



## SHARKS PROSPECTS IN GOOD HANDS WITH CHIASSON AND BONNEAU

FEB 27, 2020

by [Nick Nollenberger](#) / [sjbarracuda.com](#)

When the Sharks relieved Pete DeBoer of his head coaching duties in December along with his assistants, an immediate ripple effect was felt throughout the organization. Following DeBoer's departure, Bob Boughner was promoted to interim head coach and Roy Sommer was tagged as the team's associate head coach. In addition, Mike Ricci and Evgeni Nabokov left their posts as development coaches with the Barracuda to join the Sharks staff.

What the shifting in the organization's coaching hierarchy did was leave a vacancy in the AHL with the Barracuda. Sommer had held the Sharks' AHL bench-boss role for an AHL record 22-years. So instead of appointing one of the team's assistant coaches to head coach, the team instead elected to name both Jimmy Bonneau and Michael Chiasson co-coaches, splitting the role down the middle.

To only increase the mighty task of taking over the AHL's youngest roster, filled with a multitude of rookies and second-year players, Bonneau, 34, and Chiasson, 28, began life without the team's captain. Although not public knowledge at the time, John McCarthy had suffered an ischemic stroke due to an undetected hole in

his heart just days prior and would subsequently call it a career just a couple weeks later.

McCarthy would eventually join Bonneau and Chiasson on the bench on December 27th, as he was named an assistant coach immediately following his retirement announcement.

What made the situation even more unique was the fact that Bonneau and Chiasson are still in the infancy of their coaching careers. Bones and Chaser were hired just the summer prior after spending a pair of seasons within the Sharks scouting department.

One might think the two wouldn't be ready. But for Barracuda GM Joe Will, there couldn't have been more capable replacements. The two were built to coach and although they may have been rushed into their current situation, there was no doubt they were capable of doing the job.

"Jimmy and Michael have been a big part of the Barracuda's success on the ice and in developing players for the NHL," said Will following the coaching announcement in December. "They have learned from one of the best all-time in Roy Sommer and we are confident that they, along with support from our development staff, will work well together as a tandem leading our group."

Going through the process of taking over a team and navigating uncharted waters without Sommer has been aided by the tandem coaching setup. Bonneau and Chiasson have been able to rely on each other, along with John McCarthy.

"We come from different backgrounds and we have different takes on different situations but we are able to expand our knowledge and avoid staying narrow-minded. We've got a lot of knowledge in the hockey world, not necessarily a lot in the coaching world, so to be able to come together and go through it together is a big asset for us," said Bonneau. "The relationship has been excellent, both of us

are willing to listen and as far as decision making goes, we have our departments but we've done a good job of coming together and making a common decision."

"We are similar in a lot of ways but we're different and it kind of works in this situation and that's the biggest thing we've tried to harp on is that it is one clear message for these guys," said Chiasson. "You try and learn from a guy like Jimmy and a guy like John McCarthy because they've been around this league for a long time and they've had success."

A year and a half under Sommer's tutelage provided a coaching boot camp of sorts for the two young teachers, a grad school if you will.

"He (Roy Sommer) has great instincts and a great work ethic. The way he handles things, the way he stayed levelheaded and his one day at a time approach were greatly valuable for me to see," said Bonneau. "You can't look too far ahead in this league because it'll only bring extra stress. How to build a foundation is what he taught me in the first year and a half and now that we've taken over, we're just piggybacking on what he was doing."

"When the change was made for Roy (Sommer), Ricc (Mike Ricci) and Nabby (Evgeni Nabokov) to go up we knew we wouldn't fill the void of those guys but we knew we'd try to come underneath and try to carve out our path and just make sure guys are ready," said Chiasson. "I think it's just little things, day-to-day things, how he (Sommer) prepares, different tactics. When he brings up an example, you're always trying to ask why he does it and what the thought process was so you have a better understanding."

Now three months into the job, routines have begun to crystalize and life has begun to fall back to normalcy.

"We've got a routine with J-Mac (John McCarthy) helping out. We try to split our duties while keeping a close relationship with the players," said Bonneau. "We

work the development part but also the tactical part and now it's just business as usual."

"I think you start to feel more comfortable every day, but something you've always got to remember in coaching is new things come up every single day, so you've got to be able to take it day-by-day and be able to pivot and be able to adapt," said Chaisson.

For Bonneau, coaching was always a path he intended to take following his playing career until the Sharks presented him with a pro scouting opportunity.

"Once I retired my intentions were to go towards coaching and then with such a great opportunity, joining the Sharks scouting staff and coming back to my roots within the organization, I thought it was a no-brainer, so I went all-in on that and it showed me a completely different aspect of how management and scout's lives work and how organizations are run. A couple of years after that is when the opportunity was presented to me by Joe (Will) to come in and join the coaching staff. The opportunity to get back into the dressing and be hands-on with the team... it was a no-brainer."

Absorbing knowledge from Sommer and learning on the job has been invaluable for Bonneau but his lengthy playing career that extended 11 seasons between the ECHL and AHL has also been something he has leaned on.

"I rely on my instincts a ton. The three things you have in coaching are knowledge, preparation, and instincts. So, the more you've played, the more you can go back and rely on those instincts to connect with the players. Sometimes I'm just trying to get them to not make the mistakes that I've made (laughs), but also you've got to let them fail sometimes so they can learn from it."

For Chiasson, coaching wasn't in his conscience until the Sharks presented him with the opportunity.

“I spent the last two years working with Tim Burke and Doug Wilson Jr. in the scouting staff, I was in charge of a lot of amateur stuff, USHL, College, College free agents. I was based in Ann Arbor, a place I was familiar with, and I learned a lot in those two years from guys like Burky and Jr. You get to see why this guy was picked in the second round, why this guy was ranked in the first round and ended up going in the second round. It happened in my second year at the scouting combine when Joe (Will) and Jr. presented me with the idea and if I had any interest in joining the coaching side. It didn’t take long for me to make up my mind.”

“Chaser and Bones have been great. Since they took over, they’ve done everything they can to keep things running smoothly,” said Barracuda defenseman Nick DeSimone. “They’re both young guys but they’ve got a lot of knowledge and I think the whole team has enjoyed having them.”

“They’re both young in their coaching careers but they’ve been really helpful to me, getting me up to speed and helping me with the entire process,” said Barracuda assistant coach John McCarthy. “We’ve got a really young team here and they’ve done a great job keeping the group together and continuing to harp on the details of the game to improve these young players each and every day.”



## **BLICHFELD ADJUSTING NICELY TO THE PRO GAME**

DEC 4, 2019

by Nick Nollenberger | [AHL On The Beat](#)

The San Jose Sharks selected forward [Joachim Blichfeld](#) with the second-to-last pick in the 2016 NHL draft, 210th overall, in the seventh round.

From 2006 to 2016, just 31 players who have been selected in the seventh round and went on to play more than 50 games in the NHL. That's just 10 percent over a 10-year span.

But four of the 31 were selected by the Sharks ([John McCarthy](#) in 2006, [Justin Braun](#) in '07, [Jason Demers](#) in '08, [Joakim Ryan](#) in '12) and they hope Blichfeld is the next late-round steal.

Last September, San Jose loaned the Denmark native back to the Western Hockey League's Portland Winterhawks, where he had spent the last two seasons. As a 20-year-old, Blichfeld would go on to win the Four Broncos Trophy as the league's Player of the Year and was named to the WHL West First All-Star team after pacing the league in points (114) and shots (347), ranking tied for second in power-play assists (32), and tied for sixth in power-play goals (16).

"He drove that offense (in Portland); when you put that many points up and lead the Western League in scoring, the talent is there," said Sharks scout Ryan Russell. "We're really excited what he could be down the road, especially offensively."

When Blichfeld was initially informed that he was going back to juniors, he was frustrated. He wanted to turn pro. Nothing against Portland, but he felt he was ready for the next chapter in his career.

"I was disappointed initially," said Blichfeld. "But after letting it set in, I decided to make the best of it. Winning the scoring title in that league helped my confidence a lot."

“He knew that if he went back to Portland, he’d have an opportunity to take over that team and development-wise we thought it was best for him to go back to juniors instead of fighting for ice time in the AHL,” said Sharks director of scouting Doug Wilson Jr. “To his credit he went back to Portland with fire and dominated the first game back through the entire season.”

After the conclusion of his second full season in the WHL in 2018, Blichfeld got a small taste of the pros when he appeared in a pair of games with the San Jose Barracuda in the Calder Cup Playoffs.

That experience opened his eyes to the speed, skill, and details that are required at the next level. It also made him want to be a part of it even more.



Photo: Kevin Mistry

“The game is so fast at [the AHL] level,” Blichfeld said during an interview last season while with the Winterhawks. “You’ve got to be on your toes or you’re going to get burned... but those two games gave me the confidence that I belonged.”

Now in his first year as a pro, it took the 21-year-old six games to score his first goal. But since then, he’s netted a team-leading seven goals over his last 11 games and ranks second on the team in points (13) and tied for first in power-play goals (3).

“I’m just trying to play as well as I can every game, get a lot of shots and try to generate offense because when I get a lot of shots, I tend to score,” said Blichfeld. “It took a while to get that first one but once I got it, I felt relieved and confident.”

“He’s earned the opportunity to play big minutes as a first-year pro with all the work he put into his overage year in Portland and this past summer,” said Wilson Jr. “He has matured physically and mentally and came in ready to take a top-six forward role early. He plays with confident swagger and shooters mentality that makes him dangerous every shift. He is still very young but he has a bright long-term future.”

“When I asked (goaltender) [Josef Korenar](#) who had the best shot in training camp, one of the guys he said was Blichfeld, which is pretty impressive with all the talent in this organization,” said Barracuda head coach Roy Sommer. “He’s a natural-born goal scorer with a knack for the net. It’s hard to find those guys, let alone that late in the draft.”