



Camp invite big honour for Marc Staal



Marc Staal (left) pins Sidney Crosby against the boards during the Canadian men's Olympic hockey orientation camp scrimmage game played in front of a capacity crowd of 19,289 at the Pengrowth Saddledome in Calgary on Aug. 27.

Photo: Bruce Rakoczy

CALGARY – Canadian men's Olympic hockey coach Mike Babcock compared being associated with Canadian hockey to that of winning the lottery and Marc Staal is one of those basking in the windfall.

The 22-year-old Thunder Bay native is one of 46 hopefuls taking part in the nation's Olympic hockey orientation camp being held in Calgary.

Coming off his second full season in the National Hockey League with the New York Rangers, Staal was humbled just to be considered to be among this prestigious group of talented athletes.

"It's a big honour for me to be part of this group of players. I'm pretty excited to be here."

While many may consider the 6-foot, 4-inch, 202-pound defenceman a long shot to crack Canada's line-up for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver Staal for his part isn't putting any undo pressure on himself.



Marc Staal joins the rush during practice at the Canadian men's Olympic orientation camp Aug. 24-27 in Calgary. **Photo: Bruce Rakoczy**

"We were told that this week is more about information, getting to know the guys, the coaches and learning their systems so that helps put some of the younger guys at ease."

Despite knowing the four-day event will not make or break Staal's chances he still looks to make his mark.

"Obviously I still want to make a good impression and play well. I just want to be comfortable out there and just do what I do."

A certain benefit for the second oldest of the four hockey playing Staal family is that he is enjoying the whole experience with brothers Eric and Jordan who are also part of the camp roster. It's a feeling that he cherishes.

"Yeah, it's very cool. We all got the call with the invites on the same day so it was pretty exciting and great that all three of us got to come."

Not competing as rivals at this event also marks a pleasant change of pace.

"We battle against each other all year with our teams and now we get to pull on the same rope so to speak. It's nice."

He is also relevant of the fact that Thunder Bay and region is so well represented with a solid core of area talent taking part.

"Yeah, good Northern Canadian boys," quipped Staal with a slightly boastful grin. "We all grew up loving the game. Me, Sharpy (Patrick Sharp), Jordan and Eric got the benefit of play competitively with the Thunder Bay Kings organization and other minor hockey, which helped us out. It's great to be able to represent Northwestern Ontario like that."

From here Staal will return home and prepare for the start of the Rangers training camps, which is quickly approaching.

"I'll spend the next couple weeks in Thunder Bay skating and working out as much as I can."

Despite his early NHL success Staal will not be taking anything for granted upon his return to Broadway.

"From what I hear from Torts (Rangers head coach John Tortorella) it's going to be a tough camp so I have to be ready. I'm looking forward to the challenge and getting the season going."

Of course the goal of any NHL player is to some day win the Stanley Cup.

He's seen up close eyeing the celebrations of brothers Eric and Jordan following their NHL championships in 2006 and 2009 respectively and eyes the day that someday will be his turn to hoist the Cup.

Staal is however cognizant of the superstition that many NHL players have of not touching the Stanley Cup until doing so as a champion.

"No, I haven't touched it. I kept my distance. I wanted to, you know, grab it and throw it in the air, but hopefully in the near future I can do it the right way."

That would be the ultimate lottery grand prize for Marc Staal.



Marc Staal eyes the play during practice at the Olympic men's orientation camp in Calgary. **Photo: Bruce Rakoczy**