

JOHN PADDOCK ON LA KINGS PROSPECT AUSTIN WAGNER: "HE'S AN EXTREMELY INTIMIDATING PLAYER WITH HIS SPEED"

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 16, 2015



Photo credit: Keith Hershmiller/Regina Pats

Size, defense, goaltending, puck possession. These are four of the main ingredients used by the **Los Angeles Kings** to whip themselves into a multiple **Stanley Cup**-winner. For prospect **Austin Wagner**, however, while he does possess good size at 6-foot-1, he brings a new element to the table that has been somewhat foreign to the silver-and-black in recent years.

As wonderful as it has been to witness their transformation into a championship-winner after such an enduring rebuilding phase, the Los Angeles Kings have not been notorious for possessing a great deal of speed. While their strength in the aforementioned areas have paid off in the postseason, the club's lack of speed, while it hasn't hurt them, has not made the Kings the most exciting team to watch in recent years. That, by the way, is not a knock against the Kings but perhaps a suggestion to add another element to their recipe for success. Enter the aforementioned Wagner who, in a few years from now, could help Kings fans celebrate their club's success in a whole new way.

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Drafted in the fourth round (99th overall) by the Kings this past June, Wagner has plenty of time and room to develop his game. He is currently playing in his third full season with the **Regina Pats** of the **Western Hockey League** where he is already on pace to surpass his career-highs in goals, assists and points. So, while his offensive capabilities pale in comparison to his aforementioned size and speed, the 18-year-old has nonetheless progressed fluidly.

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Recently, I spoke with Pats' head coach **John Paddock** who gave me an accurate rundown of the left-winger's game.





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"He's an extremely intimidating player with his speed," Paddock said. "Certainly his speed is his biggest asset. He competes well."

Paddock continued.

"I think this year for the most part he's gotten better. He's had a bit of a slow start. He's fast on his feet but I think he can end up with more goals and points, stay on his pace from a year ago. I would think he'd have more goals, 25-plus certainly, but with the way he's been playing lately, he's been a very effective player."

While Wagner's size certainly fits the Kings' blueprint for success, the Pats' bench boss told me of another area where the youngster has helped his current club and, in turn, can help the Kings in the near future.

"He's been a very effective penalty-killer throughout my time with him here," Paddock emphasized.

Of course, while there is plenty of upside to Wagner's game, there are admittedly a few areas in which the Calgary native will need to improve upon before embarking on a pro career.

"He needs to find a little bit more discipline," Paddock said. "Staying out of the penalty box has been a bit of a problem for him. He needs to keep his game simple. He's an intimidating player with his speed but if he doesn't harness that and keep it simple, then he becomes an ineffective player."

"He's just not ready for NHL speed, so I think he can get more and more productive. He has plenty of time to develop. Maintaining a north-south, straight-ahead speed and power game and to just keep developing that."

While his speed may not be at the NHL level just yet, there is still plenty of excitement from the Kings' brass about Wagner and his prime asset. This is especially true coming from the club's Director of Player Development, **Nelson Emerson**.

*Photo credit: Keith
Hershmiller/Regina Pats*

"Wagner is an interesting prospect for us," Emerson told me. "We are excited about the fact that he has speed to burn. We have not had a prospect where we have ever been able to say that speed is his number-one asset."

As for John Paddock, he is now in his second season with the Pats, serving as the club's VP of Hockey Operations in addition to his coaching duties. The former journeyman has watched Wagner **go from 20 goals and 39 points in 61 games last season to 10 goals and 22 points in 29 games this season** while amassing an overall plus-21 rating.



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Overall, though, Paddock seemed most impressed with the way Wagner conducts himself, watching him accept new roles for the benefit of the team.

"He has a good attitude and he's a good worker," the head coach said. "He's a player that can play on the power play and kills penalties, so he is more than willing and understands and accepts that role."

One advantage for Wagner is that he has a coach who is no stranger to the embattled journeys of a professional hockey player.

Paddock had a nine-year professional playing career, mostly in the **AHL**, but making stops in **NHL** cities such as **Washington, Philadelphia** and **Quebec**. Paddock then moved into the coaching ranks upon retirement eventually becoming an NHL head coach with the **Winnipeg Jets** and years later with the **Ottawa Senators**. His road through the pro ranks was a long and winding one; one that has given him enough experience to help steer his youngsters, including Wagner, on the right path to the NHL.

"He wants to be an NHL player, so I think he'll have some bumps in the road," Paddock concluded. "But we'll see if he can stay the course for the most part because that's what he wants to do.

"I think he has a bright future. He's a real good fourth-round draft pick and has a real good chance to play in the National Hockey League."

Seldom have the Los Angeles Kings had a prospect with so much potential as a speedster, and that is what already makes Austin Wagner stand out despite having yet to play a game with the organization. With his 19th birthday being seven months away, Wagner's development time is to his advantage, to not only hone his gift as a fast skater but to strengthen the other aspects of his game so much that he will, in short time, be just a phone call away from donning a Kings uniform.

From **Jake Muzzin** and **Alec Martinez** to **Tyler Toffoli** and **Tanner Pearson**, the Los Angeles Kings have made a name for themselves in developing their prospects to their fullest potential. With Nelson Emerson at the helm of the club's Player Development department, the sky's the limit for anyone drafted by the silver-and-black. Austin Wagner is no exception and Emerson is certainly enthusiastic to begin working with the youngster.

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"We are excited to begin working with him," Emerson emphasized. "He will need to learn how to win battles for pucks, puck protect, and then make the next positive play. We look forward to adding this to the assets that he already has."





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Mike Ehrmann

It may not be this year or even next year but soon enough, fans of the Los Angeles Kings will be introduced to Austin Wagner, and when that happens, they will not look back, but not by choice. Because the youngster is so fast on his skates, fans would be afraid of missing something if they did look back, even for a split-second. The speed of Austin Wagner, after all, will simply be too glaring to miss.