



FORMER WHL PLAYER KARSON KING  
OF THE STONEWALL JETS



# ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

BY SCOTT TAYLOR  
Photos by Duncan Hasker

**S**tonewall Jets captain Karson King would make a great poster boy for the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League.

After all, there was a time when King might have had a future as a professional hockey player. Back in 2019, he was selected in the sixth round (111th overall) by the Swift Current Broncos in the Western Hockey League's 15-year-old entry draft. He was a big scorer with the U15 AAA Interlake Lightning at the time and finished that season with 21 goals and 41 points in just 35 games. Like so many kids his age, he'd earned the right to give serious consideration to a hockey career.

Then, after the COVID season of 2020-21 shut almost everything down, he packed up and moved to Swift Current to try his hand at the WHL. During the 2022-23 season, he had 11 goals and 20 points in 50 games with the Broncos and at 18, he was certainly good enough to be

a regular in the "best junior hockey league in the world."

But King had a problem. He was too self-aware. He knew exactly how good he was and while he loved the game, he had become cognisant of the fact that maybe the National Hockey League was not in his future.

"I was being realistic with myself," King said recently. "I was hemming and hawing about me and the coach and how that, sometimes, we didn't see eye to eye. I guess I felt a little behind, too."

"I just came to the realization that there wasn't much more of a future for me going down the hockey path, so I guess I kind of wanted to come home and just work and get an education. I was me just being a little more realistic with myself."

"I wouldn't say I regret my decision by any means. In fact, I was pretty happy with the decision. I'm still playing competitive hockey here, so I'm getting the same thing out of it. Probably more. I'm also working and

moving up in my career path. I'm in refrigeration and I've finished my Level 1 and hopefully soon, I'm going to start Level 2."

Make no mistake, King, Stonewall's 6-foot-1, 210-pound high-scoring power forward is a very good hockey player. In fact, his coach, Pat Power, thinks he's one of the best players in the MMJHL. Power believes that King could definitely play in the WHL right now.

However, at 18, getting a good start in life was much more important. That's why King abandoned his NHL dream after the 2023 season and came home to join his buddies on a team that just might challenge for the MMJHL championship this season.

"Karson is definitely the leader of our team and that's why he was named captain this year," said Coach Power. "He's a guy who didn't wear a letter the last couple of years, but that being said, he's always led by example. And he leaves it all out there."



“He’s 21, an overage player in the league this year, and having that maturity definitely makes a big difference for us. He competes every night and that’s all, as a coach, I could ever ask for. He’s also very smart on the ice. He sees the ice well. In my opinion, probably has an NHL shot.”

Interestingly, Power didn’t bring King to Stonewall. King was already there when Power joined the team as head coach. However, when Power was a scout for the Manitoba Junior Hockey League’s OCN (now Northern Manitoba) Blizzard, he convinced the brass at OCN to select King in the first round (seventh overall) in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League’s 2019 entry draft.

“Yeah, I actually drafted him to OCN before he took off to the Western League,” Power said. “He went to the Western League at a time when COVID was about to kick in, so all that crap with COVID kind of made a mess of everything and really set back a lot of good young players. Eventually I moved on from OCN to help out down south here and we’ve found our way back together here in Stonewall the last couple of years. I’m super happy to have him.”

“He’s a really good player and we’ve had guys like him

in this league over the years. Recently there was Rory Neill with St. James who had played in Calgary and came back to play with his friends. Karson’s in that group.”

“And by coming home and playing in the MMJHL, he’s got an opportunity to do all the work necessary to complete his trade. The schedule works for him. That’s one of the great things about our league. Once you come to the realization that you’re not going to play in the National Hockey League, there’s no sense riding the bus all day. I think that was one of those things for Karson, right? He was kind of finished in Swift. He wasn’t feeling it. He came back and kind of dabbled in Portage a little bit (he played six games with the Terriers in 2022-23), but then just realized that there are bigger things in life. He wanted to come home and play with his friends and get ready for the future.”

King grew up in Warren and calls himself “a farm boy.”

“I grew up on a farm,” he said. “We aren’t that big; it’s more like a hobby farm now. We were bigger, but we couldn’t really keep up with the bigger operation, so we just have hay right now.”

King played all of his minor hockey in Warren and then jumped to U15 AAA in Interlake when he was 13.

“I probably started skating when I was around four years old, and just fell in love with it,” he recalled. “I played all my minor hockey in Warren, and at a pretty young age people noticed that I was doing a lot better than expected, so my mom and dad figured I should put a little more time into it, so I played a lot of spring hockey growing up. I played Boys of the North with Larry Bumstead coaching over at the Iceplex (hockey for all centre).”

“Then I started playing AAA with Interlake and everything fell into place. I got drafted there to Swift Current and I was lucky enough to play a full season as a 16-year-old. Then I just decided to come home and play in Stonewall with a few of my buddies.”

This season, he’s playing on a team with his buddies that could challenge the powerhouses in St. Boniface, Transcona, Charleswood and River East for a shot at the Jack McKenzie Trophy.

“I think we’re all pretty confident with this team,” King said. “We’ve got a lot of 21-year-olds, and a good core of local guys too, which helps. It’s nice to have local players playing, and the city guys help too.”

“I think the coaches have done a good job building the team over the last couple of years. It’s just a matter of getting all the pieces to fit.”

It’s rather interesting that two of the team’s stars are both 21-year-olds from the area – Peyton Bateman from Stonewall and Karson King from Warren.

“We grew up playing together,” said King. “Ever since minor hockey we’ve had a connection. We generally play on the same line. We’ll bounce around with other guys, but for the most part, it’s me and him with Gavin Holod as the third member of the line. It’s kind of a top-heavy line so we’re putting up a lot of points.”

No kidding. Through the Jets first 16 games, Holod had six goals and 20 points to lead the team, Bateman had nine goals and 19 points (second), and King had eight goals and 17 points (third).

Coach Power certainly believes in his team.

“I think our team’s good,” Power said. “I think this year our depth is definitely something that we haven’t maybe had the last few years. I looked on the roster, and we’ve got guys contributing from that so-called first line right down to our fourth line, per se. We have guys that can play in all situations. I think that’s definitely a huge improvement compared to the years before.”

When King isn’t playing hockey or working, you can usually find him with a fishing pole or hunting rifle.

“I enjoy being outdoors,” said King, who plans to play senior hockey with his hometown Warren Mercurys next season. “Lots of hunting, fishing, all that kind of stuff. We usually go on a moose hunting trip every year or two. The MMJHL is such a great league for things like that. You can work or go to school and have time to do the things you love to do and still play competitive hockey with your friends. And the league’s gotten way better over the last few years, I find. For me, this is the place to be.”

# MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



The MMJHL is a 10-team junior hockey league operating in and around the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The intent of the league is to provide a program for talented and competitive hockey players to continue their education or begin their careers. Players aged 17 to 21 years compete annually for the Jack McKenzie (league founder) Trophy.

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