Red Deer Rebels draft Macleod's Chase Nielson

FRANK MCTIGHE
GAZETTE EDITOR

Fort Macleod's Chase Nielson was chosen by the Red Deer Rebels in Thursday's Western Hockey League Prospects Draft.

The Rebels picked the 15-year-old goaltender in the third round of the draft, the 53rd overall choice.

"It was an amazing feeling knowing that I had made it," Chase said. "I was extremely exited that I was able to stay in Alberta and be drafted by an amazing team."

Chase was only the second goalie taken in the WHL draft behind Dylan Mingo of Kelowna, who went to Moose Jaw Warriors in round two.

Rebels goalie coach Ian Gordon was happy Chase was available in the third round.

"I thought Chase throughout the season was the best goalie in his league," Gordon said Saturday in an interview. "I thought he was super important to his team in every game he played."

"He gave his team a chance. Whether they won or lost he managed the score and he seemed to do it with a good attitude."

Chase received strong reviews from all the games watched in person by Rebels staff.

"Coaches that he played against all had very good things to say," Gordon added. "Any of the digging in we did on Chase, everybody had good things to say."

The Nielson family gathered at home Thursday to watch the prospects draft, with the anticipation building as names were called.

"As we got into the fifties my heart rate went up and I got a bit nervous," Chase admitted.

More than half the Western Hockey League teams had Chase fill out a questionnaire prior to the draft, and six teams called him, so he was aware there was interest.

"I was hoping to go fairly early in either the second or third round to an Alberta team," Chase said.

Chase was the only goaltender and one of 11 players drafted by the Rebels on Thursday.

Gordon and the Rebels have chosen a goalie early in each of the past three drafts in order to build depth.

"We try to get, in our opinion, the best goalie in the draft," said Gordon, who had the chance to get to know the young goalie in the days leading up to the Alberta Cup.

"He represented himself very well, carried himself very well," Gordon said. "I saw how he was over those three days on the ice, off the ice."

The Fort Macleod Minor Hockey product was the fourth player selected by the Rebels, behind St. Albert defenceman Nolan Wolitski seventh overall, Calgary forward Chase Turchak (30th) and St. Albert defenceman Owen Archer (32nd).



Photo contributed

The Red Deer Rebels picked Chase Nielson of Fort Macleod in the third round of the Western Hockey League Prospects Draft.

"The first call I received was from (Rebels goalie coach) Ian Gordon, who welcomed me to the team and said that they were happy to have me," Chase said.

"The second guy who reached out was Jaimie Novakoski, the director of player personnel, who also congratulated me on being picked and welcomed me to the team."

The Rebels finished ninth in the WHL's eastern conference and out of the playoffs with 26 wins, 34 losses, five overtime losses and two shootout losses.

The six foot, 170-pound Chase joined the Lethbridge Val Matteoti Golden Hawks for the 2023-'24 season, playing 17 games.

Chase recorded seven wins, eight losses and two ties with a 3.85 goals-against average and an .893 save percentage.

This past season in the Alberta Elite Hockey League's U15 AAA league, Chase played 24 games for the Golden Hawks.

Chase had a record of nine wins, 11 losses and three ties with a goals-against average of 3.67 and a .923 save percentage.

It was a tough year for the Golden Hawks, who finished in last place in the south division with nine wins, 20 losses, two overtime losses and three ties.



Photo contributed

Chase Nielson played last season for the Val Matteoti Golden Hawks in Lethbridge.

Chase also played with the South Gold in the 2025 Alberta Cup, recording two wins and a loss with a goals-against average of 3.71 and a .900 save percentage.

Chase will spend the summer working with Trevor Hardy and Tom O'Connor, both Fort Macleod products, at Hard Training in Lethbridge.

"I will be going to the gym in Lethbridge, eating a healthy diet, and getting as much ice time as possible," Chase said of preparing for the Rebels fall camp.

Chase can also look to Gordon and the Rebels as he continues his development.

"Chase now has us as a resource," Gordon said. "That's where we come in. He has us as an organization to lean on for advice, for development."

"It is our intention, in co-operation with the athlete, that he becomes a very good WHL goalie."

As he prepares to take the next step in his hockey career, Chase Nielson is thankful for the support he has received along the way.

"Most of my success has come from my parents and every single one of my past coaches. They all believed that I could do great things and they all supported me along my journey."







