

## JOHN VIGILANTE SIGNS WITH NASHVILLE; WHALERS ACQUIRE D-MAN DEREK MERLINI FROM ERIE

Plymouth captain **John Vigilante** is getting a jump-start to his professional career.

Plymouth Whalers President, General Manager and Head Coach **Mike Vellucci** announced Tuesday that Vigilante has signed a professional contract with the National Hockey League's Nashville Predators. Vigilante - from Dearborn - has been assigned to the Milwaukee Admirals of the American Hockey League.

Vigilante left for Milwaukee today.

"We're very happy for John," Vellucci said. "He's been an excellent Whaler for a long time and has worked very hard for this opportunity."

According to Vellucci, Vigilante will return to the Plymouth lineup December 28 when the Whalers host the Windsor Spitfires. Before returning, Milwaukee plays 10 games over 18 games between Dec. 9-27, starting Friday night when the Admirals host Grand Rapids.

Vigilante is Plymouth's leading scorer this season with 14 goals and 34 assists for 48 points in 28 games. Originally selected in the 11<sup>th</sup> round (209<sup>th</sup> overall) in the 2001 OHL Draft, Vigilante is currently 10<sup>th</sup> on the Whalers' all-time career scoring list with 83 goals and 134 assists for 217 points. He's 11<sup>th</sup> on the team's career games played list with 227. Vigilante is the Whalers' all-time leader with 23 game-winning goals in his career to date.

Ontario Hockey League teams can play three overage players - or players with 1985 birthdates. With Vigilante leaving, the Whalers have goaltender **Ryan Nie** and defenseman **Mike Letizia** as overage players. To fill the third overage spot, Vellucci announced the acquisition of overage defenseman **Derek Merlini** from Erie for a conditional 11<sup>th</sup> round draft choice.

Merlini - originally selected by Erie in the 14<sup>th</sup> round (266<sup>th</sup> overall) in the 2001 OHL Draft by Erie - spent two full seasons with the Otters, playing in 132 games and scoring 12 goals with



Plymouth captain John Vigilante (above) is 10<sup>th</sup> on the Whalers' all-time scoring list with 83 goals and 134 assists for 217 points. His 227 games played is 11<sup>th</sup> on the all-time list.

## MEET WHALERS STEVE WARD and JOE GAYNOR TONIGHT

Ginopolis on the Ice - is presenting another "**Whalers Wednesdays**" tonight from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Defenseman **Steve Ward** and rookie **Joe Gaynor** will be available at the restaurant to sign autographs, take photographs and mingle with fans.

Discounts will be given to children 12-and-under for the event. Children 12-and-under can eat free for every adult they bring who pays full price for their entrée. The Kid's Menu will be their choice of Chicken Strips and Fries, Kids' Hot Dog or Kids' Linguine.

Ginopolis on The Ice Restaurant proprietor **Bob Bannatz** is offering another discount on "**Whaler Wednesdays.**"

"People who show me a Whaler autograph - received that night or any time during the season - will receive 20 percent off their bill," Bannatz said. "We want everybody to have fun when they come in on **Whaler**

31 assists and 43 points and 192 PIM's. Merlini is 6-foot-7, 248 pounds from Clinton Township.

Merlini was caught in a numbers game of too many overages in Erie. His house-mate - OA **Andrew Shennan** - was traded to Sault Ste. Marie earlier this season. After playing in 20 games with Erie (and sharing playing time with fellow OA defenseman **Jake Heller**), Merlini was scoreless with five assists and 48 PIM's in 20 games for the Otters.

"At times, I was used to sitting out every other game, which is definitely not a good thing," Merlini told the Erie Times-News. "At this point, I'm just glad it's over with. I'll be living at home and (the Whalers) are a pretty good team. I couldn't really ask for much more. I'm excited to go to Plymouth and see what I can do."

Ontario Hockey League teams have until next January 10 to decide on three overage players. So when Vigilante returns, Plymouth will have four overages.

Merlini joined the Whalers in time for practice today and will wear number 4. He's expected to be in the lineup Thursday night when the Plymouth plays in Sarnia ([www.plymouthwhalers.com](http://www.plymouthwhalers.com), 7:20 pm).

**Wednesdays'."**

## **TEDDY BEAR TOSS SATURDAY AGAINST OWEN SOUND**

When the Whalers take on the Owen Sound Attack this Saturday night at the Compuware Sports Arena, they'll be playing for two points in the standings - and for charity.

The Whalers' annual Teddy Bear Toss is this Saturday when Plymouth takes on the Owen Sound Attack at 7:30 pm at the Compuware Sports Arena. Ironically, the only other bears in the arena will be the bears on the front of the Owen Sound jerseys - that's their logo.

The premise of the Teddy Bear Toss is simple - fans attending the game bring a new teddy bear to the game, then throw their respective bruin on the ice the first time the Whaler scores a goal. The bears will be picked up and donated to charity through the Plymouth United Way.

"It's a fun thing to do," said Plymouth President, General Manager and Head Coach **Mike Vellucci**. "We try to teach our players to be good citizens and good hockey players. We try to do the same thing as an organization, and here the fans are helping out. The Teddy Bear Toss is a good cause and we are happy to help out."

Chances are the first Whaler goal will come early, so be prepared. Plymouth (14-10-1-3, second place West Division) and Owen Sound (16-10-1-2, third place Midwest Division) have played two high-scoring games in splitting their first two games this year. Plymouth beat Owen Sound, 6-5 on Oct. 30; Owen Sound defeated Plymouth, 7-6 in a shootout on Nov. 9.

The game marks the end of the Whalers' Silent Auction for 2004-05 game-worn Plymouth jerseys. Please go to <http://www.plymouthwhalers.com> to the Promotions section to find out more about the auction, which will end at the drop of the puck at the start of the third period on Saturday.

**ON THE ICE:** Plymouth plays two games this



Derek Merlino (above) was taken in the 14th round (266th overall) by Erie in the 2001 OHL Draft. Photo courtesy the Erie Otters.

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Click <http://www.plymouthwhalers.com> to go to the Whalers' website.

Click <http://www.plymouthwhalers.com/schedule.html> for the Whalers' schedule.

Click <http://www.ontariohockeyleague.com/stats/> for complete Ontario Hockey League standings and stats.

week, skating in Sarnia on Thursday (7:20 pm, [www.plymouthwhalers.com](http://www.plymouthwhalers.com)) and then hosting Owen Sound on Saturday (7:20 pm, [www.plymouthwhalers.com](http://www.plymouthwhalers.com)).

Saturday's game will be Plymouth's last home game before Christmas. The Whalers finish up the pre-Christmas part of their schedule with games in Peterborough Dec. 15, Oshawa Dec. 16 and Toronto Dec. 18.

The Whalers host Windsor on Wednesday, Dec. 28 at 2:00 pm at the Compuware Sports Arena on Kids' Day in their first game back after Christmas. Plymouth then hosts Erie on Friday, Dec. 30 at 7:30 pm to finish up the 2005 portion of their schedule.

Fans, break out your favorite Jersey for the Friday, December 30th Whalers/Otter Clash! All guests that sport their favorite Jersey will receive a voucher redeemable for an executive reserved ticket for the January 11th mid-week clash with the first place Saginaw Spirit.

In addition, all guests sporting a jersey can stop by the Fan Assistance center during pre-game or anytime prior to the start of the third period to enter to win a free Saturday night stay at the Livonia Marriott Hotel! Additional prizes, goodies and fun for the entire family will be taking place, so grab your favorite jersey and Celebrate with the Whalers on Friday, January 30th at 7:30 p.m.

*(Whale Tales is composed by Pete Krupsky, with assistance from Rob Murphy and Natalie Shaver. Walt Dmoch and Rena Lavery supply the photos. Thank you for reading.)*