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RIVER RATS MOVE UP TO BECOME NHL DEVILS

by Jon Scherzer and Erin Cassavoy



CRAIG DARBY

The Albany River Rats recently completed their 11th season as the American Hockey League affiliate of the Stanley Cup Champion New Jersey Devils. The tradition of excellence in player development continued with no fewer than nine players skating for both the River Rats and Devils during the 2003-04 campaign. The list included Albany Academy graduate Craig Darby, flashy rookie winger Aleksander Suglobov and perennial fan favorite Rob Skrlac.

More importantly for Albany fans however, the club welcomed back Robbie Ftorek, who was named the fifth head coach in River Rats history on February 17, 2004. He is in his second stint behind the bench after coaching Albany from their inaugural 1993-94 campaign through the conclusion of the 1995-96 season. The Needham, MA native guided the River Rats to a 12-2 record en route to the 1995 Calder Cup. He put together a 138-70-42 (.642) regular season record with a 14-9 post-season mark in three seasons with the River Rats and won the Louis A.R. Pieri Memorial Award as the American Hockey League's outstanding coach in both the 1994-95 and 1995-96 seasons. Ftorek holds a career AHL coaching

mark of 292-195-68 (.587) in 555 games.

Looking over the past decade, Albany and New Jersey have fostered one of the most productive relationships in professional hockey. The Devils have won three Stanley Cups (1995, 2000 & 2003) while the River Rats won the 1995 Calder Cup along with back-to-back division titles (1994-95 & 1995-96). A total of over 100 players have hit the ice at Pepsi Arena and gone on to play in the National Hockey League. Names like Patrik Elias of the Devils, Phoenix Coyotes center Michael Rupp (who scored the cup-winning goal for New Jersey last season), Nashville Predators center Steve Sullivan and Vancouver Canucks center Brendan Morrison all laced up in the Red, Black and White.

Hockey season doesn't end with warm weather as the club's popular mascot "Rowdy" The Rat makes numerous appearances promoting the "Reading with Rowdy" initiative. Whether its hard-hitting action at



ALEKSANDER SUGLOBOV

the Pepsi, a player appearance at a local school or goofing around with "Rowdy", the Albany River Rats have found themselves a comfortable nest in the Capital Region.