

# Block Party

## Swedish Beach

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Kyle Beach will make his Swedish Hockey League debut later today for the HV71 hockey club. He will wear sweater number 8.

Beach was officially loaned to HV71 on September 29th. He learned of the opportunity to play hockey this season in Sweden the day before in a meeting with Blackhawks officials after an IceHogs team meeting at the BMO Harris Bank Center in Rockford. He flew to Sweden the next day. At the time, HV71 general manager Fredrick Stillman indicated that Beach was being taken in on a three week "try-out" agreement. Although, Stillman was quoted as saying "the hope is it will work out well and he will remain throughout the year."

In an interview with ThirdManIn, Beach gave the indication that his journey to Sweden may not be a brief one.

"I'm coming over here with an open mind," Beach told the reporter. "I'm just here. I want to help this team win and get into the playoffs."

The HV71 club is off to an uncharacteristically poor start and there is speculation mounting overseas that head coach, and one-time Chicago Blackhawk, Ulf Dahlen will soon be under fire if his team doesn't soon turn their early season misfortunes around.

HV71 ranks dead-last in the SHL standings heading into today's action. So far they've won just 2 of the 9 games they've played. Gagnon had posted 2 goals and an assist in those 9 contests.

"I don't know a lot about the league," Beach said in the interview, conducted on the day of his arrival. "I know this team has a rich history, as far as winning. That's what I'm coming over to help do. Hopefully we can kind of right the ship, I guess, as we've been off to a bit of a slow start here."

Later in the interview, ThirdManIn brings up the extensive file of Kyle Beach YouTube clips cataloging Kyle's fights and various other shenanigans from his days in Canadian junior hockey as well as the AHL.

Beach chuckled, then responded.

"In North America, in juniors and the AHL – that's the role I've been forced to play," Beach proclaimed.

He continued, "I'm not afraid to take care of that side, or stick up for a teammate or protect myself. But obviously the game's a lot different over here. I think we're going to try to focus more on the skill side. And maybe not making that type of YouTube video, maybe make some other ones."

Now, Beach's claim that he was ever "forced" to play the role of a goon, fighter or instigator is downright absurd.

First off, from his first appearances in NHL exhibition games five years ago, it was evident Beach didn't have the upper body strength to hang with more than a handful of the players even close to his size. That continued on into his first two seasons in the AHL. Beach seemed to acknowledge this himself as he very often opted only to goad, or answer the challenge of opponents of a lesser stature when he did choose to fight.

Beach's second AHL season became drastically abbreviated when he had his shoulder dislocated during a fight in Peoria. He was playing his best games as a pro to that point when he suffered the injury in late October of 2011.

While there was always an organization-wide acknowledgement that dropping the gloves once in a while – because of the nature of an aggressive style and his size – was an aspect of Kyle's game, he was never cast in the enforcer role.

Kyle Hagel, Wade Brookbank and Brandon Bollig have all held that role over the span of Kyle's tenure with the IceHogs. Beach's expected role was to score

goals and knock opponents over with clean body checks, not his fists or mouth.

And that's the overbearing issue to Beach's claim that he was "forced" to be a tough guy, or whatever you'd call what Beach's game would inevitably sidetrack into.

What Beach has never seemed to reconcile within his own head is the simple fact that he was drafted at the 11th selection in the 2008 draft because his skills projected him out to be a potential 30-plus goal scorer – not a fighter or a guy who draws retaliatory penalties 100 feet from the puck.

Guys whose role it is to stir emotions or draw retaliatory penalties 100 feet from the puck are drafted in the fifth, sixth and seventh rounds – not 11th overall.

And it's not as if Beach wasn't getting that point made to him on a regular basis. He was. It just didn't appear to get through often enough.

Beach was a healthy scratch for Rockford's home opener last year after a mindless performance over two games the weekend prior in Rosemont against the Wolves.

With every Blackhawks executive and coach at Allstate Arena observing, Beach spent more of his ice time behind the play goading, diving, barking at officials – the opposing bench and faking injury than he did in the actual play. It was a performance that would have wound up on the cutting room floor in a fourth SlapShot remake.

If Kyle would have spent the last three years focusing his energy on scoring goals, getting to the opposition's net and drawing penalties by using his size instead of his mouth odds are he wouldn't be in Sweden right now auditioning for a spot on a last-place roster.

Kyle's in Sweden right now, not because he doesn't have the skill to still be an NHL player someday – he's in Sweden

because you appear to have an organization that isn't convinced it wouldn't be wasting its time, and an AHL roster spot, on a guy who clearly doesn't completely understand how big of an opportunity he's practically thrown away by his own hardheadedness.

Beach did place 5th in the Blackhawks pre-training camp physical conditioning tests and by all accounts came to training camp in the best condition of his career.

He also voluntarily traveled over to Sweden in August for some unofficial workouts Barry Smith was directing with other Blackhawks prospects and players. The Blackhawks did not ask or make accommodations for Beach to go, he did so on his own and stayed with Joakim Nordstrom while he was over there.

For Kyle though, it appears it wasn't enough to convince management he would be a big enough asset to keep around in Rockford.

HV71 will face the Frolunda Indians in a match this Saturday night. Frolunda is the team shortly-lived Blackhawks prospect and Rockford IceHogs winger Mathis Olimb now plays for.

Olimb is the player Kyle Beach picked a fight with in prospect camp in 2010. Olimb, who is five inches shorter than Beach, suffered a shoulder injury in the fight that required surgery and he missed over a month of the IceHogs' season.

When I interviewed Olimb in Rockford upon his return that fall, Olimb was diplomatic about the incident that led to his injury. However, Olimb was reportedly less than diplomatic in the newspapers back home in Norway, in which he referred to Beach as a fool.



**Chris Block**