When the Tampa Bay Lightning traded Brad Richards, they confirmed what most of us already knew. In today's salary cap era, it is next to impossible to win consistently with three superstars on your payroll and hope to fill out the rest of the line-up with low paid journeymen and minor-leaguers. Sure they won the Stanley Cup, but they had Khabibulin and Richards signed at reasonable prices. Once their contracts expired, the gig was up. They haven't been the same team since.

This season, the Lightning appeared jinxed before the first regular season game was even played. How else can you explain a skate dropping on All-Star defenseman Dan Boyle's wrist and then the multiple surgeries to correct the damage? With the quality of surgeons available to NHL teams, how often do you hear of an unsuccessful operation? It was a sign that this just wasn't going to be their year.

Almost immediately after locking up defenseman Dan Boyle with a six year contract, the Bolts

sent pending unrestricted free agent Vaclav Prospal to Philadelphia in exchange for young defenseman Alexandre Picard and a second or third round pick in 2009. If the Flyers make it to the Eastern Conference Final, then Tampa gets a second round pick.

At the trading deadline, Tampa traded their most expensive player, Brad Richards along with another pending unrestricted free agent, goaltender Johan Holmqvist to Dallas for Jussi Jokinen, Jeff Halpern, Mike Smith and a fourth round draft pick in 2009.

The players Tampa received in return have fit in very nicely so far. Although Mike Smith's statistics since coming over don't show it, he has the potential to be the answer for the Bolts goaltending woes. Last night, Smith was stellar in stopping 35 of 36 shots in a 3-1 victory over the Bruins.

The trading of Holmqvist seems to have energized Karri Ramo. Over his last five starts, Ramo is 2-2-1 with a 2.38 goals against average and 0.913 save percentage. Next season should be interesting as Tampa could have a two-headed monster in goal.

Jussi Jokinen has essentially replaced Prospal on the left side. He is averaging over 18 minutes of ice, but only recorded one goal and four assists in the nine games since arriving from Dallas. Jeff Halpern has found some chemistry playing alongside Michel Ouellet and Mathieu Darche. For now, the Bolts seem to have the right mix to ice two productive scoring lines.

In the nine games since the trade, Halpern has collected ten points, Ouellet has nine points and Darche has recorded five points. They might be worth a short term pick up, but none of them are worth protecting unless you are in a deep keeper league. A word of caution - in last night's game, Halpern played just under five minutes as he suffered a muscle strain in his back. It's too early to tell how serious the injury is.

Since dealing away Prospal and Richards, Vincent Lecavalier has scored seven points in nine games. Martin St. Louis has only recorded five points. Dan Boyle seems unaffected by all the roster changes as he has scored eight points over the same nine games.

Change hasn't been good to Prospal as he isn't prospering in his new digs. He's scored only four points in eight games with the Flyers. Surprisingly, the player he was traded for, defenseman Alexandre Picard has three points in his nine games with the Lightning.

Richards meanwhile has eight points in six games with the Stars. If you take away his five assist debut, he's only recorded three points in five games. Not too bad, but Dallas is hoping to reap the rewards of this go to guy in the playoffs.

I like what the Lightning have done. They've shed the millstone of Richards' salary in exchange for two cost effective NHL players, a potential number one goalie and a young defenseman along with two high draft picks. In the end these moves by GM Jay Feaster will prove to be for the good of the franchise's future.

The Bolts are in a race with the Kings at the bottom of the standings. The winner will end up

with the best odds of getting the top pick in what looks to be a very good draft. Tampa is only two points ahead of last place Los Angeles.

Re-tooling in the NHL doesn't have to be a long and drawn out affair, it can happen in a flash. Look at the Flyers from last year to this year. Next year, look south and I'll bet Tampa Bay fans will be all smiles.

See Miller's Blog here . Discuss the Tampa Bay Lightning here .