Matt Grzelcyk (SMG’16) is a defensive powerhouse

Hometown Hockey Star

Matt Grzelcyk is just a freshman, but the 18-year-old defenseman is well on his way to becoming a hometown success story for hockey-crazed Boston.

Grzelcyk (SMG’16) grew up a rink rat in Charlestown, Mass., the son of a longtime Zamboni driver at Boston’s TD Garden. Two years ago, he committed to play Division I hockey at BU, and in summer 2012 he was chosen by the Boston Bruins in the third round of the 2012 NHL Entry Draft.

“Playing hockey and getting the chance to play Division I, obviously your goal is to play one day in the NHL,” says Grzelcyk, one of nine freshmen in the 2012–2013 Terriers lineup. “But you have to stay realistic at the same time and realize how hard it is to get there. I have to work if I want it to happen.” Proof of his work ethic: in December 2012 he was named Hockey East Rookie of the Month and put on the preliminary roster for the U.S. National Junior Team.

Grzelcyk’s father, John, taught him to skate at the age of two by getting him to lean on stacked milk crates at a local rink. The elder Grzelcyk has worked for 45 years as a member of the Garden’s “bull gang,” the team that switches the arena surfaces between hockey and basketball games. “I can remember waiting for my dad to call, telling me to come down and skate when the Bruins weren’t playing at home,” Matt recalls. “Anytime I got the opportunity I always took it.”

Grzelcyk played several years of youth hockey with the Middlesex Islanders then at the Belmont Hill School. At 16, he joined the USA Hockey National Team Development Program in Ann Arbor, Mich., which prepares the top amateur hockey players in the country for pro hockey careers. The one drawback of the program, he says, was living away from home. One of the reasons he chose to play for the Terriers was to be close to his family and friends.

“Matt has worked so hard and has made so many sacrifices,” says his father.

In June, Grzelcyk and his family traveled to Pittsburgh for the 2012 NHL Entry Draft. They hadn’t planned to attend, fearing they might sit around all day and never hear his name called. They were shocked and elated when the Bruins—his home team—ended up choosing him in the third round; he was 85th overall.

“Putting the jersey on was something you dream about, and it was pretty unbelievable for me,” he says. “I grew up watching tapes of players like Joe Thornton, Bobby Orr, and Ray Bourque. It didn’t really set in for a while.”

WEB EXTRA: Watch a video about Terrier Matt Grzelcyk (SMG’16), who has been drafted by the Boston Bruins, at bu.edu/bostonia.