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BREAKAWAY

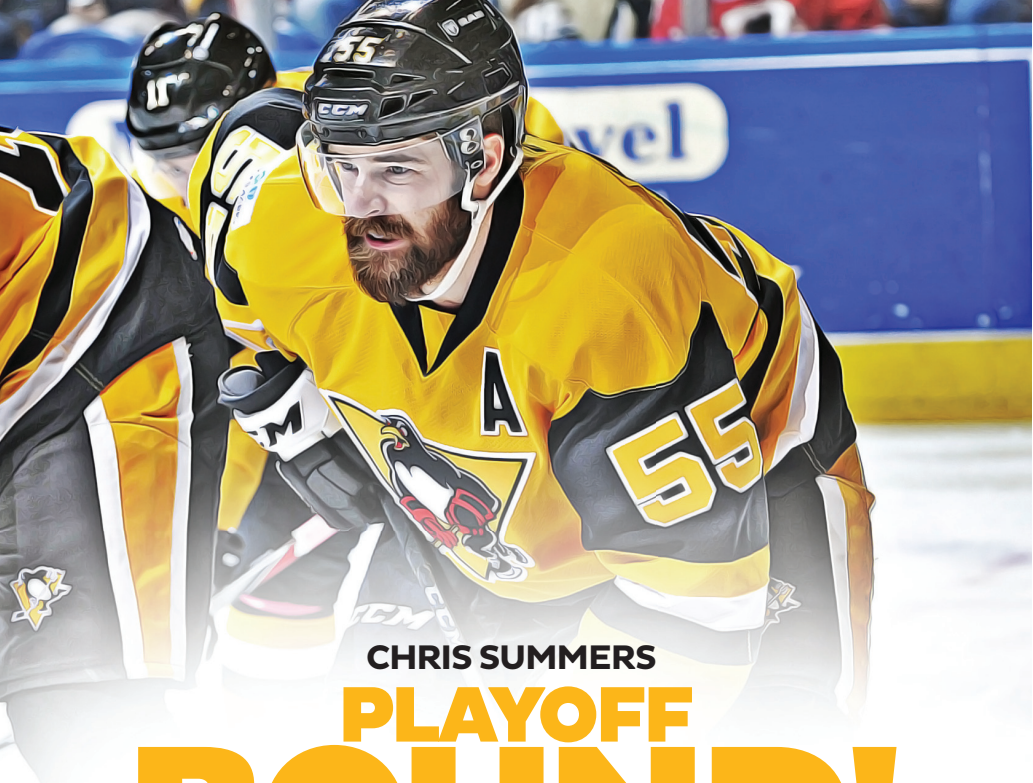
ISSUE 21 | VOLUME 14 | WBSPENGUINS.COM



WBS PENGUINS

SEASON RETROSPECTIVE





CHRIS SUMMERS
PLAYOFF
BOUND!

BY: JONATHAN KLIMENT

As the season winds down, eyes in the stands and on the bench begin scoreboard watching. Every day there is a new preview section on the league website, and it is as if there is a newly rejuvenated spirit throughout arenas across the American Hockey League.

It's playoff time.

It is a favorite time of year for both fan and player alike, as murmurs of "this is our year" rumble through the halls of the arenas of contending teams. Fans in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton have become accustomed to cheering on their team in the spring. The Penguins have been a staple of the playoffs since 2002-03,

and in every year but two, this team has played two rounds of postseason hockey. It is a luxury that not everyone experiences. Just ask Chris Summers.

Despite an extensive junior and collegiate résumé, Summers has only three games of playoff experience as a pro. Those three contests came in 2013 with the Portland Pirates when they were swept out of the first round against Syracuse. Despite the small sample size, the playoff atmosphere left an impact on the veteran defenseman.

"Things change, they change in every aspect of the game," Summers said. "Every shift is do or die."

During his time in the professional ranks, Summers has played for the Phoenix Coyotes, San Antonio Rampage, Portland Pirates, Hartford Wolf Pack and New York Rangers. This past offseason, the potential for postseason hockey was a point of emphasis for him while exploring free agency. When his contract expired, he wasted little time and signed with the Penguins.

“One of the biggest things I was excited about at the beginning of the season coming into this year was knowing that this team in particular has had success for many years, and to be able to be a part of that is very exciting,” Summers said about his decision to join the Penguins.

Success may be an understatement as it concerns Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins. Including three runs to the Calder Cup Final in 2000, 2004, and again in 2008, Wilkes-Barre/Scranton continually plays a major role in the AHL postseason. Sixteen consecutive appearances in the Calder Cup Playoffs is the AHL’s active record, and the Penguins had made it to the second round six straight seasons. That was, until last year, which was the first playoff run in a long time in which that they didn’t advance past the first series.

“(Last season) was a shock to everybody,” Summers said. “Playing against Wilkes-Barre last year, I thought this was a team going to be contending in the finals. Talking to the guys that were here for that last year, they were just as surprised, too. But I think that’s good for us. I think that gives you that hunger, an emptiness in your stomach that you want to try and satisfy.”

“One of the biggest things I was excited about at the beginning of the season coming into this year was knowing that this team in particular has had success for many years” — **#55**

As Summers finally gets the chance to satiate his playoff appetite, he will have to continue to be not only a solid defenseman, but also a leader for the Penguins. Wearing a letter on the front of your chest comes with a higher set of expectations for the person wearing it.

“Guys are looking up to the older guys, and there’s things they see that you may not even recognize that they are noticing,” Summers said of his leadership role. “Making sure you’re doing the right thing at all times is probably the most important thing. That goes for the whole year, but especially playoffs.”

Both Chris Summers and the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins are seeking firsts in these playoffs. For one, a victory. The other, a championship. There are a lot of things that contribute to a group’s long playoff run, but one of the most important things to consider going into the 2018 Calder Cup Playoffs, according to Summers, is depth.

“It’s gonna be key, and that’s out strength as a group,” he said. “There’s certainly enough bodies here right now, enough able bodies to make a good run.”