Cal O'Reilly's road to the NHL has been nothing short of a struggle. Cal was selected in the fifth round of the 2005 draft after finishing up a strong season with the Windsor Spitfires in the OHL. While Cal posted 73 points in 68 games, the Spitfires most alluring prospect that season was **Steve Downie**
, who posted 73 points of his own in seven fewer games, not to mention the 179 penalty minutes he added. With the focus on Downie, O'Reilly flew well under the radar.

With no international experience and only one strong OHL season under his belt, O'Reilly returned to Windsor the following year, scoring 26 more points (18-81-99) in the same number of games. He graduated on to the AHL that season on a tryout basis, but struggled to adjust, scoring only one point in 10 playoff games. That summer he would sign his first entry level contract.

In the three years of that contract, Cal would show strong skills in the AHL (213 points in 225 games), but see limited NHL time (five points in 11 games). With that short exposure to the NHL, Cal was smart enough to realize he had the talent to play in the NHL, but would just need the opportunity to stick. Rather than forcing the hand of a GM, Cal signed a very smart contract. He inked a two year contract, negotiated as a two-way deal in the first year and a one-way deal in the second.

Cal would split time in the AHL and NHL during the first year of this contract and find himself with a full time roster spot with Nashville out of camp in 2010-11. Unlike his brother Ryan, who was selected number 33 overall in the 2009 draft and started playing in the NHL right away, Cal had to be patient but it was finally paying off. Despite being almost five years younger, Ryan has been making a case to be the better fantasy option since 2009. In the short term, Ryan does have bragging rights with not only a quicker road to the NHL, but an extra $300k on his contract. Both Ryan and Cal do share similar attributes though and one of those is a strong work ethic.

Cal has been said to be a leader on and off the ice and in his road to the NHL he would often be the first player on the ice and the last one off. Any success throughout Cal's career has been earned through good old fashioned hard work. In addition to his work ethic, Cal has a very high hockey IQ. He plays on the power play and penalty kill units and sees the ice extremely well, which explains why he is able to rack up so many assists each season. Despite having high point totals, Cal has only eclipsed the 20-goal plateau once in his career and it was in his draft year. He's also well-disciplined and takes few penalties. While Cal should be a strong point performer, keep this in mind if your league is goal-heavy.

In Cal's first full time season, he had the poor luck of suffering a broken bone in hisleg about halfway into the season. Cal has begun skating again, but the date of his return is not yet certain. Due to the injury Nashville brought Mike Fisher to town and as it stands now, the

Predators will enter the 2011-12 season with Fisher, Legwand, and Lombardi locked up to contracts in excess of $3 million, with O'Reilly being an RFA, and Wilson and Geoffrion having only one year remaining on their entry-level deals.

While that might appear frustrating at first, keep in mind that Nashville has had a tendency of moving out the higher salaried players and allowing the younger (and cheaper) players to thrive. One or two of Fisher, Legwand, and Lombardi will most certainly be moved with ice time once again opening up for O'Reilly, who performed quite well as Nashville's top line center this season. Geoffrion and Wilson have both been used at wing and are more likely to play the wing than O'Reilly. If for some crazy reason the Predators do not decide to bring O'Reilly back, look for Cal to make a big impact wherever he goes. Take **Mike Santorelli** as an example, who has followed almost an identical path as Cal and has already emerged in his new home. One way or another, you should be able to expect dividends from Cal next season.

One thing that should always be taken into consideration when reviewing prospects is consistency. Cal has shown not only consistency, but growth at the OHL level, followed by steady consistency at the AHL level. As he further solidifies his role in the NHL, consistency should be part of his game. Expect a strong season with a bit of adjustment next season, followed by growth in 2012-13 and beyond. His point totals in 2012-13 should be about what you can expect as a fantasy owner on a yearly basis.