HOCKEY

Merkley earns OHL rookie of the year

First-year defender leads all rookies in scoring

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Mississauga defenceman Ryan Merkley is this year's Ontario Hockey League rookie of the year after leading all first-year players in scoring.

Taken first overall by the Guelph Storm in the 2016 OHL Priority Selection Draft, Merkley recorded 55 points (12 goals and 43 assists) in 62 games, which was enough to lead the Storm in scoring.
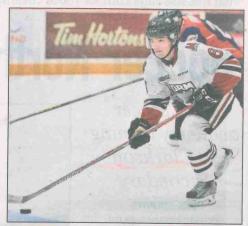
He became the first defenceman to lead the league in rookie points since London's Rick Corriveau did so in 1988.

"It is an honour to be selected as the OHL Rookie of the Year," Merkley said in an OHL news release. "Knowing that there are so many talented first year players, makes the award extra special. I would like to thank my teammates and the Storm organization for all their help and support."

Merkley, a two-time OHL rookie of the month, was chosen to play for Canada at the 2016 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge and tried out for Canada's Under-18 World Championship team as an underage player.

All 20 OHL general managers vote on who wins the award and Merkley earned 75 out of a possible 95 points, well ahead of runner up Akil Thomas from the Niagara IceDogs (44) and Allan McShane of the Oshawa Generals (24).

"Even as a 16-year-old, Ryan was a critical part of a very young Guelph Storm Hockey team, and he provided our fans, and fans throughout the OHL with some

Terry Wilson/OHL Images

Ryan Merkley has been named OHL rookie of the year.

spectacular hockey memories," stated Mike Kelly, Guelph's recently departed general manager.

"As good as Ryan was this past year, he will be even more special in upcoming seasons."

The Sarnia Sting's Adam Ruzicka, Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds' Matthew Villalta and Kingston Frontenacs' Linus Nyman were also finalists for the award.

Merkley earned a spot on the OHL's first all-rookie team along with Mississauga Steelheads goalie Jacob Ingham, the first goalie picked in the 2016 draft.

Ingham served a big role with the Steelheads, playing in 31 regular season games while recording 17 wins, two shutouts, a 2.69 goals-against average and .907 save percentage.

He was named OHL goaltender of the month for January and started all six first-round playoff games while veteran Matt Mancina was injured.