I have to have patience with Mike as long as he works. Right now I don't want him to put him on the back too much or get down on him too much."

Modano's baby face reminds you of Delvecchio. His maturity reminds you of an Yzerman.

Having lived over 1,000 miles away in Prince Albert, Modano seems already adjusted to life as a professional.

"It's not really a problem, I've already been three years away from home," said Modano, who met with family and friends afterwards. "Last spring I stayed with (teammate) Brian Bellows (a veteran player). We'd go out to a bar with the other guys. That was good for me."

Modano's first game at Joe Louis was something special, he admitted. His father offered no critiques, only support.

"He lets me do my thing," said the



JIM JAGGELD/staff photographer

Facing off against the Wings is No. 9, Mike Modano, the No. 1 pick of the 1988 NHL draft by the Minnesota North Stars.

North Stars' rookie. "My dad already had his chance when I was young and now he realizes he can't say much. I can do things on my own."

PAGE HAS ALREADY seen some positive signs in the play of this young player.

"It's an adjustment for the kid, how long did it take Steve Yzerman (of the Wings)?" Page said. "So far I think he's been good as the pointman on the power-play. And going five-on-five it's kind of hard to tell. We're still trying to find the right combinations, but he's been playing well. It just hasn't added up in results for him."

With the North Stars start the regular season, Modano could be flanked by veterans Mark Gartner and Basil McRae, the latter who is considered an enforcer.

On this night, no Red Wing challenged him as he was paired up on a fast-skating line with Russian Ilmut Balderis and Gaetan Duchesne. (The night before, however, in an exhibition game in Kalamazoo against the Red Wings, Modano was given a game misconduct in the third period for high sticking.)

Ultimately Modano will be tested, but his opponents will also be on the lookout, not wanting to get burned by this gifted athlete.

"He has moves other people don't have," Page said. "He has eyes other people don't have. He has a shot other people don't have. And he can make passes other people can't make."

MODANO, although young, realizes what is expected of him.

"I need to get more aggressive and go a little more to the net," he said. "And there's a lot more responsibility in our own zone."

"But as long as I work hard and do the things he (Page) wants me to do, he'll give me all the chances I need."

Modano, who was robbed of a goal by the Wings' Randy Hensch in the second period, called his first game at Joe Louis "something special."

"It's always nice to come home to your family and friends," said Modano, who got a big kiss from his mother Karen before the team bus pulled away. "It's something I'll look forward to."

Redford revives junior club

By Doug Church
special writer

As the final seconds ticked away in Saturday's Redford NACE-Compware North American Junior Hockey League game at Redford Arena, NACE players on the bench celebrated a thrilling 5-4 victory.

Well, it was only exhibition. But by defeating league power Compware and stopping 16-year-old sensation Eric Lindros, the NACE team gained a hefty load of confidence while bringing themselves closer together.

And for a young team with players who have been acquainted for all of only five weeks, and a coaching staff that is only five months old, it was exactly the boost they needed in preparation for the 7:30 p.m. start for Saturday's season opener against Chicago at Redford Arena. The two teams meet again at 1 p.m. Sunday. (Tickets are \$5 for adults and \$2 for students. Children under 6 are free.)

"I proved to our players that if we execute a given system, we can play with anybody and we can beat anybody," Head Coach Kyle Krug said.

CONVINCING the team of winning is a hurdle that only a big victory can clear. But winning has been an ingredient missing in this organization over the past few years.

Formerly the Redford Royals, the 11-year-old organization has had many bright spots; turning out NHL players such as Larry DePalma (Minnesota North Stars) and Kelly Miller (Washington Capitals).

This year, however, the situation has changed. North American Computer Equipment has taken over the sponsorship of the club. Rudy Ciofelli and former Red Wings goalie Eddie Mio, who have coached together for two years, have assumed general managing responsibilities.

Krug has moved over from the Compware program to become the head coach and seven scouts have been added to the staff.

Thus far, the rookie organization has found a renewed spirit.

"MR. CIOFELLI and Kyle, along with Eddie Tim Zimmerman and Dave Rostek (the assistant coaches), have really rejuvenated

hockey

this hockey club," said center Jason Weber, a Livonia native. "They've changed the whole atmosphere around. They've got us believing we can win."

The new coaching staff has brought a lot more than enthusiasm to the team, however. Discipline on and off the ice has been instituted to uphold Krug's conviction of "making sure the players respect the staff."

"I have talked to some of the veterans who said the big problem last year was discipline," Mio said. "Whether they want it or not, or if they realize it, they're going to get it."

Fans can expect to see a very offensive-minded club on the ice this season. The coaches are emphasizing a heavy skating system, with breaking forwards and forechecking being primary features.

"THE GAME has changed so much. We have to be very offensive to win because everybody else is going to be offensive," Mio said. "We're trying to get them to play an NHL style of game. There will be a lot of skating and shooting."

The team feels it has the personnel to carry out the plan. The first line consists of three players who have the capability to move and shoot the puck.

Center J.J. Bamberger anchors the line and is flanked by left wing Mike Mattis and right wing Pat Hultman. The three have shown what they can do in recent exhibition games.

In the win over Compware, the line accounted for six points, with Mattis scoring two goals and Hultman scoring the game-winning goal, converting a perfect pass from Bamberger on a two-on-one break.

Mattis and Hultman are among seven returning players which include: Marc Chiappelli, a hard-nosed center who also is the team's assistant captain; Rich Sewell, a big right winger; and Brian Idalski, Dave McLenaghan (Redford Catholic Cen-

tral High) and Steve Kast (team captain). They form the heart of the defense.

REDFORD ACQUIRED center Tony Molina from the Detroit Junior Wings and goalie Mark Rogers from the Bloomfield Junior A Jets.

Three players spent last season with successful high school programs: Eric Popowicz (Trenton), a hard-shooting defenseman, Jeff Christensen (Southgate Anderson), a left-winger and goalie Marc Holm (Fox Valley, Wisconsin).

Coming from the Midget AAA and Bantam AAA levels are defenseman Fred Hoffman, Chad Ackerman and Doug Smalley, centers Tom MacLean and Weber and forwards Mark Becker and Ron Ciofelli.

In the Midget Entry Draft in June, NACE chose Joe Condino with their top pick, a solid goalie who will start the season opener Saturday.

Rounding out the roster are a couple of talented wingers; Jason Lewis, who spent the last two years at a New Hampshire Prep School and Jim Afridi, who comes to the team from Miami (Ohio) University.

Combined, this mixed roster forms a team that offers no big names like a Lindros. Instead, they'll come at you with depth.

"We have no superstars, no snipers, like Compware," Lewis said. "We have a lot of hard workers. Everybody on this team is willing to work 100 percent."

ADDS MIO: "I think the kids that are out on the ice now have a lot of potential. We're not there now. We have a lot of work to do, but we'll get them there."

Getting them there in time to win a division title is the aim of the team. It may seem like a lofty goal for a new organization, but as Ciofelli explains, it's important to reestablish a quality program in Redford.

"The basic goal of the team is to win," he said. "But beyond winning, we want to make a contribution to the NAJHL and the community by improving the caliber of play, which will in turn attract more skill talent. All of this will strengthen hockey in this area."

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