

Panthers real threat to improving Fife Flyers

Kirkcaldy is a long way from Grande Prairie (population 63,166) in north-west Alberta, where oil and timber are the major economic drivers, but that's the journey ambitious Reece Harsch (*pictured by Derek Young* and courtesy of Fife Flyers) has made to further his ice hockey career.

The 23-year-old is one of a number of new players in Fife Flyers' dressing-room and he makes the trip with them to big-budget Nottingham Panthers in the Premier Sports Elite League on Saturday.

The 6ft 4in former college hockey star is in his first full season of professional hockey after a brief spell in the paid ranks in North America, icing in five games for Abbotsford Canucks in the American Hockey League (AHL) and seven for East Coast Hockey League (ECHL) combine, Toledo Walleye.

It may be a long road trip to Nottingham for British-born players, but Harsch admitted: "I come from way up north (in Canada) and the nearest road trip for me is 4.5 hours. The key is to get a good warm-up in and get rid of the bus legs."

Flyers, he said, are developing as a unit but the Canadian said: "We need to improve our starts and that is something we are really focusing on.

"It all starts from the off, making sure we are moving the puck around, making sure we take shots and warming-up our goalies and making sure that as soon as the puck drops we are not on our heels, we are ready for them to come at us.

"That's why we are having aggressive, more intense practice and we want to create an identity for ourselves."

Harsch has done his homework and he believes that success-hungry Nottingham will come at Fife in the early minutes, hoping to gain an edge.

The blue-liner added: "I've been looking at the stats and they (Nottingham) have picked up. We have to go out there and match them. Getting the first goal would be huge so we want to get them on their heels and then go at them."

Reflecting on last weekend's double-header defeat to high-flying Guildford Flames (5-3 at Kirkcaldy and 5-3 at The Spectrum), who top the table ahead of the weekend skirmishes, Harsch declared: "We've done some video stuff and we must make sure we play for the full 60 minutes. Yes, we had some off moments against Guildford which cost us, so we must make sure we are on the gas for the whole game and, if we get ahead, make sure we do not let them back in."
