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The anxiety has subsided as the nerve-racking part is already in the bag for youngster Jaden Schwartz.

Schwartz played in his first NHL game Saturday in Tampa Bay. He also notched his first NHL goal in the first period, which stood to be the game-winning goal in a 3-1 victory for the St. Louis Blues.

It didn't take Schwartz a very long time to overcome the pressure of scoring an NHL goal.

"It was pretty special," said Schwartz. "It's something you dream about. I was happy I could come in and help get the win. Getting the first goal was exciting."

Schwartz, 19, had a very eventful couple of days. He played in his last game for Colorado College last Saturday, which was a loss to Michigan Technological University that swept Colorado College out of the playoffs. Schwartz immediately began discussions with the St. Louis Blues, the team that drafted him 14th overall in the 2010 NHL Entry Draft. He signed a three-year entry level deal Monday and met his new teammates and coaching staff in Chicago Tuesday. Schwartz practiced with his team as soon as he arrived, but was told that he would not play that night when the Blues would battle the Chicago Blackhawks at United Center.

Schwartz continued to travel with the team to Carolina but was held out of the lineup yet again Thursday when the Blues took on the Carolina Hurricanes. Something happened in this game that allowed Schwartz to step in Saturday in Tampa Bay.

Hurricanes hard-nosed forward Tuomo Ruutu drove Blues forward Andy McDonald into the boards early in the second period, causing McDonald to leave the game and not return. It was reported Friday that he suffered a shoulder contusion on the play, putting him on the shelf for a few weeks. Blues Head Coach Ken Hitchcock says that McDonald is "week-to-week" and that it

is “not day-to-day, but it's not a month either.”

McDonald has been the driving force behind the Blues’ offense since returning from a concussion on February 12. In that time, the Blues had gone 12-4-1 and McDonald had at least one point in 13 of those games. He was averaging a point-per-game and really helped the Blues’ power-play improve, as they converted on 15 of 55 chances while McDonald was in the lineup (27.2%).

This is where Schwartz fit in. He played his first game Saturday on the Blues’ second scoring line with Patrik Berglund and Jamie Langenbrunner. Schwartz’s first goal was scored on the power-play, after defenseman Carlo Colaiacovo fired the puck at the net and forward Chris Stewart tipped the puck back in front. Schwartz was right in front of the net to scoop the puck past Lightning goaltender Dwayne Roloson.

"He's a hungry player," Hitchcock said. "The big thing is he knows where to go on the ice. He knows the places to go. That's hard to teach."

Schwartz finished the game with 13:50 on-ice time, while being 100% accurate, scoring on his only shot-on-goal.

Schwartz may get an even bigger chance to get top-line minutes, as Blues Captain David Backes left Saturday’s game in the second period after blocking a slapshot with his left foot. Backes did not return to the ice, but Hitchcock listed him as “day-to-day,” adding that he “will be fine” in a few days.

While Backes’ injury may not be significant, the coaching staff may decide to still give him some time off, such as they did with veteran Jason Arnott. The 37-year old center has not played the past two games so that he can heal some minor wear and tear NHL players go through in the regular season.

This is a luxury a team has when they are the first team in the league to register 100 points and are the only club to have clinched a playoff berth.

In the midst of a seven-game road trip, the Blues will now have three days between games, as they left Tampa Bay Saturday night and will return to the road Wednesday night when they battle the Ducks in Anaheim. The Blues have not had more than two days between games since the All-Star Break (January 25 – February 2).

Jeremy Rutherford of the St. Louis Post Dispatch reported Sunday morning that forward Alex Steen will be meeting the team in Anaheim Wednesday and plans to practice in the morning. Coach Hitchcock says he has not devised a game plan yet but says that Steen “feels great.”

Between Arnott, Steen, D’Agostini, McDonald and Backes’ injuries, it is expected that Schwartz will continue to see time for the remaining nine games of the regular season.

It’s up to him to decide what he does with it.

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