

Block Party

TVR On The Radio

Back-to-back serious injuries have posed a challenge to the bright, young career of Trevor van Riemsdyk.

The 23-year old New Jersey native, affectionately known by Blackhawks fans now as "TVR," had his rookie season derailed after 18 games on November 16th when he blocked a Trevor Daley shot off the side of his left knee in the first period against the Dallas Stars, which was also the night of Brad Richards' 1,000th game.

"I couldn't tell at first. I just knew that it hurt," said van Riemsdyk when asked if he knew the severity of the injury right away. "But I didn't know how serious it could be. So then I got the x-ray done and that was that."

Further examinations determined van Riemsdyk had suffered a fractured left patella bone and he underwent surgery four days later. It was determined he would need three to four months of recovery time. 117 days went by before van Riemsdyk would play in his next game.

This was the second severe injury TVR suffered to his left leg in ten months.

His junior, and final season at New Hampshire, was cut short in mid-January on 2014 when he broke his left ankle in a game against Union College. The injury ended van Riemsdyk's collegiate playing career as he signed with the Blackhawks upon the conclusion of UNH's season. He spent some time with the Rockford IceHogs in April until the time their season ended, but he never came close to playing in a game.

TVR couldn't compare or say which injury was worse.

"It's hard to say, they were both different," van Riemsdyk said after playing this past Sunday in his second game for the Rockford IceHogs. "Both had different things to get through. I don't know which one was worse necessarily. But, yeah, they both weren't very fun."

The rookie blueliner made his return to game action on Saturday night in Grand Rapids, almost four months to the day of the night of the injury at United Center against Dallas.

He played 13:30 minutes in a 3-1 loss to Grand Rapids. The IceHogs dressed seven defenseman. TVR wasn't initially in the grouping of six, but he skated a regular 5-on-5 shift alongside Stephen Johns for most of the night.

After playing his second game on Sunday, van Riemsdyk said he felt good and was optimistic about his chances for a return to the Blackhawks this season.

"It's getting there," TVR said after the IceHogs' 4-3 win over the Chicago Wolves on Sunday. "It's getting pretty close. Obviously I just got to shake off some rust. I think it's getting pretty close. It's still the same game. You just got to trust your instincts, and that will all be there. So, it's just trust in those (instincts) and just not hesitating. It's been a little while, obviously, it's gonna be slow in a couple areas, but overall I felt pretty good."

TVR played the left side with Johns, which is notable because van Riemsdyk spent a lot of his time with the Blackhawks in October and November skating the left side with Michal Rozsival. Rockford IceHogs head coach Ted Dent was quick to point out that he had five right-handed shots in the lineup Saturday, and that it was natural to position TVR on the left since he had experience there.

However, with six defensemen dressed on Sunday in Rosemont and TVR paired with Kirill Gotovets, an AHL contracted player and lefty shot whose customary spot is on the left, TVR also played some on the left side. Gotovets (who is the Cornell grad the Hawks got in return for trading Philippe Paradis to Tampa Bay a couple years ago) and TVR flipped sides several times during the game. That could be seen as a sign that the Blackhawks wanted to see van Riemsdyk on the left side perhaps because that's where they see him best fitting in Chicago.

Ted Dent was complimentary of TVR's first two games.

"I thought he was fine," Dent said in his post-game media scrum on Sunday. "To be honest with you, he's never played here. So, we don't know completely what his game is like anyway. So, it's all new territory for us. But I thought he handled himself good."

TVR doesn't mind playing either side. He sees the positives in his versatility.

"Yeah, it's just being able to do whatever they need. Anytime you can do multiple things and offer different things at the table it just makes it that much easier for the team to have a use for you."

It's worth mentioning that Blackhawks assistant coach Kevin Dineen was on hand Sunday to watch van Riemsdyk's second game back. While the Blackhawks' hockey operations staff typically has a large presence for IceHogs games at Allstate Arena, it's rare that a member of the coaching staff makes an appearance. It's usually because Joel Quenneville wants one of his guys who he trusts to give him their first-hand opinion.

This will lead to speculation as to how long it could be before TVR returns to the Blackhawks' blue line. That's difficult to say. TVR looked slow and understandably tentative in both games this weekend.

When he spoke to the media on Monday, Quenneville was also more cautious about laying expectations for TVR's potential return.

When asked after Sunday's game, van Riemsdyk didn't have any clear indication of what the Hawks plans are for him.

"Yeah, I think they've left that door open for me, kind of put it on myself to get to that level that I was playing at. And if I can get there, maybe that's an option that they'll use."

He says he's not feeling any pain in his left knee despite playing a back-to-back in his return.

"No, no pain. A little stiff, a little weaker at the moment. Nothing too drastic anymore, I'm working to get that (strength) back. It's pretty much getting there, so it should be good."

There's definitely a concern when it comes to TVR suffering two severe injuries to the same leg over a stretch of ten months. He wasn't the greatest skater to begin with and now he has two major surgeries on his left leg.

The Middletown, New Jersey boy admits it has been a tough process.

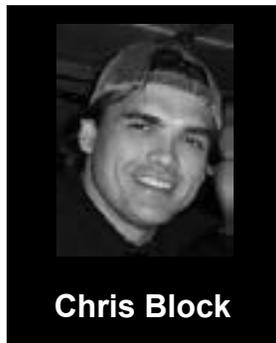
"It's definitely tough to go through and injury but I've had a little bit of an experience before. I have a great support staff, whether it'd be the people with the Blackhawks or just my family, they've been really good. So, it's made coming back a little easier."

Mentally, van Riemsdyk says the past four months weren't easy to deal with, but the jovial youngster is ready to get back and return to his early season form.

"Yeah, it was tough," he said. "It was definitely, when you get that news in the locker room after you do some x-rays. It was definitely not fun. It was a good start. Things were going pretty well. I thought I was playing pretty well. I seemed to be getting pretty positive feedback from the coaches. So, yeah, it wasn't fun to deal with that, but that happens. I play a sport with injuries that are definitely a part of it. So, it's something you've got to deal with and come back stronger."

And once he does regain that strength and sharpness, he hopes he can make a contribution to the Blackhawks again this season.

"Yeah, that's always the goal – to get back to playing your best. And hopefully that means I'll be playing back up there. But I just have to take care of stuff on my end, just play my best, get back to playing good, feeling normal and go from there."



Chris Block

ChrisBlock@TheThirdManIn.com
Twitter.com/ChrisBlock