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## HEJDUK BROTHERS PLAYING FIRST YEAR OF HOCKEY APART FROM EACH OTHER

By Heather Rule, SportsEngine, 11/24/20, 2:45PM MST

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Hub exclusive: Marek is playing this season with the National Team Development Program in Michigan while David continues skating with the Colorado Thunderbirds.



Marek Hejduk (pictured) is playing in Michigan with the NTDP's Under-17 team this year, separate from his twin brother David, who remains in Colorado playing with the Thunderbirds. Photo courtesy of Rena Laverty/USA Hockey's NTDP

Twins brothers Marek and David Hejduk knew that sooner or later their hockey careers would split them up.

"It's just the reality of hockey," Marek said. "It's different, but hopefully I can play with my brother sometime soon again."

The 16-year-old brothers grew up playing hockey together in Colorado, the sons of retired Colorado Avalanche forward Milan Hejduk, who played 1,020 NHL games in an Avs sweater from 1998-2013. Marek and David both skated the past few years with the Colorado Thunderbirds, but this year Marek is in Plymouth, Michigan, after being selected to the USA Hockey National Team Development Program's (NTDP) Under-17 team, while David remains in state with the Thunderbirds.

"It took some time to adjust to, but after that it has kind of become natural," David said of playing without his brother.

It's different this year, competing for separate teams states apart. They both love playing hockey with each other, and with their college commitment they'll have an eventual reunion as David and Marek each committed to Harvard over the summer.

It's a good feeling to have made that commitment, Marek said.

"I can't wait to go to Harvard and play there," Marek said. "Hopefully with my brother, too."

Marek added that he's always been attracted to Harvard, a sentiment David echoed — given the school is great both academically and hockey-wise. Marek said he'll most likely study business though is still not decided. David is looking to study business or economics.

It's nice that they're committed to the same school, said Marek, even if that wasn't the plan from the get-go.

"Yeah, it kind of worked out that way, but it worked out for the better," Marek said.

"I'm super grateful to have this opportunity to play for USA. It's the best program. You can get drastically better every single day. I go to the rink every day wanting to get better."

**--Marek Hejduk said of playing for the NTDP U17 team**

They both skated on the 13U, 14U, 15U Thunderbirds teams over the past few years. David, a defenseman, recorded three goals and eight assists in 20 games in 2019-20 on the 15U squad. He now plays for the 16U team.

Marek, a forward, tallied seven goals and 16 points in 13 games with the 14U team in 2018-19, and put up eight goals and eight assists in 17 games the next year for the 15U squad. He spent all of those seasons playing with his brother and his friends, learning and growing as a player along the way.

"I absolutely loved playing for the Colorado Thunderbirds," Marek said. "I thought it was amazing."

Marek's had a fun season with the NTDP team so far, complete with hard practices and good workouts. He registered four goals and seven points in his first seven games of the season. The pace and speed of the game are much faster this year with U17 than in his past seasons with the Thunderbirds. His teammates and opponents are all very skilled and competitive as well.

"It's a great way to get better, to play those kinds of games," Marek said. "I'm super grateful to have this opportunity to play for USA. It's the best program. You can get drastically better every single day. I go to the rink every day wanting to get better."

Playing for the national team, he has the resources to do that, he added.

Marek said he's learned a little bit of everything when it comes to his game and has especially improved strength-wise. He hopes to continue to improve throughout the season to round out his game. The forward describes himself as a fast, smart, playmaker who's skilled and competitive.



David Hejduk (pictured) and his brother are in separate states this fall but the twins are committed to collegiate careers at Harvard. While Marek plays in Michigan, David continues skating with the Colorado Thunderbirds. Photo submitted by Zlata Hejduk

Marek and David are similar in their play, being that they're both competitive, make plays, and work hard, even if they're different in style, according to Marek.

"He's bigger, he's more defensively minded," Marek said of David. "I'm a little smaller, little quicker, more offensively minded."

David, who describes himself as a playmaker, said this year with the Thunderbirds has gone pretty well so far, despite some COVID-19 shutdowns. He's trying to help the team reach its goal of making it to Nationals, which also could be dependent on what happens with the pandemic. Other than that, David looks to continue improving his all-around game, too.

The boys started playing hockey at age 4, with their mom driving them to the rink while their dad competed for the Avalanche. The brothers tried some other sports, too, but it became obvious which game would win out.

"We just decided that hockey was it," David said.

They always played together, practiced together and did almost everything else together growing up. Playing hockey with his brother every single day provided some of the best memories for Marek over the years.

"Everything's a game to us," David said. "Everything's something that we want to win. Pretty competitive."

"He understands the game more than any of us, maybe even ever will understand. So he gave us tips and whatnot — tricks that we can use."

**--David Hejduk on his father, Milan Hejduk**

Being apart this season, the brothers keep in touch, calling each other to talk, or having a weekly FaceTime call to keep up with the other.

There's a level of competitiveness between them when they're on the ice, but Marek being a forward and David on defense keep things in check a little bit more.

"I think it would be worse if we were both in the same position," Marek said.

With their dad having played his entire NHL career for the Avs, David and Marek also had the chance to start out their youth hockey careers in their home state. Their father was very involved throughout his boys' time in hockey. He attended all the practices and games for them, constantly giving them tips on improving along the way, Marek said.

"He understands the game more than any of us, maybe even ever will understand," David said. "So he gave us tips and whatnot — tricks that we can use."

Both teens would like to play in the NHL, just like dad, whose No. 23 hangs in the rafters of Ball Arena in Denver.

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