With the recent passing of the 2012 NHL Draft, there was so much talk about how this draft was heavy in defensemen. Names like Murray, Reinhart, Rielly, Lindholm, Dumba, Pouliot, Ceci, Maatta, Matheson, Trouba, Skjei, and Schmaltz were among the many that went in Round 1. In fact, at one point there were seven defensemen taking in a row from picks four through eleven and thirteen blue liner were selected in Round 1 in all. Then were a couple of other rearguards that slipped into the second round. One in particular that has been rising through the ranks is Western New York native, Dylan Blujus.

Blujus was chosen in the second round, 40th overall, by the Tampa Lightning. Not bad for a player that was ranked 71st by the NHL's Central Scouting Services (CSS) early April. The list only included North American skaters, as European players are ranked separately by the CSS.

Personally, my first glimpse of Blujus came during his midget days during the 2009-10 campaign while he was playing for the reputable Buffalo Regals AAA U18 program as a 16-year old.
He had an overall strong game, although one area of improvement needed was his skating ability.

Blujus has raised his game to the next level in a little over two years. Steve Yzerman and the

Lightning scouting staff like what they see in the 6-3, 200 pound defenseman.

His mobility and lateral movement have greatly improved from the midget days. He is nowhere near ready for the NHL game today and Tampa will let him continue to develop his game in the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) this coming season again with the Brampton Battalion.

The beauty in Blujus' game is that he is a very intelligent as a defensive defenseman, yet he also possesses offensive instincts that could blossom in the coming years with the right coaching and system. His ability to join or lead the rush is what caught my eye a couple years ago.

He certainly picked a good year to impress this past season. Scouts were pleasantly surprised this year with his poise and control with the puck. Blujus consistently made solid decisions with and without the puck.
He is projected to be a top four defenseman in the NHL. He rarely makes mistakes with that black rubber disc on his blade, and he has the vision to make great stretch passes to his forwards. Another great quality Blujus brings is his heavy, accurate shot and was very effective in Brampton in leading the power play.

If he wants to be successful at the pro level, he will need to learn to use his big frame more frequently. While he certainly utilizes his stick well, he could be more aggressive in the defensive zone by winning more puck battles with physicality. He already has the size and strength.

Again, his hockey sense shows well in each zone with his solid positional play. He controls gaps soundly, and is active with his stick in passing lanes.

While everybody in the hockey world fell in love with the Round 1 selections, Blujus has quietly

developed into a top prospect. Statistics will show that the probability of making the NHL greatly decreases from Round 1 to Round 2. But this American defenseman's development curve is certainly trending up, and he will be standing tall on Tampa's blue line at some point in the near future.