I tried unsuccessfully this summer to get Kyle Palmieri in my keeper league. He was available cheaply, but I didn't act quickly enough and he got tossed back into our pool of free agents and re-drafted. I was just a little disappointed that I missed out, but that disappointment has grown as he's got off to an excellent start to his pro career. Palmieri scored his first goal in the NHL against Tampa Bay on Wednesday, November 3.

Early season injuries to Joffrey Lupul (yet again) and Dan Sexton prompted the Ducks to call Palmieri up from the Syracuse Crunch. In his first nine AHL games with the Crunch, Palmieri scored seven goals and two assists. I don't expect him to keep up that kind of pace in the AHL this season, but it shows that the former first-round pick was ready to leave the Notre Dame Fighting Irish this summer.

On the flip side of the coin, the Notre Dame Fighting Irish might have been ready for Palmieri to leave after his off-ice drinking incident and brush with the law. That aside, Palmieri's skills as a hockey player are not the issue. If he can mature – and getting out of college and turning pro has a way of encouraging players to do that – then he will be well on his way to a solid NHL career.

In the spring, we wrote about Palmieri in the 2010-11 DobberHockey Prospect Report and we were high on him then.

He was part of the package Anaheim received for Chris Pronger (the Ducks used one of the picks they received on him) and has lots of potential, despite modest offensive totals with the U.S. NTDP and Notre Dame during the last three seasons.

Notre Dame coach Jeff Jackson liked Palmieri's offensive instincts, grit and intensity. The New Jersey native is strong on his skates and has excellent quickness. His solid frame (5-10, 195 pounds) will be able to withstand the rigours of the NHL. He has good vision with an excellent shot and release. Although listed as a right-winger -- the natural position of Corey Perry and Bobby Ryan – Palmieri has also played centre.

He has been compared to Chris Drury for his playing style, but unlike Drury, is more of a finisher than a playmaker (although at this point the argument could be made that Drury is neither of these things). Palmieri's freshman season in college didn't match Drury's, but all players

develop at a different pace. I wouldn't rule out Palmieri having Drury-type offensive upside.

There's a top-six opening on the left side in Anaheim even if you believe that Matt Beleskey belongs there. As of now, he's also on injured reserve and the Ducks have moved Ryan over the left wing a fair bit this season. This has given Palmieri a prime opportunity to prove himself. Even if he doesn't stick, I'd rate Palmieri as a buy and hope he sticks. You should be able to pick him up pretty cheaply in one-year leagues and you might be able to acquire him for a decent price in a keeper league. If he doesn't finish this season in the NHL, this cup of coffee will be a great experience for him and make him hungrier next season.

Upside: Top-six winger, 40-35-75, 60 PIM