MBA All Star: Brian Donaldson
Student puts his career plans on ice
by Mike Hoban, Special to the Journal

Like lots of kids, Brian Donaldson dreamed of becoming a professional hockey player. And like many kids, he had to alter his dream to something a little more practical. So Donaldson set a new goal for himself: to become commissioner of the National Hockey League.

Ordinarily such a goal would sound impractical at best and insane at worst, but he actually has a plan. Donaldson is in his final year at Boston College’s combined Juris Doctor and Master in Business Administration program, which BC offers for the lawyer who also wishes to be trained as a business professional — or a hockey commissioner.

Donaldson began playing hockey at the age of 5 in hockey hotbed Detroit, and throughout his youth he played the sport “all over the country and the world.” He went to hockey powerhouse Shattuck-St. Mary’s School in Faribault, Minn., on a scholarship from grades 8-11, and then followed his coach to Brooks School in North Andover. “I left with (my coach) to get more exposure to Ivy League schools,” he said.

After a stint in the Eastern Junior Hockey League in Lawrence, Donaldson enrolled at Dartmouth College, where he tried to make the team as a walk-on, but “the coach decided that the recruited players were more effective,” said Donaldson.
It was then and there that he set a goal. “If I can’t make it as a professional on the ice, then I’ll make it as a professional off the ice.”

After graduating Dartmouth, he worked as a cost analyst for auto-parts manufacturer Arvin Meritor before entering the dual program at BC. After clerking for a federal court judge in Detroit his first year, Donaldson got closer to his dream, interning for Detroit Red Wings general manager Ken Holland. He took a second job in the law department in Meritor’s legal department, doing labor law.

“I started to incorporate the work experience into my desire to work in the sports industry,” said Donaldson. He spent last summer with the NHL’s hockey operations department and is actively networking with former employers, professional sports teams and leagues, law firms, and businesses.

“I’ve been positioning myself since that point in time at Dartmouth to become a CEO, whether it be in the NHL, in the financial sector or in the tech industry. So my long-term vision gives me short-term purpose to obtain the requisite skills to be a leader,” he said.