

# Hot stick for Burgoyne

*Hamilton defenceman is tearing up the net for CHL's Oklahoma City*

The drill wasn't anything close to what you'd call intricate or complicated.

In fact, it was so repetitive it bordered on boring after a while. Yet five days a week throughout much of the summer he faithfully perfected it.

Move from the point to the slot. Receive a pass. Corral the puck and unleash a laser beam. Always to the same place on the net. Or more accurately, places. Plural.

"I have a couple go-to spots," Mike Burgoyne says.

Two in particular. Low on the blocker side is Option 1. High over the glove is Option 1A. Either works for him as long as the puck hits net.

Which it is these days. A lot.

The 26-year-old Hamiltonian is well on his way to leading his Central Hockey League Oklahoma City Blazers in scoring for the second-consecutive season. This despite being a defenceman.

Fifteen games into the young season, the league's top-scoring rearguard already has 19 points including eight goals.

That puts him on pace for 34 goals which would obliterate last year's leader in that category, who had 21.

Last year's champ being, of course, Burgoyne.

"Things are going pretty good. That's for sure," the Sherwood Secondary and Hamilton Kilty B's grad says.

"This year they're just going in when I'm in close."

No kidding. After starting the season with goals in his first five games, he hasn't gone more than two contests without adding to his total. Only four times this year has he been held off the scoresheet altogether.



**Scott RADLEY**

And even when he's not scoring, he's causing problems for the other teams' goalies, like in his last game in which he pumped seven shots on net.

But it's the goals that are drawing so much attention.

The secret — and what he spent so much of his summertime working on when he wasn't operating hockey camps in the area — was refining his ability to get that shot away without even looking at the target. Like a free-throw shooter who can find twine with his eyes closed or a knife thrower who can pop balloons without impaling his lovely female assistant all while blindfolded, it was about building muscle memory and visualization. Without the visual part.

Plenty of time on the top power play unit helps build up the stats for sure. But he's had to adjust to make this hot start happen. Because like any good scorer, other teams quickly pick up on his tricks.

Last year — when he was a league all-star — many of his goals came on howitzers from the blueline. A couple feet off the ice and on net.

Really simple stuff.

Trouble is, within a couple games this year he had a winger on top of him constantly, taking away his chance to unload. So to find room to shoot, he had to move.

That brought him to the slot. And made all that off-season work without a goalie in the net



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**IN CLOSE.** Hamilton native Mike Burgoyne is on pace to break his own scoring record this season in Oklahoma City.

worthwhile.

"Sometimes you don't even see the goalie anymore," he says.

Add it all up and you've got the makings of a great situation. Despite what many around here surely think, Oklahoma City is a good hockey market. The massive arena in which the Blazers play is opulent and National Hockey

League-ready. The enthusiastic and noisy crowds they draw are about double the size the Bulldogs pull in and regularly fill the lower bowl that holds more than 8,000. The travel isn't bad, with most of the league located in and around Texas. And the locals treat the players like heroes.

"You're a big deal here," he says.

Especially a big — 6-foot-2 and 200 pounds — occasionally combative, rushing defenceman with a small-man's hands and a knack for filling the net.

That kind of guy would be a big deal anywhere.

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