



- Home
- News Collector
- Consent to Treat Form



## COLE CAUFIELD NAMED JIM JOHANNSON COLLEGE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

By Heather Rule, 06/10/21, 8:59AM MDT

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### **Wisconsin Badger finished the college season with 30 goals, 52 points in 31 games**

Cole Caufield suited up for his third NHL playoff game with his Montreal Canadiens facing elimination down 3-1 in the opening-round series. He then found himself on the ice in a Game 5 overtime with teammate Nick Suzuki.

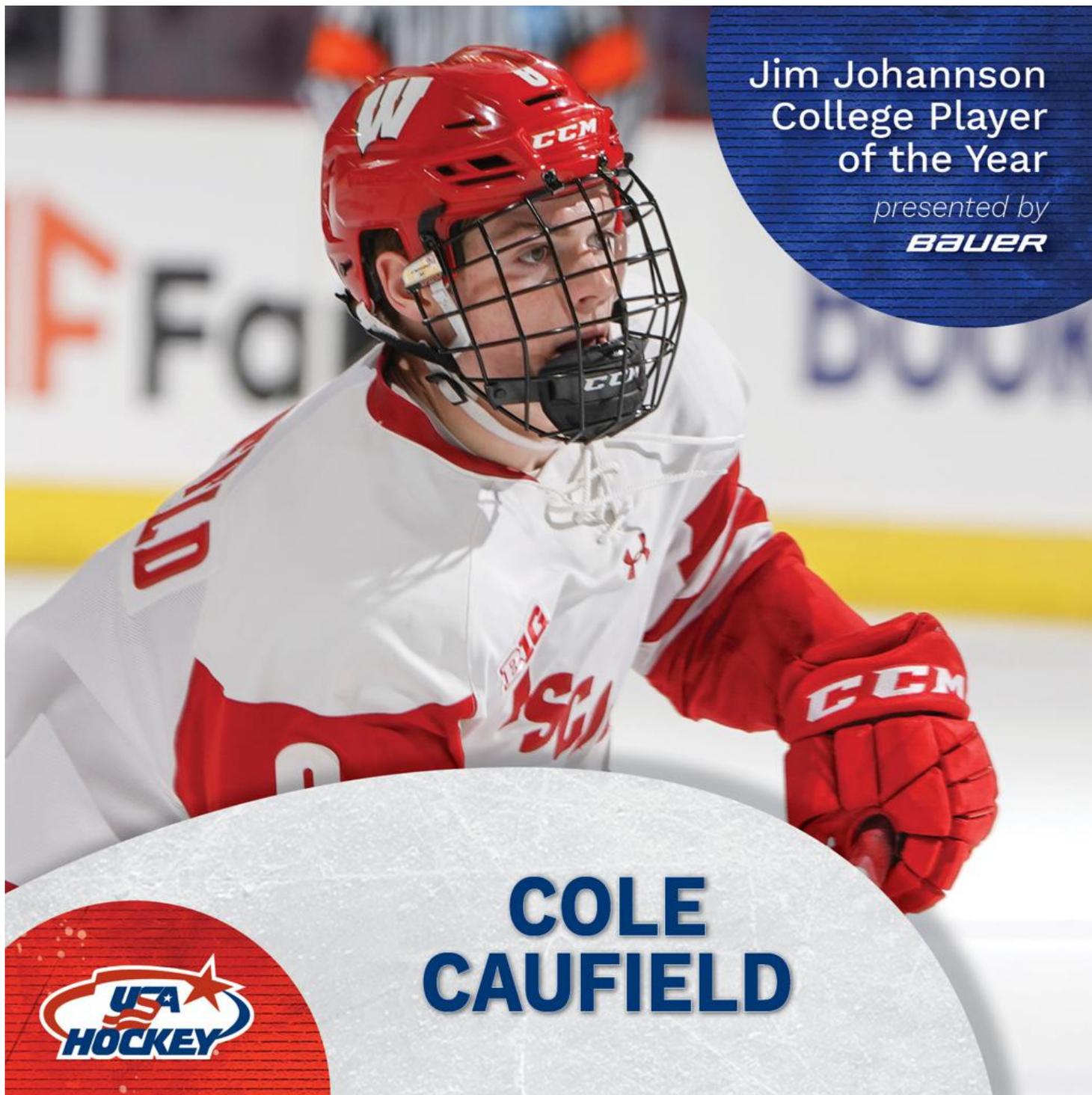
The two passed the puck back and forth, rushing the goal all alone. Caufield had a chance for the shot in tight, but instead, he passed the puck one more time, leaving Suzuki to score the winner 59 seconds into overtime.

If this was a year ago in Caufield's hockey journey, University of Wisconsin men's hockey coach Tony Granato said he could see Caufield taking the shot himself with a "gimme the puck, I'll put it in the net" goal scorer's mentality.

"I think he's starting to go above and beyond just being a goal scorer," Granato said. "That goes along with the theme of figuring out how to be a better teammate, figuring out how to help [his] teammates become better."

For all that and more, Caufield was named the 2021 Jim Johannson College Player of the Year, presented by Bauer. The honor means a lot to Caufield, his family and his Wisconsin hockey program, he said.

"I think last year was big for our program as a whole, just getting back on the map," Caufield said. "I'm really appreciative and honored to have received this award."



The award recognizes the accomplishments of the top American-born player in NCAA Division I men's college hockey. In 2019, the award was renamed to honor the late Johannson, who was a USA Hockey executive for two decades and a college hockey player for the University of Wisconsin.

It's not hard to see why the 20-year-old winger is this year's winner of the award. Caufield was the best in college hockey with 30 goals and 52 points in 31 games in his sophomore season with Wisconsin.

Caufield also finished as Big Ten scoring champion for the second year in a row, was unanimously selected as the Big Ten Player of the Year (24 goals and 43 points in 24 Big Ten games this season) and won the Hobey Baker Memorial Award as the best player in NCAA men's hockey.

Beyond the stats, it's Caufield's passion for the game and leadership at such a young age that stand out to Granato. Being the best player in college hockey this season, as a sophomore, is hard to do, Granato said. Especially when opponents tried to shut him down.

"He bounced back whenever he got knocked down," Granato said.

"Five major penalties this year, he drew. And every time they took the major penalty, they regretted it. Because he found a way to go score the goal or make the play."

Individually, this college hockey season was one where Caufield saw himself take a big step forward.

"I think my ability to drive the play and create things off the rush, give my teammates more time to make creative plays, I think that's what kind of made our team click is stuff like that," Caufield said.

He also gained confidence, which stemmed from a coaching staff that believed in him, too. Caufield recalled a conversation with Granato telling him to "stick with it" and be a leader for his teammates by saying the right things in the locker room, leading by example or finding a way to get the next goal.

"I think that guys look to me when things weren't going the right way in the game," Caufield said.

## Acceptance Remarks

Cole Caufield | 2021 Jim Johannson College ...

"I think maybe my freshman year, I would've shied away or got frustrated or something like that if things weren't happening."

That same development was evident at the 2021 IIHF World Junior Championship, where Caufield served as an alternate captain for Team USA on the way to winning a gold medal. In seven games, Caufield tallied two goals and three assists.

For Granato, it was a pleasure to watch Caufield this season. Anything discussed last summer in regard to areas where Caufield needed to grow or improve, he went above and beyond with his commitment, according to Granato.

"His performance on the ice is one thing, but his ability to lead and his ability to help his teammates in tough times ... he was sensational," Granato said.

Wisconsin finished the season 20-10-1, seeing its season end with a 6-3 loss to Bemidji State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. But Caufield recalls the final regular-season game, a 2-1 victory over Michigan State to capture the Big Ten regular-season championship. Down 1-0, Caufield scored a power-play goal in the final minute of the second period to tie it before adding the winner in the third.

"We came together as a group and really understood what we had to do, and I think that's the biggest moment for me and our team is that we came back under the circumstances that we needed to, to do what we wanted," Caufield said.

If there was ever a big moment, Caufield found a way to get the job done, Granato said.

"And that's what he did all year," Granato said. "And that's why he's having success in the NHL, because of the time, the work, the effort that he put in this year to be ready for that opportunity."

While Caufield's still riding the Stanley Cup Playoffs momentum with the Canadiens, he already had memorable moments in his professional career. He scored four points in two games in his first professional games in the AHL. The 2019 first-round (15th overall) pick of the Canadiens officially signed with the club March 29, 2021, making his NHL debut April 26.

His first two NHL goals were overtime-winners, scoring four goals and five points in 10 games. He made his playoff debut in Game 3 of the first round against Toronto. He's always soaked up a lot of information and learned a lot in the playoffs.

"Every game's not going to go your way," Caufield said, the day before the Game 5 victory. "It's a seven-game series. You're never out until you're out."

*Story from Red Line Editorial, Inc.*



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