



College Hockey:

Won't Take No For An Answer

For BU's Gilroy, Perseverance Pays Off

by **Mike Scandura**/Special to USCHO

Feb. 21 — Frustrating.

Discouraging.

Demeaning.

Take your pick but each of the above adjectives is applicable when describing what Boston University defenseman Matt Gilroy experienced during his senior year at St. Mary's High School in Manhasset, N.Y.

Gilroy captained the Gaels as a junior and a senior and was a key player on two state championship teams.

He even was voted St. Mary's Athlete of the Year as a senior due in part to his proficiency at lacrosse. But college hockey coaches weren't exactly inundating him with text messages.

To be precise, the number of schools that expressed a serious interest in Gilroy was virtually zero.

"There weren't many," said Gilroy who was the only — repeat, only — player in the country to earn All-America honors each of the last two seasons (Second Team as a sophomore and First Team as a junior).

Gilroy then emulated a salesperson and started cold-calling coaches.

"I was asking to go places and asking for someone to take me," said Gilroy, who also was a Hockey East First-Team All-Star as a sophomore and a junior. "It was frustrating. I was asking 'Why weren't people looking at me?'"

"I believed in myself but nobody gave me a chance."

A lesser person might have thrown in the proverbial towel. But, eventually, BU coach Jack Parker "allowed" Gilroy to try and make the Terriers as a walk-on in the fall of 2005.

"Coach Parker opened the door and gave me a shot," said Gilroy. "If it wasn't for him, I don't know where I would have ended up."

"Nowhere" might have been the answer to that question. But trying to make a team the caliber of BU as a walk-on can be the hockey equivalent of the distance between the Earth and the moon.

"There wasn't a guarantee at all of a scholarship," said Gilroy. "(Coach Parker) said 'You can come here and be a practice player and we'll see what happens.' So I worked the hardest I've ever worked that summer.

"I knew the tradition of college hockey in Boston and the atmosphere and that's where I wanted to be. I'm grateful



Matt Gilroy has been an All-American the last two seasons, a singular honor for this key member of Boston University's 2008-09 push (photo: Melissa Wade).

that my parents (Peggy Ann and Frank Gilroy) worked their butts off all their lives so I could afford to come here.”

Good point, considering Boston University isn't the least expensive school to attend. But the rest, as the saying goes, is history even though Gilroy in his wildest dreams never envisioned the level of success he would attain — primarily because he had set more modest goals.

“I never thought about it,” he said. “I just wanted to break into the lineup and play college hockey and be part of something.”

Part of something, indeed.

Given how much he improved and his age (he played for the Walpole Junior Stars of the Eastern Junior Hockey League after graduating from St. Mary's), Gilroy last year received the type of attention from NHL teams that he didn't receive from colleges.

Because he would have been a free agent, 23 teams made him an offer.

In fact, even Parker told him to take one and run with it.

But Gilroy said “No” 23 times.

Go figure.

“We went through it all with coach and my family and coach told me to go,” recalled Gilroy. “I said ‘I don't think so.’ I thought it would be better for me to come back to school. My (younger) brother (Kevin) was coming (he's a freshman forward this season). I never got a chance to play with him on a team so this was going to be the first time we came together. To do it at a school like BU, with a great program, made it worth coming back.

“Plus, I was going to be a captain. I wanted to get my diploma. And you only get four years (of college). It means a lot for my classmates and me. Hopefully, we'll finish with a good run.”

Being named a BU co-captain along with John McCarthy is a singular honor — one that carries more cachet than being named a captain of, oh, East Podunk Tech.

“When you get picked by people you work with every day in practice ... they look to you as a leader so it makes you work harder because they rely on you,” said Gilroy. “To be named a captain, you get put on that list with guys like Chris Drury, Jay Pandolfo and Mike Eruzione and it's very rewarding.

“It's nice to get the respect of my teammates and my coaches. It's pretty special.”

“Special” also is the word to use when describing the number 97 Gilroy wears on his uniform.

It's in honor of a younger brother, Tim, who was killed in a bicycle accident as a child.

“I made a promise to my mom when my brother passed away that I would wear his number as long as I played,” explained Gilroy. “It's something special that I get to wear every night and I get to honor my brother.”

Parker initially declined Gilroy's request to wear 97. But when he was told why, he acquiesced.

“It meant a lot to me,” Gilroy said of Parker's decision.

What Gilroy means to the Terriers isn't necessarily quantified by statistics (even though his plus-minus ratios have been off the charts: plus-21 as a freshman, plus-18 as a sophomore and plus-17 as a junior).

“I just come every night and play hard and try to lead every night,” he said. “I want to win every night. Hopefully, when people watch me that's what they see.

“It doesn't matter about my goals or points or ice time. What matters is that you compete. You want to be known as a competitor.”

Considering what Gilroy went through just to get a skate in the door at BU, who's to say otherwise? ■

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ScoobyDoo wrote on February 23, 2009 at 01:07 pm CT:

I agree. Great story.

PCM wrote on *February 23, 2009 at 11:54 am CT*:

Great story. It illustrates what college hockey is all about.

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