After the freefall of Kirill Kabanov, many wonder who will be the best Russian prospect in the upcoming NHL Entry Draft. I, personally, have little doubt. I never had actually. I always thought that Vladimir Tarasenko is a better prospect than Kirill Kabanov. It might be easy to say it now, but let's discuss the reasons.

The accomplishments

Let's start with some numbers. Kabanov's career against men has been pretty unimpressive. Six regular season games, four playoff games. And zero points. He got leveled by Vitaly Vishnevsky, and that's not what you would expect from such a hyped player. On the other hand, Vladimir Tarasenko played two full KHL seasons and scored 20 goals and 34 points. This year he scored 13 and 24. Such numbers might not sound huge to a casual Russian hockey follower but, just for comparisons, they are the same stats Ovechkin collected in his draft year. Malkin had three goals and 12 points. Datsyuk three and eight. Numbers don't tell the whole truth, but they are a good indicator, usually.

The character

Vladimir Tarasenko and Kirill Kabanov seem to be two opposite persons. We all know what happened with Kabanov from one year ago to now. First he swapped Russian teams, then he moved to the CHL, missing more than two months for an injury. Apparently this didn't stop him from going on vacation in some hot, sunny locale though. When he returned he played rather well, but he was not up to expectations. Then during the playoff the Moncton Wildcats freed him for the U18 WJC, using this as an excuse to get rid of him after some on and off ice discipline issues. Too bad that a couple of weeks later the same problems made him kicked off Team Russia too. "I feel like we are better without him, than with him" and "Kabanov doesn't know how to behave" are two of the latest quotes about him, said respectively by his head coach in

Moncton, Danny Flynn, and U18 Russian national team's coach Mikhail Vasiliev. It's a question even what team he will play next season, since it looks now unlikely that he will return back in Moncton, and he already said that he won't sign in Russia.

Vladimir Tarasenko on the other hand has been always off such problems and has never faced any kind of personality issues or clashes with coaches. Recently Tarasenko was called to the Team Russia training camp for the 2010 IIHF World Championships in Germany, something that Kabanov might need some years to accomplish.

The ceiling

In spite of all that I said, Kirill Kabanov remains an excellent talent with tons of upside. His skating abilities and his high level of technique would make him a lock for a top 10 pick in the upcoming draft. Now of course his stock has fallen, but he still will get a lot of attention on draft day. And should he fix his attitude problems, he will become a force in the NHL and maybe even more interesting for fantasy GMs as he has all the tools to score 100 points in the regular season.

But Vladimir Tarasenko is not far off of him, although he is a different player. He doesn't have the same raw talent of Kabanov, but he's still a great puckhandler and a very fine goalscorer. He has one thing more than Kabanov: he plays with more poise. While Kabanov is a kind of a prototypical Russian one dimensional player, Tarasenko fights hard in the corners, tries to commit on defense, gets down to block shots. He isn't a Russian Jere Lehtinen, but North American teams will surely appreciate his commitment and hard work on ice.

That being said, the draft is approaching, and we'll find out soon who will really be the first Russian picked. I'm all for Tarasenko, we'll see in June if NHL GMs agree with me or not.