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Lost in the fact that the 2008 Entry Draft was filled with a group of high-end defensemen rarely seen in an NHL draft, a very good non-Steven Stamkos forward was available. How good? That remains to be seen.

We all remember the 2004 NHL Entry Draft. Alexander Ovechkin was by far the top player available. By far. That was known years in advance. But in hindsight, how much better is he than Evgeni Malkin, taken second overall? Four years later, we are quite clear on the fact that Ovechkin is one of the three best forwards in the game today. So is Malkin.

Nikita Filatov, an 18-year-old Russian, was drafted sixth overall by the Columbus Blue Jackets this summer. Given that Filatov was drafted sixth in the NHL draft, the effort that is being put into drafting him in fantasy leagues is not even half of what is being put into drafting Stamkos. If you are in a one-year league, Stamkos was drafted in the middle rounds and Filatov was either not drafted at all – or he was drafted late. If you are in a keeper league, owners were offering up 80-point players in their package to get the first overall pick. What was being offered to get Filatov?

Stamkos is certainly no Ovechkin – and never will be. But the gap between he and Filatov is about as wide as the gap between Ovechkin and Malkin. It is early to pinpoint where Stamkos will peak, but it is likely he will fall into that 80- to 100-point range. Our exposure to Filatov is significantly less. His peak could be anywhere between 65 and 105 points…or more.

Let's review what is known for sure.

1) He has a great attitude. He speaks English fluently and his dream has always been the NHL. He has his eyes on that prize and that prize only. There will be no fleeing to the KHL in three years.
2) He is defensively responsible. This is quite possibly the number one reason why a coach will choose not to keep an 18-year-old in the NHL. He needs to be familiar with his own end and

Filatov is just that.
3) If any team that drafted second, third, fourth or fifth desperately needed a forward instead of a defenseman, he would have been seriously considered as a selection.
4) His talent is potentially at that rare elite level. He has great speed and he thinks the game well.

At the very least, as I wrote in the Fantasy Guide, you're going to have a Milan Hejduk if you draft Filatov. That is – a forward who will be good for 70 points per year, with a couple of 80- or 85-point campaigns. In the very best-case scenario, you should not put a limit on him. There are not a lot of players out there who could get 110 points in this league. Until we see three seasons of what this youngster can do, I don't think you can rule out a big number like that.

Do not make the mistake of treating Filatov like you would treat a Mikkel Boedker (PHO) or a Cody Hodgson (VAN). As far as the 2008 draft is concerned, from a fantasy (forwards) standpoint, there is Stamkos, Filatov, a big gap…and then the rest.

Meanwhile…

Andy McDonald leads all NHL players in preseason scoring with 13 points. He has really clicked on a line with Lee Stempniak and Brad Boyes. McDonald apparently played much of last season with several nagging injuries. He was coming off a short summer (when Anaheim won the Cup) and when he got off to a slow start he paid with his power-play time. This year, the summer was quite long, as his new team in St. Louis failed to make the postseason. He is one hundred percent and should return to his old ways. He averaged 81 points in his two seasons prior to last year.