

## 'A man playing among boys' - At 6-1, 204 pounds Aurora's Justin Wade recently played defense for U.S. Under-17 Select team

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He doesn't look like a typical 16-year-old kid. Not when he stands 6-feet, 1-inches tall and weighs 204 pounds - and that's before Justin Wade puts on his skates and shoulder pads.

Once he's geared up, he just might be the biggest hockey player in the nation for his age.

"There are guys who might be a little taller, but they don't have his weight - he's got a great combination of size and strength and athleticism," said Sean Tremblay, who coached Wade on the U.S. Under-17 Select team, which won gold at last week's Five Nations Tournament in Switzerland.

"He's a man playing among boys," Tremblay added. "He could be a great linebacker."

Luckily for Team USA, Wade, a former Marmion Academy student, seems content with being a defenseman. Wade, whose physical style and size make him a prototypical defensive defenseman, led the tournament with a plus-7 rating while picking up one assist in four games.

He also helped the U.S. kill off all but four of its 33 shorthanded situations, a mark that also led the tournament. The U.S. finished 3-1 in winning the annual event for the first time since 2005.

Tremblay said he was concerned Wade's style could draw negative attention from the European officials, who are known to frown on the physical play that defines North American hockey. But Wade set his coach at ease, getting called for only three minor penalties in the tournament.

"He did such a great job of keeping his stick low that everything was a shoulder check," Tremblay said. "And my god, did he absolutely hurt some kids out there."

Wade turns his attention now to the United States Hockey League, a junior league known to be a feeder system for U.S. college hockey.

Wade was selected eighth overall by Fargo in the 2010 USHL Futures draft.

One day after arriving back in Aurora from Switzerland, Wade was in a car heading to Fargo with his mother, Courtney. In Fargo, Wade will live with a host family, attend a local high school and spend a lot of time on the ice. It will be the first time he's lived away from his parents and four younger sisters.

"It's going to be a new experience," Wade said as he rode through Wisconsin on Tuesday afternoon. "It's almost like being in college. I feel like I have to mature earlier than other people, but with hockey players it's almost expected you have to go to the USHL and move away at 16 or 17."

He won't be without friends, though. He said he'll be reunited with a couple players who also played for the Chicago Mission club, which is based at Seven Bridges Ice Arena. Wade, who started playing hockey when he was 6 after the family moved to Aurora from Ohio, played in the organization for six seasons.

Wade said he also knows a handful of other teammates from various camps, adding that will help him as he tries to get comfortable to his new surroundings, which includes living with a family he's never met in person.

"I'll just have to adapt," he said. "It's going to be different but they are friendly. It may be a little change, but I don't think it's going to be a problem at all. I don't know their house rules yet, but I'll find out. I'm sure it'll be like what's expected of me at my house."

Wade's parents split the duties when it comes to his development. Wade's father, David, oversees the hockey part, while Courtney makes sure he doesn't fall behind with the academics side. She admitted it won't be easy to have her only son living so far away. But she also knew if Wade was going to develop as a player, the USHL was where he'd eventually need to be.

"He's been on this hockey track for quite some time, so we've been prepared for the different possibilities," she said. "It's hard because he's still young. But we knew this would be coming - at least we were hoping this would be coming."

**Caption:** Aurora's Justin Wade, who won gold playing defense for the U.S. Under-17 Select team in Switzerland, is on the move again. Wade will be living and playing for Fargo in the United States Hockey League this upcoming season. submitted photo

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