

Colborne a Big Catch

Written by Jeffrey Renaud

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Brian Burke has his detractors, no doubt. But when you consider Tomáš Kaberle had the Toronto Maple Leafs' over the proverbial barrel, a hotshot prospect like Joe Colborne and a first round draft pick is a pretty decent return. Especially, if Colborne, and his six-foot-five frame, dominates at the NHL level in a few seasons, the way many believe he can.

Selected 16th overall by the Boston Bruins in the 2008 draft (coincidentally one pick before Jake Gardiner, the slick-footed defenceman the Leafs landed from the Anaheim Ducks in the François Beauchemin deal last week), Colborne played the last two seasons with the University of Denver Pioneers where he was a teammate of Tyler Bozak during the 2008-09 season.

This season, his first full-season as a professional, Colborne's been enjoying moderate success

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with Boston's AHL affiliate, the Providence Bruins. With 12 goals and 26 points in 55 games, Colborne ranks 20th in AHL rookie scoring, seven places back of Toronto's *other* highly touted prospect centre Nazem Kadri, who is playing at nearly a point-per-game pace with 11 goals and 30 points in 31 games.

Providence Bruins Head Coach Rob Murray, one of only seven players in AHL history to play 1,000 games and the second most penalized player in league history, told **PROSPECT PRESCRIPTION** that while Colborne needs some "seasoning," he's on the right track to becoming an NHL-calibre player.

"You never know what he's up against, in terms of getting a look this year, at least, in Toronto," says Murray, who expects the 21-year old Calgary native will begin his Toronto career with the Marlies. "But it's a good opportunity for Joe."

With Boston, Colborne was likely considered, at least from a distance, as the eighth or ninth centre on the depth chart behind Patrice Bergeron, David Krejci, Tyler Seguin, Rich Peverley, Chris Kelly, Brad Marchand, Gregory Campbell, and Marc Savard, who is still recovering from his most recent concussion.

In Toronto, Colborne's path to the NHL is a little less crowded as he will battle Bozak, Kadri, Mikhail Grabovski and not much else for a spot on the roster quite possibly as early as next

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season unless Burke goes after Brad Richards this summer.

Speaking of Colborne's chances of finding a spot with the Leafs for the 2010-11 season, Murray says, "I don't know if he's ready right now because as with a lot of young players, it just takes a little while. Even the best of guys, guys like David Krejci, he wasn't ready at first but his game got better and better and now he's one of the better players in the NHL, as far as I'm concerned."

Any team's fanbase, Toronto especially, is always looking for somebody to step right in and be *the player*

. And that's hard to do, says Murray. "It's a tough jump from junior or college right to the NHL. And that's what we (AHL) are here for, to move guys on and develop them. But Joe's a guy whether it's this year, at a time next year, or whenever, there's definitely a good upside for him."

Murray says one thing Colborne has been getting better and better at this season is his puck protection down low.

"It comes with his size, but Joe's got a good way of fending off a defender and finding seams to the net," says Murray. "That's one of things he's getting better at and buying into."

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“On a given night, one of the things we had to keep on him about was moving his feet and playing at a high pace. And when he does that, he can get things done. And other nights, when he tends to just coast and try read plays as opposed to taking away time and space, that’s when he doesn’t look as effective.”

Murray thinks in the long run, Colborne is going to be more of a scorer than a playmaker.

“He’s got great size and a great release. And a good shot. He has the ability to make plays, don’t get me wrong, but I think he’s the type of guy that when he gets around the net, he’s going to be a shoot-first guy,” explains Murray. “As opposed to a make-a-pass guy, so that’s where I think he’ll have some success.”

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