



**Norwin's  
Austen  
Swankler**  
sets his sights  
on the  
NHL draft.

# FIRE & ICE

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

If Austen Swankler's long-held dreams come true, he will soon be playing professional hockey.

It's not an exaggeration to say every junior hockey league in the country wants Swankler. After all, every single league—as well as one in Canada—has drafted him. He's currently living in Waterloo, Iowa, and playing for the Waterloo Black Hawks, part of the United States Hockey League, the nation's only Tier 1 junior hockey league. He was selected by the Black Hawks in the ninth round in the 2017 USHL draft. Also in 2017, he was drafted by the Syracuse Stars, which is part of the U.S. Premier Hockey League. He also was picked up by the Ottawa 67s in the third round of the Ontario Hockey League, the top junior league in Canada. Then, this past June, he was drafted by the New Jersey Titans of the North American Hockey League.

Swankler, a skilled forward who plays center/left wing, was only 4 years old when he started playing hockey. After his older brother Marc introduced him to the game, his prowess on the ice quickly became evident. He joined the Pittsburgh Penguins Elite team at the age of 13, where he led the 16U team with 61 points during the 2016-2017 season.

"The Penguins Elite really helped me grow as a player, and as a person," says Swankler, who also played for Norwin's middle school team.

To further his goal of someday playing for the NHL, Swankler made the difficult choice to move to Michigan at the age of 15 to play midget hockey for the Oakland Junior Grizzlies. It was a choice that would prove prophetic: in August, after initially deciding on Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., Swankler announced that he's committed to play for the University of Michigan next season.

"It was a really tough decision leaving my family at 15, but we knew it was the right move, being able to play for the Grizzlies and in front of the school I'm now committed to," he says. "Being away from my family was really hard, especially being away from my little brother Noah, who's 9. They made it easy, though, visiting for games and such."

Swankler chose the University of Michigan because of its rich history. Recognized as one of the most prominent hockey programs in the country, the school has produced numerous pro players, including current Pittsburgh Penguins Carl Hagelin and Jack Johnson.

"Deciding to go to college was a decision my parents left to me," he notes. "Being able to play hockey and have a degree from Michigan will be amazing. They have a great coaching staff and a great facility, and really treat you like a pro."

Not surprisingly, the 6'0" Swankler isn't afraid of the hard work it takes to succeed in such a competitive sport. "I'm a player who goes on the ice every day to get better. I never pass up opportunities," he says. "I'm a skilled forward who can put up points, and I'm working on my defensive side."

Swankler also recognizes the efforts of his family and coaches who've helped to guide him. "I want to thank my family for everything they've done to get me here, as well as my advisor, trainers and coaches, who've spent a lot of time talking to me to make me a better person and player," he says.

Over the summer, Swankler skated a little closer to his dream of playing for the NHL: In September, he represented Pittsburgh at the 2018 USA Hockey All American Prospect Game, which was held at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minn. The all-star game featured the top 42 American-born prospects eligible for the 2019 NHL draft.

Then, in October, he learned that he was given a "B" rating on the 2018-2019 NHL Central Scouting Report, which means that he's a potential second or third round selection in next summer's NHL draft.

Looking ahead, Swankler is concentrating on the not-too-distant future. He's set his focus on winning the Clark Cup, which is the USHL's equivalent of the Stanley Cup. "I'm hoping to have a great season in the USHL with the Waterloo Black Hawks," he says. "After this season, if I play well, [I'd like to] get drafted by the NHL. I'm really just taking it slow, game by game. I'm trying to get better and focusing on this season." ■



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