

## Aurora's Sikura feels 'ready' for NHL's Blackhawks



By Jake Courtepatte

When Dylan Sikura takes to the ice in Traverse City, Michigan this weekend for the Chicago Blackhawks annual prospects tournament, the speedy forward will be putting his skills to the test against some of the Hawks' elite first and second round draft choices.

For the Aurora native, his path to the big leagues has been more of a journey since being drafted in the sixth round four years ago: but one he says he is now ready for.

'Yeah, it's definitely a little different to be surrounded by those guys,' said Sikura, the latest pick to take part in the tournament.

'But I think at this point in our careers, if you're here, you're here. It doesn't really matter where you got drafted, if you got drafted or whatnot. Like I said before, I don't think it matters too much where you go, but the organization that picks you and if it's the right fit. Obviously Chicago's been nothing but perfect for me so far. This is a pretty cool experience being here.'

The 22-year old Sikura spent most of three seasons with the OJHL's Aurora Tigers, before becoming a prominent piece up the middle for the NCAA's Northeastern University Huskies over the past four seasons.

Over four seasons at Northeastern, Sikura averaged more than a point per game, with 58 goals, 88 assists and 146 points in 137 games.

Sikura's college career ended with an upset when the Michigan Wolverines beat Northeastern 3-2 in the first round of the 2017-18 NCAA tournament. He signed an entry-level contract worth \$925,000 with the Blackhawks shortly after.

Described by Hawks brass as having a 'meteoric rise' up the Blackhawks prospect charts in recent years, Sikura jumped from twenty-second to fifth on the Hawks' 'Top 25 Under 25' list released by the team last month.

His five games spent in the NHL late last season, where he showed chemistry with some other big-name young wingers like Alex DeBrincat and Brandon Saad in putting up three assists in five games, helped his cause significantly.

'I think that was huge,' said Sikura. 'Even though it was just five games, I think I got a taste of what the league is like. I got to play against some pretty special players and see them at their highest form. I think it's just good to have a benchmark like that, kind of compare yourself to other players throughout the league and see how you match up and what you need to work on.'

'This summer I was obviously able to use that little experience I had with those five games and kind of remember what it's like. Obviously it's been a huge summer for me and getting pretty antsy and ready to get back out to Chicago.'

Sikura will also have another familiar name at training camp this season: older brother Tyler Sikura, the 26-year old centreman who signed with the Blackhawks last year, and a current member of the Blackhawks' AHL affiliate, the Rockford IceHogs.

The brothers last skated together as members of the St. Andrew's College Saints in Aurora.

'It's going to be pretty special,' said the younger Sikura. 'I don't think I've played with him since I was in Grade 9. We played a little bit of high school hockey together. For me, it's my first main camp, so I don't know what to expect too much. He'll definitely be someone that I lean on while I'm there. We've been training together this summer. He's been working hard, keeping tabs on each other. I think that'll be a pretty special moment for us to be there together.'