

Thacker on course with Flyers

Kyle Thacker stepped off an overnight trans-Atlantic jet from Canada, met his new Fife Flyers team-mates at 9am as they came off the ice after an early training session and was then whisked to the first tee at one of Scotland's leading golf courses.

The 6ft 3in defenceman then played 18 holes at Fairmont St Andrews, savouring four seasons in one day in a biting wind, then returned to Kirkcaldy and bed.

The 28-year-old defenceman (***pictured in training courtesy of Fife Flyers by Derek Young***) had two training sessions with Fife before heading south on a nine-hour bus trip to Guildford for a Premier Sports Elite League clash.

He'll head home overnight up the M6 on the bus to face Belfast Giants, one of Britain's top teams, at Rosslyn Street, Kirkcaldy, on Sunday (18.00).

The whirlwind process was kick-started last week after the Ontario-born player agreed to join Flyers.

He drove six hours from Adirondak in Upstate New York to his native Ontario, spending a day at home to get his gear together, before boarding a jet in Toronto bound for Scotland.

It's the former college hockey star's first trip to Europe, but it is one he relishes and Mississauga-born Thacker admitted: "It's a challenge coming to a new country, new culture and a new team, but it's also an opportunity to make my mark in British ice hockey."

That's one of the main reasons Thacker agreed to turn his back on a loan spell at Adirondak Thunder to move across the pond and into the Elite League, a division he admitted he knows little about.

However, the 6ft 3in player is keen to put down a marker after being with four teams this season, Evansville Thunderbolts in the Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL) then on loan spells at three East Coast Hockey League clubs, Iowa Heartlanders (five games), Cincinnati Cyclones (14 games) and Adirondak Thunder (eight games).

He said: "I've wanted to play in Europe for some time and also want to put my roots down somewhere. Agreeing to come here gives me foot in the door in British hockey.

"It's an exciting time for me. Obviously, I'm a little nervous, but I'm also excited. I have two days to work with the squad then it is a tough start with an 18-hour, road trip to England.

"Then we come home overnight on the bus to play one of the best teams in Britain, but this is a challenge, 100 per cent a challenge."

Thacker, a competent golfer with a handicap between 12 and 15, had to pinch himself on day one of his European adventure when he was offered a game at St Andrews, the Home of Golf.

He said: "It's my first time in Europe, and my first day in Scotland and I'm playing golf at St Andrews. I played OK but we had rain, sleet, wind and sun, but wow, playing at St Andrews."

The hard work begins and Thacker faces a crash course in British ice hockey. He has already started his homework, looking at videos of domestic games and he added; "Now, I've got to familiarise myself with the team.

"I'm in good shape as my last game was last week, Thursday in fact, but then I had to drive to Ontario, pack and then get on the plane in Toronto." That's where we came in.