

Archibald has taste of NHL with Canuck call-up

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Darren Archibald was looking forward to making his home debut as a member of the Utica Comets' American Hockey League club in late October.

That opportunity never came to fruition for the 23-year-old former Stouffville Spirit forward and Newmarket native.

Rather, it was put on hold after the six-foot three-inch, 212-pound forward took to a higher calling when the club's parent Vancouver Canucks requested his presence for their Oct. 25 road tilt against the St. Louis Blues.

For Archibald, who was bypassed in the NHL entry draft, the opportunity to make it to the big leagues — where he stayed for an eight-game stint and collected two assists before being returned to Utica, fulfilled a lifelong ambition.

"I really didn't expect to get called up so early in the year," he conceded upon receiving the good tidings. "Fortunately for me, Vancouver was battling through some injuries at that time and our season in Utica was just starting.

"I was going through my routine one day and got a telephone call one night from my coach at Utica who told me to pack my bags for at least five days. The next morning I got on the plane and went to St. Louis," he recalled. "I had no idea how long I would be with the Canucks. Fortunately I showed well in my first game and got in seven more games."

Stating it's not in his nature to experience the butterflies, Archibald acknowledged he felt them in making his long-awaited NHL debut that saw the Canucks skate off with a 3-2 overtime road win.

At the same time, he was quick to praise his teammates on the Canucks, who tried to help him feel at ease.

"I waited my whole life for that moment," he recalled. "But once the game got under way it was surreal."

In making the jump to the big leagues, Archibald felt his biggest adjustment wasn't so much in the speed of the game, what other players tend to suggest.

In his case, it was a matter of maintaining his focus since he was utilized on the Canucks' fourth



DARREN ARCHIBALD

line.

"In playing on the fourth line you get just a few minutes of ice time. But during that time you've got to be sharp because you can lose your focus when you're not on a lot," he said.

As for the physicality of the game, Archibald felt he could hold his own since that's the way he's always played and it's his forte.

"My job on the ice is to play physical," he said.

Launching his tier two junior A career with the Spirit in 2007-08 before progressing up the competi-

tive ladder where he toiled with the Barrie Colts and Niagara IceDogs in the Ontario Hockey League and the Chicago Wolves and Kalamazoo Wings, Archibald was quick to credit several people in helping him along the way to where he's on the cusp of full-time NHL employment.

Along with his immediate family, he praised former Spirit head coach Dave D'Amazio, who offered him a spot on the club's roster after watching him in a spring rookie practice.

"I wanted to play for Newmarket since that's my hometown, but they didn't have a spot on their roster so I went to Stouffville," recalled Archibald. "Dave (D'Amazio) gave me a chance as a young guy."

While playing just one season with the Spirit in 2007-08 where he amassed 21 goals and 27 assists in 49 games, the one moment that firmly remains entrenched in Archibald's memory bank was setting up Corey Trivino with the game-winning goal in overtime of the seventh game of their playoff series against the host Huntsville Muskoka Otters.

"We were underdogs going into that series," recalled Archibald.

Also instrumental in Archibald's

on-ice development were his OHL coaches in Marty Williamson and Dave Hawerchuk and Canucks' amateur scout Dan Palango.

"Dan (Palango) saw me play in the OHL and threw my name out there and I signed a contract with them. He was a big part of that," cited Archibald.

Since returning to the Comets where he had three goals and four assists in 17 games, Archibald was quick to note he's still a work in progress.

But having had a taste of what life is like in the NHL, he maintains a positive outlook that he will soon be back.

Whether it be with the Canucks, who Archibald described as a team with plenty of veteran players, or another NHL team, he's gained a better appreciation of what it takes to gain full time employment.

"Sure it's hard to come back (to the AHL) once you've been there. But I look at it as a positive. You want to produce even more to get back and now I just have to be patient.

"There's no better way to make a living than playing in the NHL," he said.



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