

Block Party

Beach Time

Recently I sat down with highly touted, and debated, Hawks prospect Kyle Beach to discuss his progress during his 1st pro season, mending fences with teammate Mathis Olimb and how he responds to his critics (which admittedly, we've been one). The following are excerpts from that interview.

To date, Beach has posted 11 goals and 26 points in 50 games. Beach does own an IceHogs' worst minus-15 plus/minus rating. He's been on the ice for a staggering 27 of 61 even strength goals scored against (44%) on home ice and 37 of 102 (36%) even strength goals scored against Rockford overall. As mentioned below, he's been benched on occasion as well as designated a healthy scratch by head coach Bill Peters twice, and as recently as nine days ago. The IceHogs have lost 10 of their last 12 games. Beach has 2 goals, 3 assists (-8) in that stretch. When we spoke with him, he was enjoying a season-best stretch of 4 goals, 5 assists over 8 games.

Chris Block: Halfway through your first pro year, what's different for you now as opposed to earlier in the season?

Kyle Beach: I think it's just getting used to the play. Getting used to the bigger bodies... having to use your strength; use your size and learn how to protect the puck. I mean, coming into this level from junior, I was one of the older guys last year. I was always one of the bigger guys and now I'm average. And you gotta learn the little tricks of the trade. And now pucks are starting to my way, bounces are starting to go my way.

CB: How would Kyle Beach describe Kyle Beach, the player?

Beach: Well, I think I like to be a big physical guy that gets under the other team's skin. A guy that's hard to play against. A guy that you'd love to have on your team but hate to play against. I think depending on the role you're playing it can be chipping in offensively or, you know, just being an even player playing against the other team's top line.

It all depends on the role you're playing. Right now I'm playing in a second/third line role. Needing to put up points to help the team, but also shut down the other team's top line. And, you know, whether I am or I'm not, I'm always going to try to play as one of the bigger guys.

CB: I think you've acknowledged that skating is one aspect you need to work on. Other than the defensive aspect, what else do you think you need to work on personally, to get yourself to the next level?

Beach: Like you said, skating can always get better. Skills can get better. I think my defensive game can definitely get better. I think I've been better as far as blocking shots and being more responsible. I've been on (the ice) in the last minute of a couple of the last few games and one goal games which, that I hadn't seen all year. So, I think the coach is starting to trust me a little bit more in those situations. And that's huge. If you wanna play at the next level and be able to be counted on, and be able to play in your role, you're going to have to be good in your defensive end. That's one thing that I'm really trying to work on. And at the same time, you talk about composure with the puck; making the smart little plays. You know, chipping the puck in, instead of trying to force something. And really just knowing the time of the game and what you're capable of doing.

CB: There's always been a lot of talk about you. In junior, you always seem to be in the middle of things. And that's kind of the type of player you want to be; tough to play against. How do you balance being that type of player you want to be, but not getting into trouble and being in the box at the wrong times?

Beach: Well, I mean, there's a time and a place. There's a time and a place when you run your mouth. There's a time and place when you get in scums in front of the net. And then there's a time and a place where you've got to take that shot in the face or take that punch in the back of the head and you've just got to skate away.

The coaching staff and veterans here have been great in helping with that. Wade Brookbank's talked to me a lot about stuff along those lines. And also Bill Peters. You know, I knew coming in, playing against Bill in juniors that we were going to have some things to figure out. I played in Spokane where Bill coached and talked to the guys, and kind of knew his style and what he liked.

There's a zero tolerance for the unneeded stuff. The offensive zone penalties; if you're going to take (o-zone penalties) you're not going to play. And he made that point to me and made it clear early on. And you know, there was a couple of games where I think I only played one-two shifts in the third period because I took a penalty in the offensive zone or took a penalty at the wrong time. He made it clear if you wanna play you can't do that. You know, that kind of forces you to learn in a way.

CB: On the topic of criticism. I think you understand the reason why there's so much talk about you is because there's a lot of enthusiasm about you as a player and what

people see your top-end ability as. How do you respond to that or do you even pay attention at all to criticism?

Beach: I think you definitely have to pay attention to it. You definitely gotta look at it and see what people are saying. You know, lots of times you can learn quite a bit from criticism.

At the same time, you can't let it affect you to the point where you're not performing to your best. There has been a lot of criticism about me. Always been people asking questions and putting a question mark beside my name. I think it's just something you have to take in stride and learn from it. Move forward to the best of your ability and take what you need to and learn from it. But at the same time, continue to perform and do what you need to do to get to the next level.

CB: [On the 2 July prospect camp fights with Mathis Olimb, resulting in shoulder surgery for Olimb and 4-month rehab] Was there anything you and Olimb needed to do to hash that thing out?

Beach: Well, as soon as we got here, we talked. It was almost like we became instant friends. He's a great player. He's got unbelievable skill. We've talked about it a couple of times. We joke around about it now. It kind of happened in the moment. I feel terrible that he got hurt and was out all summer. It's not something you feel good about whether the guy is on your team or on the other team. The fact that he's on my team and now he's one of my teammates and a close friend, you know, it sucks to see it happen. But at the same time I'm glad he's okay. He's playing well now. I'm glad we were able to move past that and hopefully he can help this team win games.

CB: Favorite player growing up?

Beach: Jarome Iginla.

CB: Is that the type of guy you see yourself as?

Beach: Yeah, he lives in Kelowna in the summer, which is where I'm from. I've got to know him a little bit. I did a little bit of boxing with him a couple summers. You know, he's just been a great mentor. He'll

take five minutes to sit down and talk with you. He's been really good with that. And every time you watch him play: He's a captain. He's a leader. He's willing to go into the corner. He'll fight if he has to. He'll score. He can play a shutdown role. He can do everything. He's an all-around great player and great person and someone I'd love to be like.

CB: Anybody else mentor you, whether it be here or in junior of note that you'd like to single out?

Beach: Yeah, I obviously you've got to thank all of your coaches. But the one coach that really gave me the opportunity, really pushed me, really helped me learn the game and helped me learn the defensive aspect of the game that I do know today is Kevin Constantine. I had him for two years in Everett. He gave me every opportunity. I played power play. I played penalty kill. I played with the likes of Zach Hamill and Peter Mueller. My two years there under him, he was a guy that was always all over me. He demanded perfection. If you weren't going to give it to him, he wasn't going to put up with it. I think I learned a lot from him. As much as you talk to guys, and lots of guys don't like him, I've got a close relationship today. And if I ever needed anything, I know he'd be there for me.

CB: You and Shawn Lalonde are living together. How did that come about?

Beach: I don't exactly know [chuckling]. We got to know each other at the Under-18's a bit. Getting drafted in the same year, uhh, going through the same experiences. With camp the first year, moving up together, getting called up together. We just kind of got to know each other. It felt like I had known him forever. He's a great guy. He's a lot of fun. You know, I thought we were a good mix. So this year when we got to camp and we were talking about it, we started talking about possibly living together. We hung out quite a bit together this summer. Hung out all training camp and just kind of made it a no-brainer that we already knew each other pretty well.

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