

Nov. 2 – DESPITE battling the flu George Gwozdecky managed to get behind the bench to reach a historic milestone in his coaching career.

The day was Oct. 24 and the scene was Mariucci Arena in Minneapolis, Minn., where by virtue of the Denver Pioneers 3-0 victory over the Minnesota Golden Gophers it marked win number 500 in Gwozdecky's lengthy tenure behind the bench in the NCAA hockey ranks.

Now in his 24th season as a head coach the Thunder Bay native now sports an impressive overall record of 501-343-68 after Denver picked a win and tie vs. visiting Minnesota State Mankato over the weekend.

After earlier stints at Wisconsin-River Falls and Miami (Ohio) Gwozdecky is currently in his 16th year guiding the Pioneers where he has led them to multiple 20-plus win seasons, numerous Western Collegiate Hockey Association titles and back-to-back NCAA national championships in 2004 and 2005.

He is also the only person in NCAA history to win a national hockey title as a player, assistant coach and head coach.

Gwozdecky has also garnered plenty of coaching honours including twice being chosen as the top coach in all of U.S. college hockey.

TOP TENDERS: A pair of area netminders were recently recognized by being named their respective league's goaltender-of-the-week recipient.

In voting done by league coaches Thunder Bay's Paul Karpowich was selected as the most recent top puck stopper in the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference while Fort Frances product Ryan Faragher was tabbed for similar accolades in the North American Hockey League.

Karpowich, a sophomore at Clarkson University was recognized for his efforts in an Oct. 24 win over St. Lawrence where he made 30 saves allowing only one power play goal that was deflected into his net by one of his own defenders.

The St. Louis Blues draft choice was also named the game's first star.

Faragher meanwhile backstopped the Bismarck Bobcats to a two-game sweep over Alexandria Oct. 24-25.

He stopped 45 of 47 shots he faced over the weekend including a 26-save shutout in the finale.

ACROSS THE POND: A number of Thunder Bay products are having impressive seasons with their clubs.

In the German National League Mike Kompon is tied for sixth in GNL scoring with 21 points as his Munich side sits in second spot in the 14-team loop.

He is also riding a six-game point streak with a goal and seven assists in that span.

Also in the GNL another local player in Mike Wehrstedt is knotted for second in goals with 13.

He plays for ESV Kaufbeuren who is coached by Ken Latta who also hails from the city.

Latta has his squad sitting in an impressive fourth spot in their first year in the league.

Over in Italian second division Joe Tallari is currently leading Appiano in the eight-team league in point production with 23 in just 10 games as his team is in first place going 8-1-1.

Tallari is coming off a six-goal game on Oct. 30 vs. Gherdenia where he tallied five consecutive times including potting the game-winner in an 8-1 triumph.

TOP DOG: It's been a good start to the American Hockey League season for Thunder Bay's Tom Pyatt. He leads the Hamilton Bulldogs in scoring with nine points in 10 contests.

Skating for the Montreal Canadiens affiliate Pyatt has six goals, which is a tie for the team lead and also has supplied three assists.

His plus-7 rating also is the fourth best total in the AHL to date.

Nov. 9 – ALREADY in his 14th season playing professionally Derek Landmesser recently reached a significant landmark in his Central Hockey League career.

Earlier this season the Thunder Bay native skated in his 500th CHL game, all of which have been played on defence for the Mississippi River Kings.

The 34-year old blueliner has amassed some solid numbers during his time in the CHL and is closing in on some impressive offensive bench marks.

He is five assists shy of the 400 plateau, 18 goals from reaching the century mark and 23 points away from 500.

Those totals come as no surprise as in Landmesser's nine-year run in the CHL he has been among the top 10 scorers for defencemen each campaign while also finishing in the top four or better in five of his first eight years.

He's right there as well this season sitting tied for fifth in points among D-men in the league.

Overall as a pro he has produced 646 points in 814 games while also racking up 1247 penalty minutes.

CZECH PLEASE: After making his NHL debut last season Terrace Bay's Aaron MacKenzie is now looking to make his mark in Europe.

The 28-year-old defenceman has signed a tryout agreement and hopes to ink a contract with Pardubice who compete in the Czech Republic national league.

They are currently fourth in the 14-team loop just two points shy of top spot.

Among the more notable names on their roster are former NHLers Dominic Hasek and Petr Sykora.

MacKenzie saw action in five games with the Colorado Avalanche last season.

Following a standout career at the University of Denver playing for George Gwozdecky, he went on to play six years in the American Hockey League with three different teams.

He had a brief three-game stint with Idaho of the ECHL before heading overseas.

UP TO THE A: Averaging a point-per-game and leading his club in scoring has earned Trevor Kell a call-up to the AHL. The 23-year-old Thunder Bay native was brought up by the Lowell Devils over the weekend from their ECHL affiliate in Trenton, N.J.

He took to the ice Saturday as Lowell blanked Providence 3-0, but was held off the score sheet.

Kell had eights in as many matches with Trenton at the time leading the ECHL Devils points on three goals and five assists.

MILLER TIME: An impressive run in the English Elite Hockey League has Matt Miller of Sioux Lookout near the top of the scoring race in the eight-team loop.

Skating for the Cardiff Devils Miller sits tied for third overall in offensive production accumulating 26 points, including 13 goals, in just 19 games.

Two other area players are also in the league in forward Cameron Mann, who plays for the Nottingham Panthers and Mike Jacobsen, who toils on defence for the Belfast Giants.

They have 16 and 11 points respectively for their clubs.

LOCAL CONNECTION: The Green Bay Jr. Gamblers of the North American Prospects Hockey League certainly have a definite local connection.

No less than five players from Thunder Bay are on the Gamblers squad consisting mainly of 17 and 18-year-old prospects.

Forwards Josh Elvish, Mark Dawd and Kevin Missere are on the team as are defencemen Jordan Andrusyk and Paul Zysko.

Elvish and Dawd are currently one-two on the Gamblers in goals and points.

Green Bay also boasts Lakehead product Sheldon Wing as their assistant coach.

Nov. 16 – WITH the recent arrival of Tom Pyatt to the National Hockey League ranks he joins a couple of lists involving those from the area who have seen action in the NHL.

Pyatt's recall by the Montreal Canadiens allowed him to join brother Taylor on the scroll of those sibling combinations from Northwestern Ontario who have skated in the NHL while also becoming part of the smaller group that has seen both father and son play in the league.

Among those brother acts to have seen ice time in the NHL, they include the likes of fellow Thunder Bay natives the Staal's (Eric-Marc-Jordan), the Johnson's (Ryan-Greg), the Busniuk's (Ron-Mike) and the Poile's. (Bud-Don)

The outlying regions have also provided some brother combos as well in the Pronger's (Chris-Sean) of Dryden, Mike and Dave Allison of Fort Frances and the Shock's (Ron-Dan) from Terrace Bay.

Among those local father-son duos to see NHL action Tom Pyatt joins Taylor and father Nelson in this category.

Another trio that is part of this rare NHL grouping is Taylor and Marc Chorney, Lee Fogolin Sr. and Jr. as well as Bill and Trevor Johansen.

EARNING HIS STRIPES: Jonathon Stephenson of Thunder Bay was one of 15 referees from across the country selected to take part in the Hockey Canada Level VI officiating seminar held last week in Moncton, N.B.

Stephenson already has experience in refereeing in all levels of amateur hockey within the boundaries of Hockey Northwestern Ontario as well as working in the Alberta Jr. Hockey League and being a full-time member of the Western Hockey League officiating staff.

He was also chosen to represent HNO a few years back to officiate during a previous World under-17 event in Saskatchewan where he first caught the eye of the WHL.

The seminar helped prepare the premier officials in the nation for officiating assignments at upcoming Hockey Canada and International Ice Hockey Federation competitions. The Level VI seminar is the highest grade an official can achieve in Canadian amateur hockey.

SHINING IN SASKATOON: The first few months have been quite productive for Walker Wintoneak in the Western Hockey League.

The Thunder Bay native is currently among the top 15 players in WHL scoring registering 28 points in 22 games on 13 goals and 15 assists.

A 20-year-old forward with the Saskatoon Blades the 6'3", 212-pound Wintoneak has only been held off the score sheet five times so far this season and is currently tied for third in the WHL in plus-minus at plus-20.

He is also well on his way for setting new career single season highs in goals, assists and points, which he set last season when he tallied 31 goals and dished out 28 helpers for 59 points in 72 games.

TOP D: Looking around various leagues across North America a number of area defencemen are continuing to excel with solid offensive numbers.

In the NHL Chris Pronger is second among all NHL players in plus-minus at plus-13 while also sitting fourth in scoring among defencemen with 17 points.

Part of that success has come from a six-game point streak which the Dryden product is currently riding having amassed nine points in that span.

There is Thunder Bay's Jesse Baraniuk who shares the goal scoring lead among defencemen in the Southern Professional Hockey League and is third in offence among SPHL blueliners averaging close to a point-per-game with Pensacola.

Meanwhile over in the Central Hockey League you have Derek Landmesser of the Mississippi River Kings sitting third in points among D-men with 11.

Nov. 23 – THE University of Minnesota-Duluth women's hockey team is starting to stockpile area talent on its roster.

UMD announced this past week that Schreiber's Jenna McParland has been recruited to join the Bulldogs on scholarship in time for the 2010-11 season.

Next fall UMD will also welcome back Thunder Bay's Haley Irwin for her junior season at the Western Collegiate Hockey Association school following her year with the national team program and a hopeful berth on the upcoming Canadian women's Olympic team roster.

The highly-touted McParland is fresh off helping Team Ontario Red capture a gold medal at the recently completed national women's under-18 championship in Surrey, B.C. earlier this month.

In the gold medal game at the U-18's she scored twice, including the game-winner, and dished out an assist helping her side to a 5-1 triumph while earning player of the game laurels.

McParland is currently skating for the Toronto Jr. Aeros in the Provincial Women's Hockey League where she is averaging a point per game for her club.

U-17 BERTH: For the first time in a number of years the city will be represented at the World under-17 Hockey Challenge.

Justin Sefton of Thunder Bay was one of 22 players named to the Ontario U-17 squad that will be competing at the upcoming event, which goes Dec. 29 through Jan. 4 in Timmins.

The towering 6'-3", 200-pound defenceman is in his rookie season in the Ontario Hockey League with the Sudbury Wolves.

Former Thunder Bay Senators forward Jake Grimes will serve as head coach of the provincial U-17 side. He is currently an assistant coach with the Belleville Bulls of the OHL.

This international event features five regional teams from across Canada competing as well as five international squads from Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Russia and the U.S.

WHAT A KNIGHT: It was an impressive weekend for Clarkson Golden Knights goaltender Paul Karpowich.

The Thunder Bay native stopped 76 of 80 shots he faced over two games helping his school pick up three of a possible four points in road games vs. Dartmouth and Harvard.

On Friday the sophomore netminder made 35 saves, including 14 in the third period, while picking up the game's first star honour in the process as the Knights edged the Big Green 3-2.

Saturday Clarkson traveled to Cambridge, Mass., to take on Harvard and Karpowich once again earned first star honours for his performance.

The St. Louis Blues draft choice made 41 stops keeping his side in the game as the Knights rallied for a 2-2 overtime draw with the Crimson.

MAKING THEIR CASE: While the first-year Central Hockey League franchise in Allen, Tex., is dubbed the Americans they could make a strong case for calling themselves the Canadians.

Boasting a roster that is made up of 75% Canadian-born players, that include seven of their top eight point producers, Allen has jumped out to the second best record in the CHL with an impressive 10-3-1 mark.

The club continues to also boast a strong local presence with Thunder Bay's Bill McDonald serving as associate coach of the team.

Allen also features another local product in Erik Adams and Longlac's Nathan O'Nabigon on the squad as well as former Lakehead University Thunderwolves standouts Tobias Whelan and Chris Whitley.

Whelan sits tied for third on the team in scoring, Adams leads all team D-men in points while Whitley is sporting a solid 6-1-1 record that includes him posting his first CHL shutout on Saturday, a 4-0 home ice win vs. Corpus Christi.

Nov. 30 – FOR the second time this season Thunder Bay's Paul Karpowich has been named the most recent Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference men's hockey goaltender of the week award recipient.

His latest honour came for his efforts that helped his Clarkson Golden Knights pick up three of a possible four points on a two-game road trip.

The sophomore netminder made a combined 76 saves on 80 shots faces in the pair of the contests finishing with a .951 save percentage. He had 35 stops in a come from behind 3-2 victory at Dartmouth, including 14 saves in the third period. The following night at Harvard, the St. Louis Blues draft choice turned in a 41-save effort, including 27 stops through the first 40 minutes, to keep Clarkson close before the Knights rallied with two late scores to gain a 2-2 overtime tie.

TOP TENDER: Fort Frances product Ryan Faragher is leading the way among goaltenders in the North American Hockey League.

The Bismarck Bobcats puckstopper currently leads the NAHL in goals-against average with a stingy 1.85 mark. Faragher also shares the league-lead in shutouts with three and sits fourth in save percentage at .929 while posting an 8-3-5 record.

Thunder Bay's Drew Strandberg is also having a solid campaign in the NAHL. Tending goal for the Traverse City North Stars Strandberg is second in the league in wins with 12 registering an impressive 12-3 record while posting a 2.47 GAA and a .916 save percentage.

MILESTONES: A number of local players who are in the National Hockey League recently reached or are nearing some milestones in their respective careers.

Patrick Sharp recorded his 200th NHL point last week for the surging Chicago Blackhawks who are sitting tied for fourth overall in the league standings.

Despite battling through injury and with his team struggling on the ice Eric Staal is two assists shy from 200 with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Over with the Philadelphia Flyers Kenora's Mike Richards is just 10 goals shy of the century mark and seven points away from 250 overall.

Meanwhile Taylor Pyatt is only eight markers away from 100 and six points from 200 overall.

MAKING HIS MARK: Despite only playing in half of his team's games because of injury Travis Oleksuk is making his mark at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

Among a long-line of local products to suit up for the Bulldogs over the years Oleksuk has averaged a point per game on the year. In seven games the sophomore forward has a pair of goals and five assists including a recent overtime game-winner vs. arch-rival Minnesota.

UMD currently sit two points out of top spot in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association standings heading into a two-game weekend home set against North Dakota.

AROUND THE OHL: The duo of Kale Kerbashian and Jared Staal are the highest point producers among the area players skating in the Ontario Hockey League this season.

Kerbashian leads the Sarnia Sting in offence with 23 points, including eight goals, while Staal sits second in scoring on the Sudbury Wolves scoring six times and dishing out 17 assists.

Emo's Luke Judson, who plays for the Belleville Bulls, tops all area players in goals with 10.