

Ex-Tiger Formenton makes NHL debut with Sens



By Jake Courtepatte

When the Ottawa Senators were introduced for their warm-up before their matchup with the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday night at Canadian Tire Centre, one lone skater took to the ice for a couple of laps.

As is tradition in hockey circles, that player was Alex Formenton, skating in his first ever regular season NHL game.

Just two seasons ago, Formenton was skating on the left side at the Aurora Community Centre for the OJHL's Aurora Tigers.

Saturday, the winger from King City's NHL dreams came to fruition, lacing them up for the Ottawa Senators.

Two years removed from a thirteen goal, thirteen assist season in Aurora, Formenton became the youngest player in Senators history to make his NHL debut at 18 years, 24 days.

"It's definitely exciting," said Formenton. "I can't take the smile off my face. It's been fun lately."

His rise to the top level of hockey has been rapid and unexpected from all corners of the hockey perspective, with most scouts pegging the skinny youngster as a mid-second round pick at the 2017 NHL Draft.

Picked 47th overall by the Senators, Formenton impressed the higher-ups enough in camp to earn a surprise roster spot over a handful of much more experienced NHLers.

Though Saturday's debut against the Red Wings came with just seven shifts, compiling a little under five minutes of ice time, Formenton made sure to make his presence felt with both a hit and a shot block.

"It was tough because it was so tight," coach Guy Boucher said in a press conference after a 2-1 shootout loss to the Red Wings.

"You don't want the kid to make the poor mistake there and he remembers his first game. If you take the lead, matchups are a little tough. He's not on the power play and he's not on the penalty kill. He worked hard, he skated. There's no issue there."

The skilled winger started showing NHL potential in his one season with the OHL's London Knights in 2016-17, when he put up 16 goals and 18 assists as a rookie with limited ice time.

An expected assignment to the Senators' AHL affiliate, the Belleville Senators, was put on hold after a strong preseason in September where Formenton notched a goal and two assists in five preseason appearances.

With a nametag above a stall now in the Sens' dressing room, it all seems very real for the former OJHLer. Though it may be a long shot, as most players as young as Formenton are sent back to the junior ranks to develop, he is hoping to get the chance to stay.

"I've got a good stall here," said Formenton. "I'm hoping to maintain it."