

## The Prototypical Left Winger

Written by Ryan Van Horne

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The best left wingers in Los Angeles Kings history are known for scoring goals and racking up the points. Luc Robitaille and Charlie Simmer had stellar careers with the Kings and they also had Jari Kurri for a few years, but the left side has always been a difficult spot to fill. When they have found a keeper, he's been a skill guy, not your prototypical left winger (Gary Roberts, Brendan Shanahan). Alexander Frolov is the most recent example of this, but he might not even be around after this summer.

This makes a great opportunity for players such as Kyle Clifford, a rugged, up-and-down winger with defensive savvy and enough skill to play a support role on the second line. I can imagine Clifford being a good fit on a line with Brayden Schenn and Oscar Moller in a couple of years.

Clifford was the Kings second round pick (35th overall) in the 2009 NHL Entry Draft last June. He was signed to a three-year, entry-level deal last September after impressing the Kings' brass at training camp.

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The 6-2, 208-pound native of Ayr, Ontario convinced the Kings his tough, aggressive style of play was exactly what they were looking for when they drafted him.

Like many power forwards, Clifford's offensive skills developed at a little slower rate. His production as a 16-year-old was miniscule. He scored just one goal in 66 games and 15 points. He boosted that to 16 goals and 28 points in his draft year and then doubled it this past season to 28 goals and 57 points. That boost in offensive production this year has helped erase some of the doubts people had when the Kings drafted him in the second round last summer. Many thought it was a reach, and that they could have nabbed him with a later pick.

He's keeping it up in the playoffs, too, with 11 points in 13 games. His team, the Barrie Colts, has advanced to OHL final and awaits the winner of the Western Conference final between Kitchener and Windsor.

Kudos to Dean Lombardi and his staff and seeing Clifford's potential -- they'll be rewarded. Clifford got nods in OHL Eastern Conference coaches' poll this past season. He was second in hardest worker and first in best defensive forward. Clifford doesn't back down from anyone. As a 17-year-old, he fought Kyle Neuber and Akim Aliu as 19-year-olds and took on fellow draft prospect Zack Kassian -- one of the top young fighters in the OHL.

He plays with an edge but also has good hockey sense. Knows sometimes that the simple play is the better play and will be the kind of player that Kings coach Terry Murray will trust. He does

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a good job cycling the puck in the offensive zone and can be a handful for opposing defencemen. He loves to hit and plays a responsible game in his own zone.

What production will be in the NHL depends on his linemates and his role, but if he continues to improve his skating – a fair assumption given his work ethic – he'll be fine and could be a second-liner.

**Upside: 50 points, with 150 PIMs.**