

Cogliano: Under The Radar

Written by Tim Lucarelli

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In the final season before the NHL lockout, 2003-04, the worst three teams in the league were the Pittsburgh Penguins with 58 points, and the Chicago Blackhawks and Washington Capitals with 59 points each. Seven short years later and two of the franchises have already added a Stanley Cup. Despite their leading scorer failing to score even 60 points, in that 2003-04 season the Edmonton Oilers finished with 89 points, yet still failed to qualify for postseason activity. They would go on to not only lose the Sidney Crosby sweepstakes, but in one of the strangest drafts of all time, they were awarded the 25th overall pick.

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Determined to make the most of their situation, they were excited to select the 18-year-old Cogliano, who had just compiled 102 points in 49 games in the OPJHL, good enough to be crowned top scorer in the league. In the limited time he had played internationally, Cogliano scored five goals and seven assists in only six games to lead a team that also featured players such as Steve Downie, Bryan Little, Marc Staal, Ryan Parent, Ryan Wilson, and Cal Clutterbuck. Needless to say, Canada won the gold that year.

After being drafted, Cogliano decided to go the college route, and played two years at Michigan, skating again for Canada in the U-20 World Juniors each year. Although his international point totals were much lower, his college production was getting better and he added two more gold medals to his resume. As of today, Cogliano has skated for Team Canada three times, winning gold each time.

In 2007-08, the speedy Cogliano made the jump from college straight to the NHL, which is something very few players have been able to do. In that rookie season, Cogliano would score 45 points, heating up specifically toward the end of the season, where he would even set an NHL record by scoring three consecutive overtime goals. Up until this point in his career, everything was moving along fantastic for a guy who still couldn't even buy a drink in the United States. The future looked extremely promising.

The Edmonton Oilers organization though, was having trouble attracting elite talent. After Chris Pronger's departure in 2006, the Oilers were fighting hard to avoid the stereotype of being a city

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that no one wanted to play for. The team would find itself sliding further and further over the next three seasons, with Cogliano getting caught in the quicksand. Despite scoring 18 goals in each of his first two seasons, Andrew would score only 21 over the next two years.

As Cogliano's stock fell, there were some positives to look at that many either fail to acknowledge or simply skim past. After almost being shipped to the Ottawa Senators in a package for Dany Heatley, the deflated Cogliano registered his lowest NHL point total in his third season (28). Working hard to improve upon that low period, Cogliano rebounded with a 35-point season and showed his frustration through 64 penalty minutes, over double any of his previous penalty totals. The frustration is encouraging, showing that Cogliano is not happy with the losing environment.

With the Edmonton franchise building around youth, Cogliano found himself skating primarily with the most recent number-one-overall choice Taylor Hall and the highly-touted Jordan Eberle for the majority of the season. The average age of this line was 20 years and 8 months and the talent was out of this universe.

While it's taken some time and it will likely continue to take development time, try to remember that Andrew Cogliano is only 23 years old, has still *yet* to play an AHL game, and has also yet to miss an NHL game in the four years he's played. He's fast and incredibly skilled, but is still learning the game on one of the worst teams in the league

right now

. Although the Oilers are having trouble moving up in the standings, how long will it be before they replicate the success of Chicago, Pittsburgh, or Washington? As the short-sighted managers in your league focus on Edmonton players such as Taylor Hall, Sam Gagner, Jordan Eberle, or Magnus Paajarvi, keep Andrew Cogliano's name in the back of your head. With this much talent in the organization, it's only a matter of time before the team establishes itself in the upper echelon of the league.

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