

Islanders Make Tavares First Pick, Choose Flash and Scoring to Regain Fans

Written by Jeff Levine
Friday, 03 July 2009 15:56



The 2009 NHL Entry Draft came and went last week. Overall, the event lacked any real drama. However, Friday's first round had a good amount of action, as it featured both a blockbuster trade and finally unveiled to the world which can't miss player the New York Islanders were going to anchor their rebuilding efforts around: [John Tavares](#).

Held at the Bell Centre, home of the Montreal Canadiens, the first day's action included future hall of fame defenseman [Chris Pronger](#) and his hefty contract being moved from the Anaheim Ducks to the Philadelphia Flyers in exchange for a package that included top six forward [Joffrey Lupul](#) and several first round draft picks.

Flyers fans will love Pronger's bruising style of play and on ice leadership while the Ducks receive a major player in Lupul as well as several chips the now rebuilding franchise can use to quickly rebound into a contender. FYI, this is the second time Lupul has been traded for Chris Pronger, first time being when Lupul (then a member of the Ducks) was involved in the package that brought Pronger from Edmonton to Anaheim.

Not lost in all of this is the decision by the Islanders to choose flash and scoring over stay at home defensive reliability. In choosing to draft mega prospect in Tavares, the Islanders will get scoring help that the struggling franchise desperately needs, seeing that a defenseman led the team in points this past season ([Mark Streit](#)).

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One of the alternatives that GM Garth Snow was considering in drafting number one was [Victor Hedman](#), the towering Swedish defenseman and top rated European prospect coming into the 2009 draft. Going with Tavares brings instant name recognition to New York, a major hockey market, and will instantly pay dividend because more goals will translate into more fans in the seats of the aging Nassau Coliseum. Tavares has been touted as a future first overall pick since 2004, so even if he does not light the lamp right out the gate, fans will still come to games, and Tavares has been groomed to handle the spotlight, which he most certainly will face in New York.

Now the arduous task for Snow and company is to reverse the tremendous [LA Clippers-like curse](#) that has befallen the once proud New York franchise. Only time will tell if Tavares is the real deal; however if he lives up to half as much of the hype he should be a serviceable NHL player for a few years.

The larger issue here is whether Tavares and the new crop of Islander players (see [Kyle Okposo](#), [Jeff Tambellini](#), and [Josh Bailey](#)) can resurrect the franchise and begin the road back toward respectability and profitability. Owner Charles Wang has voiced regret in buying the team and is frustrated that the team's new arena is nowhere close to breaking ground. He has also dropped subtle hints that he is [exploring relocation options](#).

A new arena (the Coliseum is one of the oldest venues in the game and lacks the hallmarks of most modern stadia that enable teams to produce millions [i.e. suites, club seating]) is a necessity if the Islanders are to remain in the Metro New York area and actually make money. Regardless of the fact that the Islanders are far from profitable and are probably paying very close attention to the bankruptcy proceedings playing out in Phoenix, Islanders fans should rejoice because their franchise has made a good choice, although they really could not had messed this one up...or could they? Luckily Mike Millbury was not at the helm for this draft.

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