

# Smith sees potential in Canisius hockey

## Amherst resident enters 10th year as Division I coach

by PATRICK J. NAGY  
Reporter

When Amherst resident Dave Smith took over the reigns of the Canisius College men's ice hockey team in 2005, he saw the potential of the program.

"The Canisius job appealed to me because of what it could be," he said in a recent phone interview. "I think we are really developing a first class Division I hockey program."

In his first season with Canisius, the team finished 10-23-3, including seven road games which is tied for the second most in the past nine years. They also sported the fifth-lowest goals against average in team history.

Last year, Canisius went 9-23-3 but scored 39 power-play goals, third most at the school in the past 16 seasons, and had six short-handed goals, which ranked the team in the top 20 in the nation. In addition, Michael Cohen and Billy Irish-Baker, both products of Williamsville North hockey, signed professional hockey contracts.

This season, the Golden Griffins are 3-6-3 in the Atlantic Hockey Association and 4-10-4 overall, although two additional wins didn't count because they were against Canadian teams.

The rough start is largely due to a young team (19 of the 27 on the roster are either freshmen or sophomores) and a tough schedule. Out of the 20 games Canisius has played, 16 have come on the road, including stops against the No. 1 team in the nation, Miami of Ohio (lost 4-1 and 11-1), seventeenth-ranked St. Cloud State (lost 7-0, tied 3-3), as well as Alabama-Huntsville (lost 4-3) and Manitoba (won 3-2) in Omaha, Nebraska, Air Force (two 3-3 ties), Holy Cross (lost 3-2, won 4-3) and Rochester Institute of Technology (lost 4-3, won 6-2). They also beat Mercyhurst, 4-0 and Niagara, 4-3.

"There will be a point where we will look back and see how much we have learned from these games but we're not at that point yet," said Smith, who moved with his family to Amherst in the summer of 2006. "I believe we've gotten closer as a team and definitely gained a lot of experience."

Smith said his team needs to play effective within its system to

find success.

"There's certain things you have to do to win and if you don't do them, it makes it that much more difficult, like timely scoring and playing well on the power play," he said. "Every moment is important and as a young team, there's been moments, sometimes periods, where we've lacked consistency and urgency. Once we start to do that, it will take us to a good place."

Hopefully, the New Year will bring better success for the Golden Griffins.

Canisius begins a four-game home stand starting with Bentley at 7:05 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and Connecticut at 7:05 p.m. on Jan. 11 and 12 at the Amherst Pepsi Center, 1615 Amherst Manor Drive.

"We want to appeal to all of youth hockey and the Pepsi Center provides a great location and an opportunity for us to get in front of a lot of people and showcase college hockey," said Smith.

There is some local flavor on the Canisius roster. Greg Brown and Vincent Amigone Jr. (Williamsville North) and Vincent Scarcella (St. Francis) played games at the Pepsi Center in high school in the Section VI Western New York Varsity Hockey Federation. Brown, a senior left winger, is Canisius' team captain. Amigone is a sophomore right winger. Scarcella is a forward as is Amherst resident, freshman Pat Kenney.

### Hockey roots

Dave Smith grew up in Arthur, Ontario, which he said when he was growing up had a population of 1,200.

A self-appointed "sports junkie", Smith started playing hockey at age 3, although he said by the time he got to high school, he played all kinds of sports, except soccer and football because there wasn't enough children to fill out a team.

He said he didn't make a conscientious decision to play hockey. It just kind of happened.

Growing up, he played youth hockey at the "C" level ("AAA" is the highest level of youth hockey).

"We didn't have a major or minor level," said Smith. "Because there wasn't enough kids to fill a major or minor team, we had five

or six kids from a minor team play on a team with five or six kids who could play major."

Smith went on to play junior hockey in Guelph, Elmira and Stratford in Ontario, Canada. After juniors, he played center for four years at Ohio State University. He finished his career with 140 points, ranking him 14th all-time at the school. In his senior year, he had 41 assists and 63 points and was named team MVP. He was a team captain in his junior year.

After graduating from Ohio State, Smith played six years of professional hockey, playing five full seasons in the now defunct International Hockey League with the Fort Wayne Komets, Detroit Vipers, Los Angeles Ice Dogs, Orlando Solar Bears, and San Antonio Dragons, and one year in the American Hockey League with the Binghamton Rangers. He also played briefly with the Dayton Bombers of the Eastern Coast Hockey League.

His best year statistic wise came with Binghamton, farm club of the New York Rangers, in 1994-95. In 77 games, he recorded 60 points (20 goals, 40 assists) and amassed 225 penalty minutes.

"It was awesome," said Smith of his playing days. "I played with so many good players (Peter Bondra, Michal Pivonka, Sergei Samsonov - Bondra and Pivonka played for NHL's Washington Capitals, Samsonov plays for the Montreal Canadiens). I look back as a fan. I don't look at myself as one of those guys."

He also played for Bruce Boudreau (NHL's Washington Capitals coach), Rick Dudley (former Buffalo Sabres coach, currently is Chicago Blackhawks assistant general manager) and John Van Boxmeer (former assistant coach with Sabres).

### Coaching break

Smith always thought about being a coach, even when he was a player.

"In college and junior hockey, I used to keep notes on drills and things that I liked and disliked about coaches," he said. "I always thought it would be something I would like to do. I liked the lifestyle and I had good memories from my college playing career."

Smith said he was prepared to go back and play for the Fort Wayne Komets when he got a call from the Miami of Ohio University hockey team asking if he would be interested in serving as an assistant coach.

"I thought it was a great opportunity to start a career in a good place in a good school with good people," said Smith.

Smith would spend the next seven years as an assistant coach



Amherst resident Dave Smith is trying to turn the Canisius College men's ice hockey team into a first class Division I program. Smith became the program's third coach on April 15, 2005.

with stops at Miami of Ohio, Bowling Green State University and Mercyhurst College.

In Smith's time with Mercyhurst, the team won two league championships and appeared in the NCAA Division I Tournament twice. In his seven years as an assistant, he recruited and coached 16 all-league award winners, four Players of the Year, two Hobey Baker Award Finalists, two Rookies of the Year and three Terry Flanagan Award Winners for Perseverance, according to his bio on the Canisius College Web site.

Smith was named Canisius' third coach in program history on April 15, 2005. He has enjoyed his time so far with the Golden Griffins.

"The administration has been great to work with," said Smith. "The school's commitment to academics as well as having an interest in athletics has been outstanding."

"Dave is a great communicator on campus and really is tireless in trying to figure out how we can help our program move forward," said Canisius College Athletics Director Bill Maher. "Dave brings reasonable questions to the table and works as hard as anybody to find solutions to them."

"He's very good at building relationships and getting to know people and that is a real asset for him," Maher added. "That helps when he is recruiting and working on campus to get things done."

Smith's biggest thrill as a coach at Canisius has been watching younger players mature into leaders on the campus and in the community.

He also coached the Western Region's men's scholastic hockey team to a gold medal at last summer's Empire State Games.

### Miscellaneous Smith info

The father of Smith's wife, Susan, is Gary Sabourin, who played 10 years in the NHL (1967-68 to 77-78 seasons) and was named to the NHL All-Star Game in 1970 and 1971.

Smith's daughter, Ellis, who was born 20 days before Wayne Gretzky (Smith's idol growing up) is a defenseman on the Squirt Major '97 hockey team in Amherst Youth Hockey. His other daughter, Kylie, plays Amherst Youth Basketball and Lou Gehrig softball.

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## North

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(Cam Sroda) and Matt Battista (Chris Marsack) but Dave Husnay and Chris Flynn scored goals for Whitesboro.

North outshot Whitesboro, 20-19.

The Spartans bounced back early against Clinton, also of Section III, outshooting them, 14-4 in the first period and leading 3-1.

The Spartans' Marc Kadish (Stephen

Pizzuto) scored 1:22 into the period. Sophomores Ian Moskal (Collin Schreiner, Kyle Agius) and Joe Johnson (Pizzutto) added their first goals at 5:51 and 4:14, respectively.

Senior Josh Liddle (Angelo) and Johnson (Pizzutto) scored in the second period and Angelo (Liddle, Mark Smith), Kadish (Johnson) and Liddle (empty-net goal)

tallied in the third.

North outshot Clinton, 39-25. Branden Komm, who also played against Whitesboro, tended net for the first two periods against Clinton. Parker Gahagen played the third period.

"I was happy with how we were able to bounce back," said Rosen. "The kids had a team meeting on Friday morning and

talked about what they needed to do. It was nice to see them go out and do it in the game."

North (10-2) plays Orchard Park at 9 p.m. on Thursday and Kenmore West at 3 p.m. on Saturday on the Amherst Pepsi Center Feature Rink. Both are Division I state qualifying games. The following Thursday, they have a showdown with St. Joe's.