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Sharp aims for Canadian Olympic berth



Thunder Bay's Patrick Sharp takes part in drills at the Canadian men's Olympic hockey orientation camp Aug. 24-27 in Calgary. Photo: Bruce Rakoczy

CALGARY – For Patrick Sharp, his continuing efforts to be among hockey's elite jumps to another level this week as the Thunder Bay product is one of 46 hopefuls taking to the ice at the Canadian Olympic men's hockey orientation camp in Calgary.

The 27-year-old Chicago Blackhawks forward began day one of the four-day event Monday get together still humbled when queried about recalling his mind set when learning he had be invited to take part.

"My first thought was it's a huge honour," reflected Sharp. "In Canada, the Olympic hockey team is one of the most difficult to make and just to be considered as one of the forwards is pretty remarkable."

Like any new setting, Sharp was not fully aware of what will transpire during the course of the week.

"I really don't know what to expect. It'll be exciting to play and learn from a lot of the great players that are here. I think more than anything it'll be a fun week even though I'm not really sure what else is in store. It certainly is a great opportunity though."

Coming off a late season knee injury that hampered him from playing at full capacity with the Blackhawks this past season, Sharp's goals this week were to simply try being part of the group.

"I just want to try and fit in as best as I can off the ice. I think that's just as important as the play on the ice. You're trying to build a team for a short tournament and I think off-

ice relationships are really important."

Among personal goals Sharp has set for himself he offered these thoughts.

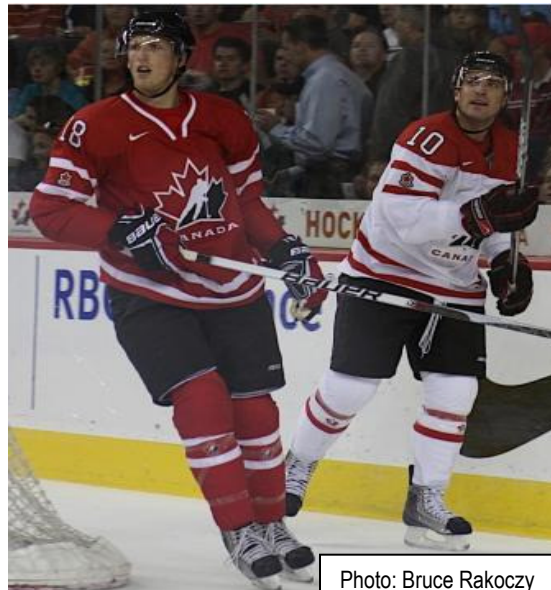


Photo: Bruce Rakoczy

Patrick Sharp (right) and Marc Staal look up towards the play at the Canadian men's Olympic orientation camp inter-squad contest in front of a boisterous, sell-out crowd at the Pengrowth Saddledome in Calgary on Aug. 27.

"I just want play strong, stay healthy and show the team that I can play a lot of different positions. I'd love to be part of it in any capacity."

One individual who is certainly familiar with the smooth skating forwards attributes is Team Canada assistant coach Ken Hitchcock.

Sharp feels the man who was his first NHL coach back in his days with the Philadelphia Flyers as well as the bench boss for Canada at the 2008 World Hockey Championships, in which Sharp was also a part, has its advantages in attempting to earn an Olympic roster spot.



Patrick Sharp (right) and Sidney Crosby share a laugh during the Canadian men's Olympic hockey orientation camp in Calgary Aug. 24-27. Photo: Bruce Rakoczy.

"I think it helps quite a bit. I got my start with Hitch and I learned a lot from him as a coach. He's helped me become a more complete player. It's nice having him behind the bench this time too helping make those decisions."

Finishing tied for the NHL lead in shorthanded goals in 2007-08 is also something that is sure to impress the defence-savvy Hitchcock.

Sharp credits the experiences taught by Columbus Blue Jackets head coach for rounding out all aspects of his game.

"At the World Championship I played a role that I really wasn't accustomed to during the NHL regular season. It more of a checking line role and I played a different position. Showing the coaching staff that I can do a variety of things should only help my chances."

He'll continue to compete and is willing to offer whatever is required should it mean an Olympic berth.

"I'd be willing to play any role they asked me to do and it's a big honour just to be invited."

While Sharp is in Calgary looking to impress individually he is also part of a large Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario contingent invited to show their wares.

Also competing are the Staal brothers - Eric, Marc and Jordan - as are Dryden's Pronger, Kenora's Mike Richards and Duncan Keith who has ties to Fort Frances.

Sharp relishes the fact that the region is so well represented.

"Yeah, it's pretty impressive," said Sharp. "It just goes to show you what kind of minor hockey system we have in Thunder Bay and the region and the type of people we have living here. Hopefully we can all make it."

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