*In this special edition of **PROSPECT PRESCRIPTION**, DobberHockey spoke with the coaches of two players who made big news this week, namely 15-year old phenom Aaron Ekblad and free agent French national and Merrimack College standout Stephane Da Costa.*

In 2005, the OHL tagged John Tavares with ‘exceptional player status’ granting the then 14-year permission to enter the league’s annual priority draft. Tavares was selected first overall by the Oshawa Generals and four years later, the Mississauga native was drafted first overall in the NHL Draft by the New York Islanders.

The OHL got it right back then and now Aaron Ekblad, a 15-year-old defenseman from Belle

River, Ont., is hoping lightning strikes twice. This past season, the six-foot-three, 200-pound Ekblad starred for the Sun County Panthers Minor Midget AAA program, recording 34 points in 30 regular season games. But his coach Frank Evola told **PROSPECT PRESCRIPTION** that the numbers don't indicate all that he meant to his team.

"He [Ekblad] plays every situation. He knows every situation. He's aware of every situation," explains Evola. "And in terms of skill set, Aaron has all the elements. He has all the tools. He's mature, he's poised and his hockey I.Q. is off the charts. He's a very good skater. He skates well for a big boy. There are not too many boys of his stature that skate like him. He's got a very heavy shot. But most importantly, he's a quality young man. He's almost like a man to be honest with you."

And that is important as the OHL only grants its 'exceptional player status' on players that combine a tremendous skill set with academic and social maturity. Evola says Ekblad, who is expected to go first overall to the Barrie Colts, has it all – in spades.

"Aaron's a very good student. He could have gone to any college he chose, if that's what he wanted to do. If you sat down and had a conversation with him, you wouldn't think he just turned 15 years old. He's truly beyond his years, not only when he's playing hockey."

Ekblad has played in the Sun County hockey program since he was nine years old and Evola says from Day 1 everyone knew he was going to be something special.

“Obviously, he grew into his body. He played all the way up to pee wee major at his own level and then at bantam minor, he decided to make the jump so he made the request and as an organization, we thought it was the best situation for him at that time in his development. And everything paid off. We do it for other guys too, if they’re in that type of category.”

Evola says Ekblad doesn’t necessarily have a ‘wow’ factor to his game, he’s just rock solid on both ends of the ice like a Zdeno Chara or a Chris Pronger.

“He doesn’t wow you because he’s deking guys. He does everything very, very well in every aspect of the game,” says Evola, who adds the young phenom hasn’t let his meteoric rise get to his head.

“He’s very humble. He really didn’t want to do this but it was something that he felt he had to do. He doesn’t want everyone saying, ‘You’re the Next One’ or whatever. He’s a pretty humble guy.”

E.P.T.A. (ESTIMATED PROSPECT TIME OF ARRIVAL): 2015-16

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Gary Bettman and the rest of NHL braintrust may want to consider bringing a Premiere Game to Paris, France next season now that the Ottawa Senators have a Parisian taking faceoffs in the nation's capital. Maybe a Heritage Classic between the Senators and the Maple Leafs at the steps of the Eiffel Tower?

Stéphane Da Costa, who signed a two-year entry-level contract with Ottawa Thursday, will make his debut tonight on the biggest stage the NHL has to offer in this country: Hockey Night in Canada.

In two seasons at Merrimack College, the 21-year old Da Costa tallied 90 points in 67 games, leading the school's transformation to the top of Hockey East and a Top 10 national ranking. Da Costa also participated in the 2010 IIHF World Championships, tying for the team lead in scoring.

Merrimack Assistant Coach Phil Roy, who played five seasons of professional hockey in North America and Europe including stints with the Johnstown Chiefs (ECHL), the St. John Flames and Cleveland Barons (AHL), told **PROSPECT PRESCRIPTION** that it didn't take Da Costa long to prove he was going to be a big time player for the Warriors.

"In his second collegiate game, he scored five goals. That shows you the type of skill that he has," says Roy, who compares the five-foot-eleven, 180-pound Da Costa to current French Canadian star Mike Ribeiro.

"Stéphane's a little stronger and a little heavier, muscle-wise. But he's slippery like Ribeiro and has great vision," explains Roy. "They're not really big, physical specimens, they're just solid athletes and really slippery. It's tough to defend against him. You don't know where he's going to go. He gives you the kind of soccer shoulder drop and then the hips are going somewhere else and then you're going one way and at the last second, he'll bring everything back the other way.

"He's also got a good shot. It's really accurate and he's able to slow things down and make things happen. He brought a great offensive dimension to our team. Not just our team but our whole league, as well."

Da Costa is a true centre according to Roy but adds he and Coach Mark Dennehy weren't afraid to use their star forward on the point during the man advantage.

"On the power play, we started using him on the half boards and down low and then ultimately, we put him on the D and from there, there was a couple of patterns where he was rolling and moving and that sort of thing but he's a true centre."

Despite his success and being the big man on campus, Roy says Da Costa's teammates respected him and that he was a joy to coach.

"He's a great teammate. He knew he was probably the top-end player not just on our team but in our league but it wasn't like his head got big or anything like that. And while he wasn't necessarily the poster child for our program, we obviously used him for lots of promotional stuff. And that never got to his head either. He's still down to Earth. He likes to kid around and the guys respect him for that because they know he's going to work hard and do some pretty special stuff on the ice but in the locker room, he's just one of the other guys."

It's just that the other guys aren't going to be on Hockey Night in Canada tonight.

E.P.T.A. (ESTIMATED PROSPECT TIME OF ARRIVAL): 2010-11