

## 2011 Draft Preview- Atlantic Division

Written by Matt Bugg

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The Atlantic Division has been one of the league's most successful in the past five years, with two of the last five Cup finalists- and one winner- coming out of the division. However, one former powerhouse is experiencing its first shot at lottery talent, while another is hoping that their lengthy rebuild is finally coming to an end.

### Philadelphia Flyers

**Record:** 57-23-12 (2nd, East)

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**Draft Picks:** 84th (PIT) 116th, 118th (TB), 176th, 206th

**Draft Habits:** No matter where the Philadelphia Flyers have found themselves selecting in the first round since 2003, the results have been positive. From stars Jeff Carter, Mike Richards and Claude Giroux to every-day players now with other clubs such as Luca Sbisa and Steve Downie, the Flyers possess one of the league's most consistent scouting staffs.

However, in attempting to turn their draft picks and unproven talent into a Stanley Cup champion today, first round picks have been scarce in recent years. GM Paul Holmgren finds himself in that situation once again; without a pick until the 3rd round, Philadelphia's scouts will have to leverage the most they can out of a thin talent pool.

The QMJHL has been a major factor in recent years. The Flyers have selected a total of eleven Quebec League players since 2005, the most from any league. While the process has only led to one NHLer of note- the aforementioned Giroux- Philadelphia's defensive pipeline is largely made up of QMJHL prospects.

**Outlook:** Unless Holmgren can maneuver a trade for a pick or two in the first two rounds, the Flyers will be dormant until the 3rd round. Don't expect any miracles.

### Mock Draft Results:

84th- LW Michael Mersch (U. Wisconsin)

A nasty, abrasive winger who found a home on the third line for Wisconsin as an accelerated freshman, Mersch could do the same for a Flyers team sorely lacking grit.

### Pittsburgh Penguins

**Record:** 49-25-8 (4th, East)

**Draft Picks:** 23rd, 54th, 144th, 174th, 209th (SJ)

**Draft Habits:** With success comes a price- especially the draft table. Although the Penguins earned two trips to the Final, including a Stanley Cup, Pittsburgh has seen their once prolific collection of young talent replaced by riskier and riskier youngsters picked for their potential ability to compliment superstars Evgeni Malkin and Sidney Crosby. To this end, the Penguins have invested only two selections in three years on natural centermen in a bid to fill needs and leverage their strengths.

A look at Pittsburgh's draft history in the past three years reveals an eclectic assortment of leagues and player types, from BCHL star Beau Bennett to German forward Tom Kuehnhackl to high school standout Ben Hanowski. GM Ray Shero will likely continue this trend at the draft table with the logic that enough swings should result in a home run.

**Outlook:** Owning their most complete set of draft picks in the top sixty since their return to

contention began, the Pens should find plenty of enigmatic talent available to them.

### Mock Draft Results:

23rd- RW Ty Rattie (Portland, WHL)

54th- RW Shane McColgan (Kelowna, WHL)

### New York Rangers

**Record:** 44-33-5 (8th, East)

**Draft Picks:** 15th, 106th, 134th, 136th

**Draft Habits:** Since 2005, no team has been better in the 2nd round than the New York Rangers. Mike Sauer, Artem Anisimov, Derek Stepan and promising prospects Ethan Werek and Christian Thomas have helped re-ignite a once stagnant pool of talent, allowing the Rangers to stay in contention even as GM Glen Sather attempts to fill holes with high-priced free agents that have a poor record of success.

Diversity has been the key to New York's success in this regard. While the OHL leads the way with 12 picks since 2005, the WHL (8) and Europe (9) have all contributed to New York's pipeline and roster. Even Junior B is represented (Max Campbell, 2007). Size-wise, the team has shown as much a preference for big men who can skate (Chris Kreider, Evgeny Grachev, Ethan Werek, Artem Anisimov) as they have for smaller players with abundant talent (Thomas, Ryan Bourque).

**Outlook:** Thanks to their acquisition and subsequent signing of defenceman Tim Erixon, the Rangers are now down to four total picks in the Draft- a fair trade considering that Erixon would have been a top-twenty pick had he gone unsigned re-entered the Draft. The 15th pick represents the team's best opportunity to find a future stud, but don't count out the team in the later rounds.

### Mock Draft Results:

15th- D Nathan Beaulieu (Saint John, QMJHL)

Although the Rangers have accumulated a strong stable of young defensive defensemen, finding a mobile two-way player that can spark the offense has been a challenge. After strong debuts, both Mike Del Zotto and Matt Gilroy have struggled with replicating their success. Look, then, to Nathan Beaulieu. A steal should he be on the board at 15, he has the tools to be a top-pairing D.

### New Jersey Devils

**Record:** 38-39-5 (11th, East)

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**Draft Picks:** 4th, 99th, 129th, 159th, 189th

**Draft Habits:** It's a simple strategy, really: take the most talent available in a skater, regardless of personal/off-ice issues (Jon Merrill) or size deficiencies (Mattias Tedenby). Otherwise, seek out cerebral two-way forwards that can fill roles in the bottom six at minimum (Adam Henrique and Jacob Josefson). It's this approach that has helped the Devils remain competitive despite a changing environment- first from the old CBA to the cap world, and now at a time when the Devils must seriously consider life with mainstay Martin Brodeur.

**Outlook:** With the fourth overall pick, New Jersey has a chance to fill a major void left on their blueline by the departures of Scott Niedermayer and Paul Martin in recent years: a number one defenceman who move the puck smartly and efficiently. Dominating the transition game is the key to moving forward without Brodeur, and it starts on the blueline.

### Mock Draft Results:

4. New Jersey- D Adam Larsson (Skelleftea, Elitserien)

It's a Swedish invasion in New Jersey, with countrymen Jacob Josefson, Mattias Tedenby and Alex Urbom all looking to replace the old guard built under Lou Lamoriello. Larsson is a big minute-eating defenceman who provides unrivaled stability at that position in the 2011 class.

### New York Islanders

**Record:** 30-39-13 (14th, East)

**Draft Picks:** 5th, 34th, 50th (MTL), 63rd (COL), 65th, 95th, 125th, 127th (ATL)

**Draft Habits:** Conventional wisdom is the enemy of the New York Islanders. Eschewing the higher-ranked player for a high-character favorite has been a common theme on the Island, even as the team struggles through yet another phase of their ever-perpetuating rebuild. However, talent like Josh Bailey, Nino Niederreiter and waiver find Michael Grabner have given star centerpiece John Tavares the future depth he needs to lead the Islanders back to the post-season and beyond.

Two leagues stand out in their number of draft picks: the consistently Ontario-centric Isles have used eight picks on OHL talent since 2007, and five on Minnesota high school talent. Goaltending is also a consistent theme; four have been selected in the past three years, including two back-to-back at the 2009 Draft.

**Outlook:** With a total of eight picks- the most since the team has owned since the 2008 Draft, when they selected thirteen times- the Isles scouting staff will have plenty of ammo with which to target their favorites.

### Mock Draft Results:

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5th- D Dougie Hamilton (Niagara, OHL)

34th- D Ryan Sproul (Sault Ste Marie, OHL)

50th- (from MTL)- LW Matt Nieto (Boston U, NCAA)

63rd- (from COL)- RW Maxim Shalunov (Chelyabinsk, KHL)

65th- G Samu Perhonen (JYP, Fin-Jr)