

# Block Party

## Sweden Didn't Need Another Beach

*"It's day to day. This is Kyle's fifth year here – or parts of five seasons. It's just him being a true professional in the way he conducts himself on and off the ice. And when he crosses the line, then he's not going to play, and he knows that. And that's why he hasn't played the last (four games)."* – IceHogs head coach Ted Dent

No one in the Blackhawks organization knows Kyle Beach better than Ted Dent. The current Rockford bench boss was an assistant when Beach first dipped his toes into the professional ranks at the end of his junior seasons in 2009 and 2010. Dent was there when Beach and Akim Aliu's off-ice antics got the duo banished from the IceHogs during a playoff series after an incident in a Milwaukee hotel in 2009. Dent was an assistant working directly with the forwards in Beach's first full pro season in 2010-11, and became Rockford's head coach in the summer of 2011.

So when the word came in late October that Beach's hockey excursion to Sweden had come to an end, and the Blackhawks 2008 1st round pick would be returning to the IceHogs roster, I asked Dent what he was expecting from Beach once he did return to the team.

"We'll have to talk to him and make sure his head's in the right place," answered Dent after a game in Rockford on October 26th.

A strange response it may seem to some, but to those behind the scenes Beach's mental state (in terms of his commitment to playing for the Hawks organization) was an issue some were wondering about.

Organization contacts have suggested to us that when the idea of playing in Sweden this season came up, Beach was the one who pushed for it. I asked Dent about that in October and if Beach's return in correlation with that was an area of concern.

"I don't know. I'll be able to tell you that next week after I talk to him," Dent said. "Kyle and I have a real good relationship. I don't know what happened over there, whether it was good experience or a bad experience. So we'll talk and figure it out."

Beach returned to Rockford's lineup in Milwaukee on November 1st. He skated again in the next game two days later. In his post-game media scrum on Nov 3rd, Dent wasn't exactly colored with enthusiasm when we followed up on his comments from the week before. I asked Dent if he felt Kyle was happy to be back playing in Rockford.

"I'm not sure. You'd have to ask him."

Beach declined to speak to me that day through an IceHogs spokesperson. He was upset with the article published in *The Committed Indian* back in October while he was in Sweden. But by the time Beach did speak on the record during the IceHogs weekly talk show on November 11th, he spoke in glowing terms about his stint with the HV71 club.

"It's definitely different," Beach explained. "It's more like socially relaxed, I guess you would say. You don't wear suits going to the game. They provide a lot more for the guys that come over. My housing was paid for, car was paid for, cell phone was taken care of. You're pretty well taken care of once you get over there."

When the host suggested some of the IceHogs players were excited to have Beach back, Kyle joked, "depends on who you ask."

"I'm loud. I like to talk a lot," Beach admitted. "That's just part of who I am. The first two weeks in Sweden I was pretty quiet, and by the time I was coming back (to Rockford) I was one of the louder guys in the room again."

"(Wade) Brookbank is always good at telling me when to zip it. I can always count on him. But there's a time and a place for it. You still have to have fun because if you're not having fun coming to the rink every day then you're not going to be at your best. At the end of the day this is a job. And if we're not winning, we're not doing are jobs. But with that being said, there's nothing wrong with having a little fun while you're doing your job."

Beach was officially on a 3-week tryout contract while in Sweden. Still, there was the belief from both sides (Beach and the Blackhawks) that he would play the entire season over there. When Beach left Rockford in late September he said his goodbyes to his teammates while commenting to some that there was a chance that he'd be back after the Swedish Hockey League season was over in the spring.

Of course, when the tryout ended, HV 71 decided to use their limited "foreign" contract slots on other players. The team signed former NHLers Erik Christiansen and Chris Campoli in effort to save their maligned season. Beach painted the picture of an amicable

parting of the ways when we spoke to him this past Saturday.

"I sat down with the coaching staff and the management over there and we just decided that it was going to be a numbers game," said Beach. "It was a group decision to come back. There was another option for me to go to another team over there. But, I felt it was the best choice for my career, at the time, was to come back and battle it out here - maybe get an opportunity, maybe get traded and just see where the cards played."

Upon returning, it appeared to those on the outside looking in that Beach was dealt a bad hand. He was scratched from the IceHogs lineup for 8 of the first 13 games he was available to Rockford. Beach was even left home from a 2-game road trip in late November. He was scratched and didn't even make the bus ride to Rosemont for the game on Nov 29.

Ted Dent shed some light on Beach's frequent absences the next night.

"Why was he? Just his conduct on some ground rules that we set when he came back from Sweden, that he didn't conform to. It wasn't necessarily his play on the ice because I think his play on the ice has been actually pretty good. It's just been some different things we've talked about, not including his on ice play. And that was the reason why," Dent answered.

"When he just plays hockey and keeps his mouth shut he's very effective. When he gets his mouth going and draws attention to himself that's when he gets in trouble."

This past Saturday's three-goal performance in a 4-3 victory over the Chicago Wolves marked the first hat-trick in Beach's 175 game professional career. It was certainly a banner night for the fourth-year pro, but Dent knows every next day has presented a new challenge when it comes to Beach's career thus far.

"He's got to maintain that consistency every night. He can't get too high and too low. And that's been part of the issue as well. You can't think you're bigger than you are. He scored three goals tonight, and hit a crossbar. And was really good for us. But Monday's a new day and next game is a new game. He's got to come out and play a solid game next game as well."

To be fair to Beach, while many fans and observers have done and labled Beach things like "bust" for the past year or two, the reality is Beach's on-ice experience as a pro is approximately 2 and 1/4 seasons. Brandon Pirri has 215 AHL games under his belt, a half season's worth more than Kyle. Jeremy Morin has skated in 3 more than Beach and he hasn't been able to stick on the Blackhawks as of yet either. And no one is marking Morin for bust because he's at least had a sniff here and there, but the end results ultimately are no different than Beach's. Both are toiling in the minors, vying to be the next in line.

Beach was in great spirits and on a high after his career-best performance on Saturday. That should be taken into account when listening and reading his thoughts, but overall he was reflective and careful when speaking about his future.

"That's a tough question because this organization is the only organization I've ever been with," Beach said.

"Sometimes people say that the grass is greener on the other side, but that's not always true. You've got to be careful what you wish for. That's something that we'll see over time, the next month, two months here leading up to the (trade deadline)."

But for now, Beach is concentrating on being a permanent fixture in Rockford's lineup.

"I really appreciate what Teddy has done, letting me kill penalties, giving me an opportunity to kill penalties. That's all I want is an opportunity. If you give me the opportunity and I go mess it up, then that's on me. But, I obviously want the opportunity."

And who knows, if he gets past his professional conduct issues and continues to perform at the level he does when he's at his best and most-focused, Beach can still be an asset the Blackhawks can use either in bartering, or on the ice.

"If I can play like I did tonight, then I think I won't give them a choice."



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