

MANCHESTER TO LA: THE CASE FOR CALDER CUP MVP JORDAN WEAL

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 19, 2015

With the belief that Justin Williams and Jarret Stoll will not be returning next season, the Los Angeles Kings will likely be dipping into their future to kick off the 2015-16 campaign. But while there are a few candidates on the verge of making the jump to the NHL, none seem more likely than Jordan Weal.

Fresh off helping the Manchester Monarchs capture their first (and only) Calder Cup, Weal finished with a share of the playoff scoring lead – good enough to earn him playoff MVP honours – with teammate Michael Mersch with 22 points. Of course, while Mersch – who finished second in playoff goal-scoring with 13 – is a viable candidate for call-up discussion, he did just finish his first full year in the AHL. If GM Dean Lombardi's regime is any indication, then Mersch will not be playing for the big club anytime soon. At 22, he still has plenty of time to develop.

Open the door for Mr. Weal.

After a tenure in Manchester that saw him score 172 points (58 goals, 114 assists) to go in hand with a +47 rating over three full seasons, it would be an understatement to suggest that Weal made his mark with the junior Kings. What is definite is that the 23-year-old will be in Southern California next season. Whether that means Ontario or Los Angeles is another matter, but it seems that Weal is set for the next level, especially after narrowly missing the cut last season.

A couple of weeks ago, John Hoven of MayorsManor asked Dean Lombardi for an update during a conference call:

"He just won't be denied. It's hard to explain. I'll try to give you an example – he's always fought the size issue, as a lot of smaller players have had to do, and they become so driven. He goes through another solid regular season [this year], but you saw in the first round of the playoffs, it was very physical. Phoenix's [AHL] team tried to run us out of the building. They were heavy, and [Weal] was one of our best players out there. He showed he could play in a physical series. The next series was more skill and stuff, and he was more than fine there, even though his space was closing because it's the playoffs. Again, he just keeps on showing you. 'Keep doubting me, I dare you,' It's almost like he says it every time he gets on the rink. He's pretty good."

While nothing is set in stone – and won't be until the fall – such an endorsement is hard to ignore, especially from a general manager who has been so emphatic on the importance of size – an area Weal

lacks in. But, as Lombardi noted, the former Regina Pat proved that he can keep up physically with larger, heavier opponents, and that speaks volumes on his chances in the NHL.

There is no denying that the size factor has been a proven winning method in Los Angeles. Two Stanley Cup victories in three years did not happen by accident and as far as yours truly is concerned, it needs to remain intact. With that said, it wouldn't hurt the silver-and-black to mix the size in with some speed and finesse – two facets Weal brings to the table – even if his stature of 5' 10, 171 pounds pales in comparison to the Kings' average of just under 6' 2 and a shade under 207 pounds. But there's just more to Jordan Weal than his appearance because, like Lombardi said, there's just no denying him.

I admit that I was disappointed when he was cut by the Kings last fall but as the old adage goes, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," and Weal's 69 points (20 goals, 49 assists in 73 games this past regular season backed that up as the native of North Vancouver answered rejection with a vengeance, assuming, of course, that "rejection" is a fair term. Then, of course, 22 points in 19 playoff games guided the Manchester Monarchs to the top of the mountain. The latter was simply gravy for Weal's chances at the next level.

Standing between 5' 9 and 5' 10, I can certainly identify with Jordan Weal. If Tampa Bay's Tyler Johnson is any indication, then players don't need to be 6' 3 to excel at the NHL level. That isn't to say that size is overrated, because it's not, but Jordan Weal donning a Kings uniform next season may just spark an extra bit of excitement to a fanbase disappointed by their team's playoff miss this past spring. Even just thinking about it now makes yours truly feeling excited for the inevitable Jordan Weal era in Los Angeles.

Of course, while I do admit that the jump from the minors to the big leagues is like, as Jerry Maguire put it, is "like popcorn in a pan. Some pop... some don't," there is a fact, made famous by Wayne Gretzky, that, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take." So, Weal's success at the next level is worth a try. After all, with the nefarious presence of the salary cap, the Kings could get themselves quite the discount in giving the pending RFA his shot.

His size (or lack thereof) may have kept him away from the NHL thus far, but there's only so much abuse the door that Jordan Weal is kicking can take. As of now, that door is hanging on its last hinges and once its down, Weal will finally be on the inside with the urge of looking over his shoulder gone right out the window.