

LOCAL SPORTS Journal



SUBWAY

**Muskegon
Lumberjacks
2017-18
FREE**

Quest for the Elusive Cup



2017-18 Lumberjacks team preview

Jacks' recipe for success: balanced scoring, experience

By Steve Gunn
LocalSportsJournal.com

The United States Hockey League is a training ground for young, talented hockey players who are just launching their careers. With so much youth on the ice, the teams that contend for a Clark Cup championship are usually the teams with the most experienced players.



Starting goalie Adam Brizgala, who won 15 games last season. Photo/Eric Sturr

The 2017-18 home opener will be Friday, Oct. 13 against the defending Clark Cup champion Chicago Steel, with Game 2 slated for the next night against the Team USA 18 and Under squad.

"I think fans are going to see a little more speed, a little more depth throughout the lineup, a high competitive level, and probably overall a higher skill level throughout the lineup," said Lumberjacks Coach John LaFontaine.

LaFontaine was new to the team last year, and joined the Lumberjacks organization just a few months before the start of the season. He wasn't familiar with a lot of players, and had to install his system on the fly.

That's probably why the Jacks sputtered a bit last fall, before getting hot in the second half of the 2016-17 season.

This year the coach is familiar with the players, and was around to help shape the roster in the offseason. He thinks that will be a big advantage this time around.

"This year I have returners who know what's expected," LaFontaine said. "We are so far ahead of last year, in terms of being on the same page and working together. I am excited about having a good start."

The team's experience starts in goal, where Adam Brizgala returns as the full-time starter after sharing the job with standout Keith Petruzzelli last season.

Brizgala had the second-best season of any goalie in Lumberjacks history, He posted a sparkling 2.48 goals against average with a .914 save percentage and an 15-8-4 record.

Brizgala and Petruzzelli allowed just 157 goals, the fewest in team history. They became the first Lumberjacks goalies to each win more than 10 games in the same season.

LaFontaine thinks Brizgala is more than ready to become the No. 1 netminder this season.



Muskegon's Jachym Kondelik chases the puck during a game last season.

Anthony Del Gaizo (11 goals, 13 assists), Mikael Hakkarainen (9 goals, 9 assists) and Jachym Kondelik (7 goals, 8 assists).

The Jacks were also aggressive about bolstering their attack by acquiring several experienced forwards over the summer through trades.

Perhaps the top name on that list is Emelio Pettersen from Manglerud, Norway, who registered 10 goals and 17 assists as a 16-year-old newcomer with the Omaha Lancers last season.

Also coming on board with promising resumes are Wyatt Bongiovanni (12 goals, 18 assists for Tri-City). Michael Graham (10 Goals, 8 Assists with Fargo) and Montgomery

Graham (8 Goals, 16 Assists for Tri-City).

Unlike last season, when the Lumberjacks depended heavily on talented forwards Andrei Svechnikov and Collin Adams to provide much of their scoring, particularly in the first half of the season, LaFontaine expects to have much more balanced point production in 2017-18.

"Day in and day out, we should have four lines where anyone can score, which is harder for teams to play against," LaFontaine said. "We have third and fourth liners who can put the puck in the net. I feel like we're going to have a lot of scoring by committee, starting with the older guys.

"With that said, the key is going to be how hard all these guys want to work defensively. I don't care how good you are offensively, if you're not willing to move the puck and play defense, you're not going to do very well."

The Jacks will also be seasoned on the defensive end of the ice, with Marc Del Gaizo, Colby Bukes. Travis Mitchell and Collin Murphy all back from last year's squad.

Marc Del Gaizo is also a threat offensively. He registered three goals and 20 assists last season, and his 23 points were second among USHL rookie defensemen last year.

Serving as team captain this season will be Anthony Del Gaizo, who is entering his third year with the Lumberjacks.

"He's our undisputed leader," LaFontaine said. "I don't think I've ever had a season where it's more obvious who the leader is. Anthony brings heart and soul. He plays hard every shift, plays hard every practice, hates to lose, and demands a lot from everyone around him. He'll make everybody else toe the line, work hard and get better."

"I don't think I should do anything different," Del Gaizo said about his new role. "When someone tries to force being a leader, everyone can smell it, they can sense it. It's just gotta be natural for you, and if you can do it, people will look to you to lead them. If not, it's no big deal. It's not something I focus on."



Defenseman Marc Del Gaizo, who had a strong rookie season in 2016-17.



Muskegon's Mikael Hakkarainen (left) and Des Moines' David Keefer mix it up last season . Photo/Eric Sturr



MUSKEGON LUMBERJACKS
2017-18 SEASON SCHEDULE

MuskegonLumberjacks.com
470 West Western Avenue
Muskegon, MI 49440
(231) 724-5225

SEPTEMBER 2017						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

OCTOBER 2017						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
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NOVEMBER 2017						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
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DECEMBER 2017						
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JANUARY 2018						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
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FEBRUARY 2018						
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MARCH 2018						
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APRIL 2018						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14



LUMBERJACKS HOME GAME TIMES
SUNDAYS 3:15PM
MONDAYS-SATURDAYS 7:15PM
NOVEMBER 8TH 2017 10:30AM

HOME
AWAY

CIL Central Illinois Flying Aces DUB Dubuque Fighting Saints MAD Madison Capitals TC Tri-City Storm
CHI Chicago Steel FGO Fargo Force OM Omaha Lancers WAT Waterloo Black Hawks
CR Cedar Rapids RoughRiders GB Green Bay Gamblers SC Sioux City Musketeers YNG Youngstown Phantoms
DM Des Moines Buccaneers LIN Lincoln Stars SF Sioux Falls Stampede U17 & U18 Team USA

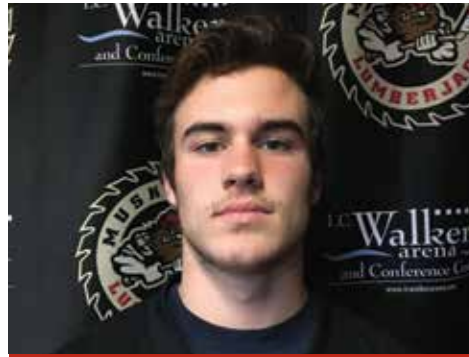
2017-18 MUSKEGON LUMBERJACKS



Wyatt Bongiovanni
Forward - 6-1, 195 lbs.
2016-17: Tri City 12 goals, 18 assists



Michael Graham
Forward - 6-1, 201 lbs.
2016-17: Fargo 10 goals, 8 assists



Nash Nienhuis
Defenseman - 5-7, 141 lbs.
2016-17: Sarnia 4 goals, 24 assists



Jachym Kondelik
Forward - 6-6, 216 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon 7 goals, 8 assists



Marc Del Gaizo
Defenseman - 5-9, 191 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon 3 goals, 20 assists



Nolan Sullivan
Forward - 5-11, 194 lbs.
2016-17: Eden Prairie HS 17 goals, 21 assists



Montgomery Graham
Forward - 5-11, 180 lbs.
2016-17: Tri City 8 goals, 16 assists



Mikael Hakkarainen
Forward - 6-0, 183 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon 9 goals, 9 assists



Matthew Vernon
Goalie - 5-11, 170 lbs.
2016-17: Yourkton 3.63 GAA



Bray Crowder
Defenseman - 6-6, 200 lbs.
2016-17: Amarillo 2 goals, 11 assists



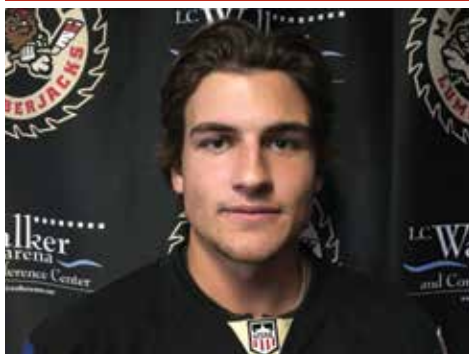
Emilio Pettersen
Forward - 5-9, 158 lbs.
2016-17: Omaha 10 goals, 17 assists



Bobby Kaiser
Forward - 6-2, 193 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon



Anthony Del Gaizo
Forward - 5-11, 190 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon 11 goals, 13 assists



Colby Bukes
Defenseman - 5-11, 192 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon 4 goals, 6 assists



Collin Murphy
Defenseman - 6-3, 190 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon 0 goals, 2 assists



Adam Brizgala
Goalie - 6-0, 220 lbs.
2016-17: Muskegon 15-8-1, 2.46 GAA



Matej Pekar
Forward - 6-0, 165 lbs.
2016-17: Oakland U16 13 goals, 14 assists



Sam Renlund
Forward - 5-11, 174 lbs.
2016-17: Omaha AAA 20 goals, 42 assists



Blake Evennou
Defenseman - 5-9, 181 lbs.
2016-17: Lone Star 4 goals, 12 assists



Matt Staudacher
Defenseman - 6-1, 181 lbs.
2016-17: Shattuck St. Mary's 2 goals, 14 assists



Donovan Ott
Forward - 6-1, 200 lbs.
2016-17: Johnstown 32 goals, 25 assists



Egor Afanasyev
Forward - 6-2, 192 lbs.
2016-17: Little Caesars U16 5 goals, 3 assists



Coach John LaFontaine
2016-17: Muskegon 37-23
2nd place Eastern Conference



After an exciting first season behind the Jacks' bench, Coach John LaFontaine is **FEELING RIGHT AT HOME**

By Steve Gunn
LocalSportsJournal.com

When Muskegon Lumberjacks officials hired Coach John LaFontaine in the summer of 2016, they were attracted by two major points on his resume.

He was very good at developing young players, and he's won everywhere he's coached.

LaFontaine added to his winning reputation in 2016-17 in his inaugural year in Muskegon. Despite taking over the Jacks in the summer, just months before the start of the season, he led the team to a second-place finish in the extremely tough USHL Eastern Conference, and got them back in the United States Hockey League playoffs after a year's absence.

"It was great," LaFontaine said about his first season. "The support within this organization is so strong, and the teamwork. If we need something, the owner (Dan Israel) is at your disposal. He wants us to have the tools and the resources to get the job done. When he says something, he follows through."

LaFontaine's name was familiar right away to Muskegon fans, because he's the older brother of former National Hockey League great Pat LaFontaine.

The brothers are only a year apart in age, and grew up playing hockey together in Waterford, Michigan. Both ended up building their professional lives around the sport. but took different paths to success.

Pat LaFontaine played for the United States in the 1984 Winter Olympics, then went on to a prolific 15-year career in the NHL, playing for the New York Islanders, Buffalo Sabres and New York Rangers between 1984 and 1998.

He finished with 468 career goals and 545 assists. He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2003 and was later voted one of the 100 greatest players in NHL history.

John LaFontaine played with Pat until his senior year in high school, when he moved

on to play three years of junior hockey. He spent his last two seasons playing at the elite level of junior hockey and scored 51 goals. He was invited to training camp with the New York Islanders, but the team's brass didn't think he had the skills to make it in the pros.

"I wasn't good enough, wasn't strong enough, so I chose to go to school and hang up the skates," he said.

LaFontaine earned his college degree from Miami of Ohio, then moved on to spend several years in a management position in several manufacturing companies in southeast Michigan.

"I was entering my fifth year in a factory when I was asked to be the assistant coach of the Detroit Freeze, a junior team," he said. "A month into the

Lumberjacks 2016-17

**Tied for 2nd in USHL
Eastern Conference
with Dubuque**

Advanced to USHL playoffs

**Team record for wins
37**

**Team record for points
79**

**Team record for goals
192**

season the head coach quit, I took over the team, and it became clear in my directions from the Good Lord above, that's where he wanted me."

After three years of coaching juniors in Detroit, LaFontaine spent several seasons as an assistant coach at Lake Superior State University, then a few more as an assistant with the Soo Indians, a junior team in the North American Hockey League (NAHL).

He became a head coach again in 2000 with the Bozeman Ice Dogs, a junior team that competed in the America West Hockey League and later the NAHL, when the two leagues merged. When the Bozeman team ceased operations in 2007, he became a coach and later the athletic director at Shattuck St. Mary's prep school in Minnesota, a hotbed for young hockey talent.

LaFontaine moved on to coach the Wichita Falls Wildcats of the NAHL in 2014-15 and 2015-16, before joining the Lumberjacks.

He's had more than his share of success as a coach.

His Bozeman squad won the America West Hockey League championship in 2001-02, and was the NAHL's top regular-season team in 2005-06. His Shattuck St. Mary's 14-and-



Under team won a national championship in 2014, and his Wichita Falls team advanced to the NAHL finals in 2016.

Then the Lumberjacks called and offered LaFontaine a chance to return to his native Michigan, and he jumped at it.

He came late to the Lumberjacks, and didn't have a chance to help the team prepare for the USHL player selection drafts. He also inherited a core of returning players who didn't know him, and vice-versa.

Predictably, it took a while for the team to start clicking.

The Jacks finished calendar year 2016 with a 16-11-2 record - not bad, but not great - and nobody was convinced they could compete for a playoff spot.

But LaFontaine never seemed overly excited about the good games or upset about the bad ones. He maintained a calm demeanor throughout October, November and December.

Fans started to see the team's potential in January, when they turned their season around by winning seven of nine games.

They finished the regular season with an outstanding 37-23 record and 79 points, good for a tie with Dubuque for second place in the Eastern Conference, only two points behind

first-place Chicago.

The Jacks broke team records for wins, points in the standings and goals scored.

"I think we would have liked to get off to a better start, but our second half was great," LaFontaine said. "When you look at Christmas, how far we were behind in the standings, then we ended up only two points out of first place. The guys hit their stride at the right time."

Unfortunately some bad luck struck the Jacks in the playoffs.

Star forward Andrei Svechnikov, a young Russian who went on to win USHL Rookie of the Year honors, had to leave the team to play in an international tournament. The same was true for forward Jachym Kondelik.

Three other forwards - Mikael Hakkarainen, Casey Gilling and Austin Alger - were either out with injuries during the playoffs or played hurt.

As a result, the Jacks fell three games to one to the Dubuque Fighting Saints in the first round of the Clark Cup playoffs.



Coach John LaFontaine, whose 2016-17 Lumberjacks set a team record for wins, points and goals. Photo/Marc Hoeksema

"We didn't get it done against Dubuque," LaFontaine said. "Up the middle of the ice we were thin. But we will learn and grow from that. You have to have a lot of things fall into place at the end of the season to be the last team standing."

LaFontaine is fired up about his second season in Muskegon. He says the club has a deep, experienced and talented roster, with eight key players returning from last year's squad.

The Jacks also bolstered their lineup by trading for several players who competed for other USHL teams last season, and have a talented crop of youngsters coming in from the draft.

"I think fans are going to see a little more speed, a little higher skill level and depth throughout the lineup," he said.

A coach with a winning track record like LaFontaine is sure to be in demand throughout the hockey world. But he says he and his wife Lorrie love Muskegon, and are in no hurry to go anywhere.

"We just love it here," he said. "The people are great, and we really enjoyed getting to know the area and the fans."

"I'm not going to find a better league to coach in, and I don't think there's a better city for me to coach in. I'm as close to home as I'm ever going to get. I'm a Michigander."

BREAKING THE CYCLE: JACKS READY TO END ON-AGAIN, OFF-AGAIN PLAYOFF PATTERN

By Steve Gunn
LocalSportsJournal.com

It's been a bit of a frustrating pattern for Muskegon Lumberjacks fans. In their seven years of competing in the United States Hockey League, the Jacks have made the Clark Cup playoffs four times. That's not so bad, in and of itself. But it's been one year in, one year out, as far as the playoffs go.



*General Manager
John Vanbiesbrouck*

That's because league members voted in the offseason to expand the playoff format from eight to 12 teams, with the top six in each conference qualifying. First-round playoff series will be two out of three games, while all the other rounds will be best of five.

Lumberjacks General Manager John Vanbiesbrouck said the playoff format was expanded to give more teams, and more young players the chance to experience post-season play.

In the past, a lot of teams would fall behind in the standings early, and start trading top players to stock up on future draft picks.



With their best talent gone so early in the season, those teams would seal their fates, instead of leaving themselves the chance to improve and reach their potential down the stretch.

With more playoff spots available, teams will be more likely to keep their rosters intact and keep battling throughout the schedule, according to Vanbiesbrouck.

"A lot of teams were eliminated pretty much by Christmas," he said. "It's never good for a league to have half of its teams out of it by Christmas. This gives more teams a chance to win, and more of a chance to catch fire at the end."

The expanded playoff format means the Lumberjacks will only have to beat out three of the nine teams in their conference to make the postseason.

But there's no guarantee of success. As Lumberjacks Coach John LaFontaine points out, the USHL is well known for its parity. There isn't usually a great deal of separation in the talent level from team-to-team, and the standings can be tight.

"So many teams had good drafts," LaFontaine said. "It's going to be a dogfight. With 17 teams, it's tough to be that much better than everyone else. You have to work hard and improve throughout the season."

"You have to get better faster than the rest of them. You have to be the team that improves the most. To me that's the fun part – here's where we're at, and we know where we want to go. How do we get there?"

That being said, the Lumberjacks are very excited about their 2017-18 roster. They believe they have the talent, experience and depth to go toe-to-toe with any USHL opponent.

"We're feeling good about the players we have," Vanbiesbrouck said. "We feel good about the style of game we're going to play. I think we're strong in every position, but the proof is going to be on the ice. It's hard to compare teams right now, because we haven't played everybody, but we are well balanced and we have good coaching."

Getting in the playoffs is one thing. Winning that elusive first Clark Cup has been an even bigger challenge. The Jacks lost in the second round of the playoffs in 2011, lost in the first round in 2013, lost in the Clark Cup finals in 2015, and were eliminated in the first round last spring.

The Jacks could almost taste the Cup in 2015, when they snuck into the playoffs as the fourth-place team in the conference, then got hot and plowed their way to the finals.

Muskegon fans watched with excitement as the Jacks stunned first-place Youngstown in the first round of the playoffs, three games to one. They came from behind in all three of their victories in that series.



AS CLOSE AS THEY'VE COME TO THE CUP

The 2014-15 Lumberjacks made it all the way to the Clark Cup finals, before being swept in three games by Sioux Falls. At top, goalie Eric Schierhorn in action during the playoffs; Above left, Matej Paulovic on the attack; Above right, Robbie DeMontis gets tangled with an opponent in the finals. Bottom, Matheson Iocapelli and Corey Schueneman celebrate a goal. Photos/Eric Sturr

The fans cheered as the Lumberjacks upset second-place Dubuque in the conference finals, three games to two. The Jacks' last two victories in that series came on the heels of two ugly losses, when the Jacks fell by five and six goals, respectively.

Hopes were sky-high heading into the finals against Sioux Falls, but the hot streak ended as quickly as it began, and the Jacks were swept in three games.

"We put a ton of work into that team, and we were so close, but we didn't get it done," Vanbiesbrouck said. "There were no excuses."

Last season was also disappointing, after the Lumberjacks had a great second half of the regular season, and finished tied for second place in the conference, only two points behind first-place Chicago.

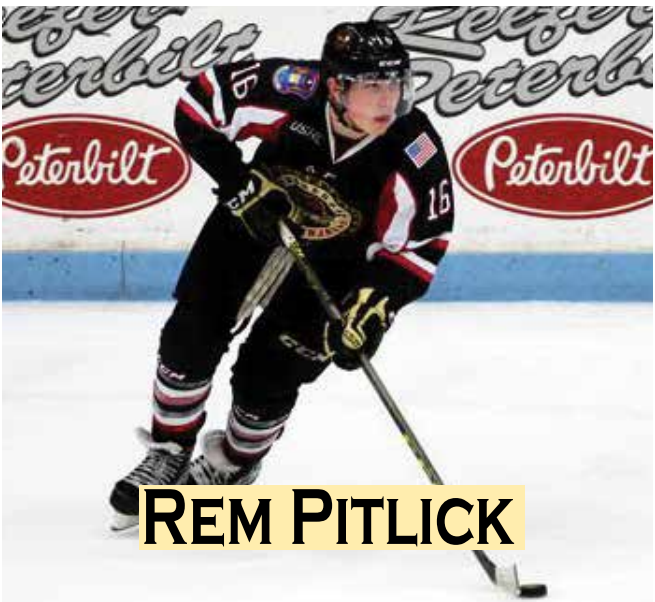
But their hopes took a hit when two top players, Andrei Svechnikov and Jachym Kondelik, left the team to play for their countries in an international tournament, and three other key players were hobbled by injuries.

The Lumberjacks lost their first-round playoff series to Dubuque, three games to one. But the Jacks, led by passionate third-year owner Dan Israel, remain laser-focused on their goal of bringing the USHL's ultimate prize to Muskegon.

"In the '17-18' season we will have players from six different countries and approximately 15 states," Israel wrote recently in an open letter to fans. "Our goal and expectation is to compete for a Clark Cup championship this season."



MATHESON IACOPELLI



REM PITLICK



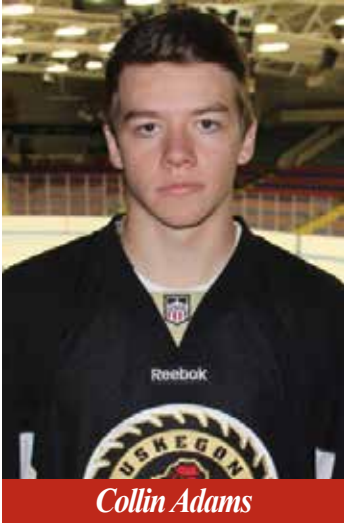
ANDREI SVECHNIKOV

... SO WHO will be the Jacks' next BIG SCORER?

By Steve Gunn
LocalSportsJournal.com

Some recent seasons have gone better than others for the Muskegon Lumberjacks. But no matter how the team has fared in the standings, Muskegon fans have had the opportunity to watch some amazing young players.

Ever since the 2013-14 season, the Lumberjacks have been blessed with a parade of big goal scorers who created excitement every time they touched the puck.



Collin Adams

In 2013-14 and 2014-15, it was Matheson Iacopelli, who is currently launching his pro hockey career after starring at Western Michigan University. In two seasons in Muskegon, he compiled 64 goals and 36 assists. His biggest year came in 2013-14, when he thrilled fans by piling up 41 goals and 23 assists.

In 2015-16 it was Rem Pitlick, who was acquired before the season from

Waterloo, then came to Muskegon and set a team single-season record for goals (46) and total points (89).

He was named the USHL Player of the Year and Forward of the Year, and is currently beginning his second season of NCAA hockey at the University of Minnesota.

Last year the Jacks' had a true phenom – young Russian star Andrei Svechnikov, who broke into junior hockey with a 29 goal, 29 assist performance. He won USHL Rookie of the Year honors at the age of 16, and is projected to be a top-five pick in the National Hockey League draft next June.

The Lumberjacks actually had two big scoring threats each of the last two seasons. Collin Adams, now at the University of North Dakota, had 27 goals and 34 assists in 2015-16, and 24 goals and 27 assists in 2016-17.

So who will carry on the big-scorer tradition at L.C. Walker Arena this winter?

The Lumberjacks were not shy about giving us a hint last June, when they acquired talented forward Emilio Pettersen from the Omaha Lancers in a trade for three draft picks.

"Emilio is a world-class player," Jacks GM John Vanbiesbrouck was quoted as saying in a team press release. "He is a versatile player who can make a difference at both center and wing. We are excited to add him to our team."

Pettersen, who hails from Manglerud, Norway, was a 16-year-old rookie with Omaha last year, and his numbers were promising, but not off the charts. He totaled 10 goals and 17 assists in 57 games.

But Vanbiesbrouck said Pettersen, who is only 5-10 and 155 pounds, has the potential to accomplish much bigger things, perhaps this season.

"He's still just 17," Vanbiesbrouck said. "But his work ethic and talent are great. He's not mentioned among the top 30 in the (NHL) draft right now, probably because of his size, and because he comes from Norway."

"He had to come to North America to be seen. How



Forward Emilio Pettersen, acquired by the Lumberjacks over the summer, has enormous offensive potential.

he produces is yet to be seen, but he is quick, elusive and smart with the puck. He's still got a lot to figure out, but when you have God-given ability it just comes out."

One clue about Pettersen's potential came before he was even in the USHL, when the Lancers signed him to a tender deal, which is a mechanism that allows teams to recruit and secure top players in exchange for surrendering a first-round draft pick.

"Omaha got him on day one of the tendering season," Vanbiesbrouck said. "That tells you how good they thought he was. Nobody usually gets tendered until the last day before the draft."

If Omaha was so high on Pettersen, why did the Lancers trade him to Muskegon?

"I think he was looking for a change," Vanbiesbrouck said. "The players have a lot of say in this. I think he heard through some good sources that we're a development-type team, and our coach is a player developer. "Players want to come to Muskegon. You can't get them here unless they want to come. That tells a big story about our coaching, the environment here, and how they're treated in the homes. We don't hear directly from kids on other teams – that would be tampering – but we definitely hear about players who want to come here, from coaches and managers of other teams."

Vanbiesbrouck said it's important for any team to have at least one big scorer who terrorizes opposing goalies

and draws extra attention from defensemen. "I think it does have an impact," he said. "The guys on the team like to have a top guy – you always want to have that go-to guy. What team that wins doesn't have a go-to guy, in any sport?"

The Lumberjacks believe they have several forwards with the offensive skills to become go-to guys this season.

That list includes (but is certainly not limited to) returning Lumberjacks Mikael Hakkarainen (9 goals, 9 assists last season), Jachym Kondelik (7 goals, 8 assists) and Anthony Del Gaizo (11 goals, 13 assists).

The Jacks are also high on several veterans they acquired from other USHL teams over the summer, including Michael Graham (10 goals, 8 assists with

Fargo), Montgomery Graham (8 goals, 16 assists for Tri-City) and Wyatt Bongiovanni (12 goals, 18 assists for Tri-City).

As Vanbiesbrouck notes, there's no such thing as having

too many players who can put the puck in the net, and he thinks the Lumberjacks will have plenty this season, after being overly dependent on Svechnikov and Adams for much of last season.

"There's a lot of potential here," he said. "Balance is something that's hard to stop. I don't mind talking about this now. I don't believe in any sort of jinx theory. We know we have talented guys who are feeling good about themselves."

"Who knows who might come out of the mix?"

2013-14	Matheson Iacopelli - 41 goals, 23 assists
2015-16	Rem Pitlick - 46 goals, 43 assists
2016-17	Andrei Svechnikov - 29 goals, 29 assists



Tomorrow's Stars

24 Lumberjacks have been drafted by NHL teams, with more to come



By Dave Hart
LocalSportsJournal.com

Remember the names.
Get a few autographs when you have the chance.
The players you see on the ice at L.C. Walker Arena could become household names someday.
Muskegon fans were reminded of that in June, when Keith Petruzzelli, a goalie for the Jacks last season, was the third-round pick of the Detroit Red Wings in the National Hockey League draft.



Keith Petruzzelli after being drafted by the Red Wings in June. Photo/MIHockey

There's no guarantee that Petruzzelli will ever make the big leagues. And if he does, it will be a few years before it happens. He will be playing hockey at Quinnepiac University this season as he continues to develop his hockey skills.
But the Red Wings were obviously impressed with Petruzzelli and the numbers he put up for the Lumberjacks last season.
The 6-foot-5, 185-pound goal-keeper appeared in 35 games for the Lumberjacks, posting a 2.40 goals against average while winning 22 games and shutting out his opponents twice throughout the season.
After he was chosen by Detroit, Petruzzelli gave a lot of credit to Lumberjacks General Manager (and former NHL goaltender) John Vanbiesbrouck for helping him

develop his skills.
"It was awesome to be able to pick Beezer's brain this year," Petruzzelli said. "Obviously, we have two totally different playing styles, but he knows so much about the game it's incredible. He was there with me on draft day, to congratulate me and give me a hug, and that was awesome."
Over the years more than 700 United States Hockey League players have been drafted by NHL teams. Quite a few have had a lot of success in the big leagues.
The one most familiar to Muskegon fans is Mona Shores High School graduate Justin Abdelkader, who has spent at least parts of the past 10 seasons with the Red Wings. He has played in 544 NHL games, piling up 87 goals and 108 assists.
Abdelkader led the Cedar Rapids RoughRiders to a USHL Clark Cup title in 2005 after scoring 27 goals and 25 assists in 60 games during the regular season.
Another example is Joe Pavelski, who played 104 games for the Waterloo Black Hawks from 2002-2004, and has spent 11 seasons with the San Jose Sharks.

Pavelski has scored 295 goals and notched 336 assists for 631 points in his 806 games in the NHL. His best season was in 2013-14, when he scored 41 goals and picked up 38 assists.
The number of USHL alumni in the NHL is bound to increase in the coming years, according to Vanbiesbrouck.
That's because the NHL is finding more of its young talent at American universities, and the universities get many of their players from the USHL.
"Ninety-five percent of these players get Division 1 college scholarships," Vanbiesbrouck said. "Every Division 1 school is looking to the USHL for players."

A total of 24 former Lumberjacks have been selected in the NHL draft. Three have seen ice time in the big league.
Brandan Woods, a forward who played for Muskegon during its inaugural season in 2010-11, became the first Lumberjack to make it to the show.
He was selected by Carolina Hurricanes in the fifth round of the 2012 draft with the 129th overall selection.
During his lone season with Muskegon, Woods played in 57 games, scoring 14 goals



Muskegon native, Mona Shores High School graduate Justin Abdelkader is a former USHL player who has found great success with the Red Wings.

and 12 assists for 26 points.
Woods then spent two seasons playing collegiately for the University of Wisconsin, where he scored 10 goals and picked up 12 assists.
He has spent nearly all of his professional career for the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League, where he has 30 goals and 34 assists.
He played a total of seven games for the Hurricanes, in 2014-15 and 2015-16, but has yet to register an NHL point.

Defenseman Jaycob Megna played for the Lumberjacks during the 2010-11 season, where he scored one goal and picked up 17 assists in 55 games. He spent three seasons at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, then four more years playing professional minor league hockey.
Megna's best professional season was 2016-17, when he had five goals and 22 assists for the San Diego Gulls of the American Hockey League, before being called up to the Anaheim Ducks and playing in one game.
Forward Griffin Molino, who spent the 2014-15 season with the Lumberjacks, played in five games for the Vancouver Canucks last season.
In his lone season in Muskegon, Molino posted 18 goals and 64 points. His 46 assists are currently a single-season team record.
Molino spent two seasons at Western Michigan University after his stint with Muskegon, where he scored 26 goals and 32 assists in 76 collegiate games.

He jumped straight from college to the NHL last season, without playing a single game in the minor leagues. Molino is still looking for his first professional point as a member of the Canucks.

More former Jacks could be on the way to the NHL in the near future.
Matheson Iacopelli, a native of Brownstown, Michigan, was selected in the third round of the 2014 NHL draft by the Chicago Blackhawks.
He spent two seasons with the Lumberjacks, in 2013-14 and 2014-15, playing in 114 games while compiling 64 goals and 36 assists.
He spent the last two seasons playing for Western Michigan University. Last season he had a breakout campaign, scoring 20 goals for the Broncos.
Iacopelli signed a two-year contract with the Blackhawks last March, and finished last season with their minor league affiliate, the Rockford Ice Hogs of the American Hockey League. He scored a goal and notched three assists in eight games.

Rem Pitlick, from Plymouth, Minnesota, joined the Lumberjacks during the 2015-16 season after spending his first year in the USHL with the Waterloo Black Hawks.
He exploded offensively in his lone season in Muskegon, setting a team single season record in goals (46) and points (89).
Pitlick is about to begin his second season at the University of Minnesota. Last season, as a freshman, he had 14 goals and 18 assists for the Golden Gophers.
He was selected in the third round of the 2016 NHL draft by the Nashville Predators.
Perhaps the next former Lumberjack to make it to the NHL is a player who has yet to be drafted.

Andrei Svechnikov, who is from Barnaul, Russia, spent 2016-17 with the Lumberjacks as a 16-year-old phenom, piling up 29 goals and 29 assists.

This season he is playing for the Barrie Colts of the major junior Ontario Hockey League and already has two goals in his first two games.
This will probably be Svechnikov's last season as an amateur.
NHL teams have been drooling over Svechnikov's skills for several years. He is widely expected to be a top five overall selection in next summer's NHL draft, and could move up to the big league right away.
Draftsite.com projects Svechnikov going third in the draft to the Arizona Coyotes. MyNHLDraft.com predicts he will be the second overall selection.
A quick ticket to the NHL may follow.
After watching Svechnikov's star performance in Canada at the 2016 Junior World A Challenge tournament, Hockey News writer Daniel Nugent-Bowman described him as "Russia's next best thing."



Brendan Woods was the first former Lumberjack to make it to the NHL.



Former Lumberjack Griffin Molino went straight from Western Michigan University to the Vancouver Canucks last spring.

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LET'S GO JACKS!

Muskegon hockey through the years

Season	Team	League	Record	Coach	Result
2016-17	Muskegon Lumberjacks	USHL	37 18 5	John LaFontaine	Lost in round 1
2015-16	Muskegon Lumberjacks	USHL	27 26 7	Todd Krygier	
2014-15	Muskegon Lumberjacks	USHL	35 21 4	Todd Krygier	Lost in Finals
2013-14	Muskegon Lumberjacks	USHL	30 25 5	Todd Krygier	
2012-13	Muskegon Lumberjacks	USHL	31 23 10	Jim McKenzie	Lost in round 1
2011-12	Muskegon Lumberjacks	USHL	17 35 8	Kevin Patrick	
2010-11	Muskegon Lumberjacks	USHL	24 28 8	Kevin Patrick	Lost in round 2
2009-10	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	51 20 5	Richard Kromm	Lost in round 1
2008-09	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	43 26 7	Bruce Ramsay	Lost in Finals
2007-08	Muskegon Fury	IHL	35 35 6	Bruce Ramsay	Lost in round 1
2006-07	Muskegon Fury	UHL	49 21 6	Bruce Ramsay	Lost in round 2
2005-06	Muskegon Fury	UHL	51 18 7	Todd Nelson	Lost in round 2
2004-05	Muskegon Fury	UHL	51 20 9	Todd Nelson	Championship
2003-04	Muskegon Fury	UHL	47 20 9	Todd Nelson	Championship
2002-03	Muskegon Fury	UHL	38 29 9	Mike Busniuk	Lost in round 2
2001-02	Muskegon Fury	UHL	48 22 4	Danton Cole	Championship
2000-01	Muskegon Fury	UHL	37 28 9	Richard Kromm	Lost in round 1
1999-00	Muskegon Fury	UHL	43 26 5	Richard Kromm	Lost in round 3
1998-99	Muskegon Fury	UHL	50 18 6	Richard Kromm	Championship
1997-98	Muskegon Fury	UHL	43 23 8	Paul Kelly	Lost in round 2
1996-97	Muskegon Fury	CoHL	39 29 6	Paul Kelly	Lost in round 1
1995-96	Muskegon Fury	CoHL	40 27 7	Bill Stewart	Lost in round 1
1994-95	Muskegon Fury	CoHL	42 27 5	Steve Ludzik	Lost in Finals
1993-94	Muskegon Fury	CoHL	35 24 5	Steve Ludzik	Lost in round 1
1992-93	Muskegon Fury	CoHL	28 27 5	Bruce Boudreau	Lost in round 1
1991-92	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	41 28 13	Phil Russell	Lost in Finals
1990-91	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	38 40 5	Blair MacDonald	Lost in round 1
1989-90	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	55 21 6	Blair MacDonald	Lost in Finals



1988-89	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	57 18 7	Blair MacDonald	Championship
1987-88	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	58 14 10	Rick Ley	Lost in round
1986-87	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	48 30 4	Rick Ley	Lost in Finals
1985-86	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	50 27 5	Rick Ley	Championship
1984-85	Muskegon Lumberjacks	IHL	50 29 3	Rick Ley	Lost in Finals
1983-84	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	82 19 55	Doug McKay	
1982-83	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	82 29 41	Doug McKay	Lost in round 1
1981-82	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	30 49 3	Popiel, Moore	
1980-81	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	28 45 9	Moore, Garvin	Lost in round 1
1979-80	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	29 43 8	Gerry Moore	Lost in round 1
1978-79	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	15 58 7	Gerry Moore	
1977-78	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	27 42 11	Lallo, McLay	Lost in round 1
1976-77	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	31 36 11	McLay, Lallo	Lost in round 1
1975-76	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	34 31 13	Moose Lallo	Lost in round 1
1974-75	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	48 24 3	Moose Lallo	Lost in round 2
1973-74	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	44 26 6	Moose Lallo	Lost in round 1
1972-73	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	36 34 4	McLay, Lallo	
1971-72	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	49 21 2	Moose Lallo	Lost in Finals
1970-71	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	43 24 5	Moose Lallo	Lost in round 1
1969-70	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	46 18 8	Moose Lallo	Lost in round 2
1968-69	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	34 29 9	Moose Lallo	Lost in Finals
1967-68	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	43 17 12	Moose Lallo	Championship
1966-67	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	27 43 2	Moose Lallo	
1965-66	Muskegon Mohawks	IHL	46 19 5	Moose Lallo	Lost in round 1
1964-65	Muskegon Zephyrs	IHL	22 45 3	Lorne Davis	
1963-64	Muskegon Zephyrs	IHL	31 36 3	Moose Lallo	
1962-63	Muskegon Zephyrs	IHL	34 31 5	Moose Lallo	Lost in round 1
1961-62	Muskegon Zephyrs	IHL	43 23 2	Moose Lallo	Championship
1960-61	Muskegon Zephyrs	IHL	25 41 4	Moose Lallo	Lost in Finals