

So how does a 25-year-old fringe NHLer creep under everybody's radar to thrive in a plum role on a line with an up-and-coming superstar? And will Matt Moulson continue to thrive or is he destined to fizzle?

Some background...

- Moulson will turn 26 in a couple of weeks.
- He has been a long-shot offensive prospect for several years, earning a spot on my Top Prospects template, but never getting higher than 135. He was never profiled in a DobberHockey Fantasy Prospects Report another indication that he just hasn't been taken seriously.

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-	A dominant scorer in Junior B, a solid two-way producer in the ECAC, a point-per-gam	е
guy in	the AHL.	

- Has NHL size (6-1, 205).
- He has played practically every shift in the preseason and regular season with John Tavares, with an average ice time hanging around the 19-minute mark.
- Two of his four goals so far were not assisted by Tavares, although J.T. was on the ice. His stats are not strictly reliant on Tavares. (FYI, Moulson assisted on two of the three Tavares goals)
- Moulson has a plus-2 rating so far this campaign. That leads an Islanders' team with six players at minus-4 or worse.
- His salary is sweet at \$522,000 cap hit he's easily earning his salary. The Isles are nowhere near the cap, so his low salary is not as much of an advantage as it would be on other teams.
- He's averaging 4.3 shots per game. Coaches love to see that.
- His college and AHL career indicates that he doesn't get hurt. Very durable.

Matt Moulson - The Real Deal?

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- He will need to go through waivers to be sent down. Given his start of seven points in six games, there will be some interest from other teams if it ever came to this.
The negatives
- He was drafted 263 rd overall in 2003. Players drafted later tend to see few opportunities and the coach feels less pressure to keep throwing him out there if he stumbles. A hot-shot first rounder will keep getting thrown out there on the top line no matter how much he messes up.
- Just 29 NHL games under his belt prior to this year.
- The Penguins let him walk in 2006. The Kings let him walk this past summer. Why?
- His contract is a two-way deal. This is because of his lack of NHL experience. But still, a different salary in the AHL is pretty tempting if he starts putting up goose eggs.
The list of positives certainly outweigh the negatives, but three or four of those points are statistic based and can certainly change within a week. Chances are, Moulson will remain healthy this season. As well, he will need to go a good 10 games without putting up much in the way of numbers before he's finally taken off the Tavares line. The coach seems to be pretty stubborn about keeping those two together.

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I think he is the real deal, but my level of certainty on that could use some bolstering. So what exactly is the "real deal"? Let's assume that Tavares continues to post at a reasonable, but slower, pace and ends up with 70 points. That's about where I had him pegged in the Fantasy Guide, so we'll go with that. Will Moulson keep up with him? Doubtful. I'll put him down for 65 at the absolute very top and 35 at the absolute bottom. The wide range is another indicator of my lack of confidence here. Those are the absolutes, but use a safety range of 50 to 55 points in terms of your expectations and act accordingly.

If he does make it to 60 points, then that is a strong statement that he has arrived in the NHL and that better things are ahead...

Meanwhile...

In keeping with the Matt Moulson theme...how about that Rich Peverley? He jumped onto our radar last season after a trade to Atlanta. He was 26 at the time (that's in Moulson's range) and his background is also that of a former ECAC star. It doesn't seem to matter who he plays with, he puts up decent points regardless. He now has seven of them in just five contests. That gives him 42 in 44 as a Thrasher...

Chris Higgins is pointless in his last six contests. Consider the team he plays for is on fire, this is

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not a good sign. He is currently lining up with Chris Drury and Ryan Callahan on what looks like an average second line or above-average third line. The 26-year-old's career high is 52 points and although his prime years start next season, I don't think he will ever top 60...