

## Cole on the Cusp

Written by Ryan Van Horne

Saturday, 29 May 2010 11:13 - Last Updated Sunday, 30 May 2010 11:17

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Ian Cole is on the cusp of becoming a good fantasy prospect. There's no doubt that the first-round pick from 2007 is a good hockey prospect and will help the St. Louis Blues, but when combing through the prospect ranks for the upcoming Dobber Prospects Guide, I had the option of picking one of their players for the Prospect Guide. I considered Cole, but didn't include him, because in the end, I don't think he will be a good fantasy player.

I will keep an open mind on Cole – you should always keep an open mind and watch how a young player develops – but there are a few reasons why his value is much greater to a real hockey team than a fantasy hockey team.

Cole was already physically mature when he was drafted, and thus he had little room to improve in that regard. He has a tremendous work ethic and while he was with the U.S. National Team Development Program, he put on more than 20 pounds and beefed up to 210 pounds by the time he was drafted.

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In a television documentary about the St. Louis Blues at 2007 draft, there was a tell-tale comment from Jarmo Kekalainen, the Blues' assistant GM and director of amateur scouting. The documentary took viewers inside the NHL club's "war room" and chronicled the discussions among the team's brass and scouts.

Kekalainen liked Cole and, in urging GM Larry Pleau and President John Davidson to make a trade to move up to get him, said this: "He's a man and he's got a bomb for a shot."

Cole, who was 18 at the time, was almost fully grown and had little room to improve in terms of adding strength or size. He's added a bit of weight in the three years at Notre Dame, but not a lot and was last listed on the Notre Dame website as 220.

Cole was ranked 81<sup>st</sup> in Central Scouting's final rankings (completed before the world under-18 championship) and 57<sup>th</sup> by International Scouting Services. Another independent scouting service, Red Line Report, had Cole ranked ninth and even predicted the Blues would take Cole. Kyle Woodlief, the chief scout for Red Line, called Cole the "steady, sturdy bookend for Barrett Jackman" which, while complimentary, hardly speaks of offensive upside.

The Blues liked Cole and it was largely because of Kekalainen's advice that the Blues traded

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with Calgary to move up to the No. 18 spot from the 24<sup>th</sup> to grab Cole, who made huge strides in his draft year. He also played great at the world under-18 championship, but still had doubters about his offensive upside – despite his excellent shot.

Cole had 17 goals and 48 assists in 111 games during his three seasons with the Fighting Irish. He made a modest improvement in production in his sophomore year, but slipped back a bit in his junior year. With Erik Johnson already in the NHL, Alex Pietrangelo on the verge of being a full-timer, and 2009 first-rounder David Rundblad touted as a skilled puck-rusher, Cole's role with the Blues will likely be that of a defensive defenceman. The three aforementioned defencemen are all right-handed shots, but Cole is a left-handed shot, so he could end up being paired with the top dog on the blueline. Cole plays solid defence and looks like a linebacker on skates so he will get his share of ice time, too. With his solid shot and good work ethic, he's a good horse to back, just keep in mind the offensive upside is limited because of his skating and puck skills. He was picked in the first round largely because of the impact he will make in preventing goals.

The Blues would have liked to see Cole turn pro after his sophomore season, but he opted to return to Notre Dame. Academically, you can't argue with the decision, but from a hockey standpoint, it didn't work out and the Blues think he would have been better off in Peoria.

Cole signed an amateur tryout contract and played in nine games with the Rivermen. He had a goal and four assists – including a goal and a helper in his second game -- which is a promising pro debut, but a small sample size. He should not need more than one year in the AHL before he's ready for the NHL.

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**Upside: 10-20-30, 100 PIM.**

**One-timers:** There was a flurry of prospect signings this week as teams rushed to lock in many of the junior prospects they drafted in 2008. If teams don't sign certain junior players by Monday, they re-enter the draft. Teams have more time to sign college players – as long as they're in school. ... Jarmo Kekalainen announced this week that he's taking a job as GM with Jokerit in Finland. Kekalainen did a superb job as the Blues scouting director and was at the helm when the team drafted Erik Johnson, David Perron, T.J. Oshie, Patrik Berglund, David Backes, and Alex Pietrangelo.