

## LA KINGS' NELSON EMERSON SAYS MICHAEL MERSCH "HAS ALL THE ATTRIBUTES OF BEING A GREAT NHLER"

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 25, 2015

Aside from their Stanley Cup victories, what has been most refreshing about the **Los Angeles Kings** under GM **Dean Lombardi** has been having the diligence of developing their young talent into NHL-ready players. Some have needed longer timeframes than others but while patience is an acquired virtue for most, said end results have made the wait well worth it. One such prospect who may not need as much time developing in the **AHL** is a youngster the Kings took in the fourth round of the 2011 Draft. At 6' 1, 225 pounds, he certainly meets the physical requirements of being a modern-day King but there is much more to this individual's game than meets the eye.

For someone who spent just one full season in the **AHL**, **Michael Mersch** has already proven that the **National Hockey League** is just around the corner, and it's approaching faster than some would think.

I spoke with **Nelson Emerson**, the Director of Player Development for the Los Angeles Kings, about Mersch and his overall game. It was evident just how excited Emerson is about the 22-year-old.

"It took him a little to get going but he's a real studier of the game as he wanted to watch videos and watch how he could get better," Emerson told me.

Over the last few seasons, the Los Angeles Kings, to a large degree, have struggled to score goals. While their defense and their goaltending have made up for said struggles, the Kings' trouble lighting the lamp could be partially attributed to not creating enough traffic in front of the opposition's net. Emerson discussed how Mersch, in just one season, has enhanced his game in front of the net.

"The thing about Michael Mersch is that place in front of the net, that area below the top of the circle, he's become just a super pro in that area," Emerson said. "Can't knock him off his skates, he jumps on loose pucks, he screens in front of the net with tips and rebounds. That's become an area where he's become an expert in."

His stats alone last season have left many Kings fans salivating but Michael Mersch, who has dedicated to turning himself into an all-around player. His 22 goals and 45 points in addition to his +20 rating last regular season are indicative enough that linemates, coaches and fans alike become giddy when he steps onto the ice. This was especially prevalent in the playoffs this past spring when the native of Park Ridge, Ill., notched 13 goals and 22 points in just 19 games, helping the **Manchester Monarchs** win the **Calder**

**Cup.** As superb as his scoring abilities are, though, Mersch has more to offer, using more hard work than natural talent to achieve success in other facets of his game.

"One thing about [Mersch], most don't know about his skating but he has worked so hard on his skating over the last couple of years," Emerson continued. "Now, people will go watch him in a game and they will only talk about his skating being an efficiency. So, give him credit because he's worked so hard."

If his tone is any indication, Emerson's enthusiasm for Mersch could not be any more evident than it was when speaking of his outstanding progress thus far.

"This guy Mersch, he's a real pro just like **[Jordan] Weal**, trying to get better every day," a glowing Emerson said matter-of-factly. "They're early there, they want to learn and [Mersch] has all the attributes of being a great NHLer, just like Weal, and you could see that when the playoffs come on. Those are the type of players you like, Weal and Mersch. When the playoffs were going and the series kept going from one series to the next, they just kept getting better. Mersch kept getting better. [Mersch would] get a little dinged up but came back and was tremendous, played hurt and was still just a warrior."

At 225 pounds, it is hard to fathom how opposing players could keep a player of Mersch's stature down. The latter statements from Emerson certainly aren't surprising but it nonetheless reassures fans of the silver-and-black that Jordan Weal is not the only up-and-coming prospect they will be seeing at **STAPLES Center** soon. He may not be donning a Kings uniform as soon as Weal does but make no mistake that Michael Mersch will not have to wait long to find a spot on the big club's roster.

While he could not tell me the chances of Michael Mersch making the club this season, Emerson's excitement to see the forward in training camp next month is nonetheless palpable.

"It was awesome the year he had and how he progressed," Emerson said. "We're just really looking forward to watching him at camp, really looking forward to watching him as he continues his pro career."

The one-and-done philosophy in the AHL has not been a common practice under general manager Dean Lombardi. In fact, aside from the rare cases like **Drew Doughty** and **Kyle Clifford**, it is imperative for Kings draft picks to make a couple of stops before landing in Los Angeles. Michael Mersch is no different, although that is not any reason to be discouraged.

After he was drafted in 2011, Mersch spent the next three years playing for the **University of Wisconsin**, racking up 30 points in 37 games, 36 points in 42 games and 35 points in 37 games respectively before moving on to Manchester. He may not have fit in right off the bat but Mersch has worked very hard to become the player he is today, and while he will most likely be missing linemate Jordan Weal this coming

October, chances are the two will be reunited sooner rather than later. When exactly is unknown at this point but like Weal, Mersch is substantial evidence that the future of the Los Angeles Kings, despite the setback of missing the playoffs, is brighter than ever.

Like in any field, the success of a professional organization is to evolve, to constantly build towards for the future. The Los Angeles Kings continue to do just that and while he isn't the only one who deserves praise, many thanks are due to Michael Mersch and his eagerness to consistently better himself as a player.