

## Alumni Forward and Soo Native Matt Caria

Matt Caria spent the 2004-05 season with the Soo Thunderbirds after being drafted by the St Michaels Majors in the 6<sup>th</sup> round of the Ontario Hockey League draft in 2004 118<sup>th</sup> overall. Matt played 48 games for his hometown Thunderbirds amassing 70 points.

Following an impressive 4 year OHL career Caria played 239 games while putting up 257 points for the Majors, Soo Greyhounds and Plymouth Whalers.

Upon graduation from junior hockey Matt had brief stint in the ECHL before turning to the CIS. Caria enrolled at Lakehead to study education and played hockey for the Thunderbirds. Matt enjoyed an outstanding career at Lakehead playing 81 games and scoring 127 points.

Following an outstanding CIS career which saw Caria named to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> all star teams the Soo native signed with the Kalamazoo Wings of the ECHL. An outstanding rookie season led Caria to be named to the all rookie team in 2013/14.

**Looking back on your time with the hometown Soo Thunderbirds how did a season of junior a hockey prepare you for the Ontario Hockey League?**

*I had the opportunity to play for the Thunderbirds when I was 16 years old in the NOJHL and it greatly prepared me for the next level. The league had players up to 20 year old who were bigger and stronger at that time than I was. The speed of the game combined with the bigger players really prepared me to go to St Michaels as a rookie in the OHL the following season. The schedule was very similar to what we played in the OHL with some long bus rides which was great to be able to form lifelong friendships.*

**There has been a long history of outstanding players to play for the Thunderbirds in the NOJHL. What memory sticks with you from your season with the team?**

*The Thunderbirds have a long history of having great teams and great players. Countless players have gone on to the professional ranks and to college or university. It was great coming to the rink everyday and playing with a fun group of guys such as Ryan Maunu and Matt Dias.*

**You decided after an outstanding OHL career to pursue your education at Lakehead. How is the level of play in the CIS?**

*Going to Lakehead following junior hockey was a very difficult decision for me. Every kid coming out of junior wants to play pro hockey so it wasn't easy. At the same time I understood that you can't play hockey for the rest of your life so after much thought I decided to pursue my education. I had a strong interest in becoming a teacher and follow in my mother's footsteps so I studied Education at Lakehead. In saying that I feel like going to school was the best decision I ever made. Lakehead is a great school and Thunder Bay is a beautiful city. We were able to practice and go fishing or hunting with the boys all in one day. I made lifelong friends on the team and in the classroom that I'll never forget and I know we'll stay in close contact with each other. I also played with current Thunderbird coach Jordan Smith who was captain of our team and was a leader both on and off the ice. It was a great 3 and a half years of my life up there.*

**What advice would you give current Thunderbirds who are looking to play college hockey and possibly professionally down the road?**

*The advice I'd give to players wanting to play NCAA or CIS hockey is that no one can take your schooling away from you. If you have the opportunity to receive an education while playing hockey your degree will be something you will always have. Hockey can be very rewarding, but you are not guaranteed to play without injuries and you never know how long your career might last. We all want to play the game long enough to support yourself and eventually your family, but having that education to rely on upon retirement is important. You always want to be prepared for your future. With schooling you will always have something when the time comes when you're done playing.*

**There are many leagues and options for young hockey players now. Why should potential future Thunderbirds choose the NOJHL over other leagues?**

*I think being able to play junior hockey right here in your hometown is an ideal set up. You get to play in front of family and friends. Junior hockey can be some of the best times of your life and playing in your hometown, living at home and going to high school with your buddies is the icing on the cake. The organization has a tremendous history of winning and helping players move on to the next level*

