

Santini spices up blue line brigade

It's easy to see why Steven Santini became a hockey player.

After all, when your father owns a rink and you have free reign to all the amenities, learning the game and all the camaraderie that goes with it pretty much takes care of itself.

That was the easy part. The challenging part is developing into an NHL-caliber defenceman, but to hear Santini talk about that notion, all he wants to do is play hockey.

"I guess I started to realize that I was a pretty good player when I was playing bantams," said Santini. "Scouts started showing up and I started to figure out what was happening. All I kept doing was going

"Knowing a couple guys who have played here will help with some of my nerves going to college, I'm sure," said Santini. "I won't be like some kids who go to college and don't know anyone, so I'll have that going for me."

Santini's father, Steve, owns the Brewster Ice Arena in Brewster, N.Y., and also coaches a youth team in the area. The younger Santini said being around his father, who also played college hockey at Maine, as a child helped mould him into who he is today.

"My dad was the one who instilled my competitive spirit," Santini said. "We talk a lot. He was my coach my whole life and it's nice to have him there to help

Santini Report Card

Size/Strength	A-
Skating	B+
Shot/Scoring ability	B-
Puckhandling	B+
Hockey Sense	A-
Competitiveness	A
Physical play	A-
Composure/Poise	B
Defence	A

just a more comfortable feeling."

It's when talk of the NHL draft comes up that he lets it go in one ear and out the other.

"I just focus on my game and that's it," said Santini. "The draft will happen and if I get drafted, it will be a great moment for my family and I. Every day, I just want to go to practice, work my tail off for two hours, get in a good lift and get ready for the next day. I've never been a big stats guy and all I worry about is playing my best."

In fact, Santini explained how it's not the overseas trips with the NTDP that have left him in a state of culture shock, but rather all the travel in the U.S.

"Our first trip to Moscow in 2011 was unbelievable," said Santini. "We saw the Red Square, the Kremlin, everything. That will be a cool story I can tell my grandkids about one day and that's something that hockey has given me. To see other cultures is something not everyone gets to experience.

"But really, playing in the United States Hockey League and going to places like Iowa and Indiana, it has shown me how diverse people are right here in our country."

Santini models his game after Toronto Maple Leafs' captain Dion Phaneuf and in comparing the two players, it's easy to see similarities. Santini has good size at 6-foot-1 and 210 pounds and has leadership qualities.

"Phaneuf is your typical Canadian, hard-nosed player," Santini said. "He's a solid defenceman and doesn't get beat a lot. That's something I pride myself on is my defensive zone play. I like to be physical and like to stop the 1-on-1s. I think I'm good at getting the puck up to the forwards and playing a pretty good transition game."

Odds are Santini will be able to transition from juniors to college to the pro game pretty well, too.

Steve Santini File

- ◆ **Ht/Wt:** 6-1/208
- ◆ **Position:** Defence
- ◆ **Shoots:** Right
- ◆ **Birthdate:** March 7, 1995
- ◆ **Team:** U.S. NTDP U-18
- ◆ **Scouting Report:** Strong, physical blue-liner who has outstanding four-way mobility and very good natural hockey sense. Controls play in his own end and is defensively aware with his head on a swivel. Strong in coverage and containment down low and will staple his man to the boards. Ties up men in front legally. Makes quick counter-strike passes in transition, and his outlets are crisp and on the tape. Offensive game and vision are just developing, but does have a heavy point shot.

to practice and playing my game. Then I got invited to the Select 15 camp and then to the 40-man camp for the U.S. NTDP and things started to happen. I've just been fortunate to have these opportunities. When I first had the chance to commit to the NTDP, I visited the program and learned what it was all about and it just seemed like the perfect fit for me. I want to get to the next level and the NTDP can help make that happen."

In late September, he played in the inaugural All-American Prospects Game in Buffalo and was one of the two best defencemen in the game. Santini will skate for Boston College next season after he finishes up with the NTDP, and actually committed to BC, the defending national champion, before signing with the NTDP.

"I had visited multiple schools, but once I saw the BC campus and met the coaches and saw the rink, I instantly imagined myself being an Eagle," said Santini, a 17-year-old native of Mahopac, N.Y.

Santini's NTDP teammate and fellow defenceman Scott Savage will join him on the BC campus next fall.

me through the junior and college process. Growing up, I was a rink rat and spent a lot of time at the rink watching my dad and watching bantam, midget and junior games. My mom [Sandra] has also been great, as well as my three sisters. They've all kept me humble and respectful.

"It's weird to think about how fast time flies and how much I have been through and how much I have in front of me. My dad coaches younger kids now and I just watch him and realize that those kids are where I once was. I truly appreciate where I've been, but am also looking forward to where I am going. It's pretty exciting."

Over the past two seasons with the NTDP, Santini, who skated with New York Apple Core of the Eastern Junior Hockey League prior to coming to Ann Arbor, said he has enjoyed every minute of representing the United States.

"This season has been an easier transition than last season," said Santini. "This year, I came in and you know the coaches and most of your teammates and it's