

Orlov'in It

Written by Jeffrey Renaud

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You've all read or heard the quote about Washington Capitals' top prospect defenceman Dmitry Orlov: "I think as far as a 19 or 20-year-old, after just a few games, it's the best 19 or 20-year-old that I've seen in Hershey at this level."

The man behind the quote is Doug Yingst and after watching the 19-year old native of Novokuznetsk, Russia now for a dozen games in his recently launched professional career, the president and general manager of the AHL's Hershey Bears isn't about to change his tune.

Yingst told **PROSPECT PRESCRIPTION** that Orlov, who has scored a goal and chipped in four assists for the Bears, has been nothing short of outstanding since he arrived in Hershey and echoed his statements about the offensive-minded defender that he proclaimed earlier in the month; a week after Orlov signed a three-year entry-level contract with the Caps.

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"I think in all of my years in Hershey, which is 29 years, he's the best 19-year old I've seen," said Yingst without pause. "Being able to come not only from Europe but even out of junior and be able to compete at this level. And not only compete, but excel is outstanding."

Drafted by Washington in the second round (55th overall) in the 2009 NHL Entry Draft, Orlov skated for Russia at both the 2010 and 2011 World Junior Championships, getting named to the 2011 tournament All-Star team after scoring nine points, including a goal, in just seven games.

Yingst says the main thing that separates Orlov from other young defencemen is his steadfast playmaking ability. "He sees the ice extremely well. His first pass out of the zone is crisp and on the stick. And I'm just as impressed in the fact that he just doesn't panic. He doesn't lose control. For an individual coming here, who really can't speak the English language, we have to teach him through the use of diagrams, it's extraordinary.

The Bears are expecting Orlov will begin English language lessons shortly but in the meantime, forward prospect Dmitri Kugryshov is serving as Hershey's Russian translator.

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“Dmitry’s staying with him and he [Kugryshev] has been acting as an interpreter for us. But Dmitry is picking up little things here and there, in just a short time. We’ve been on the road quite a bit but he wants to get into working in English as soon as possible. Hopefully, we can get started this week.”

But while his studies in the classroom haven’t started, his education on the ice is progressing at a torrid pace.

Over the past six or seven years, Hershey has cranked out a number of NHL-ready defenceman, including Mike Green, arguably one of the top two or three fantasy options at the position and John Carlson, a Calder Trophy candidate this season for the NHL’s best rookie.

Yingst, who is quick to add Jeff Schultz and Karl Alzner to the list, says Orlov’s rapid rise only elevates Hershey’s success rate. But he says the fact the Capitals are stacked with elite talent on the back end will not stunt Orlov’s growth. In fact, it may ignite it.

“He’s such a competitive guy that I don’t think that bothers him at all. Because of the language barrier, I’m only guessing what he’s thinking, but he sees the success these players out of Hershey have had, so it gives him confidence right away that he can do the same,” offers Yingst. “I don’t think he has any fear, whatsoever, in competing against anybody.”

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Asked point blank if Orlov had a shot to stick with the big club next season, Yingst said there is no doubt he will be an NHL player one day, but his career may not start in 2011-12.

“For his development and for him to fulfill his talent level, especially coming into a league that is more physical with a smaller ice surface and playing in so many more games, I think that he needs more time in Hershey,” says Yingst. “Whether it’s a half-a-year or a full-year next year, it’s yet to be determined. It depends on placements in Washington and injuries and so forth but I think taking his time in development and getting used to the game over here would be in his best interest. But he is an NHL player.”

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