

## Lecavalier vs. Richards

Written by Steve Laidlaw

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Have you ever lived in another person's shadow? Being constantly outshone by another is a maddening experience that can tear away at the fabric of your soul. This is because, more often than not, it is someone you genuinely like or at the very least respect who is keeping you down. Whether it is your best friend or a family member who is keeping you out of the spotlight, you cannot help but start feeling like this person is not someone you love but rather your mortal enemy. This can put a heavy strain on the relationship but even more than that it can shatter your feelings of self-worth. Consider then the plight of Brad Richards; doomed to live in the shadow of friend and former teammate Vincent Lecavalier.

It all began in 1997 when Richards joined the Rimouski Oceanic for the 1997-98 QMJHL season where he'd team up with Lecavalier for the very first time. It was a highly successful season as both players recorded 115 points on the season, went on a lengthy playoff run and both went on to be drafted by the Tampa Bay Lightning in the 1998 NHL Entry Draft. It was Lecavalier though who received all the hype. He would play for Canada at the World Junior Championships that year and would go on to be the first overall selection in the draft. Richards was an afterthought, deemed to be a product of his environment, ultimately being selected in the third round. You could hardly blame Lecavalier though. He had his own problems to deal with; namely having to carry the weight of being a number one pick and being publicly anointed the next great French Canadian hockey player.

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The following season Lecavalier made the jump to the NHL leaving Richards back in Rimouski to make a name for himself. Richards would do just that putting up some absolutely exorbitant point totals over two more QMJHL seasons and leading Rimouski to the 1999-00 Memorial Cup. That was great but Lecavalier was still an NHLer and thus still shone brighter.

When Richards finally made his NHL debut in 2000-01, he outscored Lecavalier but that was also the season that Lecavalier was first named Captain of the Lightning. Richards could not catch a break. Lecavalier was doomed to be in the spotlight and Richards was doomed to live in his shadow.

That all finally changed in the 2004 NHL Playoffs when the Lightning won the Stanley Cup and it was Richards, not Lecavalier who lead the team to victory and won the Conn Smythe. The spotlight was on Richards for what would seem like the first time ever but then the lockout came and all was soon forgotten. Then one season after the lockout Lecavalier finally reached his potential scoring 108 points and leading the league in goals with 52. Richards was once again an also ran and would be traded to Dallas the following season.

This is where Richards finally got to make a name for himself emerging as a bonafide superstar and one of the top playmakers in the game. He would culminate his rise from the shadows becoming the top prize of this summer's free agent market. By signing with the Rangers all eyes will now be on Richards. Lecavalier has meanwhile seen himself shifted to the backburner in the wake of Stamkos fever. It truly is a paradox and leaves us with the ultimate question: Who is better, Richards or Lecavalier?

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A quick glance at the numbers from the past few seasons would no doubt leave you leaning towards Richards but it is important to look deeper than just point totals when considering who to take in your standard Yahoo! pool.

**GP**

**Goals**

**Assists**

**Plus/Minus**

**PPP**

**PIM**

**SOG**

**Lecavalier**

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74.67

26

37.67

Minus-10

25.67

53.33

265.33

### **Richards**

69.33

22.67

49.33

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Minus-5

29.33

14.67

245.33

These are the season averages for both players over the past three seasons. The first thing to note is that durability has been an issue. At 31 years old, neither Richards or Lecavalier is a spring chicken. They are still in their respective primes but neither one should be counted on for a full season. There is little advantage for either one with regard to durability.

Goal scoring has been rather tight, which is surprising considering Lecavalier is a former 50-goal scorer and Richards has never even topped the 30-goal plateau. Lecavalier does hold a slight edge as you would expect.

Assists provide a much wider margin. Richards has always been a much better playmaker and that is reflected in his strong advantage in this category.

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Both players have been dreadful in their careers with regard to Plus/Minus. They both prefer to do their work on the powerplay. Richards has however been stronger in this regard and heading to New York with Henrik Lundqvist I'd expect Richards' numbers to improve here giving him an even stronger advantage.

Powerplay points are close but once again Richards has an advantage. Lecavalier is a lock to produce in this category playing with the likes of St. Louis and Stamkos on one of the leagues best powerplays. Richards on the other hand may see a drop but I don't expect much of one in New York. Much like his situation in Dallas, Richards is on a team without a true powerplay QB. That suits him just as fine as he can fill the role better than most defensemen. The forward group in New York isn't quite as flashy as it was in Dallas but it could potentially be better as Gaborik is a bonafide star, something the Stars never had to pair with Richards. I think Richards' powerplay production goes unscathed with his move to the Big Apple, which helps him maintain his slight advantage.

PIM is a cake walk for Lecavalier. Richards just isn't a PIM option.

SOG like Goals, are also much closer than expected. Despite his reputation as a playmaker Richards has always been a very solid producer of SOG, failing to eclipse the 200-SOG mark only twice in his career. Lecavalier remains a stronger option in this category but with the presence of Stamkos has seen his SOG totals decline. This category is very close but Lecavalier still has an edge.

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I have this one scored 3-3 and a tie on the whole. What we must then consider things beyond the numbers.

Just how “in-decline” is Lecavalier? It is no secret that Lecavalier has taken a hit since the arrival of Stamkos but Stamkos’ arrival has also coincided with some major injuries for Lecavalier. It is important to note that St. Louis is the major driver of the offense in Tampa Bay. Whichever centerman is paired with the diminutive winger is the one who gets the bulk of scoring the scoring chances. While both Lecavalier and Stamkos play together with St. Louis on the powerplay the difference is seen with regard to who plays with St. Louis at even strength. Over the past few years Stamkos has been the one seeing greater time with St. Louis and that trend should continue despite the departure from that lineup during the playoffs. That leaves Lecavalier as the ~70-point player he’s been the last three seasons. He certainly has upside for more but that would most likely require an injury to Stamkos.

Richards on the other hand looks like he should remain as an 80-point producer with upside for more but slightly less substantial peripheral numbers. He too has upside for more but that will rely on the health of Marian Gaborik. So once again we see a paradox. Lecavalier needs an injury to a relatively healthy player to get to his upside, while Richards needs a perpetually injured player to stay in the lineup to meet his upside.

It isn’t a good gamble either way, which is why I don’t think you can go wrong with either Richards or Lecavalier. Analyze your team needs and pick accordingly. You can probably find a way to fill the peripheral stats of PIM and SOG with mediocre players and can thus go for Richards’ boost in Assists and PPP but you may also prefer Lecavalier’s more balanced production. This Cage Match is a draw but I’m sure you will all have some strong opinions one way or the other. The important thing (at least to me) is that we are having this conversation.

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Richards and Lecavalier are finally on an even keel.