



**KINGS CAPTAIN /** Jeff Lee of the Edmonton Oil Kings stands ready during a faceoff.



# OIL KINGS' LEE EARNS CO-CAPTAINCY

BY / WES GILBERTSON

What a difference a year can make.

In November 2007, Jeff Lee was looking for a hockey home. Fast-forward 12 months and the big winger has established himself as a fixture on Edmonton Oil Kings' top line and even has a captain's 'C' stitched to his jersey.

"They gave me a chance and I never quit," Lee said. "They gave me an opportunity to come in here and play a lot of minutes, and I earned it."

The 2007/08 campaign was a rollercoaster ride for Lee, a product of the Calgary minor hockey system and former member of the AJHL's Drayton Valley Thunder and Sherwood Park Crusaders.

Lee muscled his way into the lineup during his freshman season at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, but after the Nanooks made an off-season coaching change, he found himself on the outside looking in. He packed his bags after suiting up for just one contest in the first couple months of his sophomore season and joined the Oil Kings in mid-November.

The provincial capital turned out to be a pretty soft landing spot. When he announced the signing, Oil Kings GM Bob Green called Lee "a big, strong kid" and predicted the former Nanook would "fit right into head coach Steve Pleau's systems."

Lee is making him look like a genius.

He's won over fans at Rexall Place with his gritty play and has established himself as a go-to guy both on the ice and in the locker-room. He and Brenden Dowd were picked to serve as co-captains this season, a sure sign Lee has earned the respect of his teammates and coaches.

"It was hard to leave (Alaska-Fairbanks) it was hard on my confidence but it worked out good because I came to a team that really wanted me," Lee said. "It's a good situation for me."

Lee showed flashes of offensive brilliance at the tail-end of his first WHL season. He scored the first hat-trick in Oil Kings' franchise history with just five games left in their expansion campaign, then followed up with a three-point effort in their final home outing.

He's picked up right where he left off.

Through the first three months of the 2008/09 season, the 6-2, 209-pound left winger had notched 10 goals and 18 assists in 29 outings, and was tied with Brett Breitkreuz atop the Oil Kings' scoring charts.

Better yet, Lee had posted a plus-4 rating, the best mark on the team.

The Oil Kings haven't had too much trouble lighting the lamp in their second season. Breitkreuz, Lee, and Tomas Vincour have already hit double digits in goals scored, while Dowd, Craig McCallum and Brent Raedke are closing in but the club is struggling to keep pucks of its own net.

Through Nov. 25, the Oil Kings were surrendering an average of 4.03 goals per game, the fourth-highest mark on the 22-team loop and worst among squads hanging on to a post-season spot.

That's something that has to change if the club want to keep pace in the playoff race, and Lee is trying to lead by example.

"I've always taken that pretty seriously playing in both ends of the rink," he said. "Talking to a lot of guys, they say that's the big thing the next level is looking for. Nobody wants a guy that can only play at one end of the rink."

"That's a big motto for our team so, as a captain, I try to show the young guys it's defence first and offence second."

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