It’s not very often that you’ll look at a 19-year-old’s decision to leave Harvard and say it’s a good one – but in the case of Louis Leblanc, it definitely is.

Leblanc is a gifted hockey player who can make millions of dollars if he develops his talent properly and he won’t do that with the Harvard Crimson.

When it comes to name brands, it doesn’t get much better than Harvard. The school has world-wide renown for its education; but their hockey team does not deserve to ride on the coat-tails of that reputation.

Few players have spent any significant time at Harvard and become impact NHLers because the conference they play in is a weak conference – even though it is considered NCAA Division 1. Don Sweeney, Ted Donato, Dominic Moore, Craig MacDonald and Craig Adams are the top names among Crimson alumni who played in the NHL. The first three were solid players, but you'd like to think that Louis Leblanc aspires to more than their level of play in the NHL and he certainly has the tools to better their careers.

Leblanc, Montreal's first-round pick in 2009 (18th overall) was the Ivy League rookie of the year last season as he scored 11 goals and 23 points in 31 games last year. He was playing well there, but Leblanc needs to be challenged more and he'll get that by turning pro.

Montreal drafted him out of the USHL – where he was rookie of the year with the Omaha Lancers – so they can send him to the AHL this season if they want to. They could also send him to the QMJHL to play for the Montreal Juniors. There's a good chance Leblanc will make Montreal's AHL farm team in Hamilton and that would be a better move for Leblanc. Montreal will be carefully assessing him at training camp and will only put him in the QMJHL if they don't think he's strong enough for the AHL.

Leblanc got off to a fast start with Harvard last season and tailed off near the end of the short 31-game season. Some might argue that going from the NCAA Division 1 ranks to the major junior is a step down, but the longer season will benefit Leblanc – even if he doesn't make the Hamilton Bulldogs.

Leblanc, who hails from Kirkland, Que., played two years in a row for his province at the world under-17 challenge and won a gold medal with Canada at the world under-18 tournament in 2008. He was cut from last year's world junior team, but will try to make the team again this year and will attend the development camp in St. John's, Nfld., next week.

When preparing the 2010 DobberHockey Prospects Guide, one of the reasons we were so high on Leblanc is that there were strong indications that he was going to leave Harvard. It took quite a bit longer than we expected for him to make the jump – and there was even a time when we had given up hope – but he will make enough money as a professional that he'll be able to afford a Harvard education later on in life.

If he wants to be a top-six forward in the NHL, then this is the right move for him. He gets excellent grades in all the skill areas that you can't teach, or that are difficult to improve at this stage of a player's life: hockey sense, skating, and competitiveness.

The areas that he needs to improve are size and strength. He might not get much taller, he's six feet tall and that's tall enough. Added strength will certainly help him and that's the easiest area for a player to improve.

In the Team Canada world junior media guide, Leblanc lists his favorite player as Philadelphia's

Mike Richards. That's a good comparison for Leblanc, who combines feistiness and skill like the Flyers' captain.

With his decision to turn pro, Leblanc now has an opportunity to develop into the kind of productive pro Richards has become.

Upside: 30-50-80