



FROM LEFT, ACOYEN FEHR,
HAIDEN FRIESEN AND
COACH CHRIS UNGER

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy of James Carey Lauder,
the Thunder Bay North Stars and
Manitoba AAA U18

COMING HOME

Sometimes the best move in hockey is the one that takes you right back where you started. Acoyen Fehr and Haiden Friesen left southern Manitoba in search of Junior 'A' hockey, bigger opportunities and the experience that comes with packing a bag and chasing the game away from home. Now they're back. And for the Pembina Valley Twisters, their

return might be every bit as important as their departure was to their development.

Fehr, 20, and Friesen, 19, have joined the Twisters of the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League after spending last season in the Superior International Junior Hockey League. They return as older, more experienced players who have already demonstrated they can perform at a higher level.

For Twisters head coach Chris Unger, landing both is a significant addition to a club looking to continue its climb.

"Them deciding to come back to play for us has really improved the overall outlook for the team amongst the players," Unger said. "I can sense the excitement around the season, just because we have managed to land some quality guys from higher levels that have decided to

come back and play for us. "They will make us much more competitive."

Fehr certainly arrives with an impressive resume. The Morden product had 15 goals and 40 points in 38 regular-season games with the Thunder Bay North Stars last season, then added three goals and 13 points in 16 playoff games as the North Stars captured the SIJHL championship.

He went all the way to the Centennial Cup before deciding it was time for a change. Or, more accurately, time to come home.

"I just felt like it was the right time," Fehr said. "I had my fun out there, and I was just ready to come home, go to school and play a little closer to home."

Fehr has enrolled at the University of Manitoba, where he is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree and is considering a future as a French teacher.

Meanwhile, he can continue playing high-level junior hockey with some very familiar faces.

Fehr grew up playing minor hockey in Morden, beginning almost as soon as he could walk. He later played high school hockey before moving

into AAA and eventually Junior A. His hockey journey took him through Virden before he was traded to Thunder Bay. Now, with the Twisters, he has been reunited with old friends and former teammates including Josh Guilford and Darby Olsen.

"A little blast from the past," Fehr said. "It's kind of fun coming home to play with your buddies."

Coach Unger believes Fehr will bring considerably more than offence.

"He's come in with just a very, very positive attitude and wanting to bring a positive air to the team," the coach said. "I really see him as being a leader both on the ice and off the ice."

Friesen's road home was a little different. The 19-year-old spent last season with the Dryden Ice Dogs, producing six goals and 15 points in 41 games during his first Junior A campaign. His original objective this fall was to make the Winkler Flyers.

Unger encouraged him to pursue it.

"We want these kids to play at the highest level they possibly can," Unger said.

Friesen remained with Winkler deep into camp before being released. He could have returned to Dryden, and Unger said there was also interest from another Junior A team in Manitoba. Instead, Friesen finished camp with Pembina Valley. Then he stayed.

"I kind of weighed out my options and thought this was best for me," Friesen said. "I could do more things at once."

For Friesen, that means hockey and life on the family farm northeast of Winkler, where the family raises approximately 500 cattle and also grows grain.

"I'm working right now full time on the farm," he said, adding that furthering

his education is also something he is considering. And unlike Fehr, who has two seasons of MMJHL eligibility remaining, Friesen could be a Twister for three years.

"I'm hoping we can stick with a good group of guys for all those years and just continue to get better every single year," he said.

He already knows many of his new teammates, having either played with them or against them while growing up in southern Manitoba. And Unger expects him to make an immediate impact.

"He's a goal scorer," Unger said. "We anticipate that he'll really lead our charge on the power play, even strength, when it comes to goal scoring."

That is precisely what makes the arrival of Fehr and Friesen so intriguing.

Junior hockey is usually built around players leaving home - leaving family, friends and familiar rinks in pursuit of another level. These two did that. They travelled the Junior 'A' road, lived away from home and discovered

what hockey looked like outside the Valley. Fehr even returned with a championship.

Now they have chosen to bring all that experience back with them.

They can attend university, work on the family farm, reconnect with old teammates and still play competitive junior hockey. And for the Pembina Valley Twisters, two young men coming home could help take the entire team to a new place.



HAIDEN FRIESEN

ACOYEN FEHR

THREE-TIME MMJHL CHAMPION PEMBINA VALLEY TWISTERS

ARE PROUD TO BE A PART OF THE
MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



DARBY OLSON

JOSH GUILFORD

ETHAN WILDE



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