(cliquez ici pour la version française)

I had prime seats to see the London Knights host the Windsor Spitfires Friday – center ice, luxury box. Needless to say, it was a beauty – and afterwards, I had the pleasure of talking prospects with an NHL scout – he looked through the DobberHockey Fantasy Prospects List and with the understanding that the list measures a player's potential in terms of points only, he was able to give me quite a bit of insight.

The opinions of a scout need to be taken with a grain of salt. While scouts are certainly more qualified to give the opinion, it also needs to be understood that if scouts were perfect then every player ever drafted would be in the NHL and the annual Draft would be reduced to three rounds.

First, some thoughts on the prospects in the game.

London Knights

John Tavares (projected first rounder this summer) – This was the eighth time I watched him play live, but the first time since he was traded to London. Similar to what I witnessed in Oshawa, he dominated when challenged, but was rather ordinary when he wasn't. The difference is really quite shocking. For 35 minutes, the only reason Tavares wasn't completely invisible was because of a couple of terrible giveaways and a couple of half-hearted swipes at the puck defensively that was almost embarrassing to watch. With about five minutes left in the second, the Tavares of legend finally arrived. He drove hard to the net, protected the puck, got off some shots and started bulging the twine. It was night and day, the difference in his play and in that respect I was reminded of Alexei Kovalev. He ended up with two goals, but if he played the first 35 minutes like he played the final 27 (the game went to overtime), the Knights would have won 8-0.

Nazem Kadri (projected first rounder this summer) – He was noticeable throughout and made things happen even in the first period when he wasn't on Tavares' line. A smart hockey player who was probably knocked off the puck a little too much.

Trevor Cann (goalie, drafted by Colorado) – Unimpressive. I was told by a friend of mine to watch how he gives up the weak rebounds and how he will often get burned on the second shot. Sure enough, it seemed as though every goal on him was scored that way. I don't think I saw him make that rebound save until late in the third period.

John Carlson (defenseman drafted by Washington) – He was the best player on the team in the first half of the game. They had him on the left wing for the power play initially and he scored two power-play goals that way. He loved to shoot and generally made the shot a good one.

Michael Del Zotto (defenseman drafted by NY Rangers) – He had three assists and hit everything in sight. This is just carrying on what I saw him do in Oshawa. Offensively, he was quiet – it was one of those games where you look at the game sheet at the end and say "hey, he got three points". He gobbled up tons of ice time and was always out there on the power play.

Windsor Spitfires

Taylor Hall (undrafted – eligible in 2010) – To me, he was the best player in the game. If I own Tavares in my keeper league, I would swap him straight up for Hall any day. I wouldn't do that if Tavares was "on" for every minute of the game, but he's not. So I would take Hall. Brilliant positioning, quick release and he protects the puck. He had two points to give him 24 in 10 playoff games.

Ryan Ellis (undrafted defenseman, will go first round this year) – He was more noticeable offensively than Del Zotto (though not in the hits department). He manned the power play with composure and set up the fourth goal nicely. He also had a second assist to give him two points on the night.

Greg Nemisz (drafted by Calgary) – Didn't impress. He played with Hall and it makes me wonder if his solid numbers got a little boost from that in the season. I didn't even notice him until the second period. On one hand that means he didn't make any glaring mistakes to draw my attention, but on the other hand he didn't make himself noticed in a good way either.

Josh Unice (goaltender drafted by Chicago) – Was fantastic at opening the door for the players. Yes, he was the backup goalie. He lost the job long ago to the undrafted Andrew Engelage. His 7-5-0 record just doesn't measure up to Engelage's 46-4-1.

Dale Mitchell (drafted by Toronto) – To be honest, I didn't notice him. I watched him closely for one uneventful shift.

Andrei Loktionov (drafted by Los Angeles) – He played bigger than his 5-11 size and won some key draws. He notched an assist in the game, but probably could have had three points with the opportunities he created.

Now, about the players on the DobberHockey Fantasy Prospects List

The first thing that the NHL scout – who will remain anonymous, as he was rather candid about players belonging to other teams - wanted to make clear was that a player either had the skills to be in the top six, or he had better find a way to become a fit for the third or fourth line. If you're a top sixer, but it's looking as though you aren't quite good enough to make an NHL team in that capacity, you had better adapt to the other aspects or you'll be a career AHLer/European.

I didn't have my recording device with me, so I'll be paraphrasing a little, as well as giving my own interpretation of what was said. Here's a brief summary of a whole slew of players. His take:

On James van Riemsdyk – Lacks intensity and does not use his size enough to ever become a player who can tally 85 points.

On Jiri Tlusty – What we saw in the final two months of the season is what we can expect from Tlusty. He can control a game.

On Viktor Tikhonov – He suspects that Tikhonov would return to Russia had Phoenix not kept him with the big club. He may always be a danger to jump ship.

On Vladimir Sobotka – I've said this many times, and the scout repeated it without my prompting: "A great player who would do well on another NHL team. Boston is too deep." (Reminder: I'm paraphrasing all the quotes)

On John Tavares – When I mentioned Alexei Kovalev, the scout jumped on that. "I was just thinking the same thing. Kovalev." Not that he plays like Kovalev, but he disappears/reappears like him.

On Gilbert Brule – He is not a top sixer. He needs to adjust his game and if he does, he can succeed in the NHL as a third liner.

On Rob Schremp – Lacks the wheels to be a top sixer and lacks the tools to play on the third or fourth line in the NHL.

On Cody Hodgson – The best player on the prospect list – but for his all-around game and leadership. As far as offense goes, 85 points will be tough.

On Brett MacLean – "Great player". In fact, MacLean was the only player he pointed to on my list without my prompting, just to tell me that.

On Ryan Jones – He'll find a permanent role on the third line and could produce 45 to 50 points season.

On Patric Hornqvist – He suspects Hornqvist will return to Europe if he does not make the team in the fall.

On Cal O'Reilly – Proved that he belongs in the NHL. However, he needs to be in the top six to succeed.

On Nikita Filatov – Has just as much chance of leaving for Russia as any other Russian player. They all say "Rah-rah NHL!" in the interview. There are no safe Russian picks. The scout did not argue Filatov's spot on the top of the Prospects List.

On Mark Santorelli – I got the impression that he is a bit of a long shot. His skills are suited for the top six – his hands and vision are incredible. Other areas are lacking.

On Mike Santorelli – Seemed out of his element in the NHL and that may never change. He caught onto the AHL game this past season, but that may not happen in the NHL.

On Steve Downie – Not a lot of positives were said here. Okay, none. Let's leave it at that.

On Nick Spaling – He's a surefire NHLer, but he's a "tweener". The Preds are unsure whether Spaling will fit in the top six, or if it will be as a third liner. His upside is 65 points.

On Cody Franson and Jonathan Blum – The latter has passed the former on the depth chart and will be in the NHL sooner rather than later. Franson is still a coveted prospect and given the depth Nashville has in the position, he makes a great candidate to be dealt.

On Eric O'Dell – "No." (The question was – will he make it to the NHL?)