Why did Guy Boucher choose Tampa Bay over Columbus? Elliotte Freidman of CBC sums it up best: "Word is the biggest reason was time, as in he's got more of it in Tampa. When Steve Yzerman took over, he preached patience. "It's going to take some time" was his mantra, repeating it often and to everyone. It's the right path for that organization." Boucher will have time to build and mold Tampa Bay's on ice product to his exact specifications. His coaching philosophy is one centered on a consistently aggressive offensive attack. Pushing the puck up the ice is a significant part of that, and it places a huge emphasis on a defenseman's ability to skate, make plays, and pass the puck quickly and accurately.

Boucher's 1-3-1 forecheck requires mobile, confident defensemen who are able to jump into the rush and quickly retreat to the defensive zone if necessary. In Hamilton this past season, he had three defensemen break the 30-point mark (including PK Subban, who led the way with 53 points in 77 games). Kurtis Foster, the only Lightning defenseman to break the 30 point mark in 2009-10 is a free agent this summer. There are several very good offensive defensemen available this summer, both on the free agent market and the trade block. However, Tampa Bay already has significant salary committed to the back end, and on paper they have some puck

movers who for various reasons struggled last season. They don't necessarily need to go outside the organization to find the players Boucher needs.

Breaking down Tampa Bay's fantasy hockey-relevant defensemen…

Andrej Meszaros *($4 million per season, signed through 2013-14)*

After averaging eight goals and 37 points during his first three seasons in the league (all with Ottawa), Meszaros has averaged only four goals and 16 points during his past two seasons with the Lightning. He is big, mobile, and was a solid power play defenseman with the Senators. He is also very durable – outside of his injury-plagued 2008-09 season, he has missed only one game since breaking through in 2005-06. His contract is an ugly one, and Yzerman would have a tough time moving him. Meszaros *should* rebound under a new coach, as he proved in Ottawa that he could be a valuable offensive contributor from the back end.

Kurtis Foster averaged a defense-leading 3:50 of ice time per game on the power play last season for Tampa Bay, nearly double the amount Meszaros saw (2:10). Boucher's system will

allow for scoring chances at even strength as well, but Meszaros will need to see more power play time to return to the 35 or 40 point level.

2010-11 projection: 6 goals, 27 assists, 33 points

Mattias Ohlund *($3.6 million per season, signed through 2015-16)*

Ohlund will play a defensive role under Boucher, much like he did last season under Rick Tocchet. He has a booming shot but Tampa Bay will want him to focus his efforts on the penalty kill and shutting down the top players on the opposition.

2010-11 projection: 4 goals, 18 assists, 22 points

Victor Hedman *($3.5 million per season including bonuses, signed through 2011-12)*

All things considered (poor team on the ice, idiot owners off of it), Hedman had a very respectable rookie season in 2009-10. He averaged over 20 minutes of ice time per game, including 1:19 on the power play and 2:30 on the penalty kill. He finished the season with four goals and 20 points. Expect those totals to increase significantly in 2010-11. Hedman is incredibly mobile, smart, and dynamic with the puck on his stick. Throw in the fact that he is 6’7”, and things are looking good for him in the future. Expect him to play a big part in the Lightning’s offensive attack, both with the man advantage and at even strength.

2010-11 projection: 12 goals, 33 assists, 45 points

Matt Lashoff *($550,000 per season, signed through 2010-11)*

Lashoff suited up for only five games last season, and he averaged less than nine minutes of ice time in those games. He has proven he can produce offensively at the AHL level (119 points in 234 career games), but he has only one goal and 14 assists in 63 career NHL games. He skates well and can make plays, but his defensive play has held him back from being an everyday NHL defenseman. Because of his small cap hit he may have the inside track at the sixth spot on Tampa's defense for 2010-11.

2010-11 projection: 3 goals, 14 assists, 17 points

Paul Ranger *(RFA)*

Ranger mysteriously left the Lightning for personal reasons early into the 2009-10 season. There is no word on whether he will be returning to hockey for 2010-11, but he was extended a qualifying offer this past week from Lightning management. Of the players currently on Tampa Bay's roster, Ranger fits the mold of the puck mover the best, and he is solid in the defensive zone as well (albiet prone to blunders from time to time). Hopefully he was able to sort his issues out; as he is a very good defenseman with a lot of room to grow (he doesn't turn 26 until September).

2010-11 projection: 4 goals, 31 assists, 35 points

Mike Lundin *(RFA)*

Lundin is one of those players who will never have the same value in fantasy hockey as he does in real life. He was a nice surprise for Tampa Bay last season. In the Lightning's final 17 games, Lundin played over 22 minutes 14 times. On April 4th, he played over 30 minutes and had two assists in a win against Ottawa. He is an RFA and I expect the team to sign him to a multi-year extension. Lundin did have 29 points in only 51 games with Norfolk in 2008-09, but he probably won't see enough power play time to approach the 30 point mark in 2010-11. Like Ohlund, he will see primarily defensive minutes because that is where he excels.

2010-11 projection: 6 goals, 22 assists, 28 points

Ty Wishart *($1.1 million per season including bonuses, signed through 2010-11)*

The 22-year-old defenseman had a very solid 2009-10 season for Norfolk, finishing with nine goals and 23 assists in 76 games. He projects as a solid two-way defenseman somewhere in the top four in the long-term. For 2010-11, he has a great shot at cracking the top six, but anything more than 15-20 points would be gravy.

2010-11 projection: 3 goals, 12 assists, 15 points

Not included: **Matt Walker**, **Matt Smaby**

Obviously something has to give here. I'd expect one of Meszaros or Ranger to be traded. Tampa Bay loves Lundin, and for good reason. He was arguably their most consistent defenseman during the second half of the 2009-10 season. Wishart should be on the team. Smaby is a solid depth defenseman. Walker is overpaid for what be brings, but baring a trade he will be back in the top six for next season.