

The Week It All Turned Around? [1]

Submitted by pete on July 3, 2009 - 14:34 [Tampa Bay Lightning](#) [2]

Make no mistakes about it, the 2008-2009 season, which was the debut for General Manager Brian Lawton and the OK Hockey ownership group, was one of the most humiliating in the history of the Tampa Bay Lightning. That's saying something, considering the Lightning's chequered history includes fake British royalty, allegedly broken fax machines, and a 1997-1998 team that was arguably the worst in the history of the NHL. What made 2008-2009 a disaster of such epic proportions that it could be mentioned along side an unmitigated failure like that 1997-1998 team was the undeserved, arrogant swagger with which Lawton and OK Hockey entered the season. They threw money around in free agency. They dealt off star player Dan Boyle and then jawed with the blueliner through the media. They fired the winningest American coach in the NHL history and replaced him with a talking head from ESPN that hadn't coached in 13 years under the assumption that poor, slack-jawed hockey fans from Tampa Bay weren't smart enough to know a backward step in the coaching department when they saw it. And, that's just the tip of the iceberg. They were self styled high rollers who expertly gambled away much of the credibility the franchise had fought to earn over the previous ten or so seasons since the 1997-1998 nightmare and, in the process, gambled away their credibility with the Lightning's fans and the media as well.

Well, in the last week, Brian Lawton and the Lightning organization may have finally started to do something to earn that credibility back. Things didn't start in a promising way with talk of ownership infighting, players defecting to Russia, and neverending rumors of [Vincent Lecavalier](#) [3] being dealt to Montreal for a bag of pucks in order to save money. But, a week later, the Lightning seem to have finally gotten their act together and if the Lightning do manage to re-emerge as an elite caliber team over the next five or so seasons, as I believe is possible, this may be the week we point back to as the starting point for the rise. Rather than trade Lecavalier, Lawton and OK Hockey sat on their cell phones, choosing not to deal a true superstar from a position of extreme weakness at the trough of his value and strip their brightest young player, [Steven Stamkos](#) [4], of the protective talent he needs on the line above him to push for a big sophomore campaign. They now seem to have put Lecavalier's future in the hands of Lecavalier: if Lecavalier has a big season I would expect that he will be retained. If he has another poor season, he'll likely be gone.

Overshadowed by the Lecavalier soap opera, but not unnoticed by this website, the Lightning went out and executed what may prove to be the second best draft in the team's history. They once again lucked out in getting the perfect fit for the organization's needs when [Victor Hedman](#) [5] fell to the second overall pick, giving the Lightning the best raw talent they have ever had on their blueline and a player some independent scouting firms believe could have the most upside of any player to be drafted since Sid Crosby. Beyond Hedman, who could be dismissed as a bit of a no-brainer pick, Lawton was surprisingly aggressive in trying to move up in the first round, and he eventually managed to move up to twenty-nine in the first to grab power forward prospect [Carter Ashton](#) [6], who was thought to have been a lock to go more toward the middle of the first round. Day two opened up with two more exciting picks. [Richard Panik](#) [7], who was rated the seventh best player in his draft class by THN at this time last year before a season marred with injuries and questions about his work ethic, was taken in the late second round and gives the Lightning a player with Marian Hossa type upside. Then the Lightning managed to have [Alex Hutchings](#) [8], who has seen comparisons ranging from Chuck Kobasew, to Chris Kunitz, to Brian Gionta, to Mike Richards, fall to them all the way into the fourth round. Not since the 1998 NHL Entry Draft, which perhaps not-so-coincidentally followed the embarrassing season which paralleled last season's disaster, when the Lightning drafted Lecavalier, Brad Richards,

and Dimitry Afanasev with their first three picks, have the Lightning had such a successful first half of a draft. Undoubtedly, new head scout Jim Hammett's first run with the Lightning seems like an unabashed success, at least on paper.

That was sort of the edge of my wildest expectations going into the week: that Lawton would be aggressive and the Lightning would have a successful draft. I never thought the team would have the resources to go make much of a splash in the first day of free agency. Unlike last season, the expectation was that the Lightning might nibble around the edges, but that a top-flight veteran blueliner was surely out of reach. That's where the Lightning caught the hockey world by surprise. Roughly fifteen minutes after the start of free agency, the Lightning landed [Mattias Ohlund](#) [9], in a move that sent a shockwave of excitement through the Lightning fan base in a way no free agent signing has ever done before. Ohlund is nearly a perfect fit for the Lightning. He's a rock solid two-way defender who played 22 minutes a night last season in Vancouver, and will help trim the load the Lightning's young blueliners will have to carry. And, his Swedish heritage makes him the perfect choice to mentor Hedman. I expect Ohlund, who had been playing in a conservative Vancouver system geared toward their strength in net where Roberto Luongo resides, to get back to posting 30 point seasons in Tampa Bay, and I expect him to become the rock Head Coach Rick Tocchet relies upon to help calm down the Lightning's blueline in key situations. The Lightning also added former Blackhawks blueliner [Matt Walker](#) [10] and re-upped [Lukas Krajicek](#) [11], instantly making a club that struggled mightily with injuries on the blueline last season eight deep in the back. True, they're all lefthanded shots and, other than Hedman, they're all waiver eligible, which will prompt further moves. But, relative to the alternative, that's a good problem to have.

The Lightning still, at a minimum, have to acquire a backup netminder to replace [Karri Ramo](#) [12] after his defection to Russia. Talk in the local media indicates that Lawton intends to fill the void via trade rather than free agency. There's also talk of signing one more forward, and the Lightning do have a hole in their top six forwards. I'm still a little skittish to read the phrase, "General Manager Brian Lawton is looking to make a trade," but I must say this past week has gone a long way to start repairing the damage done last year. We can only hope that Lawton and Company can keep it up. If they keep having weeks like this one, there's little doubt the Lightning will soon be back in the playoff hunt.

[Prospect Camp Roster Finalized](#) [13]

Submitted by timothy on July 2, 2009 - 14:53 [News](#) [14] [Tampa Bay Lightning](#) [2] [Prospect Camp](#) [15] [All](#) [16]



The Tampa Bay Lightning have released their final roster for their Young Guns Prospect Camp scheduled for July 8-15 at the St. Pete Times Forum. The camp includes a prospect scrimmage on July 11 at 7pm that is open and free to the public and will include autograph sessions by the prospects and newly signed Lightning defensemen [Mattias Ohlund](#) [9] and [Matt Walker](#) [10].

The camp roster includes the following Bolt prospects and non-organizational invitees:

Goaltenders: [Dustin Tokarski](#) [17], [Riku Helenius](#) [18], [Jaroslav Janus](#) [19], Bryan Mountain, and [Michael Zador](#) [20]

Defensemen: [Mark Barberio](#) [21], Erik Gustafsson, [Victor Hedman](#) [5], [Scott Jackson](#) [22], [Vladimir Mihalik](#) [23], [Kevin Quick](#) [24], [Ty Wishart](#) [25], and [Luke Witkowski](#) [26]

Forwards: [Carter Ashton](#) [6], [Kyle DeCoste](#) [27], [Mitch Fadden](#) [28], Tommy Grant, [Alex Hutchings](#) [8], [Alex Killorn](#) [29], [Chris Lawrence](#) [30], [Matt Marshall](#) [31], Matt Read, [Juraj Simek](#) [32], [Dana Tyrell](#) [33], and [James Wright](#) [34]

Erik Erlendsson of the Tampa Tribune is [reporting](#) [35] that six players originally scheduled to attend the camp have been omitted from the final roster and includes forwards [Johan Harju](#) [36], [Justin Courtnall](#) [37], [Denis Kazionov](#) [38], [Dmitri Kazionov](#) [39], [Paul Szczechura](#) [40], and [Steve Downie](#) [41].

['67's Select Matias Sointu in OHL Import Draft](#) [42]

Submitted by timothy on July 1, 2009 - 16:00 [News](#) [14] [North American Juniors](#) [43] [Draft](#) [44] [Sointu, Matias](#) [45]



The Ottawa '67's of the OHL selected Bolt prospect forward [Matias Sointu](#) [46] with the 48th pick in Tuesday's OHL Import Draft. The smallish forward was selected by the Lightning in the 7th round of the 2008 Entry Draft. The Finnish-born Sointu failed to secure a regular roster spot in the SM-Liiga last season after suffering a season-ending injury after just 7 games into the FNL Jr.A season. Sointu potted 3 goals in 6 games for the undermanned Finnish U18 WJC team in early 2008, and has scored 22 goals and 20 assists in 48 games for the Ilves Jr.A squad.

It is speculated that Sointu is considering coming to North America after losing almost a whole year of development last season similar to [Riku Helenius](#) [18] after losing a season a few years ago to a shoulder injury.

Sointu is currently not on the 2009 Young Guns prospect camp roster scheduled for mid-July in Tampa.

[Tampa Re-ups Lukas Krajicek](#) [47]

Submitted by timothy on July 1, 2009 - 14:56 [News](#) [14] [Tampa Bay Lightning](#) [2] [Contract Status](#) [48]



The Tampa Bay Lightning have re-signed defenseman [Lukas Krajicek](#) [11] to a one-year contract today, Executive Vice President and General Manager Brian Lawton announced. Terms of the restricted free agent's deal was not released, but Lawton indicated during the NHL Entry Draft in Montreal last weekend that the sides were close on a deal. The Lightning acquired Krajicek with [Juraj Simek](#) [32] from Vancouver in exchange for Shane O'Brien and [Michel Ouellet](#) [49] on October 6, 2008.

?Lukas is one of the elite skating defensemen in the NHL and he played admirably for us last season in a difficult

blueline situation," said Lawton. "We are pleased to sign him for the 2009-10 season and we look forward to seeing for training camp."

Krajicek, a 6-foot-2, 196-pound native of Prostejov, Czech Republic, played in 71 games with the Lightning last season, recording two goals and 19 points. He led all Tampa Bay defensemen in assists and points while also ranking second in blocked shots with 90. His 71 games played were the second-most played during a season in his career. In 2008-09 Krajicek established career highs for assists, points and average ice time with 19:37.














[Bolts Bolster Defense with Matt Walker](#) [50]

Submitted by timothy on July 1, 2009 - 13:33 [News](#) [14] [Tampa Bay Lightning](#) [2] [Contract Status](#) [48]



Further bolstering their defensive corps via free agency, the Lightning have signed stay-at-home veteran backliner [Matt Walker](#) [10]. Walker played one year for the Chicago Blackhawks last season after spending 8 years in the St. Louis Blues organization. Walker has 2 goals, 23 assists, and 354 penalty minutes in 240 career NHL games.

"Matt [Walker] is the big, physical, intimidating presence that we lacked on the blue line last season," said Lawton upon making the announcement today. "He is a high-character, team-first player and he demonstrated that last season, going right back in a playoff game after suffering an ugly, ugly broken finger. He is just the type of player that we were looking for to fill a specific defensive need."

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