

Post-Lotto Mock

Written by Matt Bugg

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The results are in, and while the order hasn't changed since the season ended, have the options available to GMs shifted?

1. Edmonton Oilers- LW Taylor Hall (Windsor/OHL)

The NHL season may be done for the Edmonton Oilers on ice, but the hard work is just beginning for the team's scouting and management staff. With their lottery win, the Oilers now must make one of the most difficult choices in franchise history without any help from another club. The next ten years may rest solely on this pick and there will be no excuses if Steve Tambellini and head scout Stu MacGregor make the wrong selection.

So, will it be Taylor or will it be Tyler? While Assistant General Manager Kevin Prendergast made comments hinting that a center was at the top of the wish list, there's a long list of reasons why Taylor Hall makes more sense. He was born in Calgary to an Edmonton Eskimos draft pick, and has the name pedigree and explosive speed to be an immediate draw. Right or

wrong, the marketability of both young men will play a role in the decision-making process.

Fans expecting a Pavel Bure or Guy Lafleur will likely be disappointed, but Hall has nevertheless been a factor almost every night during the last three seasons, no matter the uniform or line he's been on. A natural leader and winner quite literally groomed for the pressure, he'll need to draw on all of that to survive in the rabid environment of hockey-mad Edmonton.

2. Boston Bruins- C Tyler Seguin (Plymouth/OHL)

There's really no other pick the Boston Bruins can make unless they choose to trade it, or at least any other pick that's remotely defensible. However, while Tyler Seguin will fill neither of the team's major holes- wing and defense- the organization has nothing to feel ashamed about. For one, Boston's lineup could look dramatically different in three years- Marc Savard may never completely recover from his devastating concussion, Patrice Bergeron may decide to demand a trade. Either way, it makes little sense to sacrifice talent to fill an immediate role.

However, *if* the Bruins are dead-set on replacing winger Phil Kessel with the next-best thing- and there are fans who have intimated that such a pick is the only way to rationalize giving up Kessel in the first place- they may attempt to either trade up or offer a package of non-roster assets in order to ensure Hall remains on the board.

Just the same, though, Peter Chiarelli is one of the most intelligent men in hockey and will welcome and build his team around his new asset going forward.

3. Florida Panthers- D Cam Fowler (Windsor/OHL)

Flash back to 2004, and the circus surrounding the top two picks. A slick winger with grit, size and goal-scoring ability dominated the charts all season long, but a rangy, intelligent center with immense natural gifts posed a long-term challenge. And third? Well, the Chicago Blackhawks had the easiest pick of that Draft- a tall, smooth-skating rearguard with a toolbox of NHL skills. While Cam Barker is no longer with the organization that drafted him, it marked the beginning a long-overdue rebuild and a bullet in what was then an empty chamber.

That's the role Cam Fowler can fill with the Florida Panthers. Smarting from the absence of 6'4 Jay Bouwmeester, the Panthers endured a difficult year in which the transition game from their defense was a critical weakness. Fowler is the best of everything among the 2010 class rearguards- size, speed, breakout pass- and while not overwhelming at any one thing, the potential for him to develop into a top-pairing player is tantalizing.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets- D Brandon Gormley (Moncton/QMJHL)

The most disappointed face at the GM roundtable in New York following the high-stakes game

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of NHL bingo wasn't Peter Chiarelli, but rather Columbus GM Scott Howson. A lottery win was never in their favor anyway, but for a GM of a team struggling to survive both on and off the ice, picking first would have been a well-timed miracle.

It's not to be. Save for shipping Rick Nash to Boston in order to acquire the #2 pick, the Jackets have no chance at impact center Tyler Seguin- a player that would have cleared up several questions moving forward.

Instead, Columbus must now decide between two blueliners on opposite sides of the spectrum. Brandon Gormley is a smooth customer, an NHL-caliber skater who can handle both head-manning the puck and breaking up scoring chances on the same shift. The Jackets may opt for the grittier rearguard on the board, but Gormley is proven at being good at everything while also being of above-average height (6'2). He's perhaps not a franchise player but for a team that's never been sound from the blueline out, a future consisting of Gormley and John Moore is a good starting point.

5. New York Islanders- D Erik Gudbranson (Kingston/OHL)

The New York Islanders failed to pull off an unexpected lotto win that would have seen the team either continue to add gems down the middle or, more likely, shore up an AHL-quality stable of left wingers with the most dynamic player at that position in several years.

Instead, the Isles and GM Garth Snow will be content to continue filling in holes as the pieces drop, an NHL game of Tetris. With the center position now firm for the next decade, defense is the next enigma.

Erik Gudbranson has all of the qualities the Isles like- both character and the raw skills to out-shine more established players ahead of him- and he's an OHL player, a big draw for New York (their last three first picks in the Draft have been Ontario products). A bout with mono slowed his development, but the Isles have the cap space to afford stop-gaps while Gudbranson develops into a potential top-pairing defender.

6. Tampa Bay Lightning- C/RW Mikael Granlund (HIFK SM-Liiga)

Like the Islanders, Tampa Bay has used the draft to slowly but surely fill organizational needs. However, 2010 is the year we learn what direction the Lightning intend to go: either a return to the high-octane offensive ways of their only championship club, or a more steady approach.

We're going with offense. RW Mikael Granlund suffered immensely in Central Scouting's final rankings, but his offensive toolkit is the most complete outside the top two forwards. Sure, he's smaller, and sure, he's not St. Louis-fast, but St. Louis wasn't either. As it is, Granlund has the perfect role model to pattern his game after and has the skills to compliment star center Steve Stamkos unlike any other player in the top ten.

7. Carolina Hurricanes- LW/RW Brett Connolly (Prince George/WHL)

GM Jim Rutherford has a clear vision for his troubled franchise moving forward: it's exactly the same one that brought the Canes the Stanley Cup just a few short years ago. Preferring to build a smart, speedy and largely invisible defensive core built around interchangeable parts, Carolina's real strength in their championship year was a lethal powerplay and clutch goaltending.

Cam Ward's health may once again rear its ugly head, but Rutherford can only control the team that dresses to start the year. That's why Brett Connolly makes sense. A homerun shot if there ever was one, no player has leaned more on their 16-year-old season than Connolly.

A series of setbacks and false starts surrounding a hip flexor injury torpedoed his stock, but the speedy winger is perhaps the best one-on-one scorer in the Draft. Loaded at center and once again restocked with young talent on the blueline, Carolina's wings are built on the corpses of Ray Whitney and Sergei Samsonov. It's their one major weakness moving forward and Connolly is the player that can help them the most.

8. Atlanta Thrashers- LW/RW Nino Niederreiter (Portland/WHL)

How the Atlanta Thrashers do in the post-Kovalchuk era has yet to be determined off ice; the team may simply never see their market share recover in the competition-heavy Atlanta area. How they do on ice in the next few years will be determined in large part by how they use their most recent top-ten pick.

In that regard, Nino Niederreiter is the best Kovalchuk replacement you could possibly hope for when picking outside the top two in any given year. A big, burly winger with a high compete level, Niederreiter may never contend for the Richard but he's also a better bet to take his team on his back in the post-season. What will ultimately win back fans is not speed and flash but consistent playoff success, and that starts by building around players like Niederreiter.

9. Minnesota Wild- RW Austin Watson (Peterborough/OHL)

As we said over the weekend, Austin Watson is the perfect pick for a team that has built itself around size the last few Drafts. Whether that was an extension of ex-coach Jacques Lemaire's demands or a calculated effort by ex-Gm Doug Risebrough is unknown, but the fact is neither are at the helm any longer. New GM Chuck Fletcher made his mark last year by taking a player neither would have considered in a million years- smallish puck mover Nick Leddy- but what that means is a mystery since Leddy is no longer in the organization, having been traded for... you guessed it... a big defenseman.

10. New York Rangers- C Ryan Johansen (Portland/WHL)

One night, the New York Rangers were a skills competition away from a playoff spot. Now they're the tenth-worst team in the league. That's a perfect summation of how weak the Eastern Conference was all year in comparison to a tough West where 100 points was essentially a minimum to make the playoffs.

Not the Rangers will complain; bereft of center depth following the trade of Scott Gomez, GM Glen Sather loves big boys with skill at any position, be it center (Brandon Dubinsky) wing (Chris Kreider, Ryan Callahan, Evgeni Grachev) or defense (Marc Staal). With that kind of history, Ryan Johansen is a letter-perfect choice. While Johansen may have earned a comparison to Jason Spezza from CSS, few WHL observers would consider that accurate beyond their shared size (6'3).

A gritty center who excels at creating time and space for his more skilled linemates, Johansen is the perfect support player for Marian Gaborik as he'll take care of all the grinding and hard work needed to compliment a temeritous talent like Gabby.

11. Dallas Stars- C/RW Emerson Etem (Medicine Hat/WHL)

22 years ago, the Minnesota North Stars kicked off their dramatic turnaround from perennial spoilers to champions with the selection of WHL sniper Mike Modano. With Modano now officially done, it would have been something fitting to see the now Dallas-based club finish low finish to precipitate a second rebuild. It wasn't to be.

Now, the Stars will have to draft judiciously. Already well on their way with power forward James Neal and Jamie Benn usurping the likes of Modano and Jere Lehtinen, the Stars could use an explosive sniper whose speed and skill can overwhelm the opposition. That's Emerson Etem to a T. A gifted finisher that has both Mike Ribeiro and potentially Brad Richards to receive passes from long-term, Etem won't be an immediate impact player but Modano was sent back to junior as an 18-year-old too.

12. Anaheim- D Mark Pysyk (Edmonton/WHL)

As we've pontificated a number of times this year, Edmonton Oil Kings defender Mark Pysyk is a note-perfect selection for the rebuilding Ducks. Smart and fast enough to step in within two years, Pysyk may have the opportunity to learn the finer points of the position from a very similar speed and body-wise: Scott Niedermayer. That kind of mentorship can go a long way, and while the odds he reaches the lofty heights proposed by CSS (Duncan Keith) are low 'Nieds' could be the X factor in his development.

13. Phoenix Coyotes- C/RW Vladimir Tarasenko (Sibir/KHL)

Our most dramatic undervaluing of Vladimir Tarasenko yet, there's nothing top-fifteen about his game; his puck skills and vision are top five among forwards and he deserves to be a high pick.

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But it just might not happen, and a team like Phoenix will be in a perfect position to benefit. Not adverse to taking even the most high-risk Russians in the 1st, the Coyotes no longer answer to Wayne Gretzky and Mike Barnett but they've retained their commitment to taking top-end skill no matter the package. Tarasenko would merely be the latest example of that- and their latest Draft steal.

14. St. Louis Blues- C Alexander Burmistrov (Barrie OHL)

Once considered the deepest future team at center, St. Louis has seen their riches devalued with time. T.J. Oshie has turned into ace power winger, and Patrik Berglund has yet to take that vital next step in his development. Meanwhile, Andy MacDonald is a free agent and Alex Steen is still not the Alex Steen of the EA series of NHL games. The Blues are a cautionary statement for a team like Boston who could eschew long-term impact for short-term gain.

Enter Alexander Burmistrov. Crafty, responsible, entertaining and cerebral all in one 5'11 package, Burmistrov is the kind of high-character the Blues love and his skills are all-world.