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JETS, GOLDEN KNIGHTS SELECT PLAYERS WITH WCHA TIES IN 2018 NHL DRAFT

***Minnesota State commit Nathan Smith goes to Winnipeg in the third round,
Bowling Green's Brandon Kruse chosen by Vegas in the fifth round***

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – June 23, 2018 – The two opponents from this past spring's Western Conference Final of the Stanley Cup Playoffs each chose forwards with connections to the men's Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA) in the 2018 NHL Draft, as Minnesota State commit **Nathan Smith** was a third-round pick of the Winnipeg Jets (91st overall) and Bowling Green rising sophomore **Brandon Kruse** was grabbed by the defending conference champion Vegas Golden Knights in the fifth round (135th overall). Their selections add to the list of more than 1,000 WCHA-affiliated players chosen in the NHL Draft since 1963.

"Congratulations to Nathan and Brandon on their selection in the 2018 NHL Draft, a tremendous accomplishment and a reflection of their talent and dedication," said WCHA President and Men's League Commissioner **Bill Robertson**. "Our WCHA programs continue to recruit high-caliber players and develop them to succeed at the highest levels of professional hockey. We are thrilled for Nathan and Brandon, and we look forward to watching them continue to grow and excel on WCHA ice this coming season."

The 2018 NHL Draft was held June 22-23 at the American Airlines Center in Dallas.

Nathan Smith, Commit, F, Minnesota State (Hudson, Fla.) / Winnipeg Jets (3rd round / 91st overall)

Smith, who will join the defending MacNaughton Cup champion Mavericks this fall, had 17 goals and 30 assists for a team-best 47 points in 51 games played for Cedar Rapids in 2017-18, his inaugural United States Hockey League (USHL) campaign. The Hudson, Fla. native was a prolific high school scorer in Florida, tallying 176 points (88g-88a) in just 45 games from 2014-2017 with River Ridge and Mitchell High. A product of the Tampa (Fla.) Scorpions midget AAA program and a two-time International Silver Stick midget AAA all-star (2015-16 and 2016-17), Smith also had a goal in five games with USA Hockey at the 2018 World Junior A Challenge, winning a silver medal.

Brandon Kruse, So., F, Bowling Green (Saline, Mich.) / Vegas Golden Knights (5th round, 135th overall)

Kruse was a WCHA All-Rookie Team selection in 2017-18 after tying for third among all NCAA freshmen with 25 assists (fourth with 0.61 assists per game). Playing in all 41 games for a Bowling Green team that tied for ninth nationally with 23 wins, Kruse was the Falcons' second-highest scorer overall with 33 points (also eight goals). The Saline, Mich. native paced all WCHA freshmen with 21 assists, 0.75 assists-per-game and eight power-play helpers in 28 conference games, while adding four goals to rank second with 25 points. Kruse is among 24 forwards invited by USA Hockey to the 2018 World Junior Summer Showcase that will be held from July 28-Aug. 4 in Kamloops, British Columbia, at the Sandman Centre.

About the Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA)

The Western Collegiate Hockey Association, among the most historic, tradition-rich and successful conferences in all of collegiate athletics, will proudly mark its 67th season of men’s competition in 2018-19. The 10-team Division 1 conference consists of the University of Alabama in Huntsville (Chargers), the University of Alaska Anchorage (Seawolves), the University of Alaska Fairbanks (Nanooks), Bemidji State University (Beavers), Bowling Green State University (Falcons), Ferris State University (Bulldogs), Lake Superior State University (Lakers), Michigan Technological University (Huskies), Minnesota State University (Mavericks) and Northern Michigan University (Wildcats). For more information, visit wcha.com.

MEDIA CONTACT

Matt Hodson
Associate Commissioner, Marketing & Communications
E: mhodson@wcha.com
O: 952.681.7668
M: 612.801.2808

MORE INFORMATION

Website: wcha.com
Twitter: [@wcha_mhockey](https://twitter.com/wcha_mhockey)
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