

King City's Pietrangelo sees Stanley Cup in his future

By Jake Courtepatte

When Patrik Berglund was traded from the NHL's St. Louis Blues to the Buffalo Sabres on the first day of free agency, Alex Pietrangelo gained another title outside of his two-year tenure as captain.

The 28-year-old from King City became the longest-tenured member of the Blues organization, responsible for playing the veteran presence in his eighth year with the club.

Yet the constant carousel in the dressing room, always a promising roster that comes up short in the post-season, does not faze the captain.

Rather, he believes the organization is now heading in the direction of the ultimate goal: to raise his first Stanley Cup.

"It's an exciting time to be a Blue," said the big, talented blueliner. "We've had some disappointing finishes in the last few seasons, with a good group of players, but I think (Blues general manager Doug Armstrong) and the team are pushing us in the right direction, filling the gaps that have been weak spots in our lineup."

Heading the other way in the Berglund trade is centreman Ryan O'Reilly, a staple down the middle of the Sabres lineup for the past three seasons.

Dumping the 31-year-old Berglund for the 27-year-old O'Reilly, Pietrangelo sees the trade as just one more piece to the puzzle for a team riding a wave of young talent.

"There's like an extra spark in the room when you bring in a player of that capacity."

Pietrangelo finished the 2017-18 season with a total of 39 points, tied for his second most productive season yet on the scoresheet, and 15 goals, a career-high.

He gave credit to his frequent defensive linemate, 25-year-old Joel Edmundson, and fellow power play specialist Colton Parayko for his upswing on offence.

"These guys, they know how to finish a play or set up a play," said Pietrangelo. "I know I can just play my game, confidently, and the puck will usually end up in the right spot."

Still, the Blues fell quite short of their Stanley Cup hopes in the 2017-18 season, failing to qualify for the playoffs for the first time since 2011, despite a 94-point season.

For Pietrangelo, the sting remains throughout the summer, when he spends much of his time back at the family home in King.

"You've got to try to use the last season to your advantage, try to get some extra training in," said Pietrangelo. "Heal all the wounds, and get ready for the next one."

Pietrangelo was forced to miss a large portion of the season himself due to a lower-body injury, and the Blues season was sent into turmoil after losing a number of ailing players late in the season.

Though he admitted the injury bug was the most difficult part of his captaincy last season, to Pietrangelo, it cannot be used as an excuse at the professional level.

"When you lose a handful of guys, everyone has to start taking on new roles," said Pietrangelo. "I noticed guys really going out of their comfort zones to fill those gaps during key times last season, and I think with a little more experience and with a couple new faces we'll be heading into next season looking pretty strong."

Pietrangelo was the Blues nomination for the King Clancy Award, handed out in June for those who make humanitarian contributions to their community, for his work with the St. Louis Special Hockey program.