Heading into the 2011 NHL Draft, hockey pundits loved Dougie Hamilton's size and his skating ability. And 12 goals and 58 points in 67 OHL games for a 17-year old defensemen, was pretty intoxicating too.

The knock on the six-foot-four, St. Catharines native was his decision making. Did we mention he picked up 46 helpers in an OHL season before his 18th birthday? But it couldn't have been all bad and Niagara IceDogs General Manager and Head Coach Marty Williamson agrees. And so did Boston Bruins GM Peter Chiarelli, who selected Hamilton ninth overall. But Williamson told PROSPECT PRESCRIPTION that there was room for improvement.

"The difference between this year and last year is that his decision making is much, much better. Last year, some people questioned some of the decisions he made and maybe it didn't always look like he had good offensive instincts but I think this year he is showing that he did have good offensive instincts, he just needed to work on his timing a little bit more," says Williamson, who coached his 500th OHL game last month. "But this year, his timing is rock on. He's making really good decisions, when to come in, where to come in, and obviously our power play is going very well and he's a big part of that."

Hamilton, who already has 12 goals and 45 points in 30 games this season, was named to Canada's world junior team this week, alongside his brother Freddie and two other IceDogs Ryan Strome and Mark Visentin, but Williamson isn't sure if he'll be running the powerplay in Calgary and Edmonton. Nor is he sure that will be his role in the NHL.

"The way the game is now, I don't know that he's a pure powerplay guy but he definitely has the ability to be a second-unit guy or a shooter on the first unit," offers Williamson. "But who knows? I really think the sky's the limit for him so I would hate to limit Dougie on anything right now.

"He's made the world junior team. We're not sure what role they're going to have him playing there but I could see him running the powerplay for the world junior team. He's getting better, month by month, this season and I truly believe he's blossoming into one of the best players in the league."

While Hamilton stands an impressive six-foot-four, he tips the scales at less than 190 pounds. Williamson says Hamilton will likely need to add 20 or 30 pounds of muscle if he's going to be a force in Beantown.

"He'll be 210 to 220 (pounds) when he matures a little bit more. He's still a young guy. He's got that baby face on him but I think he is going to mature into a real solid 210, 220-type guy," says Williamson, who adds that the muscle game isn't really Hamilton's forte. And he won't get you many penalty minutes either having amassed only 139 in OHL 161 games.

"He may grow more into that type of role down the road but he's not a real, edgy kind of guy," explains Williamson. "Dougie plays the game honest and he'll throw good hits but I still think he has to go through a bit of a learning curve there at the pro level."

Williamson believes Hamilton, who signed an entry level contract with the Bruins this week, will only get better these next few weeks skating for Team Canada.

"These experiences are invaluable. It's similar to going to an NHL camp. Dougie came back in September with a greater appreciation of the things he needed to improve, like his timing and when to go and when not to go. He learned a lot about those types of things in Boston.

"And these next few weeks in Alberta, being around all those elite players, is going to be great for Dougie. To go against the best juniors in the world will be a challenge for him and he'll bring that back and he'll know that he can stop the best in the world and hopefully he'll be able to do that for us during our run to the playoffs. And it helps him move onto the next level too because that group players that are at the world juniors are basically going to be the guys moving onto the NHL."

As for when Hamilton might make the jump to NHL, Williamson says he's not quite sure if that will happen next season. But it will happen, that's for sure.

"He can't go the AHL next year so he either has to come back to junior or play in Boston and that will be an interesting decision for the Bruins," says Williamson. "I think he could probably play next year but Boston is a team that they're not going to rebuild. They try to win every year so whether they can afford to have a young guy, we'll have to see. He may be a year away and with his body type, like I said, he may be lacking a little bit of pro strength. Other than that, I think his game is ready and who knows, by September of next year, maybe he will be strong enough, maybe he will hit 210 pounds and that will be enough but for now, I think he will be borderline.

"Obviously, if everything goes well for him, he'd love to be in the NHL next season but he's never going to hang his head and be sad that he got sent down. He's not that kind of a kid."

Here's hoping he hangs his head for a few seconds on January 5th – just long enough to get a gold medal draped over it.

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