

By Jake Courtepatte



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In joining the NHL's worst powerplay, Dylan Sikura is hoping to jumpstart the offense of the Chicago Blackhawks. The 23-year old Aurora native has made his first official regular season leap onto the big club's roster, called up from the AHL affiliate Rockford IceHogs late last week.

Since signing a two-way deal with the Blackhawks in March of this year, Sikura has become a leader in the Rockford dressing room, pacing the team lead in points with nine goals and nine assists through 26 games so far this year.

Still, Sikura says he feels the pressure in donning the red and white of one of the sport's most storied franchises.

"I think you've got to be human, feel a little pressure," said Sikura in a media scrum following his first game with the big club this season, a 6 ? 3 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins. "But I think that's good and part of the game, and that's part of the reason why you love to play the game. Obviously, it's a little magnified here, playing in Chicago in an organization like this, but I think it comes with the territory."

With three games under his belt since the call-up, the winger is still looking to find his groove and his first NHL goal, posting an assist in a 7 ? 3 loss to the San Jose Sharks on Sunday.

Yet Sikura feels up to the task.

"I'm in a lot better spot," Sikura said. "The adjustments to the pro hockey level is pretty tough and I kind of found out the hard way. But I'm going to use the experience from the time down in Rockford and hopefully have a better jump start here."

"For me it was important to go down there with a positive mindset. Some guys go down there and they're not too happy about it. But I think it's something that's going to benefit me in the long run. I got a lot from it, improved my game, just getting adjusted to this level and hopefully it will show here."

First year head coach Jeremy Colliton, who manned the bench behind Sikura in Rockford last season, said there is certainly room for Sikura to earn a permanent spot on the Blackhawks roster.

"There's room in our top nine," said Colliton in the same media scrum, praising the quickness and agility of his young protégé. "He has played better and that's important to reward guys when they show a progression. He's been more active away from the puck. He's a little heavier stick, heavier in battles, maybe more confidence, too. He's made more plays, pucks have gone in the net for him. It's always nice as a skill player to see them go in."

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 a star-studded four-year collegiate career.

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