It’s unlikely that Frans Nielsen will be drafted in any of your leagues unless it is an extremely deep league, but he is a guy that has raised a few eyebrows over his short career. Even in Long Island of all places, Nielsen has certainly shown promise. I don’t want you guys to go out and draft him right away, but I do want you to keep an eye on him. Chances are everyone else in your league isn’t paying attention to him, so if he starts to take off, you’ll be a step ahead.

For those wondering, Nielsen is a 27 year-old Danish import. Before crossing the pond to play North American hockey, he spent five seasons in the Elitserien, which speaks volumes about his development. He spent little time adjusting to North American hockey, scoring 44 points in 54 AHL games, while dressing in 15 NHL games. He would split time the next season as well before solidifying a full-time NHL spot in 2008.

Since entering the league, Nielsen has improved his point totals each year, which is a great sign both in real life and in the fantasy world. He is used extensively on the penalty kill where he is a threat, scoring a league-leading seven shorthanded goals last year. Further, Nielsen was a plus-13 last season and a plus-four the year prior. In his three full and two partial NHL seasons, Nielsen has never had lower than a minus-four rating. While most young players struggle with defensive coverage, Nielsen has this part of his game completely figured out.

On offense, last season's output started to put him on people's radars. Most likely, the guys in your league will look at Nielsen's 44-point season and tell you that's where he's likely to stay. Consider this though – last season, Nielsen skated 36% of his even-strength shifts with Grabner and Okposo. You read that right, Kyle Okposo, a guy who missed half the season. Just to show how consistent this line was paired, Nielsen's next most consistent even-strength line was with Grabner and Bailey for a whopping 8.8% of his season's total shifts.

What this says to me is that during the first half of the season when Okposo was injured, Nielsen was primarily skating with an array of players, struggling for consistency. When Okposo finally returned to the lineup, the new line combination worked quite well and they stuck for the remainder of the season. The numbers are interesting to see too as up until January 20th (pre-Okposo), Nielsen scored 19 points in 37 games, which averages to 39.5 over a 77-game stretch. Once Okposo returned, Nielsen registered 25 points in 40 games, or 48.1 over a 77-game stretch. If you recall, Grabner also had a slow start. He actually scored 21 of his 34 goals after Okposo returned on January 20th as well, showing how much each of these two benefited from the addition of more talent into the lineup.

The other thing to consider is something that has been mentioned quite a bit recently. The New York Islanders are improving every single year. As the *team* improves, the output of its players will naturally increase as there is more talent to go around. Obviously not for everyone, but if you can spot a guy on the rise that the rest of your league is ignoring, you should be in a better position.

As I mentioned earlier, I don't expect you to draft Nielsen, but there's a good chance he could turn into a 50-point player with a decent chunk of shorthanded points and a positive plus/minus rating this year. Due to lack of competition, it's also likely he'll center the second line in Long Island. If you run into injuries or if you're just looking for a waiver wire pickup, keep an eye on Frans Nielsen in 2011-12.