

2017 NHL DRAFT GUIDE

THE **SWISS** CAN'T MISS

- Nico Hischier Feature Article
- The Year of the Center
- First-Round Mock Draft

WHO'S THE BEST SHOOTER,
SKATER, ETC.? WE POLLED NHL
SCOUTS FOR "BEST OF" CATEGORIES

A LOOK BACK AT THE 2008
SENS/DUCKS DRAFT-PICK SWAP
FEATURE BY CHRIS STEVENSON



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2017 NHL DRAFT GUIDE

PUBLISHER & CHIEF SCOUT - GRANT McCAGG

SCOUTING - MITCHELL BROWN

SCOUTING - KATHRYN JEAN

SCOUTING - DEREK NEUMEIER

CORRESPONDENT - CHRIS STEVENSON

CORRESPONDENT - SIMON BOISVERT

WEBMASTER - SCOT MACDONALD

GRAPHIC DESIGN - PAT CLARKE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 - NICO FINDS HIS NICHE:

Grant McCagg's Feature on Top Prospect Nico Hischier

7 - FIRST ROUND MOCK DRAFT

12 - TOP 100 RATED PROSPECTS

17 - TOP 62 IN-DEPTH PROSPECT PROFILES

48 - PROSPECT PROFILES FOR PROSPECTS RANKED 63-100

54 - 50 HONOURABLE MENTIONS

55 - UN TOP 31 ALTERNATIF:

Simon Boisvert's French Language Feature on his Top 31 prospects

57 - EYE ON THE PRIZE:

Chris Stevenson's Feature on the Draft Day trade allowing Erik Karlsson to become a Senator

60 - 2018 NHL DRAFT TOP 40 PROSPECTS



NICO FINDS HIS NICHE

BY GRANT McCAGG

Sometimes when a prospect is evaluated it becomes apparent that his major strength lies in his weaknesses - in that there are none.

Halifax Mooseheads center Nico Hischier is not going to skate like McDavid, hit like Chara or shoot like Laine, but few will argue that the "Swiss Can't Miss" is the antithesis of his nation's famous cheese, as there are no holes in his game.

"He's just so well-rounded," said a senior scout of a team picking in the top five. "He's got some dynamics to him, but it's not like he goes out there and sets the pace every shift. He really knows whenever things are not going well on a particular shift to not just chase pucks. He goes 'Okay...things aren't going great this shift I better make sure I don't get scored on'...so he doesn't play that selfish offensive style. I like that about him, he's a good linemate in that he makes everybody better."

While he's a stickler for tending to his defensive duties, that does not diminish his high-end offensive potential.

Hischier stepped into the QMJHL and finished top ten in scoring with 86 points, 23 more than the next best rookie, who finished 32nd overall. That total is more impressive when one considers that he started slowly as he adjusted to the North American game and then missed close to a month while competing in the World Junior tournament.

"He's not dynamic like a McDavid, but he's still a pretty good offensive player," noted his coach in Halifax Andre Tourigny in an interview after the QMJHL season. "For me, he's a (Henrik) Zetterberg, when Zetterberg was at the top of his game, he's the same type of player."

"I often say he's a cross between (Pavel) Datsyuk and Zetterberg. Defensively he's a Datsyuk, and offensively he's a Zetterberg. He can't dangle like Datsyuk offensively. It's not fair to compare anyone in the world to Datsyuk in that sense."

NICO FINDS HIS NICHE

His coach is not alone in eliciting comparisons to the longtime elite Detroit forward duo. Scouts have been trying to come up with his NHL comparable all season, and also have mentioned the likes of Jonathan Toews and Nicklas Backstrom. Yes...he has been called the "Swiss Toews".

"I've heard some Pavel Datsyuk comparisons," said one eastern conference crossover scout that has Hirschier at the top of his draft list. "I don't know about that. I get what they're saying because Datsyuk is a great two-way forward... but does Hirschier become that dynamic offensively? Yeah maybe...I don't know...that would be good. But that's a high expectation for a kid right now."

Hirschier better get used to those high expectations, as players who are picked at the very top of the draft will always be highly scrutinized in today's rabid social media environment...just ask Auston Matthews. All indications point towards him being able to handle the hoopla, though.

"If you pick top five that means you have to build your team around that player, and I would be so happy to build my team around him for the next 20 years," noted Tourigny. "A person like Hirschier...a player like Hirschier. Nico is such a good man, good heart. He's very polite, respectful, I've spoken to his parents and I can't say enough about the values. A lot of reasons why he'd be a really, really good pick."

It's not just his coach who envisions Hirschier as a player who will someday wear a letter on his NHL team's sweater, perhaps even be a captain.

"I know everybody looks up to him on Halifax; he was a big part of their team," said a Quebec-based scout. "It shows you his leadership qualities. He plays like there are leadership qualities. Even at the World Juniors; when he was out there he carried them all on his back and he was one of their youngest players."

Tourigny knew early on he was coaching a player with special character traits that separate him from the pack.

"When you are that good defensively at that age...I've never seen that before," gushed Tourigny, who has coached

in both the QMJHL and NHL for the past 15 years. "I've coached really good players at U-18's and World Juniors, and in the NHL. The pride he has to play well defensively; I've never seen that. He studies so much defensively.

"We're doing a drill with defencemen under pressure on a breakout, a drill where defencemen have to break out under hard pressure, and Nico asked me if he could go as a defenceman. I asked why, and he said 'sometimes during the game when I'm back with the puck I'm under pressure...I want to make sure I can break out with the puck from my own zone.'

"I said 'oh my god.' He wants to be a pro, he wants to be good defensively. Every time he's here in my office the first thing he asks me about is his defence. He is special, he's an awesome player. He sees the game sometimes where nobody can."

"When you are that good defensively at that age...I've never seen that before I've coached really good players at U-18's and World Juniors, and in the NHL. The pride he has to play well defensively; I've never seen that. He studies so much defensively."

The true turning point for many NHL talent evaluators when it came to seriously considering him as a top-five pick fittingly came with a game on Remembrance Day since the scouts who witnessed his back-to-back performances that weekend in Halifax will never forget his nine-point outburst.

"That weekend was a pretty special one for him," noted the same QMJHL-based NHL scout. "And you just go 'Wow, nine points'. And every goal he was on the ice for, he either made the key play or finished it off. He was unbelievable that weekend, probably the best performance I saw from a prospect all season."

Hirschier's next "coming out party" came at the World Junior Championship as he bedazzled scouts, GM's and media alike with a standout performance that included a terrific quarter-final match against eventual champs US in which he almost singlehandedly willed Switzerland to an

NICO FINDS HIS NICHE

upset victory, scoring both Swiss goals in a 3-2 loss that was decided in the last ten minutes.

Hischier finished fourth overall in goals-per-game and seventh in points-per-game, highly impressive for a 17-year-old playing in what is commonly referred to as a '19-year-old's tournament'.

"That was where I first started to really consider the notion that he may be the best player in this draft," admitted one NHL scout. "You could make the argument that he was the best player in that tournament. He was exceptional."

Hischier's next audition for a huge throng of NHL personnel came at the CHL Top Prospects Game that was billed as a one-on-one contest versus his rival for first overall Nolan Patrick, and once again under the spotlight Hischier passed with flying colours, capturing the Player of the Game honours for Team Orr with a goal and two assists

"That was the game where some GM's really started asking their scouts why this guy isn't at the top of their lists," said one scout with a chuckle. "It was no longer a question of whether he was a top-five guy, but whether he was the top guy...period."

while scoring a highlight-reel breakaway goal.

"That was the game where some GM's really started asking their scouts why this guy isn't at the top of their lists," said one scout with a chuckle. "It was no longer a question of whether he was a top-five guy, but whether he was the top guy...period."

Ironically, just when scouts began to really start to take him seriously as a candidate to be first overall and crossover scouts from throughout North America congregated on Halifax to watch him...Hischier began to slow down. After collecting 73 points in his first 43 games, Hischier ended the regular season with ten points in 14 games, and looked to be lacking energy.

Tourigny concedes that Hischier hit a bit of a wall late in the season, and with good reason...three of them, in fact.

"He was playing in one of the two best divisions in the Canadian Hockey League. With Saint John, Charlottetown,

Bathurst, and Cape Breton...it was really strong. The last 19 games we played all within the division...so we played against very tough opponents every night.

"On top of that he had a wrist injury - he couldn't shoot. He could pass the puck and his stickhandling was good, but at the same time, if he had to stick battle, that was hurting his wrist a lot.

"The other thing is he was a little bit tired. It was a long season. He was not used to playing that many games - the U-18s, our camp, the regular season, World Juniors, playoffs...it was a lot of hockey for him."

He may have been tired and nursed an injury at the end of the season, but once the puck dropped for Halifax's first-round playoff encounter with defending QMJHL champion Rouyn-Noranda "Big Game" Hischier was back with a vengeance.

"In the playoffs he was really, really good," said Tourigny, who saw his team lose Game 5 at home in triple overtime with the series tied 2-2. "He was the best player on the ice every night. He was really solid...and we were right there. If we had won that triple overtime game it would have put a lot of pressure on Rouyn-Noranda."

Hischier ended his season representing his country one last time at the U-18's, and this time around in the big games Hischier was officially out of gas. He played well at the U-18's, but he didn't dominate as some expected. Did it hurt his draft stock?

"No..not at all," said one NHL head scout. "He had a very long season and showed again and again what he could do. He was still one of the best players there...but you could see he was spent by the playoff round, and that's understandable. He didn't have anyone to play with either."

Tourigny has a good thing happening in Halifax. Scouts are going to be flocking there again next season as the Mooseheads have three prospects who are legitimate contenders to be first-round picks - former number one overall QMJHL draft pick Benoit-Oliver Groulx, defenceman Jared McIsaac and goalie Alexis Gravel. The latter two played in the recent U-18's as underagers, and all are expected to be very effective players in the Q next season.

They would be even better if Hischier was back, however,

NICO FINDS HIS NICHE



and the Mooseheads would be the odds-on favourite to win the league...so it's no secret that Tourigny would love to see his prized prospect back on the team next October.

Does he expect that?

"That's a good question for New Jersey or Philly. They will decide that...I don't know. Positional-wise he will be able to play in the NHL. He will work hard enough, he will understand everything; the big thing will be physically.

"The way he plays he will be exposed. He doesn't play on the outside, he goes in...he'll be going to the net against 220-pound defencemen who are strong...oh boy...that will be a challenge. He'll get hammered a bit. It will be a good learning experience for him. Can he do it for 82 games? We'll have to see."

The one thing Tourigny is pretty certain of is that Hischier won't be rejoining the Mooseheads next October when NHL training camps wrap up.

"He will start the season there. He will play nine games, spend two weeks in the AHL, he will play in the world junior, and we will see after. I would be shocked if he's sent back after training camp or nine games. I will be happy...

but surprised."

If there is one concern with Hischier at this time it would involve his lack of weight. He is going to have to put on muscle before he's ready for an 82-game NHL schedule.

"He weighs 177," said Tourigny. "He's lean right now but he will fill out. You look at Kyle Turris. Kyle will never fill out...he's so skinny, but that's not the case with Nico. He will fill out, and get bigger."

Scouts now have plenty of answers for why Hischier should be picked ahead of Patrick...a prospect who for more than a year-and-a-half was hailed as the unquestionable number one until Nico found his niche - but no one has offered a better testament than the hockey person who knows him best - his coach.

"He can beat you in so many ways. He can beat you with faceoffs. He can beat you with defensive play...he's really, really proud of his defence. He can beat you with his work ethic, his intensity, his skill, he can beat you on the rush. He can beat you on the power play, he can beat you on the PK."

That explanation is hard to beat.

GRANT'S MOCK DRAFT



1. NEW JERSEY - MIRO HEISKANEN

The prevailing assumption is that the Devils will take either Hirschier or Patrick...but the club has used top 12 picks on centers in the past two drafts, and they are closer to being future number-one centers in New Jersey than any of the defencemen in the organization are to being number-one defencemen. Both Michael McLeod and Heiskanen are underrated in many circles, and can fill the number one center and number one defenceman slots for the Devils.



2. PHILADELPHIA - NICO HISCHIER

Flyers' scouts were not expecting to have any shot at Hirschier before the draft lottery, but fortunately there had been lots of viewings of Hirschier from their top scouts, and the club will have little hesitation to call his name second overall even if there will be plenty of debates this month about whether he is better than Patrick. Three to five years from now Giroux will be ready to pass the number-one center torch and Hirschier will be a worthy recipient.



3. DALLAS - NOLAN PATRICK

It's hard to believe the rumours that Dallas may move this pick as at number three the Stars are going to get a future top center or top-pairing defenceman. Spezza will be on the decline in the next few years and Patrick would be an excellent replacement...bringing similar size, puck skills and playmaking talent, and ensuring that the Stars maintain a dangerous one-two punch along with Seguin well into the 2020's.



4. COLORADO - CALE MAKAR

It seems like the Avalanche, much like Edmonton up until this past season, has been seeking a number-one defenceman for the past decade despite having some good pieces up front. Top-pairing defencemen don't come along in free agency or trades very often, so it would behoove GM Joe Sakic to grab an elite offensive defenceman when the opportunity presents itself who will quarterback the Colorado powerplay for 15 years.



5. VANCOUVER - CODY GLASS

Henrik Sedin isn't ready for the scrap heap just yet but he is now in his late 30's, so three years from now someone will need to step into a top-two center role alongside Bo Horvat, and by then Glass should have the requisite weight and strength he needs to improve his skating enough to compete against the NHL's top pivots. Glass has the smarts, vision and puck skills to develop into a first-line center if everything falls into place.



6. LAS VEGAS - GABRIEL VILARDI

Rumour has it that the Golden Knights are quite high on the versatile forward who recently showed off his down-low puck skills to the hockey world in helping Windsor capture a Memorial Cup championship. The fledgling franchise will need help at every position, so whether he ends up being a winger or a centerman Vilardi has the physical tools/smarts to be a first-liner for Vegas once he improves his speed enough to handle the NHL pace.

GRANT'S MOCK DRAFT



7. ARIZONA - KRISTIAN VESALAINEN

The club is extremely deep at center after picking two of them in the top seven of the past two drafts and the surprising development of Christian Dvorak, so unless one of the top-two defencemen somehow drops to the seventh pick the Coyotes would be wise to grab a huge winger with high-end offensive tools in Vesalainen. Almost 6-4 and already pushing 210 pounds, the slick Finn would complement Max Domi well on the opposite wing of the first line in a couple of years.



8. BUFFALO - MICHAEL RASMUSSEN

The Sabres are well-stocked at center right now so Rasmussen may not seem like the ideal fit on the surface. The gargantuan goal-scorer looked awfully comfortable on the wing at the Top Prospects Game, however, and if the club ended up needing him to switch positions down the road, it's always much easier for a center to move to the wing than vice versa, especially one who is so big, strong and willing to go to the net. He may end up playing on the wing in the NHL no matter who drafts him.



9. DETROIT - ROBERT THOMAS

The hardest selection in the top ten to project, as the Wings need a top-two defenceman more than anything, but after the first two it's highly debatable whether any other blueliners bring first-line upside. GM Ken Holland enjoyed great success with top-two centers who were superb both ways in the past in Datsyuk/Zetterberg, and while Thomas and Dylan Larkin will never be mistaken for Datsyuk offensively, their all-around games would bode well in helping Detroit win some playoff games some day.



10. FLORIDA - CASEY MITTELSTADT

The Panthers have a pretty deep group of young prospects having stocked up with high picks in recent years under the Dale Tallon regime, so despite being in good shape at center, the club has depth at all positions with the possible exception of goal, so Tallon will likely look at continuing to build assets and focus on who he thinks is the best player available. At tenth overall, the talented pivot would bring good asset value to the club.



11. LOS ANGELES - OWEN TIPPETT

The goal-scoring winger has appeared in the top five of a lot of public lists this draft year, so if he "falls" to 11th on draft day the Kings aren't likely to pass on a winger who might score 30+ goals per season in the NHL. Tippett has a lot of work to do on his defensive game and team play but center Anze Kopitar will be able to hide some of his deficiencies if Tippett ends up playing with the all-around multiple Cup winner in the future.

GRANT'S MOCK DRAFT

12. CAROLINA - NICK SUZUKI



The Hurricanes have several forward prospects with above-average size in the pipeline and a promising young group of defencemen, so if they get an opportunity to pick up a multi-purpose forward with very high offensive upside at 12th overall even if he's a bit undersized, he would be a nice addition to the stable. Suzuki's smarts, puck skills, competitive nature and production will be a welcome addition to a young club that needs to develop a winning attitude.

13. WINNIPEG - ELIAS PETTERSSON



The Jets are yet another club that ideally would be looking at a defenceman with their top pick, but with so many elite forwards slated to go between 5 and 15 it will be tough for them to pass up on whichever ones are still available at 13 unless they truly think there's a blueliner that brings similar value. Pettersson has top-two center upside, and has also shown that he can play on the wing. Winnipeg should be able to deal forward depth for defensive help in the future if need be.

14. TAMPA BAY - MARTIN NECAS



With Tyler Johnson's injury issues and the versatility of Steven Stamkos, who has played on the wing for much of his NHL career - not to mention the winger depth with Kucherov, Palat, Drouin and Killorn - adding another center with top-two upside would be a good idea for a team that drafted five defencemen in the top 60 in the past three drafts, especially one who is arguably the best skater at forward in this draft.

15. NEW YORK ISLANDERS - JUUSO VALIMAKI



To no one's surprise a team that has used just two of its last nine top draft picks on defencemen has a need to restock the position after misfiring on both of those selections. Valimaki seems to fit the Garth Snow mould - an offensive defenceman with a hard shot that has some issues with agility, but Valimaki has the quickness and work ethic to improve his skating enough to secure a top-four NHL position and quarterback New York's power play in a couple of years.

16. CALGARY - URHO VAAKANAINEN



For most NHL scouts the mobile blueliner surpassed Timothy Liljegren on their lists as the season went on, especially after his U-18 performance, and is the third-best defenceman on a lot of draft boards. Calgary's most pressing long-term need is on the blueline, and Vaakanainen has the all-around skills to fill a top-three role at the very least after another season or two in the FHL and some added muscle.

GRANT'S MOCK DRAFT



17. TORONTO - CONOR TIMMINS

Considered by many to be the top-rated CHL defenceman in the draft, few if any teams will have a better book on him than the Leafs, with former Soo GM Kyle Dubas and Mark Hunter in the fold. Timmins also happens to fill a definite long-term need on defence, and has the all-around game to challenge for a top-four spot on Toronto's blueline in two or three years, and a spot on the club's top powerplay unit.



18. BOSTON - LIAS ANDERSSON

If, as anticipated, there is a run of the second-tier of defencemen between the 15th and 17th picks, a very good forward many consider a top-15 pick may well drop to the 18th pick, and a team who drafted a future top-two defenceman in Charlie McAvoy last season and another promising one in Brandon Carlo the year before will be the main beneficiaries. At the very least, Andersson will be a versatile forward who can fit into any position on Boston's third line in a physical two-way role.



19. SAN JOSE - RYAN POEHLING

Poehling simply has that "San Jose pick" feel to him...an American forward with good size, character and two-way game that will fit right into the San Jose system once he's finished his college career at St. Cloud. The bonus for the team that drafts him will be that he already has his freshman season under his belt. Joe Thornton won't be around much longer, and there will be a need for top-three centers soon enough. Poehling will be a third-line center at a minimum.



20. ST. LOUIS - TIMOTHY LILJEGREN

The fall of Liljegren will likely come to an end at some point in the 20 range if not higher, and if he's still on the draft board when the Blues make their first pick, he would help fill an organizational need for a team that hasn't selected a defenceman in the top 20 of the draft since missing on David Runblad in 2009. Once thought to be a surefire top-three pick, if the smooth-skating blueliner ever rediscovers his offensive touch he'll be a valuable addition.



21. NEW YORK RANGERS - JOSH NORRIS

A club that already has ten Americans on its roster will have no issue whatsoever adding another player from the US development program, especially one who may have top-two center upside for a club that has had one top 40 pick in the past five drafts and staring at a bare prospect cupboard. Norris will get plenty of time to further develop his offensive skills at the University of Michigan until he's ready for the pro game.



22. EDMONTON - ERIK BRANNSTROM

GM Peter Chiarelli has done a terrific job of rebuilding his much-maligned defence corps in the past couple of years and there are a couple of more promising ones coming from junior in Ethan Bear and Caleb Jones. None of them, however, possess the puck carrying abilities of Brannstrom, and with time he would have the potential to one day run Edmonton's powerplay and be its main offensive catalyst from the point.



23. ARIZONA - CAL FOOTE

A club that puts a lot of stock into the statistical side of the game will be attracted to the thought of adding a 6-4 defenceman who had 57 points and finished +39. Perhaps the most important stat is the number of promising young defenceman in the Coyotes' farm system...and that number may be zero. Arizona fared well drafting a big defenceman last season who fell out of favour in Jakob Chychrun, so the temptation to try their luck again may be high.



24. COLUMBUS - EELI TOLVANEN

Another prospect who at one time was thought to be a top-ten candidate...the Finnish sniper may have fallen out of favour with a lot of scouts due to his reluctance to play a well-rounded game, but he still did one thing that he has always had the knack for doing...scored goals...and if he's still on the draft board in the mid 20's that skill may prove to be too hard to resist for a club that could use another potential sniper.



25. MONTREAL - MORGAN FROST

Montreal's rabid fan base has been clamouring for "better" top-two centers for what seems like decades now, so the addition to the club of a pivot with loads of offensive skill like Frost would be a welcome addition even if a lot of fans are unaware of just how highly regarded he is within the scouting community. Frost will need to add some muscle but there's no denying that his puck skills and creativity make him a candidate to put up solid numbers in the NHL.



26. CHICAGO - JASON ROBERTSON

Salary cap issues led to the Hawks having to deal Brandon Saad a couple of seasons ago and the club has not been able to find an appropriate replacement for the loss of a youthful big body with scoring ability in the past two first-round playoff losses. Robertson promises to be a Saad-type winger once he puts on the muscle he'll need to battle at the NHL level and keep up with the pace of the game. He already has an NHL-calibre shot.

GRANT'S MOCK DRAFT



27. ST. LOUIS - KLIM KOSTIN

It's often noted that if you are going to take a gamble on a "boom or bust" type prospect in the first round it's a good idea to do so when you hold more than one first-round pick...that way if the player doesn't pan out you still have another one to lessen the blow. If the gamble pays off you may have a franchise-changing draft. Kostin has the talent to be a first-line winger; he also has the unpredictable nature to be playing in the KHL in a couple of seasons like Valeri Nichushkin.



28. OTTAWA - JAKE OETTINGER

A club that has not drafted a goalie in the first round since Mathieu Chouinard was picked 15th overall in 1998 is in dire-need of a potential number one goalie to take over the reins when Craig Anderson, who is 36, starts to wind down his career. Having already proven himself at the NCAA level following a terrific freshman campaign for Boston University, Oettinger is considered one of the safer goalie prospects to draft in recent times - he's expected to play at the NHL level.



29. DALLAS - NICOLAS HAGUE

Much like Winnipeg last season picking Logan Stanley to one day potentially be paired with fellow giant Tyler Myers, the Stars might find the possibility of having 6-5.5 Hague paired with the 6-7 Jamie Oleksiak on defence an equally enticing proposition. Unlike Stanley, however, Hague has a bomb from the point and NHL powerplay potential, so if he's still available late in the first he might be a nice fit with the Stars.



30. NASHVILLE - ISAAC RATCLIFFE

The defence corps is loaded with good young prospects and center is nicely stocked as well, so it would make sense for the Predators to pick up a 6-6 winger to complement the likes of smaller wingers Viktor Arvidsson and Kevin Fiala down the road. Ratcliffe will need time, and Nashville is a strong club that will afford the raw winger plenty of time to hone his skills...a trademark of teams run by GM David Poile.



31. PITTSBURGH - FILIP CHYTIL

Size on the wings may be the most pressing need on a team with few holes and Chytil was the talk of the combine after measuring at a surprising 6-2.25 and showing up with his 6-5 father to illustrate his potential room for growth. Chytil's penchant for playing a strong two-way game should appeal to a Penguins' club that could use another large winger who can play a 200-foot game while chipping in a few goals. The bonus on top of that is that he has enough skill to push for top-six duties some day.

NHL SCOUTS POLL

I've always found the OHL Coach's Poll to be of great interest, giving hockey fans an informed opinion on the OHL's best skaters, playmakers, etc., so I thought it would be informative to poll NHL scouts on draft-eligible prospects in a similar fashion. Five high-ranking NHL scouts who see prospects all over the world were polled, and Recrutes came up with the top five for eight pertinent categories along with honourable mentions.

BEST SKATER - There was no debate on who was the best skater in this draft...every scout listed Cale Makar as the best of the bunch. Makar participated in skating tests at the CJHL Top Prospects event, and finished first overall in every category, to the surprise of no one. A natural skater...great edges, lateral agility, explosiveness and quickness.

1	CALE MAKAR
2	MARTIN NECAS
3	MIRO HEISKANEN
4	TIMOTHY LILJEGREN
5	ALEX FORMENTON
HM	ERIK BRANNSTROM, URHO VAAKANAINEN

BEST SHOT - This was another category in which there was no dilly dallying over who was the best - Owen Tippett unloads a blistering shot with deadly accuracy, and it is a major reason why he was one of the top goal scorers in the OHL, and considered to be one of the top prospects in this draft.

1	OWEN TIPPETT
2	JASON ROBERTSON
3	EELI TOLVANEN
4	NOLAN PATRICK
5	GABRIEL VILARDI
HM	NICOLAS HAGUE

BEST PLAYMAKER - This draft has at least a dozen players who have elite playmaking skills, but four of the scouts polled considered Hischier to be the best set-up man. Hischier may have had 20-30 more assists in Halifax this past season if he had played with a true sniper...he set up teammates on a nightly basis with terrific feeds.

1	NICO HISCHIER
2	NOLAN PATRICK
3	CODY GLASS
4	NICK SUZUKI
5	ROBERT THOMAS
HM	MORGAN FROST

BEST STICKHANDLER - This category generated the most divergence of opinion, with ten different prospects being in the mix for the top five and Hischier giving Makar a run for his money as the best stickhandler...ultimately Makar's ability to dangle at high speeds won him the nod; he makes it look easy.

1	CALE MAKAR
2	NICO HISCHIER
3	CODY GLASS
4	NOLAN PATRICK
5	ROBERT THOMAS
HM	JONI IKONEN

BEST HOCKEY SENSE - Heiskanen impressed scouts all season long with his poise, positioning and puck-moving decisions, especially as a 17-year-old playing in the Finnish men's league. He took it to another level versus his peers at the U-18's, making the game look easy and eliciting comparisons to Nicklas Lidstrom in that regard.

1	MIRO HEISKANEN
2	NICO HISCHIER
3	NICK SUZUKI
4	NOLAN PATRICK
5	CODY GLASS
HM	ERIK BRANNSTROM

BEST DEFENSIVE FORWARD - The comparisons to Jonathan Toews are quite appropriate when one considers that Hischier is thought of as the hardest-working defensive forward with the second-best smarts and puck skills in the draft while also being the top playmaker. He looks after his own end first and foremost, and is truly the complete package.

1	NICO HISCHIER
2	ROBERT THOMAS
3	MACKENZIE ENTWISTLE
4	LIAS ANDERSSON
5	SHANE BOWERS
HM	GALLANT, POEHLING

BEST DEFENSIVE DEFENCEMAN - Hardly a banner year for defensive-minded blueliners, but Heiskanen would stand out in any draft year given his mobility, smarts, positioning, gap control and outlet passes. While not the biggest or most physical defender, he's almost impossible to beat one-on-one, and has a great stick.

1	MIRO HEISKANEN
2	URHO VAAKANAINEN
3	PIERRE-OLIVIER JOSEPH
4	JOSH BROOK
5	CALE FLEURY
HM	ZACH LAUZON

MOST COMPETITIVE - Anyone who is wondering why Hischier is considered the top-rated prospect need only look at this poll to see why - he's top two in five distinctively different categories and first overall in three - combining skill, smarts and work ethic like no other prospect in this draft. No one is going to outwork the "Swiss Can't Miss".

1	NICO HISCHIER
2	JONAH GADJOVICH
3	SHANE BOWERS
4	LIAS ANDERSSON
5	RYAN POEHLING
HM	ZACH GALLANT

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

RANK	PLAYER	TEAM	LEAGUE	POSITION	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	DOB
1	Nico Hischier	Halifax	QMJHL	C	6-1.5	178	1999-01-04
2	Miro Heiskanen	HIFK	FHL	D	6-0.75	173	1999-04-17
3	Nolan Patrick	Brandon	WHL	C	6-2	198	1998-09-19
4	Cale Makar	Brooks	AJHL	D	5-11.25	187	1998-10-30
5	Cody Glass	Portland	WHL	C	6-1.75	177	1999-04-01
6	Kristian Vesalainen	HPK	FHL	RW/LW	6-3.75	209	1999-06-01
7	Michael Rasmussen	Tri-City	WHL	C	6-5.5	221	1999-07-18
8	Gabriel Vilardi	Windsor	OHL	C/RW	6-2.75	203	1999-08-16
9	Robert Thomas	London	OHL	C	5-11.5	192	1999-07-02
10	Nick Suzuki	Owen Sound	OHL	RW/C	5-11	183	1999-08-10
11	Owen Tippett	Mississauga	OHL	RW	6-0.5	202	1999-02-16
12	Casey Mittelstadt	Eden Prairie	USHS	C	5-11.5	198	1998-11-22
13	Martin Necas	Brno	CZE-Elite	C	6-1	178	1999-01-15
14	Lias Andersson	HV 71	SHL	C/LW	5-11	200	1998-10-13
15	Elias Pettersson	Timra	SWE-2	C	6-1.75	164	1998-11-12
16	Urho Vaakanainen	JYP	FHL	D	6-1.25	188	1999-01-01
17	Conor Timmins	Sault Ste. Marie	OHL	D	6-1.5	183	1998-09-18
18	Ryan Poehling	St. Cloud State	NCHC	C	6-1.75	176	1999-01-03
19	Juuso Valimaki	Tri-City	WHL	D	6-1.5	211	1998-10-06
20	Josh Norris	US-U18	USNTDP	C	6-0.5	188	1999-05-05
21	Morgan Frost	Sault Ste. Marie	OHL	C	5-10.75	173	1999-05-14
22	Timothy Liljegren	Rogle	SHL	D	5-11.5	188	1999-04-30
23	Jason Robertson	Kingston	OHL	LW	6-2	195	1999-07-22
24	Filip Chytil	Zlin	CZE-Elite	C	6-2.25	191	1999-09-05
25	Eeli Tolvanen	Sioux City	USHL	RW	5-10.5	189	1999-04-22
26	Erik Brannstrom	HV71	SHL	D	5-9	179	1999-09-02
27	Jake Oettinger	Boston University	H-East	G	6-4.25	218	1998-12-18
28	Cal Foote	Kelowna	WHL	D	6-4	218	1998-12-13
29	Josh Brook	Moose Jaw	WHL	D	6-1	191	1999-06-17
30	Isaac Ratcliffe	Guelph	OHL	LW	6-6	200	1999-02-15
31	Klim Kostin	Moscow Dynamo	KHL	LW	6-2.5	207	1999-05-05
32	Jesper Boqvist	Brynäs	SHL	RW	5-11.25	164	1998-10-30
33	Pierre-Olivier Joseph	Charlottetown	QMJHL	D	6-2.25	163	1999-07-01
34	Nicolas Hague	Mississauga	OHL	D	6-5.5	206	1998-12-05

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

RANK	PLAYER	TEAM	LEAGUE	POSITION	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	DOB
35	Joni Ikonen	Frolunda	SHL	C/W	5-11	176	1999-04-14
36	Kailer Yamamoto	Spokane	WHL	RW	5-7.5	146	1998-09-29
37	Shane Bowers	Waterloo	USHL	C/W	6-1.5	178	1999-07-30
38	Henri Jokiharju	Portland	WHL	D	5-11.75	176	1999-06-17
39	Jaret Anderson-Dolan	Spokane	WHL	C	5-11	190	1999-09-12
40	Kole Lind	Kelowna	WHL	RW	6-1	185	1998-10-16
41	Keith Petruzzelli	Muskegon	USHL	G	6-5	174	1999-02-09
42	Alex Formenton	London	OHL	LW	6-1.5	165	1999-09-13
43	Michael Dipietro	Windsor	OHL	G	6-0	202	1999-06-09
44	Alexi Heponiemi	Swift Current	WHL	LW	5-10.5	149	1999-01-09
45	Maxime Comtois	Victoriaville	QMJHL	C/RW	6-1.75	207	1999-01-08
46	Grant Mismash	US-U18	USNTDP	LW	6-0.	186	1999-02-15
47	Nikita Popugaev	Prince George	WHL	LW	6-5.25	218	1998-11-20
48	Jack Studnicka	Oshawa	OHL	C	6-0.5	170	1999-02-18
49	Jonah Gadjovich	Owen Sound	OHL	LW	6-1	199	1999-10-12
50	Cale Fleury	Kootenay	WHL	D	6-1.5	199	1998-11-19
51	Ian Mitchell	Spruce Grove	AJHL	D	5-11	173	1999-01-18
52	Matthew Strome	Hamilton	OHL	LW	6-3.5	206	1999-01-06
53	Dmitri Samorukov	Guelph	OHL	D	6-2	184	1999-06-16
54	Mario Ferraro	Des Moines	USHL	D	5-10.75	185	1998-09-17
55	Zach Gallant	Peterborough	OHL	C	6-1	197	1999-03-06
56	MacKenzie Entwistle	Hamilton	OHL	C	6-2	171	1999-07-14
57	Santeri Virtanen	TPS Turku	Fin-Jr.	C/LW	6-2	190	1999-05-11
58	Lucas Elvenes	Rogle	SWE-Jr	C/RW	.6-0.25	173	1999-08-18
59	Dylan Samberg	Hermantown	USHS	D	6-3	210	1999-01-24
60	Stelio Mattheos	Brandon	WHL	C/W	6-0.25	189	1999-06-14
61	Lane Zablocki	Red Deer	WHL	RW	5-11.25	179	1998-12-27
62	Cam Crotty	Brockville	CCHL	D	6-2.25	186	1999-05-05
63	Alexei Lipanov	Balashikha	VHL	C	6-0.25	169	1999-08-17
64	David Farrance	US-U18	USNTDP	D	5-11.25	195	1999-06-23
65	Ostap Safin	Sparta Praha	CZE-Jr.	RW	6-5	192	1999-02-11
66	Scott Reedy	US-U18	USNTDP	RW	6-1.	200	199-04-04
67	Filip Westerlund	Frolunda	SHL	D	5-11	174	1999-04-17
68	Stuart Skinner	Lethbridge	WHL	G	6-3.5	208	1998-11-01

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

RANK	PLAYER	TEAM	LEAGUE	POSITION	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	DOB
69	Scott Walford	Victoria	WHL	D	6-1.5	193	1999-01-12
70	Eemeli Rasanen	Kingston	OHL	D	6-6.75	218	1999-03-06
71	Robin Salo	Sport	FHL	D	6-1.25	189	1998-10-13
72	Ben Mirageas	Chicago	USHL	D	6-1	174	1999-05-08
73	Alexei Toropchenko	Balashikha	MHL	RW	6-3	187	1999-06-25
74	Nick Henry	Regina	WHL	RW	5-11	184	1999-07-04
75	Adam Ruzicka	Sarnia	OHL	C	6-3.5	208	1999-05-11
76	Antoine Morand	Acadie-Bathurst	QMJHL	C	5-10	175	1999-02-18
77	Marcus Davidsson	Djurgarden	SHL	C/W	6-0	191	1998-11-18
78	Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen	HPK	FIN-Jr.	G	6-4.25	197	1999-03-09
79	Gustav Lindstrom	Almtuna	Swe-2	D	6-1	185	1998-10-20
80	Jarret Tyszka	Seattle	WHL	D	6-2	187	1999-03-19
81	Max Gildon	US-U18	USNTDP	D	6-3	191	1999-05-17
82	Jake Leschyshyn	Regina	WHL	C	5-10.75	189	1999-03-10
83	Olle Eriksson Ek	Farjestad	SWE-Jr.	G	6-2.5	178	1999-06-22
84	Cayden Primeau	Lincoln	USHL	G	6-2	186	1999-08-11
85	Ivan Lodnia	Erie	OHL	RW	5-10.5	186	1999-08-31
86	Liam Hawel	Guelph	OHL	C	6-3.5	180	1999-04-18
87	Jack Rathbone	Dexter	USHS	D	5-10.5	171	1999-05-20
88	Alexandre Texier	Grenoble	France	C	6-0	174	1998-10-01
89	Matthew Villalta	Sault Ste. Marie	OHL	G	6-2	170	1999-06-03
90	Sasha Chmelevski	Ottawa	OHL	C/RW	5-11.25	178	1999-06-09
91	Kasper Kotkansalo	Sioux Falls	USHL	D	6-2.5	196	1998-11-16
92	Maxim Zhukov	Green Bay	USHL	G	6-2.	193	1999-07-22
93	Zach Lauzon	Rouyn-Noranda	QMJHL	D	6-0	170	1998-10-10
94	Jonas Rondbjerg	Vaxjo	SWE-Jr.	RW	6-1.75	193	1999-03-31
95	Reilly Walsh	Proctor Academy	USHS	D	5-10.75	183	1999-04-21
96	Kirill Slepets	Yaroslavl	MHL	RW	5-10	165	1999-03-08
97	Emil Oksanen	Espoo	FIN-2	RW/LW	6-1	190	1998-09-25
98	Evan Barratt	USNTDP	US-U18	C	5-11	181	1999-02-18
99	Dayton Rasmussen	Chicago	USHL	G	6-0.5	198	1998-11-04
100	D'Artagnan Joly	Baie Comeau	QMJHL	RW	6-2.5	175	1999-04-07

1

NICO HISCHIER

TEAM: HALIFAX LEAGUE: QMJHL
HEIGHT: 6-1.5 WEIGHT: 179

POSITION: C
DOB: 1999-01-04

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: SWITZERLAND



SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	9
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	9
CHARACTER	9
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	66

Eight months ago Hischier was considered a fringe top-ten prospect who presumably would take some time to adjust to the North American game as a QMJHL rookie.

By November, as Hischier was tearing up the Q it became apparent he was a top-five candidate, but it was his eye-opening World Junior performance that was the "Eureka" moment for many scouts and when the once unthinkable was spoken in earnest - that Nolan Patrick might not be the number-one prospect after all.

"You were always intrigued because he was so good at playing both ends of the ice," said one QMJHL-based crossover scout. "You saw the creativity...you figured it was just a matter of time. He's just so well-rounded. He's got some dynamics to him, but it's not like he goes out there and sets the pace every shift.

"He really knows whenever things are going

well on a particular shift to not just chase pucks. He goes "Okay..things aren't going great this shift I better make sure I don't get scored on'...so he doesn't play that selfish offensive style. I like that about him...he's a good linemate in that he makes everybody better."

The only question with Hischier is just how much offensive upside he possesses - the rest of the game is elite...but will he ever be a 90-point scorer? His coach in Halifax sees him as a Zetterberg-type contributor on the offensive end who will be quite productive but perhaps not in the same echelon as a Kane or McDavid when it comes to dynamic offence.

"He's an above-average shooter, but what makes him dangerous is his options," said one scout. "He can score but he can also look guys off and make great plays. I've seen a lot of tap-in goals by his linemates that he can set up."

2

MIRO HEISKANEN

TEAM: HIFK LEAGUE: FHL
HEIGHT: 6-0.75 WEIGHT: 172

POSITION: D
DOB: 1999-07-18

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: FINLAND



SKATING	9
SKILLS	9
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	8
SENSE	9
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	66

It took much of the scouting world until the final U18 event of the season to finally see it, but Heiskanen is now considered by most to be the best defenceman in this draft class and a legitimate top-three selection who may even go first overall to a New Jersey team that is in dire need of a number-one defenceman.

"He is certainly an option for first overall," said one eastern conference head scout. "He's a very talented defenceman and such a good skater. He can play an economical game; he never seems to get tired so he can play a lot of minutes."

Heiskanen is one of those rare prospects who has played an entire season in the Finnish Elite League before the age of 18, and by the playoffs was a key contributor playing in all situations for HIFK.

He followed that up with a superlative

performance in the U18's, finishing second in tournament scoring while also taking care of his own end with poise and ease.

"The way he plays the game at the junior level is similar to the way Lidstrom played," said one scout who has him pegged as one of the two best prospects in the draft. "He's like a Scott Niedermayer...very good defensively, smart when he gets the puck, and has that ability to step up. He's very good at picking his spots, and he reads the play so well."

"He's an elite prospect because everything he does comes naturally," added the scout. "His skating is fluid, he has soft hands and he sees the play a step ahead. Very poised, confident. He lets the puck do the work for him. In today's NHL you are looking for guys who move the puck quickly. It's just easy for him to play the game."

3

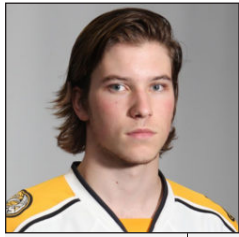
NOLAN PATRICK

TEAM: BRANDON WHEAT KINGS
HEIGHT: 6-2

LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 198

POSITION: C
DOB: 1998-09-19

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	9
SHOT	8
SENSE	9
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	64

It wasn't supposed to go down this way. The consensus number-one prospect for months on end leading up to the 2016-17 season, Patrick was expected to only build on his incredible 102-point campaign until a sports hernia injury season ended up sidelining him for close to half the season and brought his draft stock back down to earth as others closed the gap, and in at least one case, ultimately passed him.

"He needs to be given the benefit of the doubt at this time in regards to what he's done in the past, but he shouldn't be anointed as the number one," said one scout in March. "He has competition with the kid in Halifax. Hirschier is probably a better two-way player.

"It's not so cut and dried now that he's number one. If you talked to any of the western (crossover) scouts early in the year they were saying 'I don't need to see Hirschier. Patrick is the

best.' But that turned a little bit. Patrick is still a really good player...he's one or two, but now it's not so certain."

Scout loved how Patrick played as an underage, and with good reason - he followed up his great regular season by leading all WHL players in playoff scoring while playing a dominant two-way game. He brings good size, has an above-average shot, puck skills and smarts, and elite playmaking abilities. This season, however, some concerns crept in about his skating, competitiveness and play away from the puck while still keeping in mind he was injured.

"It takes time to come back to where he was before after the hernia surgery," noted one scout who has Patrick ranked third overall. "I know for a lot of guys who have surgery for a sports hernia, it takes them almost a full year to get back your skating."

4

CALE MAKAR

TEAM: BROOKS BANDITS
HEIGHT: 5-11.25

LEAGUE: AJHL
WEIGHT: 187

POSITION: D
DOB: 1998-10-30

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	9
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	64

Scouts had a pretty good idea that Makar was an intriguing prospect. After seeing him excel at the 2015 World Junior Challenge, he led Brooks to the RBC Cup where he captured the scoring title and MVP. No one was quite prepared for his performance at the WJAC last December where scouts were quickly pencilling him in as a top-ten candidate and booking return trips to Alberta to see him play in the AJHL.

"He was big time yesterday," said one scout the day after his five-point breakout game versus Switzerland early in the tournament. "He has Mitch Marner-type skill on the back end."

Makar's skating and puck skills were on display at the WJAC and in viewings ever since as he dominated the AJHL, finishing top five in scoring, and drawing comparisons to Erik Karlsson in terms of his offensive skills.

"I don't know if he can defend, but f*** is he good the other way," said one eastern conference scout. "Everything with the puck is dynamic. He has exceptional all-around skating ability. I didn't know if Erik Karlsson was going to be able to defend either. You hope he can eventually. He doesn't play that rover game, he just moves the puck. I like that. Even at the level he plays where he could go up the ice every time, he still just moves the pucks."

Makar looked after his defensive end in the playoffs, taking fewer offensive risks and rarely being caught out of position. He showed sound gap control, making few mistakes as he got Brooks back to the RBC Cup, where he became the first-ever two-time MVP, showing scouts he should be able to adapt to 5-on-5 play in the NHL after some seasoning with U-Mass Lowell.

5

CODY GLASS

TEAM: PORTLAND WINTER HAWKS
HEIGHT: 6-1.75

LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 177

POSITION: C
DOB: 1999-04-01

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	9
SHOT	8
SENSE	9
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	63

It was a steady rise for Glass in NHL scouts' draft rankings this season as it became more and more apparent that he was one of the elite prospects in the 2017 draft class.

Portland drafted Glass 19th overall out of Winnipeg's bantam program three years ago when he was 5-9 138-pounds. Five inches and 40 pounds later, the slick center is still catching up to his growth spurt in terms of adding weight, and projects to only get stronger in the one area of concern that remains in his game - his skating speed.

"Glass will be the better skater between him and Vilardi," suggested one scout that likes Glass in the top-five discussion ahead of Vilardi. "His stride is longer. Those two are close in the rankings...Glass is a better skater, Vilardi will be bigger and stronger. Both very smart, good with the puck."

Glass is one of the premiere playmakers in this draft thanks to his puck-protection skills, elite vision and soft hands. What makes him even more valuable is his great all-around game at such a tender age - he anticipates and reads the play well at both ends and does a tremendous job cutting off the middle of the ice.

He may have hurt his draft stock slightly with a disappointing showing at the U-18, but most scouts are giving him a pass considering the circumstances.

"He gets thrown in there at the last minute... what is he supposed to do?" wondered one scout. "There's no chemistry worked out. He looked tired. He was put in a bad situation where he had to come over right after he finished his series. Comes all the way across from Portland and then he probably has still got jet lag...then they never really gave him a role."

6

KRISTIAN VESALAINEN

TEAM: HPK
HEIGHT: 6-3.75

LEAGUE: FHL
WEIGHT: 209

POSITION: LW/RW
DOB: 1999-06-01

SHOOTS: LEFT
BIRTHPLACE: HELSINKI, FIN



SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	63

It was a rollercoaster ride for scouts in their attempt to slot Vesalainen this season. The rangy winger was outstanding at 16 and a lock for everyone's top ten until his lack of production in the SHL and WJC this season revealed concerns about his finishing skills and upside.

Vesalainen transferred to the Finnish Elite League but still struggled offensively. He regained his confidence playing for Frolunda U20 to end the season with a couple of eye-opening two-goal games. He carried that momentum into the U-18's where he was a dominant force.

"There were shifts where he looked like Jagr," noted one scout who moved him firmly back into his top ten. "They couldn't take the puck off of him...he would just rag it around, He's got some skill, he made plays, he shoots it. This guy may be just scratching the surface. That was kind of a coming out party for him I thought. He

looked very good.

"First game I saw him I go 'oh f***, this guy's really changed.' He looked so much more confident...just carrying pucks and holding the puck. He looked like he came a long way since the world junior. The opponents wouldn't even try to get the puck off of him. He'd stick his ass out and they'd go 'okay..we'll just leave him alone..and maybe the next guy who gets the puck we'll steal it off of him'"

Scouts always look for improvement during the season, and no one left a better impression at season's end than the Helsinki native. He led the U18 tournament in both goals (6) and points (13).

"He really got it going," added the scout. "He'll be able to bring that game with the men next season, I guarantee it. He has better hands than (Jesse) Puljujarvi."

7

MICHAEL RASMUSSEN**TEAM: TRI-CITY AMERICANS****LEAGUE: WHL****POSITION: C****SHOOTS: LEFT****HEIGHT: 6-5.5****WEIGHT: 221****DOB: 1990-03-14****NATION: CANADA**

SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	9
TOTAL	63

It's rare to see a 6-5+ CHL center score 46 goals in his draft year but that's exactly what Rasmussen was on pace to do before having to shut down his season at the start of February with a fractured scaphoid.

"It's hard to find those 6-5 guys who can score 30 goals in the NHL," said one NHL scout that considers Rasmussen one of the top seven prospects in the draft. "We all like the talented guys and when you've got the size to go with it...hard to find those guys. When you're not running an NHL team and you think they're all going small, skilled guys, whatever, that's the attitude, but you still have to have size. He's highly coveted by NHL teams."

Rasmussen was the top-line center the past two seasons in Tri-City, playing 20-25 minutes per game in all situations - killing penalties, running the power play, winning key faceoffs,

facing the WHL's top lines and scoring important goals.

"He's going to have a long, long career," said his coach Mike Williamson. "There are other guys going to get drafted either before that may have some more splash and dash, but I think that there's so many things that he'll do...his off-the-puck battles and being a playoff-type player...I think he can be a very valuable guy to a team for a long, long time."

There's not a team in the NHL that would pass on a 6-5 center with a powerful stride, soft hands, great shot/release, playmaking abilities and competitiveness so don't be surprised to see him selected in the top seven.

"Now that is a prospect," gushed one scout in December. "He has a terrific shot. He's going to score plenty of goals in the NHL with his size and hands, especially with that shot."

8

GABRIEL VILARDI**TEAM: WINDSOR SPITFIRES****LEAGUE: OHL****POSITION: C****SHOOTS: RIGHT****HEIGHT: 6-2.75****WEIGHT: 203****DOB: 1999-08-16****NATION: CANADA**

SKATING	5
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	9
SENSE	8
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	9
TOTAL	63

There may not be another prospect at the top-end of the draft who elicits such a wide divergence of opinion in the scouting community. Thought by many to be a top-three candidate, many talent evaluators aren't sold on him being in the top eight due to significant skating concerns.

"He could go anywhere in the top ten," said one scout who likes him in the 7-10 range. "You like everything else about him except his feet; some teams will really like him...some don't. From the blueline in he's really good. His feet will come around where he can play. I don't think they'll ever be great but they'll be good enough. He can hold guys off, he's smart...those guys can figure it out even if they're not fast."

While he may "figure it out," the question remains whether he will ever improve his skating enough to play as a center in the NHL.

Windsor's coaching staff wasn't comfortable using Vilardi in the middle this season even after Logan Brown was sidelined with several injuries.

If Vilardi already has problems playing a defensive role at center in junior, it's anybody's guess whether he will ever improve his speed enough to do so at the pro level.

"I see him being on the wing, but he may be a terrific winger," said one scout. "Down low he is so good on the cycle with his size, strength, puck skills and vision. He reminds me somewhat of Corey Perry...if he can become that good...that's a pretty good upside."

Perry appears to be the measuring stick, but even he showed improvement in his skating speed in his draft year. Vilardi does not look any faster than he did last season, so it will be interesting to see where he ultimately gets selected.

9

ROBERT THOMAS

TEAM: LONDON KNIGHTS
HEIGHT: 5-11.5

LEAGUE: OHL
WEIGHT: 192

POSITION: C
DOB: 1999-07-02

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	7
SENSE	8
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	62

There is no junior hockey coach more respected than London's Dale Hunter, so when he uses a draft-eligible center in all important situations, scouts won't have to dig too deeply into that player's character or deeply question his hockey sense.

"For Dale Hunter to play a young player like that shows how he trusts him, said one Atlantic Division scout. "I love him. I think there's tons of upside, elite hockey sense as well. He's going to be a helluva player. I think he has Bo Horvat possibility. I thought he was an all-star this year."

Thomas worked his way up the London depth chart in a hurry this season and ended up with a point-per-game while also providing solid penalty killing and defensive play.

"He's an intelligent player," noted another scout. "He's a really good two-way player with some skill, a dependable guy. He's like a poor

man's Hirsch almost...so...everything's good about him. There's some bigger guys around the top ten that guys maybe prefer, but I don't know where you go wrong with a guy like this. He's a top 9 guy all day, and I could see him morph into a second-line center, so...I'm not saying it's wrong to have him top ten."

By the playoffs Thomas may well have been London's top forward - certainly in terms of ice time, surpassing Cliff Pu as Hunter's go-to center on a line with Janne Kuokkanen and Mitchell Stephens.

"He's really reliable, and Hunter put him in a lot of situations where he had to trust the guy; he was the guy," added the scout. "Thomas just plays it right...he's always in the right place, on the right side of the puck. He doesn't manhandle anybody but he gets up under people and he steals pucks, doesn't let guys get by him."

10

NICK SUZUKI

TEAM: OWEN SOUND ATTACK
HEIGHT: 5-11

LEAGUE: OHL
WEIGHT: 183

POSITION: C
DOB: 1999-08-10

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	8
SENSE	9
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	62

After a sluggish start to the season for both Suzuki and his team, the versatile forward caught fire on a line with Kevin Hancock and Jonah Gadjovich that carried the Attack all the way to the OHL Western Conference finals. Suzuki began the season with 14 points in his first 15 contests and scouts who had been impressed with his play at the Ivan Hlinka showcase were cooling on his NHL upside. The rest of the way, however, he would collect 82 points in 50 games and work his way back into scouts' good books.

"He's just good," said one scout who moved him into his top ten as the season wore on. "He did everything you wanted to see. He's smart, quick, strong on the puck, he makes the other guys better because he moves it so well. He shares the puck and makes guys better. He scores...he beat London by himself almost a few times."

While he may not be the fastest or biggest player, Suzuki's hockey sense and anticipation may well be the best of any prospect in this draft, and will make up for any concerns about his size at any level he plays.

"He's always going to make a lot of plays," said one scout. "This guy is going to be a good player. He makes everybody better...you gotta like this guy."

Suzuki spent most of the season on the wing, but has played at center for most of his career, and may well project as a pivot in the NHL.

"He plays like a centerman, a solid two-way game," said one scout. "He plays smart, he goes inside when he needs to...I don't think he makes his living in there, but that doesn't mean he's shy. I've seen him compete and be totally involved. A smart, smart player."

OWEN TIPPETT**TEAM: MISSISSAUGA STEELHEADS****LEAGUE: OHL****POSITION: RW****SHOOTS: RIGHT****HEIGHT: 6-0.5****WEIGHT: 202****DOB: 1999-02-16****NATION: CANADA**

SKATING	9
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	9
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	6
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	61

If you were asked to describe Tippett's play in three words it might best be said that he is a "model of inconsistency". There is "good Tippett" and "bad Tippett", and often little in between.

"He's either really good or you don't notice him," noted one scout who has him outside the top ten. "That's how guys like him play. They don't have a fallback if they're not scoring. If it's 2-1 or 3-2 for your team...be out there defending. It's great to score..but don't get scored on, play a harder game defensively."

What had kept him at the top of many draft lists is the physical tools he possesses - great speed, deft puck skills and a terrific shot and release. Where the concerns come in is with his lack of compete level, reluctance to utilize teammates, and sporadic defensive play.

The first-round playoff matchup against

Ottawa was a good example. Tippett was a force in the first game - collecting four points while being a scoring threat most of the game. In the second game he got hit, and essentially was a non-factor for the rest of the series, reverting back to old selfish habits which concern scouts and his coaches alike.

"He's not going before seven I don't imagine," said an eastern conference scout. "You like what he can do, but you don't like those scoring mentality guys who don't want to do anything else. It was nice to see him make a couple of plays but we all know what type of player he is, you just have to look at his stats...he's a shoot-first guy. There are some good options around that area too..so if he falls out of the top ten it wouldn't shock me. I do appreciate him, but I don't like one-trick ponies."

CASEY MITTELSTADT**TEAM: EDEN PRAIRIE HS****LEAGUE: USHS****POSITION: C****SHOOTS: LEFT****HEIGHT: 5-11.5****WEIGHT: 198****DOB: 1998-11-22****NATION: USA**

SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	61

It's not often you see a top-end prospect start the season in junior, go back to play high-school hockey and then end the season back in junior, but that was the circuitous route Mittelstadt chose in his draft-eligible season.

"He's better in the USHL than in high school because he has players to play with...at times it actually looked easy for him," said one USHL-based NHL scout in March who has scouted him 15+ times. "He did some big time stuff. He's blowing away from people, anticipating. He creates separation with his speed. He's the real deal I think. I would take him with a top-five pick."

Many scouts were discouraged by his decision to go back to high school, making it tough to gauge his true upside versus inferior competition. For some it also raised questions, maybe unfairly, about how dedicated he is to

play in the NHL.

"Some (high school) guys didn't even go to the USHL," said an American scout who is fully aware of the pressures to keep playing high school hockey. "I don't think he did it for himself. Like he told me...my coaches, my parents, my friends.... basically he had the whole community behind him."

Not everyone is enamoured with his work ethic. It was apparent at the NHL Scouting Combine he hadn't been working very hard off the ice. He managed just one bench press and no chinups, a strong indication that going back to high school may not have been his best option.

"That was an embarrassment. I wouldn't take him top 10," said another scout. "There are some issues with his skating mechanics that may prevent him from improving his skating much more, especially if he doesn't work at it."

13

MARTIN NECAS

TEAM: BRNO

LEAGUE: CZECH EXTRALIGA

POSITION: C

SHOOT: RIGHT

HEIGHT: 6-1

WEIGHT: 178

DOB: 1999-01-15

NATION: CZECH REPUBLIC



SKATING	9
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	60

No scout will dispute that Necas is one of the most skilled forwards in this draft, considered by some to be one of the five most talented players in this draft class with his elite skating and puck skills.

"His skill level is really good," noted one scout who nevertheless doesn't have him ranked in the top ten. "You watch him in warmup and you say 'holy sh**', he's a superstar.' But he's a little bit like a deer in the headlights right now. You're not sure about some things, there is a little bit of risk factor, so you've got to be careful when you take him."

Necas had a topsy-turvy season. He impressed in the Ivan Hlinka tournament last summer and at times during the season in the Czech Elite League and particularly in the playoffs.

Then he struggled for the most part in the World Junior Championship and the U-18, where

he did a lot of fancy stickhandling but little else as he failed to score a goal for a Czech team that disappointed.

"I want him to be better, but he hasn't been," said another scout. "A little outside, a little soft... lets someone else do it once in awhile...he's not carrying the team on his back. With those physical attributes you want to like him better than a (Elias) Pettersson, but you can't right now. He's not as smart as Pettersson."

When there are concerns with competitiveness and willingness to go to the dirty areas scouts tend to be wary about how successful a prospect will be at the NHL level.

"You don't want to rank him too low if he's got better upside, but if there are other guys you have a better feel on and feel they're a player, sometimes you have to go by a player with his talent level."

14

LIAS ANDERSSON

TEAM: HV 71

LEAGUE: SHL

POSITION: LW, C

SHOOT: LEFT

HEIGHT: 5-11

WEIGHT: 200

DOB: 1998-10-13

NATION: SWEDEN



SKATING	6
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	59

Scouts are always quick to praise Andersson's all-around game and suggest he'll be a solid NHL player. Despite his ability to play a top-line role at both the U-20 and SHL level at the age of 18 the questions remain on whether he will ever be a top-six forward in the NHL.

"You have to love his work ethic," said one crossover scout. "He plays hard, and is very strong, he wins most puck battles. A very good two-way player, very versatile. His skating needs work and is likely what makes him a third-line NHLer, he's not overly quick. I don't know that he has top-six upside...but he should be a solid NHL forward who can play multiple positions."

Andersson lit it up at a U-20 tournament in November and then followed it up with three goals in the World Juniors, second only to Nico Nischier among all draft-eligible prospects participating in the event.

"He was solid at the World Juniors, one of Sweden's best forwards," said one senior NHL scout. "He really showed off his shot with some nice goals from the high slot. He gets it away quickly...he has a hard and accurate wrist shot."

Andersson is one of only two Swedish draft-eligible prospects to score at least ten goals in the top Swedish league in the past 11 years... the other being former top-five selection Elias Lindholm, who scored one more goal (11) than Andersson. Those underrated scoring skills are what may ultimately make him one of the best value picks in the first round of the draft, especially if he falls outside of the top 15 as some suspect.

"The last time I saw him he was very, very good," said one scout who caught him in the SHL playoffs. "He's a top 15 guy for sure...I like him more than Pettersson."

15

ELIAS PETTERSSON

TEAM: TIMRA

LEAGUE: SWE-2

POSITION: C

SHOOT: LEFT

HEIGHT: 6-1.75

WEIGHT: 164

DOB: 1998-11-12

NATION: SWEDEN



SKATING	8
SKILLS	9
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	7
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	5
TOTAL	59

Last December Pettersson was battling Hischier as the high riser in the draft, getting some props as a top-five candidate as he burst out of the gate for Timra, leading all scorers in the Allsvenskan after lighting it up at a U-19 event on a line with fellow draft-eligibles Lias Andersson and Jesper Boqvist.

Since the New Year, however, the slender Swede's game regressed, and worries about the 164-pounder's lack of strength mounted with each passing month.

"After the world junior, he was done, he hit a wall," noted one scout. "He seems immature to me. I don't know if he can get to what you want to get physically. Will he put 30 pounds of muscle? Probably not. I just don't know about build...his frame's so small. He's a year older. You could tell he didn't have the jump any more."

Most scouts look at Pettersson as a 10-15

ranked prospect now because of his lack of improvement. He went from a number-one center role to second-line left winger with Timra as his stats and play dropped off.

"It's hard to keep liking a guy when he is fading like that, but you liked what you saw earlier," said one scout. "He may not be able to put on enough strength and size...that's something that our strength and conditioning coaches will look at. It didn't seem to bother him early. I know in the second half it was tough on him and he may have got discouraged. It's about his size; he's got to get bigger."

He may have fallen out of the top 12 but scouts still like his talent level.

"He's got a very nice upside," said one scout. "He'll go inside...he may not win the battle but at least he tries. He has top-two center skills and smarts."

16

URHO VAAKANAINEN

TEAM: JYP

LEAGUE: FHL

POSITION: D

SHOOT: LEFT

HEIGHT: 6-1.25

WEIGHT: 188

DOB: 1999-01-01

NATION: FINLAND



SKATING	8
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	59

The smooth-skating blueliner has been playing against much older players, starring in a U-16 league at the age of 13 and putting up 33 points in 41 games as a 14-year-old in the Jr. B U-18 league in 2013-14. It was no surprise the Finnish national team has included him in various international events the past three seasons, including the WJC this past year where he played a steady, if unspectacular, role.

"He looked pretty solid at the U-20's for me," said one NHL scout. "He didn't look out of place, and looked like a first-round guy."

Vaakanainen played well enough to be considered a first-round candidate in the first half of the season, but there were questions among some scouts about both his competitiveness and offensive upside.

"He lacks intensity for his size," noted one scout after the WJC. "I'm not sure he is a first rounder."

Vaakanainen's game only grew as the season went on. He played a full-time role as a top-four defenceman in the Finnish Elite League. After a three-goal, six-point performance at the U-18's in Poprad, Slovakia, he was firmly entrenched in scouts' top 20 rankings.

"I love him," said one scout. "I don't know too many defencemen I like better than him. I think I'd take him over (Conor) Timmins, I'd take him over Brannstrom and Liljegren. He shoots the puck well...makes good decisions."

Vaakanainen not only answered some questions about his offensive upside; he showed scouts he can compete physically.

"He was very good," added another scout that now considers him the third-best defenceman. "This guy is pretty poised and makes a play, has some power play ability. He showed a little bit of an edge to him, he was a little more gritty."



SKATING	8
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	59

Going into his draft year there were few expectations for the OHL blueliner who had 13 points as a rookie, but it soon became apparent in the first weeks of the season that the young defenceman had made a giant leap in his development and was a poised, confident defenceman that soon shot up scouts' draft lists after equalling his rookie point total before November.

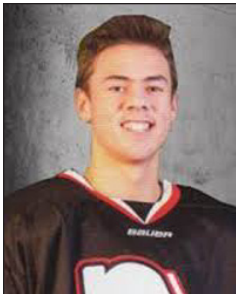
Timmins would finish the season with an impressive total of 54 assists, third most by a defenceman in the OHL behind two overage blueliners. He would also finish tied for third among all OHL blueliners with a +53 rating, further strengthening his standing as the best draft-eligible defenceman in Ontario.

"He's the best CHL defenceman for me, and it's not even a debate," noted one Ontario-based senior scout. "He's really smart, and moves the

puck well. He's always pretty good when I see him, he just doesn't make a lot of mistakes. He distributes well on the powerplay, he defends well...I think he'll fill a top-four role in the NHL."

While few scouts were anti-Timmins - with skating being the only real minor concern - as is often the case you can run into contrarians in any profession, and at least one scout has some debatable issues with the first-round lock.

"I question his hockey sense a little bit. I think he gets hyper, I think he's very average in the defensive zone for a guy that was plus (53). I thought he chased the puck in the defensive zone. He was fine...I'm not knocking him, he's fairly high on my list I'll give you that...but I don't know what he's going to be. At the end of the day he's a 6-1 guy with average feet and average mobility. But people think his hockey sense is better than what I give him credit for."



SKATING	7
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	6
SENSE	8
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	59

Starting your college hockey career as a 17-year-old is no small feat. It makes those questioning Poehling's offensive upside simply because he "only" scored 13 points for St. Cloud State as a true freshman come across overly harsh.

Poehling sandwiched his college season between two impressive and productive showings for US hockey at the Ivan Hlinka and U-18 championships that put to rest many doubts about whether he could produce offence.

"He plays a really mature game; he's a very smart player," said one US-based scout. "Hockey sense is probably the best asset, really responsible defensively, supports pucks very well, he anticipates plays, always around the puck."

Poehling's all-around game and competitiveness are what make him one of the safer picks in the draft and a sure bet to be selected in the first round, perhaps even top 20.

"He has a great motor, every time I see him he plays really hard, always moving his feet," said one scout. "He's physically immature so he lost puck battles this year. I think once he fills out he'll be able to do that. He's a good skater, could become very good once he gets stronger."

Poehling was given a third-line role at the U-18's but still managed to produce in addition to winning key draws and killing penalties in a Gold-Medal victory.

"Offensively, I think he's more of a playmaker which his stats don't really bear out as he had more goals than assists in college," added the scout. "I see a guy that has good puck poise, can make plays to the weak side, a lot of my reports noted that he could have had an assist or two if guys finished for him. I actually don't think he shoots the puck all that well, but also think he needs to shoot more."

JUUSO VALIMAKI

TEAM: TRI-CITY AMERICANS
HEIGHT: 6-1.5

LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 211

POSITION: D
DOB: 1998-10-06

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: FINLAND



SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	59

Not many 211-pound draft-eligible defencemen score more than a point-per-game in today's CHL, so there is no doubt that Valimaki holds high value in some scouting circles for his elite offensive skills, and is a key contributor on his WHL team in Tri-City.

"He's got great acceleration from behind our net to the far blueline," said Tri-City coach Mike Williamson. "He was quite often a zone ahead of his guy and created a lot of transition opportunities for us, and he carries the puck with poise, he distributes it well. He's just a very, very dynamic player offensively for sure. Great shot and release. Most of the times he and Rasmussen would be on the ice together, and Rass was extremely good about getting to the net, and Juuso would find his stick..they were an incredible pair together that way."

Valimaki had an up-and-down season, disappointing in the summer during the U-20

exhibition games and at the World Juniors, impressing during the WHL regular season, and then once again playing below expectations in the WHL playoffs, especially in the defensive zone.

"He wasn't very good in the summer...I was surprised," said one scout who has at least a half dozen other defencemen ranked ahead of him. "Watch for his pivoting...he has some difficulties with his mobility."

Therin lies the largest concerns with Valimaki - his play away from the puck in the neutral and defensive zones, where he can get out of position in part because he runs around and tries to do too much, but also because his gap control and pivots are below par. In his favour is that he doesn't lack strength and his stride is sound, so there is a decent chance that he'll be able to improve his agility and pivoting with lots of offseason work in the next few years.

JOSH NORRIS

TEAM: US-U18
HEIGHT: 6-0-5

LEAGUE: USNTDP
WEIGHT: 188

POSITION: C
DOB: 1999-05-05

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: USA



SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	58

The son of former NHLer Dwayne Norris ended the season on a positive note, leading the US in total points in the final two U-18 tournaments of the season and cementing his status as a first-round candidate.

"I thought it was his coming-out party at the 5 Nations Cup (in February)," said one scout. "He really demonstrated what type of player he is and what he could do. He played well."

What kept Norris out of most top 31 lists up until this spring was his inability to string together several good games in a row. There has always been little doubt about his physical skills.

"For me, it's all about his inconsistency, he's had a very inconsistent year," said one USHL-based scout. "He's literally a different player depending on what night you go see him. He's a center with size and really good skating. He has NHL feet. On

his good days he's really competitive, he's got some bite."

What scouts have had trouble figuring out this season is whether Norris has second- or third-line center upside. Earlier on they were leaning towards him being a third-liner, but he showed the offensive skills and production in the past two months that may well vault him into the top 25 of this draft.

"Last year I thought he was going to be a Ryan Kesler-type player, hard to play against, a two-way center that can skate, but also chip in and score," added the US scout. "I don't think he has high-end offence but I think he has some. We could be looking at this guy in a year if he's taken in the second round and go 'F***!'. Hard not to really concentrate on the good with this kid, and realize he was playing through some injuries."

MORGAN FROST

TEAM: SAULT STE. MARIE GREYHOUNDS
HEIGHT: 5-10.75

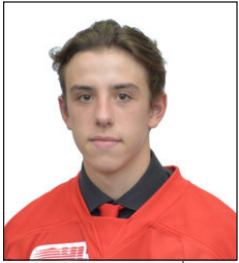
WEIGHT: 173

LEAGUE: OHL

DOB: 1999-05-14

POSITION: C SHOOTS: LEFT

NATION: CANADA



SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	6
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	58

On a team loaded with NHL draft picks at forward, Frost burst out of the gates and made it impossible for the Soo coaching staff not to play him in the top-six and on the powerplay, impressing scouts along the way with his high-end smarts and offensive skills.

"He was on such a strong team that perhaps he didn't always get put in the offensive situations," said one scout who has him firmly planted in the middle of the first round. "He's very, very talented and smart and Frost can shoot, but he's not always inclined to go inside. He's so smart and got such great touch. He has ridiculous offensive instinct."

Frost confirmed to the scouting world just how fast he was during the Top Prospects skill testing, finishing at the very top in all of the skating drills.

"He's really speedy, but he doesn't always use it when he has the puck," suggested one scout. "He

has a tendency to slow the play down and look at all his options instead of using that quickness. Sometimes it's to his benefit... and sometimes it isn't."

The main issue with Frost's game concerns his defensive game, and there are some scouts who wonder if at his size he will be able to handle larger top-two centers in an NHL setting and opine that he may end up being a playmaking winger on an offensive line.

"Frost will have a tough time playing center at the NHL level," said one scout.

"The talent is there, but he's small, and gets those games where he's not totally engaged," noted another scout who still thinks Frost can play center in the NHL. "He's soft and light on defence, a stick checker, but his defensive sense is good, he has the smarts. He needs to improve his strength so he can engage better."

TIMOTHY LILJEGREN

TEAM: ROGLE
HEIGHT: 5-11.5

LEAGUE: SHL
WEIGHT: 191

POSITION: D

DOB: 1999-04-30

SHOOTS: RIGHT

NATION: SWEDEN



SKATING	9
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	6
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	58

Touted by many to be the second-best 2017 NHL draft prospect last summer, Liljegren's draft stock took a major hit with inconsistent performances, issues with his overall hockey sense, and disappointing offensive production.

Liljegren was a turnover machine at the Ivan Hlinka, the first indication that he wasn't in the running to be selected first overall after all. He was diagnosed with mononucleosis soon after, and didn't get back on the ice until later in the fall. The struggles continued, especially in the SHL with Rogle, and to the surprise of many, even though he had been ill, he didn't make the WJC team.

"The physical parts you're not concerned about; he's such a good skater, maybe the best in the draft, but what is he? You don't know," said one scout. "He doesn't really have a dimension when he skates, he doesn't really accomplish

much. You're really putting your balls on the line if you have him in your top ten, or even your top 20. There's lots to worry about there. He doesn't play anywhere as well offensively as (Erik) Brannstrom. Liljegren doesn't know how to read the opponent to find the shooting and passing lanes..the other guy does."

Liljegren ended the SHL season in the stands as a healthy scratch, and followed up a poor showing at the 5 Nations Cup in February with an ordinary U-18 performance where he failed to score a goal and was -5.

"He's going to really have to simplify his game to be half decent," said one senior scout. "That's not what you want out of this guy. I want to see some dynamics if you're going to take him high. I love everything about his physical skills, but he doesn't create a lot. If he simplifies his game.. then he's a simple player."

23

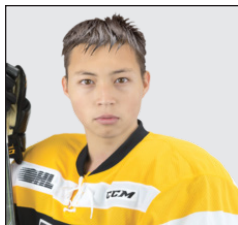
JASON ROBERTSON

TEAM: KINGSTON FRONTENACS
HEIGHT: 6-2

LEAGUE: OHL
WEIGHT: 195

POSITION: LW
DOB: 1999-07-22

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: USA



SKATING	6
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	9
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	58

It took some scouts several months to warm up to Robertson as the skating concerns were hard to dismiss until they saw him singlehandedly win games for Kingston on many occasions. Robertson scored 24 per cent of Kingston's goals this season, a remarkable number given that Sidney Crosby scored less than 20 per cent of Rimouski's goals in his draft year, and Connor McDavid scored less than 13 per cent with Erie.

"He's a stud," said one scout late in the season who earlier on had said "I have no time for him. I don't get this guy...I must be missing the boat."

He was named first star and had seven or more shots on goal 13 times during the regular season, then chipped in 18 points in 11 playoff games as the Frontenacs advanced to the second round for the first time in 22 years.

"He has really, really improved," said another

scout. "He's like a dog on that puck, and he always seems to make the right play. Very good puck possession skills and vision, and he can really shoot the puck. Skating is the concern but it's improving, and that's what you're looking for...players that get better in their development over the season."

When he adds some pounds/muscle to his frame a player who is already hard to get the puck from will be that much harder to defend.

"He's really weak at this point. After about 15 seconds into a shift you see his butt go up in the air and his legs are tiring out. He'll be a better skater than Gadajovich. His feet may never be great but will improve with strength. Should be at least adequate in the end. He has a lot of options. That's what throws everybody off...they don't know whether he'll pass or shoot."

24

FILIP CHYTIL

TEAM: ZLIN
HEIGHT: 6-2.25

LEAGUE: CZECH EXTRALIGA
WEIGHT: 191

POSITION: C/LW
DOB: 1999-09-05

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: CZECH REPUBLIC



SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	7
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	58

Scouts who showed up to U-18 tournaments anticipating a great showing by Martin Necas often left the events being almost as impressed by his teammate Chytil.

"I thought he was better than Necas," was a comment from NHL scouts on more than one occasion during the season as the versatile forward often impressed with his combination of skill and two-way play.

He really improved this season," noted one scout who has him slotted in the 25-35 range. "It looks like he's gotten bigger, thicker. He's a puckhandler, he's always on the puck, top skater, good speed, and he also played well in the Czech league."

One of Chytil's best assets was his consistency. He never had a poor overall showing in several U-18 events dating back to the summer, in part because he plays a smart game on the defensive side and competes.

"He is one of the better defensive forwards in the draft," noted one senior NHL scout. "I like his hockey sense in the defensive zone. He faded a bit at the end of the U-18's offensively but that was the case for the whole Czech team. They disappointed after winning the Ivan Hlinka the summer before."

One scout in March expressed concerns about Chytil's durability, which was keeping him out of his first round going into the U-18 tournament.

"He has a history of missing a lot of games. You're going to find out in April. A good skater, he's got skill, and can make plays, but it's hard to rank him if he's not playing."

The other issue raised after the U-18's focused on just how well he sees the ice and teammates when he's playing center.

"He puts his nose to the ice," suggested one scout. "I'm not sure he has the distribution skills to play center in the NHL."

EELI TOLVANEN**TEAM:** SIOUX CITY MUSKETEERS
HEIGHT: 5-10.5**LEAGUE:** USHL
WEIGHT: 189**POSITION:** LW
DOB: 1999-04-22**SHOOTS:** LEFT
NATION: FINLAND

SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	9
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	6
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	57

Highly regarded going into the season after being one of the top snipers at the 2016 U-18's as an underager for Finland, Tolvanen disappointed scouts with his work ethic and play away from the puck at the WJC, concerns that also became prominent the more he was scouted in his rookie USHL season despite continuing his scoring ways, finishing third overall in goals.

"I know he's frigging talented but I like Ryan Poehling more," said one US-based scout. "Poehling doesn't have Tolvanen's skill and he doesn't shoot the puck like Tolvanen, but you talk to people around Tolvanen, and the reports are not great. He's just not a fit for us. He's a small, light guy, doesn't want to pass the puck, not a great skater for his size, there's nothing hard about him.

His lack of breakaway speed and play away

from the puck are what worries some scouts in regards to where he might play at the NHL level, but with some they are not major issues, so it will be interesting to see where he gets selected in the draft. He has the scoring ability to be a top six winger with time, tutoring and patience as he has one of the best shots in the draft...deadly accurate when in the right scoring position.

"High-end skill and an elite shot for sure," said one scout who swears he wouldn't take him in the first round. "The rest will probably be inconsistent but skill like him never drops too far. Not worried about his talent level, you just worry about how much he wants it. He's competitive in the same way guys like Sprong and Ho Sang are...competitive to score but you'll never see them compete to get a puck out of the defensive zone and they cheat like crazy."

ERIK BRANNSTROM**TEAM:** HV 71
HEIGHT: 5-9**LEAGUE:** SHL
WEIGHT: 179**POSITION:** D
DOB: 1999-09-02**SHOOTS:** LEFT
NATION: SWEDEN

SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	5
TOTAL	57

As Brannstrom kept outproducing and outperforming the more highly-regarded Timothy Liljegren in U-18 events throughout the season, scouts drew the two defencemen closer and closer in their rankings, and by season's end there were more than a handful of scouts arguing that Brannstrom may be the better NHL prospect.

"They played him ahead of Liljegren in most events," said one scout. "He's much smarter, he's just as good a skater and puckhandler. He just gives up two inches on Liljegren, that's all."

Ah yes...the two inches. At 5-9 Brannstrom is four-plus inches shorter than the average NHL defenceman, and that is what makes him a risky pick for some, and a longshot to go in the top 20 despite his high-end offensive skills.

"I love him but have to be realistic as to how he translates," said one crossover scout. "You get small quickly if you draft small. He looks like a

powerplay guy now and if he can eventually play a regular shift then he's a great try in the first. He's a small guy with quickness and puck skills, but those guys aren't getting the puck back when they don't have it.

"I liked him in the first game he played in the U-18, and then he went to hell. Lost pucks, turning it over. He looked like he tried to push too much as the U-18 went on. There's something there, but you've gotta be careful. He's just a kid...he could come around."

Brannstrom is strong and competitive but he does run into problems in the defensive zone due to his lack of length and brawn, which for some discounts him as a first-round pick altogether.

"Brannstrom was good at the U-18 but he's just too small," said one western conference scout. "He's just not big enough to defend at the NHL level."

JAKE OETTINGER

TEAM: BOSTON UNIVERSITY
HEIGHT: 6-4.25

LEAGUE: HOCKEY EAST
WEIGHT: 218

POSITION: G CATCHES: LEFT
DOB: 1998-12-18 NATION: USA



ATHLETICISM	7
TECHNIQUE	9
PUCKHANDLING	7
GLOVE	8
POSITIONING	9
COMPETE	8
MENTAL	9
NET COVERAGE	8
TOTAL	65

Oettinger had a terrific freshman season, backstopping Boston to the NCAA quarter-finals with a 4-3 double overtime win over North Dakota in which he made 56 stops and was the talk of the scouting world with his superlative effort.

"To go to Fargo in that building and beat North Dakota was pretty impressive," noted one scout. "What makes him special is his hockey sense and calmness. He can't skate like some, doesn't move that great, but he's fun to watch because he has positioning down to a science. He's mature way beyond his years. He really works on his craft, you don't have to worry about that."

In the summer when the topic of best draft-eligible goalies was raised Oettinger's name was rarely in the mix but by the new year he was the consensus number-one goalie and a strong candidate to be one of those rare goalies to be picked in the first round of today's NHL draft.

"He looks like the real deal," said a western conference scout. "I didn't think that last year, but he's really developed this season. Not a great athlete but he's huge, very smart, calm and efficient. His mental game and technical game are big time. What's nice about him is there's no bust factor. He will be a good depth goalie at worst."

What gives him an edge over other draft-eligible goalies is that he already has a college season under his belt as a starting goalie. An NHL team will only need to wait three years to have a fully-developed college goalie ready to challenge for NHL duty.

He may not need much AHL seasoning, if any, before he's ready to play.

"Apparently he's got nerves of steel," said one scout. "He's really calm and poised; nothing gets him rattled, sometimes to a fault. He's a first-round pick."

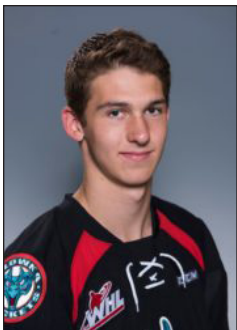
CAL FOOTE

TEAM: KELOWNA ROCKETS
HEIGHT: 6-4

LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 218

POSITION: D
DOB: 1998-12-13

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	5
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	8
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	57

The son of longtime NHL blueliner Adam Foote is one of the draft's biggest wildcards - with some scouts liking him in the top 20, and others adamant that they wouldn't take him in the first round. Scouts who dismiss him as a top-30 candidate are quite concerned that his lack of quickness/mobility will render him obsolete.

"I worry that if his mobility doesn't improve much he'll have a tough time," said one scout. "He needs to have better feet or he may struggle to even play."

Foote has been a mainstay on the Kelowna blueline for two seasons, and was widely considered last year to be a top-ten lock for this year's draft as he was already a 25-minute-per game defenceman at the age of 16. Concerns first started to pop up at Canada's U-20 camp in the summer where he struggled with the pace of the game.

"I don't know how he is going to adapt," noted one scout who insists he would not draft Foote in the top 40. "He's going to be like a sixth defenceman at the next level. I think there was a time he was a first-round pick all day...now I don't see that."

While Foote managed to produce 93 points in his first two WHL seasons some scouts wonder about his offensive skills going forward.

"I don't see offensive upside in Foote," added the scout. "His skill level is just okay. He's got a heavy shot, but he doesn't create lanes and stuff."

While doubts have crept in with many, there are still those that see Foote as a solid NHL prospect. "Foote is a reliable big defenceman with pedigree," offered one scout. "He will be fine...he's too smart. He's a top 20 pick. Minute muncher. He'll play in the four hole for 15-20 years."

JOSH BROOK

TEAM: MOOSE JAW WARRIORS
HEIGHT: 6-1

LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 191

POSITION: D
DOB: 1999-06-17

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	8
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	57

Brook is a prospect that some scouts really like while others have a hard time warming up to him, as was quite evident in the fall when he was left off of the CHL Top Prospects roster.

By the U-18's he went from missing the prospects game to a top-line role for Canada, so needless to say his draft stock had risen by that time.

Brook had some struggles in the U-18 along with the majority of his teammates as Canada was eliminated in the quarter-finals with a blowout 7-3 loss to Sweden.

"He was terrible," said one scout in regards to his U-18 performance. "He didn't look like he had a whole lot of sense out there. I know it was a bad tournament for him, I felt sorry for him actually. I've never seen him play great but I thought 'he couldn't possibly be that bad.' Our western guy said 'he's a bit better than that' and I said 'well I

hope so since they asked him to come and play.'"

That's not what scouts and WHL coaches saw in Moose Jaw for most of the season. Swift Current faced Moose Jaw 15 times, and their head coach Manny Viveiros had nothing but praise for the Warriors defenceman, who played 25+ minutes per game by playoff time.

"I like him, I really do," said Viveiros. "A really good, mobile puck-moving defenceman. A great shot, moves well, and makes plays under pressure too."

Not every scout was as critical of Brook's U-18 performance which just further illustrates the divergence of opinions on the 6-1 defenceman.

"Who in North America in the CHL is ahead of him?" asked one scout. "(Conor) Timmins arguably. He plays a ton. He's a smart, smart defenceman who moves the puck well, good skater. I really like him."

ISAAC RATCLIFFE

TEAM: GUELPH STORM
HEIGHT: 6-6

LEAGUE: OHL
WEIGHT: 200

POSITION: LW
DOB: 1999-02-15

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	6
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	57

More often than not a prospect who is 6-5+ is characterized as being raw in his draft year as he is still working on his coordination and "growing" into his body, and that is certainly the case with the gangly Guelph winger.

"He needs to grow into that body," reasoned one scout. "His quickness and agility are not great right now. But he's so big...I think he'll be fine. Huge reach, good shot, he competes. For a guy like that with his size and that shot..he came a long way this year. From the beginning of the year to the end there was improvement."

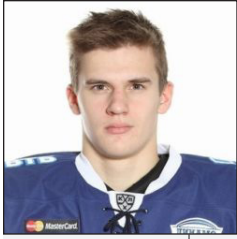
That overall improvement is what is most intriguing scouts...who see the skilled winger on an upward improvement curve.

"He played a little like a deer in the headlights at the start, for maybe the first third of the year," noted another scout who grew to like his upside

after initially being lukewarm on him. "He just had to find some confidence, he held on to the puck a little longer, used his size a little more. He probably didn't know what to do until he started to figure it out. I like his direction."

Scouts are always interested in tall, skinny prospects with good hands and smarts who aren't afraid to take a hit...the thinking being that if they fill out and find their coordination... the sky is the limit.

"I think he'll find a way to be an adequate skater," added the scout. "Pretty good hands and I think his sense is pretty good but there's a lot of projection with this guy. I think someone will step up and take him in the first round. Those are the guys you've gotta try because there is something there, and if it ever works out you hit a home run."



SKATING	7
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	6
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	57

Why would a 6-3 thoroughbred with a strong skating stride, willingness to go to the net and a scoring touch be a longshot to get picked in the top 20?

As the old saying goes..."It's complicated."

Firstly, there is the longstanding "Russian factor." Despite being a high pick by Kootenay in the CHL Import Draft...unlike several of his less touted countrymen, Kostin decided to stay home and toil in the Russian men's leagues.

"If he was in Moose Jaw, we would be talking about him right at the top," said one talent evaluator. "I think there's tons there...he's a horse, skates well, plays strong, there's an edge. Out of sight out of mind...and he's Russian."

Kostin was not only "out of sight" for North American scouts most of the season, a shoulder injury that sidelined him from January on also kept him away from Russian-based scouts. After

a terrific showing at the U-18s in the spring of 2016 and Ivan Hlinka last summer, the last time scouts got a good look at him was at the World Junior Challenge, and the reviews were mixed at best.

"Obviously he's a big-time talent, but how smart is he?" asked one scout after the event. "Does he make others better? I don't like him. He hardly has the puck because he doesn't support pucks, he turns away from the play consistently."

Kostin was in Detroit in March to work out and show scouts he was over his injury and allay concerns about his willingness to be in North America.

"I think there's lots there, but you roll the dice with the Russians," noted a scout. "He can play sleepy, so... I wouldn't touch him where we are drafting (top ten) or if we move back. I wouldn't go down that road. Who are you getting?"



SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	57

Is he a top 30 prospect or isn't he? That was a hot topic among the scouting community in Buffalo in the days leading up to the Combine testing. Some scouts were insisting that he's being touted as a top 20 prospect...others had him ranked as a top 20 guy a few months ago but have now moved other players ahead of him.

"It's tough to rank him that highly because I haven't seen him enough," reasoned one NHL scout who moved the like of Josh Norris, Jason Robertson and Urho Vaakanainen ahead of him after strong and highly visible endings to their seasons. "He wasn't playing enough for Brynas in the playoffs. He had no quality ice time since playing with the U-19 Swedish team in Switzerland in February."

That was the tournament that got scouts raving about Boqvist's high skill level, which had also

been on display with Timra in the Allsvenskan on a "kid line" with Elias Pettersson and Jonathan Dahlen before Christmas that was tearing up Sweden's second-best men's league.

"I have nothing but good things to say," said a North American scout in December who made a special trip to see Timra. "He has great feet and natural skill; great speed and anticipation, a good shot and a playmaker. Dahlen could have scored three or four on Boqvist setups."

A little under 6-0, where scouts have a bit of concern is how much muscle he'll be able to add to his 164-pound frame.

"He is thin through the shoulders and hips," said a scout. "Some are concerned about him playing to the outside, but he's playing the wing in the SHL and to me he's a centerman. I've seen him give hits in the men's league...it's just a question about how willing he is to go to the dirty areas."



SKATING	7
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	6
SENSE	7
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	56

Mathieu's younger brother had a growth spurt last summer that had scouts scrambling early on to see a prospect who was barely on the radar after a so-so rookie QMJHL season as word got out that the "gangly kid in PEI" was a pretty decent prospect.

"He's awfully skinny and definitely needs to get stronger, but he plays hard," noted one Metropolitan Division scout that now ranks him as a late first-round prospect. "He's got decent puck moving ability and is very competitive; he's a hard-working kid. He needs to get his skating going, but that should come with more strength."

It's usually assumed that a slender prospect will put on a enough weight to compete ably for an NHL spot, but some prospects simply never get much larger, and that is at the very least a minor concern for a 6-2 player who is just 163 pounds.

"There are body composition concerns," added

the scout. "Maybe he's just physically immature, but when you see him he has a slight build. His brother does as well, but he's put on a few pounds since the draft. It remains to be seen how much thicker he gets."

Joseph flashed some offensive skill this season - collecting 33 assists in 62 games - thanks to his above-average vision and passing skills. Scouts are most impressed with his lack of mistakes, especially when he gets the puck in his own zone.

"As soon as he gets the puck it's up the ice...no nonsense," said another scout. "He gets the puck and he moves it...boom...tape-to-tape..and away you go. There are no surprises with him. Every game it's the same...works hard, pretty smart, aggressive, assertive. He can get eaten up a bit with the pace, but that's more about him getting stronger and quicker."



SKATING	6
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	6
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	56

Hague entered the season in the top ten of a lot of draft lists having played as an underager for Canada in the U18's and scoring 14 goals as a rookie 6-5 OHL blueliner with a booming shot.

The closer he was scrutinized, however, it soon became clear that there are some obvious blemishes in his game that will likely drop him on draft day, perhaps out of the first round altogether.

"I'm not a real big fan," said one scout who sees him as a mid second-round pick. "He's a knock-kneed skater, a late birthday, but he moves the puck well. His size and ability to move and shoot the puck are what scouts like."

While he is far from a finished product, most scouts see him improving his weaknesses enough to develop into a decent NHLer with time.

"He's a good kid...I interviewed him yesterday," said a scout who met with him in April. "He really came across well. He understands what his problems are...he's working on them. He's pretty honest about his game. He's never gonna be a hard guy. He lets the forward get to the puck."

"I like him in the second but there's a lot of risk," noted a third scout. "It's not like he creates lanes for his shot but he seems to know when to jump in...gets a lot of shots on net. He may score some goals in the NHL, but the feet and the lack of real pushback in his game is probably what you worry about. He can make plays when he has the puck in his own end but he gets caught in cycles and with his quickness to the puck..he's going to get beat to the puck at the NHL level I think."

TEAM: FROLUNDA
HEIGHT: 5-11LEAGUE: SHL
WEIGHT: 176POSITION: RW, C
DOB: 1999-04-14SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: FINLAND

SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	5
TOTAL	56

There are few draft eligible players with the talented Finn's puck skills, and whenever he played against players his own age this season he was always noticeable as he was certain to make some breathtaking rushes...almost to a fault.

"He likes to overhandle it, and you look over the years there's some kids that just don't get it, and that's why you don't like it," lamented one scout after seeing him hog the puck a few too many times at the 5 Nations Cup in February.

"We understand when you don't have good linemates to play with, but what we don't understand is when you don't make the right plays...that's what we don't like. You want them to figure those thing out. He can pass the puck too, but he has to make that extra move every time."

Ikonen ended up with a great linemate in the U-18's in Vesalainen, and up until the

medal round he was distributing the puck with more frequency and moving his way up many scouts' draft lists to the top of the second round, particularly after his hat trick versus Belarus where he showed off a wicked one-timer to go along with the high-end dekes and stickhandling.

Ikonen played his last two games with a separated shoulder, which helped explain why his performance tailed off somewhat.

It doesn't explain why he stopped passing and only looked to shoot, however, as with a lame shoulder the last thing you can usually do effectively is shoot.

"Early in the tournament, he was good but then he was selfish I thought," noted one talent evaluator. "You could see it was there I guess early on, the inclination to pass, but later on there was no way. In the semi finals and the finals all he wanted to do was shoot the puck."

TEAM: SPOKANE CHIEFS
HEIGHT: 5-7.5LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 146POSITION: LW
DOB: 1998-09-29SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: USA

SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	3
TOTAL	56

No player under 5-9 has ever been selected in the first round of the NHL draft as teams have always put an emphasis on size no matter how skilled a player may be, but Yamamoto is making a serious case to be the exception to the unwritten rule.

"He's a good little player," said one scout. "I have no idea where he goes. He could be better than some of the guys in the first, but....I'd pick him in the second. He's not afraid..he's a small little f***er though. I don't know how you project him...he's a late birthday and 150 pounds. I'm not saying never because he's so explosive."

Not many CHL players have amassed 220 points before they were draft eligible in recent times - McDavid had more but he was playing in the OHL at 15 because of exceptional player status - and Yamamoto is also the only draft eligible CHLer to score more than 170 points in

the past two seasons.

He has a great burst, elite smarts, puck skills and can snipe goals.

"The little guys like Gaudreau, they get pushed around in the playoffs, but they're pretty good in the regular season," noted one scout who likes him but does not expect his team to draft him... common sentiment with several scouts.

"Someone is going to take him...he's going to go higher than you think. Someone's got to get you to the playoffs. He doesn't get bounced around in junior. He should be able to play on the powerplay. I don't think his play away from the puck is a problem...he's smart. Guys like that they're always coachable. I think he'll defend fine...it's just the size thing."

Yes...the size thing...and because of it, he'll likely drop some on draft day, but much like DeBrincat, some teams will likely regret it.



SKATING	8
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	6
SENSE	7
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	8
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	56

There may not be much flash but there's plenty of dash from the highly competitive forward who earned first-line duties at both center and the wing for Waterloo this season.

"He's not a high-end talent but he's a hard working, smart two-way guy," said one scout. "He's got some size, goes to the net, pretty smart. Good energy. He could be a good third-line center because he's an honest player. I like him."

Bowers finished in a tie for tenth in USHL scoring while winning plenty of key faceoffs, moving to the wing on and off when Alex Limoges joined the team, killing penalties, protecting leads and providing energy when the team was in a lull. In other words, he did it all, and was clearly a coach's favourite

"He's a guy to like, he's going to work his bag off," said another scout. "He's not creative at all, but he can really skate. He has an awesome

motor. Very, very consistent. I think he might be best suited for the wing."

Slated to join the high-powered program at Boston University next season, Bowers will likely need at least three years of development before turning pro even though he plays a pro-style game already.

"He's a high-floor, low-ceiling type player," opined one midwest US-based NHL scout. "I don't ever see him being a top two-line powerplay guy, I don't see him scoring lots in the NHL. He has average puck skills in the scoring areas, but I also think he's going to play.

"NHL habits like stopping on pucks, being responsible defensively by covering lanes, angling...he's a very advanced player in the details of the game. He's the kind of guy coaches are going to appreciate. He's very consistent. He goes to the hard areas, he's competitive. He's a great kid off the ice, very professional."



SKATING	8
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	55

It cannot be overemphasized how impressive it is for a 17-year-old European defenceman to step into a top-three role within weeks of starting his WHL career and playing like a seasoned veteran.

The wily Finnish blueliner quickly earned his coaches' trust with poised play in all three zones, making smart and decisive first passes and reading plays adeptly and maintaining good positioning and gap control.

"He's a 6-0 puck mover," noted one scout who has him slotted as a top-40 selection. "He makes pretty good retrievals and smart decisions. I'd describe him as a head and stick defenceman. Perhaps more of a support guy than one who takes charge, early on at least."

While he fit in right away defensively, and with his puck-moving skills on the powerplay, the goals weren't coming in the first third of the season (one goal through his first 25 games)

despite it being quite obvious that he had a good shot. Jokiharju had eight goals the rest of the way, finishing with 48 points while taking care of his own zone and killing penalties. By the playoffs, he was a go-to defenceman in all key situations whether protecting a lead or trying to even a match.

"He has great feet, and is a great puck mover," said an eastern scout who went to see him in March. "He's more engaged now, looks like he's a little more confident. He didn't make any mistakes the other night the game I was at. He's fast...he carries the puck and it's gone. He's got some offensive skill. I thought he was more physically involved too...something I hope develops over the years, hopefully it comes. He's making strides for me. He's not very big, but he did some things that you were looking for him to do...he'd gotten better."

JARET ANDERSON-DOLAN

TEAM: SPOKANE CHIEFS
HEIGHT: 5-11

LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 190

POSITION: C
DOB: 1999-09-12

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	7
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	55

There were high expectations for the talented centerman going into the season even though he had only turned 17 years of age, but after scoring just five goals in his first 22 games he was sliding down the draft charts in a hurry before a big weekend in late November that clearly helped him regain his confidence. In his last 50 games Anderson-Dolan would score 34 goals and work himself firmly into the discussion for the top 30.

"Take a look at the goal he scored the other night...wow...he's a player!" exclaimed one scout in early February. "You have to consider that he's only (four) days away from being eligible for the 2018 draft as well. He's just kept improving as the season has gone on, and you want to see that. He has great speed through the neutral zone that reminds me of Scott Gomez in his heyday."

Named captain of Canada's U-18 team and handed a first-line role, it was thought by many that if he lit it up at the tournament and led Canada to yet another victory he might end up being a first-round pick. Anderson-Dolan was pretty much a non-factor in the U-18's despite being handed every opportunity possible on scoring lines and on power plays, and in the biggest event of his season (Spokane missed the playoffs) he left scouts wanting more.

"He wasn't great at the U-18 but none of them were," noted one NHL senior scout. "I don't know what happened there...that was so frustrating. He has good hands around the net. I thought he played better than Yamamoto when I saw them in Spokane. I think he's a second-round pick...35-50. He's got some skill, but I don't know what he is. I like him, but I don't love him."

KOLE LIND

TEAM: KELOWNA ROCKETS
HEIGHT: 6-1

LEAGUE: WHL
WEIGHT: 185

POSITION: RW
DOB: 1998-10-16

SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	6
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	7
SENSE	8
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	55

Lind was in the top ten in WHL scoring in mid-winter and a solid first-round candidate for a lot of scouts. He led a veteran-laden Kelowna team in scoring by a wide margin most of the season.

Lind hit a wall later in the campaign, ending the season with two goals in his last 11 games. His energy level fell off and other players started leading the team offensively. Lind's production continued to wane in the playoffs where he collected 12 points in 17 playoff games and became a secondary offensive piece, finishing fifth in team scoring.

"I loved him the first game that I saw him, but then he wasn't so good," said one scout. "He should just play his game. I think he has some raw skills for sure...and he can shoot it. His skating is a little raw but I think it will be okay, there's worse than him. I think it's more about his inconsistency. I heard he had a bad playoff."

Most scouts have faded on his first-round potential because of concerns that he turned 18 in October, yet is weaker than most and showed little improvement in his skating. Scouts want to be assured that a player will be improving his speed and strength enough to translate what they do in junior to the top level.

"He really has to get stronger," noted one eastern conference scout. "His physical maturity is a bit behind for a later birthday. It's all about strength for him. He lacks explosiveness and quickness but has a good willingness and is smart."

Another scout wasn't so diplomatic in terms of Lind's NHL upside.

"I've fallen off of him. His skating bothers me. I don't see him getting much better. A smart kid and a playmaker but he's not overly physical either."



ATHLETICISM	7
TECHNIQUE	8
PUCKHANDLING	7
GLOVE	8
POSITIONING	9
COMPETE	8
MENTAL	8
NET COVERAGE	9
TOTAL	64

He may have been beaten out for a starting position for Muskegon in the USHL playoffs by Adam Brizgala yet many scouts are still insisting that the Boston native will be a top-40 pick and the second goalie to have his name called at the draft

"He's the second-best goalie in the draft," declared one NHL head scout in mid May. "There's a lot of work to do, but he's got really good upside, and is a good positional goaler. He will probably be picked in the top 35."

While he may not be one of the most accomplished goalies available this year, scouts are nevertheless intrigued with his size, confidence and net protection skills.

"He may be a Devan Dubnyk clone," noted one midwest-based scout. "He's huge, efficient... he trusts his hockey sense and uses size well, doesn't overcomplicate anything. He's on his knees a lot and his skating needs to get better.

But he's very calm and a smart kid. He has that Boston arrogance to him, which might not be bad in a goalie."

Petruzzelli put up decent stats this season, so being beaten out by another solid goalie for Muskegon's playoff games isn't going to hurt his stock much, if at all. He'll be attending Quinnipiac University next season.

"He separated himself from (Cayden) Primeau in the second half as the second goalie in the USA this year after Oettinger," added another scout. "He's better than Ben Bishop at the same age, and should be a top-45 pick. Obviously, he has elite size. But his hockey sense, ability to track pucks and make athletic stops jumps out. As a kid he's very intelligent, but brash and cocky too."

"Stylistically he looks like Matt Murray. Both are big guys that read the play well and have great depth reads."



SKATING	9
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	7
SENSE	6
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	55

Formenton is one of those prospects that impresses scouts a lot more the first time he's seen live than when they watch him on video or look at the stats sheet, predominantly because it soon becomes apparent just how fast he moves around the rink.

He's still growing, and when it is also factored in how young he is (Sept. 13 birthday) and that he got caught behind a plethora of talented forwards in London this season, scouts are more willing to forgive him for only scoring 34 points this season than they are for most prospects.

"He's a great skater, he has got a great long stride," noted one scout. "In a straight line there may not be any prospects faster...but he's more of a straight-ahead skater than an agile one... he's not going to dangle you too often. There will be some guys that leave London this year and he'll step into a little bit better role. He has

average creativity though, I wouldn't expect him to become a big assists guy."

He had scouts salivating at the start of the season due to his explosive skating skills and exciting rushes, but upon repeated viewings it became apparent that he had trouble finishing plays or paying the ultimate price to get to the scoring areas, perhaps because of his youth.

His skating skills and size combo alone will likely get him picked in the top 50, and perhaps even in the top 40.

"He has a good shot to go along with that speed, but he is likely a third line guy," added another NHL talent evaluator. "There's some development that has to happen, but you wonder about his role on that team as he often played on the fourth line, unlike Thomas. He's good, got good upside, though...he just needs to physically mature."

43

MICHAEL DiPIETRO

TEAM: WINDSOR SPITFIRES

LEAGUE: OHL

POSITION: G

CATCHES: LEFT

HEIGHT: 6-0

WEIGHT: 202

DOB: 1999-06-09

NATION: CANADA



ATHLETICISM	8
TECHNIQUE	8
PUCKHANDLING	7
GLOVE	8
POSITIONING	8
COMPETE	9
MENTAL	8
NET COVERAGE	6
TOTAL	62

The draft prospect who has the most to gain by a strong showing at the Memorial Cup was DiPietro, and he failed to disappoint, leading Windsor to a Cup championship with superlative goaltending which earned him the Top Goaltender Award and a lot of calls for the MVP Award by media members and scouts alike.

"All the guy does is stop the puck," said one scout the night Windsor upset Erie for the Memorial Cup title. "He was the best goalie in the Top Prospects Game, and the best one in the Memorial Cup...which goes to show you how much of a battler he is. I could see him going top 40."

Windsor obtained Michael Guigovaz from London in the summer of 2015 to hold the fort while DiPietro developed, but by November the 16-year-old had so impressed the coaching staff that GM Warren Rychel dealt the veteran who

was four years DiPietro's senior and handed the reins to the promising rookie, who never looked back.

"He's been great since Day One in the OHL," said one Ontario-based scout. "He is athletic, competitive as hell, and has a great glove and quick pads. The only thing going against him is that NHL teams want size."

Ah yes...the dreaded goalie height conundrum... an issue that has buried many a talented goalie on draft day who had the audacity not to be tall. All signs, however, point towards this 6-0 goaltender proving to be the exception, and he may well be the second goalie off the board.

"If he was 6-3 we'd be looking at him in the top 20," said one eastern conference scout. "I still think a team in need of a goalie will step up and take him before the midway point of the second round. He's just too good. He's a proven winner."

44

ALEKSI HEPONIEMI

TEAM: SWIFT CURRENT BRONCOS

LEAGUE: WHL

POSITION: LW

SHOOTS: LEFT

HEIGHT: 5-10.5

WEIGHT: 149

DOB: 1999-01-09

NATION: FINLAND



SKATING	8
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	8
SHOT	6
SENSE	8
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	4
TOTAL	55

The 150-pound Finn was expected to need some time to adjust to the North American game and physicalness but it soon became apparent that he was simply too smart and talented to struggle offensively, finishing top ten in assists and ending up as the only rookie in the top 20 in WHL scoring.

"He's a lightning quick playmaker, but he's tiny," said one scout. "His size might keep him out of the top 40...not sure how teams are going to think in this draft. He's certainly got the skills and the hockey sense to play in the NHL...he can play in today's game."

Heponiemi was dismissed as a top 60 prospect until scouts kept seeing him lead the Broncos' offence time and again with his superb playmaking skills, especially on the powerplay where he was almost unstoppable with the extra ice.

"His vision on the ice is as good as I've seen it in a long time," said his coach Manny Viveiros. "He sees the ice on a different level at times as far as making different plays. He's a great passer, he's got a sneaky good wrist shot too. His work ethic...I call him a typical young Finn, he's really focused, he knows what he wants to be, and he puts the work in, on ice, off ice and everything else."

"He really is going to be a good pro," added his coach. "Talking to a lot of different scouts, and they don't know where to put this young man in the draft."

In talking to a lot of scouts I'm hearing that this isn't an overly talented draft group. This kid should go sooner rather than later. Looking at the better kids in our league at that age level.. skill level that are rated higher than him, but he's off the charts.

45

MAXIME COMTOIS

TEAM: VICTORIAVILLE TIGRES

LEAGUE: QMJHL

POSITION: LW

SHOOTS: LEFT

HEIGHT: 6-1.75

WEIGHT: 207

DOB: 1999-01-08

NATION: CANADA



SKATING	5
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	54

Going into the season Comtois was one of several Canadian prospects thought to have a chance to be selected in the top ten of the 2017 draft following a superb QMJHL rookie season in which he scored 60 points, and a solid two-way performance in the Ivan Hlinka tournament that included two shorthanded breakaway goals in the same game.

Fast forward nine months, however, and the bloom has very much fallen off of the Comtois rose after scoring fewer points than in his rookie season, and disappointing both his coaches and scouts alike with his underwhelming and undisciplined play at the U-18's.

"Where's the skill level?" asked a scout in late November. "Not seeing it for a guy who is supposed to be a top 15 pick. Really disappointing! His feet are on the heavy side and not as much skill as I thought."

Comtois split the season between center and

the wing, and scouts are also split on which position he should play at the NHL level. He has the work ethic and smarts to play center but significant concerns remain about his skating speed, and at the NHL level you need to be able to get back to cover the slot in the defensive zone.

"His skating will likely never be better than average but it should improve with strength," suggested one scout. "He looks to have a weak lower body because his stride breaks down during his shift."

Comtois looked a step behind the play and was guilty of taking several unnecessary penalties in the U18's that cost his team.

"He has to play with an edge but he went over the line for me," said one scout. "He didn't leave a very good impression on Team Canada personnel. I was talking to the coaches...they weren't thrilled with him."

46

GRANT MISMASH

TEAM: US-U18

LEAGUE: USNTDP

POSITION: LW

SHOOTS: LEFT

HEIGHT: 6-0

WEIGHT: 186

DOB: 1999-02-19

NATION: USA



SKATING	7
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	6
SENSE	7
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	54

Considered by some scouts to be the best US prospect at the start of the season due in large part to his relentless work ethic, through no fault of his own he was eventually surpassed by Josh Norris as it became apparent that the centerman had more offensive upside and overall value.

"Norris and Mismash are going to battle it out all year to be the best prospect on that team," noted one scout prophetically last December. "The U-18's will tell the tale. You have to like him for his competitive nature...he has decent skill too."

Mismash's game never changed; he still competed and put up decent point totals in U-18 events, including the year-ending World Championships where he finished top ten in scoring.

"He plays hard; he is what he is," said one scout who has ranked him in the 35-45 range

all season. "He's a good player but not highly skilled, he looks like a prototypical third-line guy. If he knows and plays like he looks maybe he has a better chance, but Norris looks like a better player upside-wise. His skating and puck skills are decent, but he is by no means explosive or dynamic."

One thing working in his favour will be his development path, having spent two seasons with the development program and committing to play in the highly-regarded University of North Dakota program next season

"You like that he has an edge to him," said one senior scout. "But what I really like is that he's going to North Dakota, where he will only get better if he does the off-ice work he need to do. I like his smarts, vision and skating, though. He has enough skills to play a third-line role I think, and that makes him a solid second-round pick."

47

NIKITA POPAGUEV

TEAM: PRINCE GEORGE COUGARS

LEAGUE: WHL

POSITION: LW

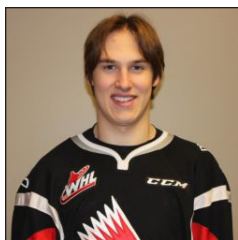
SHOOT: RIGHT

HEIGHT: 6-5.25

WEIGHT: 218

DOB: 1998-11-20

NATION: RUSSIA



SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	5
CHARACTER	5
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	54

The lanky Russian winger got off to a scintillating start, exploding out of the gates with 20 goals in his first 26 games and working his way into the top 20 of draft lists.

"He looked really good early," said one scout in December. "He's been dangerous in the games I saw, setting up lots of plays and showing off a great wristshot. Every game he's had at least one goal and set up a lot of scoring chances...his skating seems fine, especially once he's going."

Not all scouts were convinced that Popuguev was the real deal, even when he was producing close to a goal-per game.

"I'm hearing he's lazy," noted one NHL head scout. "He's a polarizing figure among scouts. The possibility is he becomes a bust. Of course I have time for him but he could be a complete bust."

That same head scout went to see him in January and was even less impressed than his

western scouts.

"I'd want more security in the first! His skating scares the crap out of me. He can't play with pace/high tempo, and he loses battles in tight. I wanna like him more but..."

Popuguev's last strong impression was at the Top Prospect's game, where he sprung Nico Hischier for a breakaway goal on a terrific saucer pass.

He faded badly after his torrid start, scoring just nine goals in his final 45 games, which included a trade to Prince George that left scouts scrambling to find out why a playoff contender would trade their second-leading scorer.

"You don't hear great things about his character," said a scout who expects Popuguev to be playing hockey back in Russia within two years. "It scares you when you see a big skilled guy... and you trade him?"

"The red flags went up."

48

JACK STUDNICKA

TEAM: OSHAWA GENERALS

LEAGUE: OHL

POSITION: C

SHOOT: RIGHT

HEIGHT: 6-0.5

WEIGHT: 170

DOB: 1999-02-18

NATION: CANADA



SKATING	6
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	54

It's been a bit of a topsy-turvy ride for the lanky centerman this season, starting off as a top 60 prospect who disappointed scouts early with his skating and consistency, but then redeeming himself in the playoffs with improved speed and effort as he picked up 15 points in ten games and was Oshawa's best forward through two rounds.

His strong finish earned him an invite to the U-18's, and he proceeded to score two goals in the first half of his first game for Canada, and ending up being the only Canadian player to score a goal-per-game in the tournament.

"He played well; he and Entwistle were Canada's best forwards," said a scout who had moved Studnicka out of his top 60, only to move him back up after his strong playoff and U-18 performance. "My only hiccup with him is his skating, but he's

got character, some skill, hockey sense...it's just that skating, but it will likely come. I don't have issues with his stride"

Scouts expect the lanky center to pick up where he left off in the OHL playoffs and become a productive center for the Generals next season who may challenge for a spot among the top ten OHL scoring leaders.

"I've always liked his game it's just that he's so weak," offered another crossover scout. "But he's got some things working for him, he's a smart player. I think he'll jump right out of the gate next year if he gets stronger this summer. He could come around and be a good offensive player. He had good puck skills, very good vision, and can shoot the puck. I liked him early but he struggled with injuries...at the end of the year I saw the player I thought he'd be."

49

JONAH GADJOVICH**TEAM: OWEN SOUND ATTACK****LEAGUE: OHL****POSITION: LW****SHOOTS: LEFT****HEIGHT: 6-1****WEIGHT: 198****DOB: 1998-10-12****NATION: CANADA**

SKATING	4
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	54

More than one scout remarked early in the season that the Owen Sound winger looked like he was 'skating with a piano on his back'. By season's end, however, they were no longer using that phrase. In fact...those same scouts now think of him as a "grand" prospect.

"You won't be wrong taking him in the mid second round," said one scout when informed that Recrutes has him ranked in the top 50. "He works so hard...he's old school almost. I'd love him in the third but you may have to step up for him."

"He's really tough, good along the boards and in front of the net. You don't have to worry about him going to the net...he's deadly. The skating is not good though, and that will keep him out of the top 40."

Early on there were scouts who weren't sure they'd even draft him, as he got off to a slow

start along with his team and was often a step or three behind the play. He kept working hard though, and when he was placed on a line with Nick Suzuki and Keven Hancock the trio jelled almost instantly and developed into one of the top lines in junior hockey.

"He willed himself into being a player through sheer determination and hard work," said Owen Sound assistant coach Alan Letang. "You see him after practice, and he's shooting hundreds of pucks every day. He knows exactly where he needs to be and scores goals, and he works on it every day."

"And his sense...if you don't have hockey sense you can't play with those other two guys. The team that drafts him...when they tell him 'we need you to go do this', you know what, he will find a way to get better at it...that's what I attribute to his success."

50

CALE FLEURY**TEAM: KOOTENAY ICE****LEAGUE: WHL****POSITION: D****SHOOTS: RIGHT****HEIGHT: 6-1.5****WEIGHT: 199****DOB: 1998-11-19****NATION: CANADA**

SKATING	7
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	7
SENSE	6
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	53

The sturdy blueliner was named captain of Kootenay in mid January, always impressive for a draft-eligible player, and a testament to his character and leadership traits. Brother of Carolina Hurricanes defence prospect Haydn, he may not possess his brother's speed but is no slouch in the skating department either.

"His skating and puck moving ability are his main assets," said one scout who likes him in the top 50. "He likes to join the rush. He also had one of the better performances by a defenceman in the Top Prospects Game."

That game ended up being an important one for Fleury as it was the only opportunity to see him perform with talented linemates. Kootenay was the worst team in the WHL this season, and Fleury wasn't even an original invite to the game in large part because teams weren't scouting Kootenay very often, and he was not

viewed much. That changed after the Prospects Game, and eastern crossover scouts who had originally not planned to see him made special trips to have another look in the second half of the season.

"It's not easy scouting him because that team is horrible," said one scout who didn't think Fleury's -61 rating would affect him on draft day. "Good size, skates well for his size, he shoots it okay. There's something there. He tries to make a difference even though they were horrible."

"He seems to move the puck pretty well, he gets a little bit caught up in watching the puck and sometimes drifts a little bit, some turnovers in the transition game, some little things he needs to work on. He's competitive. But it's not easy to rank him. One more year of junior and that team isn't very good...how much more will he develop before he turns pro?"

TEAM: SPRUCE GROVE SAINTS
HEIGHT: 5-11 WEIGHT: 173

LEAGUE: AJHL
DOB: 1999-01-18

POSITION: D SHOOTS: RIGHT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	8
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	6
SENSE	8
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	5
TOTAL	53

Scouts who flocked to the World Junior Challenge in December to get a look at Cale Makar ended up leaving the tournament quite impressed with his Canada West defence partner as well.

"He was very good at the WJAC," said one scout who thought he might be a first-round pick at the time. "Great feet...he's super smart too. Good puck mover, good defender, just has a light body but Denver will take care of that."

"He's been better than Makar recently. Not saying he's better than Makar but why such the big gap in draft stock?"

Like Makar, Mitchell also toiled in the AJHL and is a mobile undersized defenceman, so the comparisons were inevitable.

"At the CJHL top prospect game he was better than Makar," offered one scout. "He's not better than Makar...but there's definitely something there. He's a little bit of a lesser Makar...he's

actually a decent defender..but he's still small. He can skate, he's got really good puck skills. He can do everything with the puck, he can look guys off, he can skate, he does some physical things that a small guy needs to do."

Mitchell had 37 points in the AJHL, less than half of Makar's total, so the Makar comparables stopped coming as the season went on, especially after Mitchell's underwhelming playoff performance and play at the U-18's, the first true test of how he compares to his draft-eligible peers since last summer's Ivan Hlinka tournament.

"He was alright...a little smallish but he's quick and has got good hands," said one scout. "He didn't really produce a lot of offence. he's just a puck mover. A (Filip) Westerlund type. They gave him an opportunity with lots on powerplay time and such and I don't think he really ran with it. He didn't prove a whole lot."

TEAM: HAMILTON BULLDOGS
HEIGHT: 6-3.5 WEIGHT: 206

LEAGUE: OHL POSITION: LW SHOOTS: LEFT
DOB: 1999-01-06 NATION: CANADA



SKATING	5
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	8
SENSE	7
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	6
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	53

Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Strome has joined Nicolas Hague and Maxime Comtois as Canadian prospects once thought to be solid top-15 candidates that are expected to drop into the second round, and it's a good bet that none of them fall further than the Hamilton winger.

After scoring 29 goals in his first 47 games, Strome had six goals in his last 26 contests, including one goal in seven playoff games. Even more disconcerting was that a prospect who needed to improve his skating speed appeared to get slower as the season went on.

"He was by no means fast at the Ivan Hlinka last summer..but he looked a lot quicker than he did at the U-18's, where he was a turtle," said one scout who considered Strome to be a top-15 lock last autumn. "His feet are poor. You don't mind everything else, but it's a terrible stride, ugly to look at."

"Will it get better? I have no idea. He's got good hands and smarts...from the faceoff circle in he can do things when he has the puck, but when he doesn't have it...forget it."

Some scouts wondering about his commitment to conditioning as he appeared to gain weight as the season progressed.

"Usually a player will drop a few pounds during the season..and if they don't it's because they added some muscle. "That's not the case with Strome. It will be important for him to show up in decent shape at the Combine."

There are scouts who now vow that they wouldn't take Strome in the top two rounds, yet for some there is still the wonder on whether he might be able to piece it all together.

"I think he'll go in the 40's, he's pretty smart," said one scout. "If the skating ever comes you'll have a player."

53

DMITRI SAMORUKOV

TEAM: GUELPH STORM
HEIGHT: 6-2

LEAGUE: OHL
WEIGHT: 184

POSITION: D
DOB: 1999-06-16

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: RUSSIA



SKATING	8
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	6
SENSE	6
COMPETE	6
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	53

The smooth-skating blueliner was one of those European prospects who looked much better playing internationally than he did in Canadian junior...by no means an uncommon phenomenon, but also a quandary that will make it difficult for scouting staffs to correctly slot him for the upcoming draft.

After a good showing at the Ivan Hlinka tournament in August the 6-2 blueliner was expected to have a solid campaign in Guelph, but his transition to the North American junior game has had its rocky moments.

He started the season showing offensive promise before losing his confidence at both ends of the ice, turning over the puck regularly and trying to do too much and ending up caught out of position. It did not help that he was on one of the worst teams in the CHL.

"He can grab your attention, and then he does things. He doesn't come across as a very smart

player at times," said a scout. "He's got the skill level; he'll make a great play, and then all of a sudden he goes brain dead. He needs to be more consistent. Shift-to-shift he is inconsistent. He has the skill...hopefully it all comes together."

"I think most scouts feel 'I like him but there's something missing.' I think you have to be careful about considering him too high, if there's any sort of doubt there, the question will be will somebody step up for him?"

Samorukov was one of Russia's better players in the U-18's, keeping his defensive mistakes to a minimum while also producing some timely offence.

"That was a surprise for me," said a scout. "I thought he really struggled in Guelph. He was a pretty effective over there. I really wondered about his hockey sense in Guelph. I think the bigger ice helped him. I don't know if he goes in the second."

54

MARIO FERRARO

TEAM: DES MOINES BUCCANEERS
HEIGHT: 5-10.75

LEAGUE: USHL

POSITION: D
DOB: 1998-09-17

SHOOTS: LEFT
NATION: CANADA



SKATING	8
SKILLS	7
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	6
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	4
TOTAL	53

For an undersized defenceman who is a late birthday playing in the USHL to be ranked in some scouts' top 60 means he brings some special dynamics to the table. That is certainly the case for Ferraro.

"If one likes Makar he has to like Ferraro! Frickin' kid can skate and is INTENSE," texted one high-ranking NHL scout after seeing him in late March. "He looks like a top 60 prospect to me."

The stocky defenceman had 40 points in 51 games in the OJHL last season as an underager. He continued his impressive production with 41 points as a USHL rookie, the second-best total among all defencemen and 23 more points than the second-best rookie defenceman.

"What he accomplished production-wise in the USHL is rare for a first year draft-eligible rookie in the league," noted one USHL-based NHL scout. "Des Moines doesn't make playoffs without him."

Ferraro will join Cale Makar at UMass-Amherst on a team that should boast a dangerous power play. Scouts are intrigued by the pairing, figuring he will develop nicely working with another highly-talented blueliner with great puckhandling and skating skills

"He and Makar should tear it up right off the bat. He's a really good skater and a creative offensive defenceman; very aggressive and feisty too," said one scout. "Just small and high risk. He has NHL feet. A good puck mover who creates offence, and is physical. He plays 100 percent every shift. He takes the puck on the offence...a lot of upside."

"He is one of the best skaters in the draft. Good puck skills, high drive, high motor. If he's there in the second round we'd have to be considering him, with the way the game is going he may fit in with that skill set and puck-moving ability."



SKATING	7
SKILLS	5
PLAYMAKING	5
SHOT	6
SENSE	7
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	53

Entwistle had a great start and finish to his draft-eligible season. Unfortunately, when it comes to his draft stock, scouts cannot dismiss what happened in between.

After a solid showing at the Ivan Hlinka tournament and a blistering start to his OHL season with seven goals in his first nine games, Entwistle was talked about as a solid first-round candidate. Nice size, hard-working, diligent defensively, skates well, and puts pucks in the net. He looked like a solid all-around package.

In his final 46 OHL games however, the 6-2 pivot would score only five goals and have to deal with a concussion. Hopes that his offensive game was developing waned, and scouts dropped him out of top-40 consideration until his resurrection with a solid performance at the U-18's where he unexpectedly led Canada in scoring.

"He was the most consistent performer on Canada," said one head scout who likes his

character and work ethic off the ice. "He could go in the middle of the second round. I have a lot of time for him because of his growth potential. He only has average hands and lateral agility though, and he may end up being a winger. I'd say he has third-line upside."

Those are the main questions surrounding him...whether he'll be a pro winger or a center, and if he has enough skill to play a third-line role in the NHL.

"He's limited, but a good player; he works hard," said a Metropolitan division crossover scout. "Big body, works, clogs up the middle. I think he's a fourth line penalty killer. He was good at the U-18s, he was dedicated. He's a fourth line guy."

The one thing scouts can agree on is that Entwistle will play in the NHL, and expect to hear his name called before the end of the second round.



SKATING	7
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	6
SENSE	6
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	53

After a rookie season in which he failed to score a goal and had just four points, Gallant was off to another slow offensive start this season before catching fire in December with seven goals and 15 points in ten games and being named the OHL Player of the Month, going from a non-factor on NHL draft lists to a must-see in the span of a month.

The jury is still out on his pro offensive upside as many feel he's a third-line center at best, but that's light years ahead of where he was considered in November.

"He showed some offensive upside for me, strong skating stride, has some smarts," noted one scout who warmed up to Gallant quickly in the new year after not even having him on his list in the fall. "His puck skills aren't too bad, and he sees the ice pretty well. He'd be a decent pick later in the second round. He should be able to

play a shutdown center role and chip in the odd goal."

One issue with Gallant remains his offensive consistency, and his playoff production was a prime example of that.

After starting out strongly with six assists in his first three games Gallant would collect just two points in his next nine games and was relatively invisible in Peterborough's 4-0 loss to Mississauga.

He would not score a single goal in 12 playoff games, rising some concerns about his ability to step up in big games.

"He was just okay in the playoffs," said one scout who still likes him in the second round. "He may already be the best faceoff guy in the OHL, and that's such an important skill at the NHL level. That alone will endear him to coaches, along with his great work ethic."

SANTERI VIRTANEN**TEAM:** TPS TURKU**LEAGUE:** FIN-JR.**POSITION:** C**SHOOTS:** LEFT**HEIGHT:** 6-2**WEIGHT:** 190**DOB:** 1999-05-11**NATION:** FINLAND

Scouts first took notice of the 6-2 Finn last summer when he was a solid, all-purpose center for Finland at the Ivan Hlinka tournament, and were looking forward to scouting him in the USHL as he was slated to play for Dubuque.

Virtanen never made it over to North America after suffering a shoulder injury, however, and ended up appearing in only eight games in the U-20 Finnish junior league late in the season, picking up four goals and four assists, including two goals in three playoff matches.

North American scouts were quite pleased to find out that he was added to Finland's U-18 team in April, and he did not disappoint the scouting throng that had not seen him in eight months.

Once again he got the scouts' attention with his well-rounded game and attention to defence and competitiveness, and also scored

two impressive game-winning goals, one which came with his team shorthanded.

"I like Virtanen, he is a good player," said one scout that sees Virtanen going in the 50-70 range of the draft. "He's got some size, got some skill, his skating is going to be pretty good I think. A good two-way guy, kills penalties, he was even was on the power play a few times.

"You've got to remember this guy came out of nowhere because he was injured all year...he's not even where he needs to be yet, so outta sight outta mind. I'm glad that he ramped it up. I don't think he has a ton of speed yet but his mechanics are pretty good. I think it's just about playing and getting his power back. He lost that puck race with (Canadian forward) Stelio Mattheos that one time and it made you wonder about his speed, but I think his skating will be fine."

SKATING	6
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	6
SENSE	7
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	52

LUCAS ELVENES**TEAM:** ROGLE**LEAGUE:** SWE-JR.**POSITION:** C/RW**SHOOTS:** LEFT**HEIGHT:** 6-0.25**WEIGHT:** 173**DOB:** 1999-08-18**NATION:** SWEDEN

Scouts often have a soft spot for players with good hockey genes. There are few if any with a better hockey ancestry in this draft than Elvenes.

The versatile forward comes from a long line of hockey players, as his Norwegian grandfather played in the Swedish second division, then his father and two uncles played in the top Swedish elite league, and two of them, including his father, were drafted in the NHL.

Elvenes was highly regarded going into the season having excelled in U-17 events throughout 2015-16, so scouts were looking for more from the talented forward when they saw him in U-18 tournaments.

"He was disappointing," noted one scout after the Ivan Hlinka and first 5-Nations U-18 event of the season. "He skates too upright...he doesn't get any power in his skating drive. Some people might even have him in the first round but I don't see that."

He went pointless in a dozen SHL games for Rogle this season, but in the U-20 Swedish junior loop he was a force, scoring 45 points in 41 games, keeping scouts guessing on a proper ranking for the draft as he also continued to underwhelm in U-18 events.

"He was disappointing for me once again, he was soft," noted a scout in February. "He's got some skill. He's frustrating because he's got talent, but he doesn't always show it."

All of Sweden's forwards were underwhelming at the U-18's but Elvenes managed to make enough of an impression to keep himself in the discussion for the second round.

"He's got skill this guy," said one crossover scout. "Most of the year I thought third round but he's one of the few guys on Sweden that actually showed some skill. He has very good hands and good offensive sense. He's in and out with his competitiveness."

SKATING	7
SKILLS	8
PLAYMAKING	7
SHOT	7
SENSE	7
COMPETE	5
CHARACTER	5
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	52

DYLAN SAMBERG

TEAM: WATERLOO BLACK HAWKS
HEIGHT: 6-3

LEAGUE: USHL

POSITION: D

SHOOTS: LEFT

WEIGHT: 210

DOB: 1999-01-24

NATION: USA



SKATING	6
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	6
SENSE	6
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	6
SIZE FACTOR	8
TOTAL	51

When a US prospect moves from high school hockey to the USHL it doesn't always help the player's draft stock as it often proves to be a significant step up in competition.

The reverse seems to be true in the case of Samberg...who went from being a third-round prospect on a lot of draft lists to the top 60 in the last couple of months, in large part because he adapted well to being in a more defined role, and didn't think he had to be the star.

"I like him better in the USHL. There's more structure, even though he's a little raw," said one crossover scout. "He keeps it a little more simple. He moves the puck good, simply though. They put him on the powerplay, but I don't see him as a powerplay guy because it's not like he creates lanes, and probably an average shot for a big guy."

In high school Samberg was the go-to guy offensively, so he took on that role even if it wasn't an ideal one for him. Scouts had definite concerns with his decision-making when they kept seeing mistakes at that level.

"I think I like him better as a penalty killer, he's got a good long reach," noted one talent evaluator. "I still think he's got to work on his mobility and that. His skating is not great. I'd say it's average for a big guy. It's not a real fluid stride, not the type of guy that can skate all day. It looked better at the high school level."

Despite varying opinions on his skating abilities, most scouts do agree that he's likely to be selected in the second round.

"He'll get a little more time to develop than junior guys...he'll have three or four years, which will help his draft stock."

STELIO MATHEOS

TEAM: BRANDON WHEAT KINGS
HEIGHT: 6-0.25

LEAGUE: WHL

POSITION: C/RW

SHOOTS: RIGHT

WEIGHT: 189

DOB: 1999-06-14

NATION: CANADA



SKATING	7
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	7
SENSE	6
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	6
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	51

He was given the chance to play a top-center role when Nolan Patrick was out for most of the first half of the season and had mediocre results, posting average numbers considering his ice time and opportunity.

Matheos looked more comfortable on the wing alongside Patrick in a supporting role as the season went on, and then had a decent performance playing on the wing on Canada's top line at the U-18 tournament.

"He surprised me at the U-18's, his skating was better than I thought," said one scout. "He may have the upside to be a complementary offensive player, but don't expect him to ever lead the charge. They played the crap out of him. He was good...his game is down low. He does well cycling the puck down low and making plays. He worked hard, got some things done with hard work, a complementary winger of some sort."

Where he gets selected on draft may well depend on what a team thinks of his skating ability as not all scouts can agree on it.

"He's not a 200-foot player because his skating is not good enough," said one scout. "A bit like Andrew Brunette used to be."

Not all scouts have that stance, however.

"I think he skates fine," said another. "He has good straight-ahead speed."

Regardless, Matheos has never quite lived up to the hype of being a first overall pick in the WHL bantam draft even if 2014 wasn't a great draft year out west.

"He was okay at the Ivan Hlinka last summer, but certainly not anything close to what I was expecting given how high he was drafted and talked about," said one eastern-based scout. "He did play well at the U-18's though...he showed a strong work ethic. He's going to go in the second round."



SKATING	5
SKILLS	6
PLAYMAKING	6
SHOT	7
SENSE	6
COMPETE	8
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	6
TOTAL	51

Zablocki got caught in the numbers' game on the high-powered Regina team this season, but after netting just nine in 33 games with the Pats he was dealt to Red Deer, where he scored 19 goals in 31 games. A gritty, stocky winger who isn't afraid to drop his gloves, he will need to keep working on his agility and quickness if he hopes to play a bottom-line energy/scoring role in the NHL.

"He may be the toughest player in the draft," said one scout. "He can really hit and handle himself in the pugilistic department. He has been awesome the past two playoffs...he led a stacked Regina team as an underage and then scored key goals for Red Deer on their surprise playoff run."

The stats back that up. Zablocki in 18 career playoff games has scored 13 goals, and in his first two WHL seasons, he almost cracked the 100 penalty-minute mark both seasons while

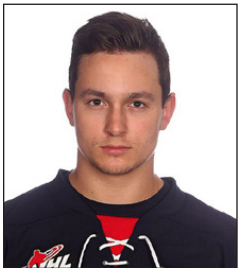
getting in several fights.

"He's alright, he hits people, he scores the odd goal," said another scout. "There are issues with his agility, though. He's a grinder, but you have to love his competitiveness and that he scored big goals in the playoffs. It's just his skating that's an issue."

Zablocki quickly became a favourite of Red Deer coach Brent Sutter, which surprised no one given his combative style that even ended up with him getting suspended for a hit from behind in the playoffs.

"He plays right on the edge," said one eastern conference scout. "He reminds me of Andrew Shaw in that regard, and also with how he lifts his game come playoff time."

"I like him; I think he's underrated. I could see him getting picked in the third round, and a lot of teams looking back and wishing they had taken him earlier."



SKATING	8
SKILLS	5
PLAYMAKING	5
SHOT	6
SENSE	6
COMPETE	7
CHARACTER	7
SIZE FACTOR	7
TOTAL	51

The mobile rearguard was highly touted and had a steady flow of scouts going to see him throughout the season despite his disappointing offensive total. Crotty ended up with fewer points than he accumulated as a CCHL rookie, and a player who at season's start was considered a top-40 possibility fell out of favour in some scouting circles.

"In the defensive zone he has issues with his defensive hockey sense," said one scout. "I don't know if it's the system they play, he seems to be chasing all the time. And with puck retrieval, he didn't do well under pressure. He didn't take a look where he should move the puck, then he went back and got it, it was chaos."

Brockville was not an offensive team so his low point totals didn't scare off some scouts, who still liked his ability to rush the puck and get it to the net with a decent shot and ability to find

lanes. He has the size/skating combo that teams will always crave and hope can be moulded into a significant pro role.

"He's going to a great program (Boston University) and they'll work with him on his offensive game and decision-making in his own zone. Yes, he is raw but the great thing about him going to college is that you'll have four years before you have to sign him and let him turn pro. By then you may have a gem."

Crotty's exclusion from Canada's U-18 roster came as a disappointment to several scouts that thought he deserved an invitation.

"I don't know why he wasn't invited to play in the U-18's, he was better than some of the guys they took over there," said one scout. "You can't tell me that his speed wouldn't have been a welcome addition on the big ice. He deserved to be there"

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

63 ALEX LIPANOV

TEAM: BALASHIKHA LEAGUE: RUS-JR.
POSITION: C SHOOTS: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-0.25 WEIGHT: 169
DOB: 1999-08-17 NATION: RUSSIA

The skilled Russian pivot impressed scouts at the U-18's and Ivan Hlinka last year, and then starred at the WJAC championships this past December playing on a line with 2018 draft phenom Andrei Svechnikov. Unfortunately, his U-18 showing this April was poor, and last impressions are often the most important. He could be a wildcard on draft day.

65 OSTAP SAFIN

TEAM: SPARTA PRAHA LEAGUE: CZECH-JR.
POSITION: RW SHOOTS: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 6-5 WEIGHT: 192
DOB: 1999-02-11
NATION: CZECH REPUBLIC

Safin is huge, can skate, and handle the puck, has a hard shot, yet at four levels of Czech hockey this season at the end of February he had a grand total of eight goals. He doesn't always work hard enough, nor is he particularly brave for a prospect who is 6-5. Had a better effort at the U-18's

67 FILIP WESTERLUND

TEAM: FROLUNDA LEAGUE: SHL
POSITION: D SHOOTS: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 5-11 WEIGHT: 174
DOB: 1999-04-17 NATION: SWEDEN

He is already a regular in the top four on Frolunda's blueline, so it surprised scouts to see the 5-11 defenceman playing on the bottom pairing in U-18 events behind 16-year-olds, often playing a defensive role even though he lacks the strength and size to be overly effective in the corners or in front of the net.

64 DAVID FARRANCE

TEAM: US-U18 LEAGUE: USHL
POSITION: D SHOOTS: LEFT
HEIGHT: 5-11.25 WEIGHT: 195
DOB: 1999-06-23 NATION: CANADA

In a year with several highly-rated defencemen that are under 6-0, Farrance is the USNTDP's version, and while he is similar to the top ones in that he is an elite skater, he will have to clean up the defensive part of his game. Scouts like him but were frustrated with the limited ice time he received most of the season.

66 SCOTT REEDY

TEAM: US-U18 LEAGUE: USNTDP
POSITION: C SHOOTS: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 6-1 WEIGHT: 200
DOB: 1999-04-04 NATION: USA

There are differing opinions on the USNTDP winger regarding his vision and skating, with the main knock being that he doesn't always utilize his linemates properly. He has some pucks skills, and will have lots of time to work on all parts of his game at the University of Minnesota starting next season.

68 STUART SKINNER

TEAM: LETHBRIDGE HURRICANES
LEAGUE: WHL
POSITION: G CATCHES: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-3.5 WEIGHT: 199
DOB: 1998-11-01 NATION: CANADA

Touted by some in the summer as a possible first-round pick as he already had two seasons under his belt in Lethbridge as the starting goalie, including a .920 save percentage in 2015-16. His save percentage dropped to .905 range and he let in a half goal more per game in 2016-17, but redeemed himself somewhat with a strong playoff run.

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

69 SCOTT WALFORD

TEAM: VICTORIA ROYALS LEAGUE: WHL
POSITION: D SHOOT: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-1.5 WEIGHT: 193
DOB: 1999-01-12 NATION: CANADA

Victoria's first-round bantam pick from 2015 rose the charts at season's end. A thick, strong blueliner with some aggressiveness in his defending along with impressive mobility, Walford was given an expanded offensive role after Chaz Reddekopp was injured, and he ended the season scoring 14 points in his final 13 contests.

70 EEMILI RASANEN

TEAM: KINGSTON FRONTENACS
LEAGUE: OHL
POSITION: D SHOOT: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 6-6.75 WEIGHT: 214
DOB: 1999-03-06 NATION: FINLAND

The 6-7 blueliner's adjustment to North American hockey had a few bumps along the way as he tried to carve an identity. He won't be a dangler who brings folks out of their seats with offensive skills but has okay mobility, smarts and a heavy shot. While not a bruiser physically, he has a good stick and plays sound positionally.

71 ROBIN SALO

TEAM: SPORT LEAGUE: FHL
POSITION: D SHOOT: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-1.25 WEIGHT: 189
DOB: 1998-10-13 NATION: FINLAND

The steady blueliner played a ton for one of the top teams in the FHL this past season, and while he may not have great skating skills or flashy offensive tools, his smarts, competitiveness and poise grew on the scouting community as the season went on, making him a decent bet to be selected somewhere in the 80-100 range.

72 BEN MIRAGEAS

TEAM: CHICAGO STEEL LEAGUE: USHL
POSITION: D SHOOT: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-1 WEIGHT: 174
DOB: 1999-05-08 NATION: USA

His trade to the Chicago Steel breathed life into his game, as Mirageas went from scoring ten points in 45 games for Bloomington to equalling that amount in the playoffs alone for the Clark Cup champions, and totaling 19 points in 24 games with the Steel. A mobile puck-moving defenceman with decent size and defensive game.

73 ALEXEI TOROPCHENKO

TEAM: BALASHIKHA LEAGUE: MHL
POSITION: RW SHOOT: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-3 WEIGHT: 187
DOB: 1999-06-25 NATION: RUSSIA

The 6-3 winger made his first big impression on the scouts in February at the 5 Nations Cup as it soon became apparent that his game had evolved since the Ivan Hlinka, where he went scoreless. "Torpedo" demonstrated a powerful stride and honest work ethic at the U-18 in addition to showing of some deft passing skills.

74 NICK HENRY

TEAM: REGINA PATS LEAGUE: WHL
POSITION: RW SHOOT: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 5-11 WEIGHT: 189
DOB: 1999-07-04 NATION: CANADA

He's shorter than the average NHL forward and doesn't possess great speed or dynamic puck skills, but when you can score more than a point-per-game as a WHL rookie and work your way into the top six of what is perhaps the deepest offensive team in the CHL, scouts take a notice. Smart, and can score goals.

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

75 ADAM RUZICKA

TEAM: SARNIA STING LEAGUE: OHL
POSITION: C SHOOTS: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-3.5 WEIGHT: 208
DOB: 1999-05-11 NATION: SLOVAKIA

One of the more highly-regarded Slovakian prospects in recent times going into his draft year after solid performances internationally, Ruzicka struggled to adjust to the North American game, in particular when it came to displaying a consistent work ethic and looking after his defensive duties. Ruzicka has pro-level size, puck skills and shot.

76 ANTOINE MORAND

TEAM: ACADIE-BATHURST TITAN
LEAGUE: QMJHL
POSITION: C SHOOTS: LEFT
HEIGHT: 5-10 WEIGHT: 175
DOB: 1999-02-18 NATION: CANADA

It was a topsy-turvy season for the talented pivot that saw him have both productive stretches and scoring droughts, bringing into question his ability to play with consistency even though his work ethic is not a major concern. He has good pucks skills a hard shot and above-average hockey sense, but his size will hurt him on draft day.

77 MARCUS DAVIDSSON

TEAM: DJURGARDENS LEAGUE: SHL
POSITION: LW, C SHOOTS: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-0 WEIGHT: 191
DOB: 1998-11-18 NATION: SWEDEN

After a quick start on Djurgardens' junior club, he joined his brother Jonathan on the men's team and looked quite good in the fall playing the wing on the third line with his brother and Lukas Vejdemo. The speedy forward's play and production fell off, not showing a lot of offensive upside or creativity.

78 UKKO-PEKKA LUUKKONEN

TEAM: HPK JR. LEAGUE: FIN-JR.
POSITION: G CATCHES: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-4.25 WEIGHT: 197
DOB: 1999-03-09 NATION: FINLAND

Thought by many scouts at season's start to be a strong candidate to be the first goalie chosen in the draft, the tall Finnish netminder hurt his cause with several mediocre outings in U-18 action this season. He needed to bounce back at the U-18's to climb back into top 60 consideration, and he failed to do so.

79 GUSTAV LINDSTROM

TEAM: ALMTUNA LEAGUE: SWE-2
POSITION: D SHOOTS: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 6-1 WEIGHT: 185
DOB: 1998-10-20 NATION: SWEDEN

It became apparent quite early in his junior season that he was ready to graduate to the Allsvenskan as he scored six goals in his first six games. He caught the attention of scouts at the U-19 tournament in Switzerland in February as he led all defencemen in scoring and showed off his puck skills. A draft riser.

80 JARRET TYSZKA

TEAM: SEATTLE THUNDERBIRDS
LEAGUE: WHL
POSITION: D SHOOTS: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-2 WEIGHT: 187
DOB: 1999-03-15 NATION: CANADA

The former first-round Seattle draft pick got lots of opportunity on a veteran Thunderbirds' blueline, playing top-four minutes on many nights and power-play time. He brings good size and mobility even if there are some concerns with his puck decisions and positioning in the defensive zone. Needs to keep it simple and get stronger.

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

81 MAX GILDON

TEAM: US-U18

POSITION: D

HEIGHT: 6-3

DOB: 1999-05-17

LEAGUE: USNTDP

SHOOTS: LEFT

WEIGHT: 191

NATION: USA

The rangy blueliner has seen his stock fluctuate this season, but fortunately the last look scouts got was positive as he scored four goals in helping lead the US to another U-18 championship. The physical skills were never in question – tall, mobile, good puck skills and shot – the concerns have been with the mental part of his game.

82 JAKE LESCHYSHYN

TEAM: REGINA PATS

POSITION: C

HEIGHT: 5-10.75

DOB: 1999-03-10

LEAGUE: WHL

SHOOTS: LEFT

WEIGHT: 189

NATION: CANADA

After starting the season with 24 points in 17 games in a top-two center role, Curtis' son was getting some buzz as a possible first-round pick despite being under 5-11. After collecting 16 points in his next 30 games and a subpar Top Prospects Game his draft stock sharply dropped. His season ended Feb. 3 after tearing up his knee.

83 OLLE ERIKSSON EK

TEAM: FARJESTAD JR.

POSITION: G

HEIGHT: 6-2.5

DOB: 1999-06-22

LEAGUE: SWE-JR.

CATCHES: LEFT

WEIGHT: 178

NATION: SWEDEN

The Swedish netminder is one of a half dozen draft-eligible goalies who was very highly regarded going into the season only to see his stock plummet as he has failed to perform up to expectations in any of his U-18 appearances, including being clearly outplayed by his much less heralded teammate Adam Ahman in the last two U-18 events.

84 CAYDEN PRIMEAU

TEAM: LINCOLN STARS

POSITION: G

HEIGHT: 6-2

DOB: 1999-08-11

LEAGUE: USHL

CATCHES: LEFT

WEIGHT: 186

NATION: USA

Keith's son has been on the scouting radar the past couple of seasons and highly regarded going into last summer's U-18s, where he disappointed those who had him penciled in as a top 40 prospect. He hasn't been lights out this season either, but given his size, natural abilities and bloodlines, many are willing to give him some leeway.

85 IVAN LODNIA

TEAM: ERIE OTTERS

POSITION: RW

HEIGHT: 5-10.5

DOB: 1999-08-31

LEAGUE: OHL

SHOOTS: RIGHT

WEIGHT: 186

NATION: USA

He played most of the first two months with Raddysh and had 41 points in his first 38 games. When Strome returned Lodnia scored 6 goals and 16 points in his last 28 games, and then just had two points in 22 playoffs games. Scouts cooled on the undersized forward as the season went on, citing skating concerns.

86 LIAM HAWEL

TEAM: GUELPH STORM

POSITION: C

HEIGHT: 6-3.5

DOB: 1999-04-18

LEAGUE: OHL

SHOOTS: RIGHT

WEIGHT: 179

NATION: CANADA

Hopes were high for the former first-round pick to start to blossom in his second season in the Soo but he got caught in the numbers game and ended up playing most of the season out of position on the wing before being dealt to Guelph at the trade deadline. Scouts like his size and raw talent.

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

87 JACK RATHBONE

TEAM: DEXTER HS LEAGUE: USHS
POSITION: D SHOOT: LEFT
HEIGHT: 5-10.5 WEIGHT: 171
DOB: 1999-05-20 NATION: USA

One of the draft's big risers remained in relative anonymity because he was toiling in Massachusetts' high school hockey. Scouts took notice of his terrific mobility and competitiveness, however. Heading to Harvard in 2018-19, there was considerable buzz starting around this darkhorse prospect even if some scouts still have their misgivings about his hockey sense.

88 ALEXANDRE TEXIER

TEAM: GRENOBLE LEAGUE: FRANCE
POSITION: C SHOOT: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-0 WEIGHT: 174
DOB: 1999-09-13 NATION: FRANCE

The young phenom from France set records in the U-18 league as a 16-year-old and turned heads as a 17-year-old in the France men's league playoffs, collecting eight points (including a five-point game) in his first-round series. Just three days shy of being eligible for the 2018 NHL draft, many teams scouted him in the U-18 B pool in April.

89 MATTHEW VILLALTA

TEAM: SAULT STE. MARIE GREYHOUNDS
LEAGUE: OHL
POSITION: G CATCHES: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-2 WEIGHT: 170
DOB: 1999-06-03 NATION: CANADA

The OHL rookie ended up winning the starting job from NHL draft pick Joseph Raaymakers by the end of the season with superior numbers and performance. He began the playoffs as Soo's starter, got pulled in the second game and never saw the ice again. Scouts like his upside...he'll go higher than most expect.

90 SASHA CHMELEVSKI

TEAM: OTTAWA 67'S LEAGUE: OHL
POSITION: C SHOOT: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 5-11.25 WEIGHT: 178
DOB: 1999-06-09 NATION: USA

The draft year started out with so much promise for the Russian-American after he led the US with nine points in four games at the Ivan Hlinka. Chmelevski disappointed with both his production and performance as the number-one center, and is in danger of falling out of the top 90 with his skating concerns after ending the regular season on the third line.

91 KASPER KOTKANSALO

TEAM: SIOUX FALLS STAMPEDE
LEAGUE: USHL
POSITION: D SHOOT: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-2.5 WEIGHT: 196
DOB: 1998-11-16 NATION: FINLAND

One of those prospects that always seems to play better internationally for his country than in league play. Played in the Feb. U-19 tournament in Switzerland and had more goals in one game than he did in 44 USHL contests. Lacks offensive upside but has the size, straight-line quickness and smarts to compete for a bottom-pairing NHL job after attending Boston University.

92 MAXIM ZHUKOV

TEAM: GREEN BAY GAMBLERS
LEAGUE: USHL
POSITION: G CATCHES: LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-2 WEIGHT: 193
DOB: 1999-07-22 NATION: RUSSIA

The Russian netminder was excellent at last year's U-17 tournament, and then not so good in the U-18's. Highly touted at the start of the season as loads of scouts went to Green Bay to see teammate Casey Mittelstadt and also ended up leaving impressed with Zhukov. Athletic and promising, but has to stop letting in easy goals.

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

93 ZACHARY LAUZON

TEAM: ROUYN-NORANDA HUSKIES
LEAGUE: QMJHL
POSITION: D
SHOOTS: L
HEIGHT: 6-0
WEIGHT: 170
DOB: 1998-10-10
NATION: RUSSIA

Jeremy's younger brother followed up a trip to the Memorial Cup finals and a spot on the QMJHL All-Rookie team with another solid season that landed him the Kevin Lowe Award as the league's top defensive defenceman. Not as offensively gifted as Jeremy, Lauzon takes care of his own end with smarts, poise and competitiveness.

95 REILLY WALSH

TEAM: PROCTOR ACADEMY LEAGUE: USHS
POSITION: D
SHOOTS: RIGHT
HEIGHT: 5-10.75
WEIGHT: 183
DOB: 1999-04-21
NATION: USA

The skilled offensive defenceman went back to play high school hockey for his father's team after 17 games in the USHL and lit it up with more than two points per game. With the high school season over he rejoined the Chicago Steel in the USHL and turning some heads with his passing skills. He'll be attending Harvard in the fall.

97 EMIL OKSANEN

TEAM: ESPOO
POSITION: LW/RW
HEIGHT: 6-1
DOB: 1998-09-25
LEAGUE: FIN-2
SHOOTS: RIGHT
WEIGHT: 190
NATION: FINLAND

The skilled sniper has disappointed this season with spotty effort and work ethic after being considered by some scouts last summer to be a top-40 prospect. He knows how to score goals, and will need to continue to do so to be picked in the top three rounds. He has the skill to vie for a second-line winger position some day.

94 JONAS RONDBJERG

TEAM: VAXJO
POSITION: RW
HEIGHT: 6-1.75
DOB: 1999-03-31
LEAGUE: SWE-JR.
SHOOTS: LEFT
WEIGHT: 193
NATION: DEN-MARK

The World Juniors were an eye opener for a lot of scouts who didn't have Rondbjerg on their radar for the draft, especially when the team overachieved and gave much more highly-regarded opponents a run for their money. The Danish winger displayed decent skills, sense, competitiveness and an ability to cycle the puck and protect the puck against older opponents.

96 KIRILL SLEPETS

TEAM: YAROSLAVL
POSITION: RW
HEIGHT: 5-10
DOB: 1999-04-06
LEAGUE: MHL
SHOOTS: LEFT
WEIGHT: 165
NATION: RUSSIA

A productive scorer for Russia internationally as a 16-year-old and high on some independent lists going into his draft year, Slepets disappointed scouts for the most part this season and dropped on most lists. At 5-10 there were already size concerns, so he's a longshot to be selected in the top three rounds despite his talent.

98 EVAN BARRATT

TEAM: US-U18
POSITION: C
HEIGHT: 5-11
DOB: 1999-02-18
LEAGUE: USNTDP
SHOOTS: LEFT
WEIGHT: 181
NATION: USA

The USNTDP's second-line center filled an all-purpose role for the club, scoring and setting up important goals, killing penalties and winning key faceoffs. What he lacks in foot speed he makes up for with keen anticipation and hockey sense, making him a solid candidate to be selected in the draft's top 100 even if he doesn't meet scouts' ideal height/speed criterion.

2017 NHL DRAFT RANKINGS

99 DAYTON RASMUSSEN

TEAM: CHICAGO STEEL **LEAGUE:** USHL
POSITION: G **CATCHES:** LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-0.5 **WEIGHT:** 198
DOB: 1998-11-27 **NATION:** USA

The 6-1 University of Denver commit was enjoying a solid sophomore season in Tri-City before being traded to Chicago, where he ended up being the backup to Alex Stezka, who led the Steel to the Clark Cup championship. Rasmussen only played six games in Chicago, but scouts like his competitiveness and work ethic on top of his natural athleticism.

100 D'ARTAGNAN JOLY

TEAM: BAIE COMEAU DRAKKAR
LEAGUE: QMJHL
POSITION: RW **SHOOTS:** LEFT
HEIGHT: 6-2.5 **WEIGHT:** 175
DOB: 1999-04-07 **NATION:** CANADA

Michael Joly's big little brother has all the tools to one day compete for an NHL job, but the key word is compete. No issues with his height, skating, puck skills or shot, and if he ever learns to show more willingness to get his nose dirty along with adding some much-needed muscle, the wiry winger has NHL upside.

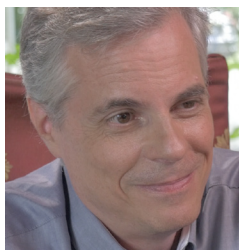
HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Michael Anderson	D	Waterloo	USHL
Jonatan Asplund	D	Djurgardens	SWE-U20
Emil Bemstrom	LW	Leksands	SWE-U20
Noah Cates	C	Stillwater HS	USHS
Jocktan Chainey	D	Halifax	QMJHL
Ivan Chekhovich	LW	Baie Comeau	QMJHL
Antoine Crete-Belzile	C	Blainville-Boisbriand	QMJHL
Brendan de Jong	D	Portland	WHL
Bobby Dow	RW	Kemptville	CCHL
Jonathan Dugan	C	Northwood Prep	USHS
Max Fortier	RW	Halifax	QMJHL
Jakub Galvas	D	Olomouc	CZE
Leon Gawanke	D	Cape Breton	QMJHL
Noel Hoefenmayer	D	Ottawa	OHL
Jan Hladonik	C	Trinec	CZE-U20
Rickard Hugg	C	Leksands	SWE-U20
Ben Jones	C	Niagara	OHL
Michael Karow	D	Youngstown	USHL
Austen Keating	RW	Ottawa	OHL
Nate Knoepke	D	USNTDP	USHL
Pavel Koltygin	LW	Drummondville	QMJHL
Ivan Kosorenkov	LW	Shawinigan	QMJHL
Filip Krivosik	RW	HPK	CZE-U20
Kirill Maksimov	LW	Niagara	OHL
Luke Martin	D	U of Michigan	NCAA

Ryan McGregor	C	Sarnia	OHL
Bryce Mисley	C	Oakville	OJHL
Oliver Gatz Nielsen	D	Herning	DEN
David Noel	D	Val d'Or	QMJHL
Kyle Olson	C	Tri-City	WHL
Jacob Paquette	D	Kingston	OHL
Michael Pastujov	LW	USNTDP	USHL
Clayton Phillips	D	Fargo	USHL
Markus Phillips	D	Owen Sound	OHL
Nate Schnarr	C	Guelph	OHL
Ian Scott	G	Prince Albert	WHL
Mason Shaw	C	Medicine Hat	WHL
Pavel Shen	C	Mamonty Yugry	MHL
Calle Sjalín	D	Östersunds	SWE-Div1
Tyler Steenbergen	RW	Swift Current	WHL
Marian Studenic	W	Hamilton	OHL
Max Sushko	RW	Owen Sound	OHL
Filip Sveningsson	LW	HV71	SWE-U20
Joel Teasdale	C	Blainville-Broisbriand	QMJHL
Adam Thilander	D	North Bay	OHL
Alex Volkov	RW	St. Petersburg	MHL
Tomas Vomacka	G	Corpus Christi	NAHL
Sebastian Walfridsson	D	Modo	SWE-U20
Linus Weissbach	LW	Tri-City	USHL
Fabian Zetterlund	RW	Farjestads	SWE-U20



UN TOP 31 ALTERNATIF



**PAR SIMON
BOISVERT**

Selon plusieurs observateurs, le repêchage 2017 est plutôt faible. Cette affirmation est probablement fondée sur l'absence de grandes vedettes comme celles des deux dernières années. Sauf que la qualité d'un repêchage ne peut être jugée uniquement en fonction des deux ou trois meilleurs joueurs disponibles.

Cette cuvée comporte bon nombre de joueurs intéressants, mais l'écart entre ceux-ci est tellement mince que l'ordre dans lequel les joueurs seront choisis est difficile à prédire. Mon classement est personnel et ne constitue pas un repêchage simulé. Ce serait la liste que j'apporterais à la table de repêchage si j'étais responsable du recrutement pour une équipe de la LNH.

Ma liste exclut quelques joueurs qui seront appelés en première ronde, car pour moi, ce sont des joueurs dont le potentiel ultime est plus ou moins élevé, et on doit plutôt viser des coups de circuit en première ronde et non des futurs joueurs de troisième trio ou des défenseurs de troisième paire. L'ordre dans lequel j'ai classé les joueurs reflète également ce principe.

En tête de liste, Cale Makar, un splendide défenseur offensif d'une grande mobilité qui peut contrôler un match. Makar a évolué dans

un circuit de calibre inférieur et cela fait en sorte que ses chances d'être choisi au premier rang sont pratiquement nulles. Mais il pourrait s'avérer le meilleur joueur du repêchage. Il n'y a pas d'attaquant générationnel cette année, alors c'est le moment idéal pour choisir un défenseur. Mon deuxième choix, Miro Heiskanen, n'est pas aussi flamboyant que Makar, mais il est plus complet, et devrait être un général à la ligne bleue d'une équipe pendant 12 à 15 ans.

Les quatorze joueurs suivants sont des attaquants. Nico Hischier se démarque, mais quelques autres ont retenu mon attention. Owen Tippett est le meilleur marqueur naturel du repêchage, Cody Glass est un excellent fabricant de jeux, et Robert Thomas est extrêmement sous-estimé. Thomas sera probablement sélectionné entre le 15^e et le 25^e rang, mais à mon avis, son potentiel est beaucoup plus élevé. Son jeu offensif semble passer inaperçu parce qu'il est très responsable défensivement. Joueur intelligent, il possède un excellent coup de patin et un bel arsenal de feintes. Mon coup de cœur du repêchage 2017.

Parlons maintenant de Nolan Patrick. Contrairement à la très grande majorité des observateurs, je ne peux classer Patrick dans

UN TOP 31 ALTERNATIF

mon top 2 ou 3. Je n'ai aucun doute qu'il connaîtra une bonne carrière dans la LNH, cependant, il n'est pas assez dynamique et dominant pour mériter un classement plus élevé. Bon joueur dans les trois zones et possédant une bonne vision du jeu, Patrick devrait être éventuellement un solide centre numéro deux, mais je préfère le potentiel des six joueurs que j'ai classés avant lui.

Par la suite, il y a quelques attaquants dont le rang est assez interchangeable, car ils comportent tous des points d'interrogation. Par exemple, Gabe Vilardi est un véritable poison à 30 pieds et moins du filet, mais son coup de patin me laisse perplexe, surtout à une époque où la vitesse prévaut. Dans ce groupe, Joni Ikonen fait partie de mon top 10, alors qu'il sera probablement choisi en deuxième ronde. Il n'a pas un physique très imposant, mais ses mains et son dynamisme font de lui un coup de circuit potentiel. Parmi les petits joueurs ultra-talentueux de 2017, Ikonen est celui qui m'impressionne le plus.

Mes joueurs 15 à 24 devraient tous, à une exception près, être sélectionnés en première ronde. Alexei Lipanov sera choisi à un rang plus éloigné, mais pour moi, on le sous-estime. Il a offert une excellente performance au Championnat mondial junior A contre des adversaires majoritairement plus âgés que lui. À surveiller également Jaret Anderson-Dolan, marqueur émérite qui suit une courbe d'amélioration exponentielle.

Les sept derniers joueurs de ma première ronde sont des coups de cœur pour diverses raisons. Safin est un peu énigmatique, mais son talent est sans équivoque. Formenton joue à Londonausein d'une équipe talentueuse, alors il n'a pas obtenu le temps de glace nécessaire pour se mettre davantage en évidence. Rapide patineur, il est aussi

LISTE TOP 31 DE SIMON

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Cale Makar | 17. Erik Brannstrom |
| 2. Miro Heiskanen | 18. Timothy Liljegren |
| 3. Nico Hischier | 19. Nick Suzuki |
| 4. Owen Tippett | 20. Jaret Anderson-Dolan |
| 5. Robert Thomas | 21. Ryan Poehling |
| 6. Cody Glass | 22. Michael Rasmussen |
| 7. Nolan Patrick | 23. Lias Andersson |
| 8. Eeli Tolvanen | 24. Kailer Yamamoto |
| 9. Joni Ikonen | 25. Ostap Safin |
| 10. Martin Necas | 26. Alex Formenton |
| 11. Kristian Vesalainen | 27. Ivan Lodnia |
| 12. Elias Pettersson | 28. Grant Mismash |
| 13. Gabe Vilardi | 29. Max Gildon |
| 14. Casey Mittelstadt | 30. David Farrance |
| 15. Klim Kostin | 31. Alexander Volkov |
| 16. Alexei Lipanov | |

l'un des plus jeunes joueurs admissibles au repêchage. Lodnia démontre de belles habiletés offensives. Mismash est moins spectaculaire, mais la transition vers les pros devrait se faire en douceur pour lui. Futur joueur top 9. Quant aux deux défenseurs américains, Gildon et Farrance, le potentiel offensif est là, mais Gildon doit être plus constant et Farrance doit améliorer son jeu défensif. À suivre dans la NCAA.

Finalement, mon 31^e choix, Alexander Volkov, peut sembler surprenant. Volkov était admissible aux repêchages de 2015 et 2016, mais n'a pas été sélectionné. Habituellement, ce type de joueur m'intéresse plus ou moins, et surtout, je ne le classe pas aussi haut. D'ailleurs, je serais surpris que Volkov soit choisi avant la troisième ou la quatrième ronde. Mais ce joueur-là peut être tellement dominant contre des jeunes de son âge qu'il est difficile de l'ignorer. Une carte cachée qui, espérons-le, saura trouver preneur en juin.

J'ai omis dans mon top 31 quelques joueurs qui seront probablement choisis en première ronde : Nicholas Hague, Cal Foote, Juuso Valimaki, Isaac Ratcliffe, entre autres. Ça ne veut pas dire que ces gars-là n'auront pas une bonne carrière, mais tout simplement qu'il faut faire des choix, et je préfère y aller avec le potentiel que le rendement actuel en fin de première ronde.

Parmi les joueurs intéressants susceptibles d'être disponibles dans les rondes ultérieures, en plus de ceux que j'ai inclus dans mon top 31, mentionnons Antoine Morand, un attaquant petit format mais très talentueux, Henri Jokiharu, défenseur offensif, et Jonas Rondbjerg, un ailier danois habile et ayant une bonne éthique de travail. Deux gardiens aussi ont retenu mon attention, soit Jake Oettinger et Michael DiPietro.



EYE TOWARDS THE PRIZE

BY CHRIS STEVENSON

THERE ARE A LOT OF STORIES ABOUT HOW ONE NHL DRAFT CAN BE A FRANCHISE DEFINING EVENT.

MAYBE IT'S JUST LUCK LIKE A BALL WITH YOUR NUMBER FALLING, WINNING A LOTTERY AND THE NO. 1 PICK, DRAFTING A GENERATIONAL PLAYER AND SAVING A RECENTLY BANKRUPT FRANCHISE.

THIS STORY IS MUCH MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT.

At the Ottawa Senators table at the 2008 NHL Draft, on the floor of their home rink, things were getting tense.

It's that undercurrent of anxiety that scouts and executives feel when their spot is coming up and the feeling begins to grow that the player they want won't be there when it's their turn to go to the stage.

There was a run on defencemen in that draft: After center Steven Stamkos went first overall to the Tampa Bay Lightning, the Los Angeles Kings took Drew Doughty. The Atlanta Thrashers took Zach Bogosian third, the St. Louis Blues selected Alex Pietrangelo and the Toronto Maple

Leafs opted for Luke Schenn at No. 5.

At No. 12, the Buffalo Sabres took defenseman Tyler Myers and the Los Angeles Kings went for Colten Teubert at 13.

Through 13 picks, six defensemen were selected.

The Senators had the 18th pick and the anxiety was growing. The player they had slotted at No. 7 was still out there.

A big part of running a draft strategy is knowing what your opponents are thinking. It's a vastly underplayed part of the draft which is usually all about a kid hugging

EYE TOWARDS THE PRIZE: ERIK KARLSSON

his parents and agent in the stands and getting his picture taken in his new sweater.

The Senators had their eye on a slender Swedish defenceman named Erik Karlsson and were getting anxious. Working their networks, the word coming back to the Senators table was the Anaheim Ducks, who were selecting at No. 17, one pick ahead of the Senators, were considering Karlsson.

At the behest of his lieutenants, assistant general manager Tim Murray and top scout Pierre Dorion, Murray got proactive. He reached out to old friend David Poile, the GM of the Nashville Predators. (Poile kept Murray on as coach with the Washington Capitals when Poile took over as GM there in 1982 and the two have been close friends since).

The Predators held pick No. 15. The Predators wanted a goaltender and were confident the next name on their list, Chet Pickard, would be there at No. 18.

They spoke and the deal was done: Murray traded the No. 18 pick to the Predators along with a third-round pick in the 2009 draft for the No. 15 selection.

"If Bryan Murray doesn't make that deal, Erik Karlsson isn't with us today," Dorion said on the eve of the Senators playing in the 2017 Eastern Conference Final against the Pittsburgh Penguins and Karlsson in the conversation as the Conn Smythe Trophy winner.

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I've spoken to Dorion a few times about that night on the draft floor and the dynamic at the Senators' table. It's the type of thing that is only superficially shown on television as a draft unfolds, but the maneuvering, the deals proposed and rejected, is as much a part of the drama as the names that are announced.

Dorion remembers it this way:

"I think (Murray) was testing me: 'Pierre, we're going to move up 18 to 15. Who are we taking?' And I said, 'well, Erik Karlsson.'

Murray: "Pierre, he's 5-10 and 160 pounds."

Dorion: "Yeah, but it's the right guy to take."

Murray: "You know I like big bodies."

Dorion: "You know, Bryan, this will be the best thing for the organization."

Murray: "How long do you want to work for?"

Dorion: "A long time, but I know this is the right pick."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman made his famous: "We have a trade to announce, and you're going to like this one," and the Senators made their way to the podium.



"If Bryan Murray doesn't make that deal, Erik Karlsson isn't with us today," Ottawa Senators GM Pierre Dorion

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A popular pastime as each NHL draft approaches is to look back and reorder the players from previous drafts with the benefit of hindsight.

From that 2008 Draft, the argument can be made Karlsson would be the No. 1 pick.

There's no questioning Stamkos' skill and goal scoring ability. Stamkos has 582 points in 586 games. Though he's a defenceman, Karlsson is within shouting distance with 456 points in 556 games.

Doughty has won a Norris Trophy, but Karlsson has two and many could competently argue Karlsson should have won the Norris awarded to Doughty, as well.

Defenceman Roman Josi, for the sake of argument,

EYE TOWARDS THE PRIZE: ERIK KARLSSON

taken at No. 38 by the Predators, could also be in the conversation.

When you look at the impact a defenceman can have on the game, particularly one like Karlsson, that sways the argument in his favor, I think.

Bryan Murray was proactive that day, listening to his staff, working the floor, finding a deal and making what is the biggest deal in both his and Senators history.

He worked the floor and wound up with the player who, when all is said and done, might just be the best player in the draft.



It's not like Karlsson came from nowhere, but it might be close. He is from Landsbro in the highlands of southern Sweden. After a stint playing junior hockey with Sodertalje,

background on him from our Swedish scout, Anders Forsberg at the time. You just felt comfortable with his elite skill set that he would find a way to play. Was it a bit of a gamble? At that point in time it was, but you knew he was going to go in the first round some time."

Another thing we love about the draft is the player comparisons. Who does this prospect remind you of?

"I thought he was going to be a real good player. Remember how good Danny Boyle was?" asked Dorion. "I thought he'd be a Danny Boyle with more skating ability. But to be the dynamic, special player that he is now? I'd be lying if I said that."



Erik Karlsson was the revelation of the 2017 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman made his famous: *"We have a trade to announce, and you're going to like this one,"* and the Senators made their way to the podium

People who have had the chance to watch Karlsson on a nightly basis in the 2016-17 season had an appreciation for how much the 26-year-old's game had expanded. On the national stage afforded by the playoffs, people saw to what magnificent extent he had grown as a player.

where he wasn't happy, Karlsson returned home and wound up playing for Frolunda, familiar to Senators fans as the home of former Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson.

"He wasn't playing in the backwoods, where it was an outdoor rink," Dorion said. "Every team saw him. He played in in February and April for the national team. Every team that had five scouts would have seen him there, so he was not 'discovered' by anyone."

But Bryan Murray does feel the Senators had an inside: they hired Anders Forsberg as a scout in Europe in 2008 and he knew Karlsson well. Along with scouts Vaclav Burda and Mikko Ruutu, they were on the frontlines of positioning Karlsson as the player to target midway through the 2008 Draft.

"(Forsberg) knew Karlsson and knew he was a competitive guy," Murray said.

"He just got better and better. He just elevated his game to another level that year and that's where we knew he would be a first-round consideration," Dorion said.

"It was easy to say because we had really good

Trophies, he had a reputation for being an offensive force and possession driver, but lacking the same energy in his own zone.

No more.

Karlsson is a force at both ends of the rink and forced himself into the conversation as not just the best defenceman in the game, but the best player in the game.

The Senators were at the top of their game that night on the floor of the rink in Ottawa. They had scouts who had done their homework and made a case for a player.

They had a general manager who believed in his staff and had the confidence and ability to make the deal the moment demanded.

In the space of a few minutes on the floor of the rink that night, they made a move that would define the franchise for a decade.

You could argue if the Senators were that smart compared to the 29 other teams, they would have had Karlsson ranked No. 1.

They weren't that smart. Just smart enough.

2018 NHL DRAFT TOP 40

Head scouts are going to be reversing their Canadian travel schedules next season. Instead of eastern-based crossover scouts being sent out west in droves like what transpired this past season there are going to be plenty of western scouts making the trip to eastern Canada next season, as it's a possibility that close to half of the prospects picked in the first round in 2018 may be playing in the OHL and QMJHL, and also apparent that the draft crop in the Q may rival or perhaps even surpass 2013 in terms of first-round depth.

In 2013 there were six players chosen from the QMJHL for the first time in draft history; at this early stage there are at least seven QMJHL-based prospects who look like decent candidates to be chosen in the top 31 in 2018.

Conversely, it's not looking like a banner draft season in the WHL next season, especially at forward, where there are no prospects who look like good bets to be taken in the top two rounds.

Here are 40 prospects who will be watched closely next season - in alphabetical order:

Alexander Alexeyev	D	Red Deer WHL	6-3	186
The St. Petersburg Russia native played in the 2016 U-18's and was an assistant captain at the Ivan Hlinka for the Russian team last summer. A rangy mobile defenceman that had 21 points in just 41 games as a WHL rookie, he'll likely be a top-scoring blueliner on Red Deer's defence next season.				
Adam Boqvist	D	Brynäs U-20	5-11	170
His tremendous skating and puck skills have already drawn comparisons to Erik Karlsson from at least one high-ranking scout. Almost scored a point-per-game in the SuperElit U-20, a strong indication that Jesper's younger brother will be a major point producer going forward.				
Xavier Bouchard	D	Baie Comeau	6-2	176
The son of Rouyn head coach Gilles Bouchard made giant strides this season totalling 34 points and by the end of the season getting time on both the first power play and penalty killing units. Brings size mobility and good hockey sense to the draft table.				
Rasmus Dahlin	D	Frolunda	6-1	165
The "Next One" from Sweden put up mind-boggling stats this season in the U-20 SuperElit as a 16-year-old that Erik Karlsson and other great Swedish defencemen never came close to equalling at the same age. A supreme talent that possesses skills that result in numerous highlight-reel goals. He is the real deal and is the early favourite to be picked first overall next June.				
Ty Dellandrea	C	Flint OHL	6-1	181
The fifth-overall selection in the 2016 OHL enjoyed a 13-goal rookie campaign that culminated with a berth on Team Canada's roster in the U-18's. The talented sniper is expected to be a go-to player on the Firebirds next season and vie for 30+ goals.				

2018 NHL DRAFT TOP 40

Noah Dobson	D	Acadie-Bathurst QMJHL	6-2	163
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A mobile defender with good size and offensive skills. Dobson just kept getting better as the season went on with 17 points in the last 28 games of the season after starting his QMJHL career with nine points in his first 35. He played in all key situation by playoff time for a team that made it to the second round for the first time in nine years.

Nando Eggnerberger	LW/RW	HC Davos	6-2	185
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The rangy winger has been on the scouting radar for a couple of seasons now, first catching international attention with his strong play at the U-18's in 2016 as a 16-year-old. While he's never produced with any frequency at any of the U-18 and U-20 events he played in, he has impressed with his all-around game, size and skill.

Joel Farabee	LW	USNTDP U-17/U-18	5-11	150
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Solid all-around winger with a heavy shot who will have work to do on his skating speed. His lack of size may hurt him on draft day so will need to add some weight. He has committed to Boston University for 2019-20...so he'll have several years to develop before the team that drafts him has to sign him.

Alexis Gravel	G	Halifax QMJHL	6-3	209
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It's not often that a 16-year-old CHL rookie goalie wins the starter's job in training camp and plays 50 games but Gravel won his coach's confidence early on and repaid him in the playoffs with a great effort posting a .924 SP and almost backstopping Halifax to a huge upset over the defending QMJHL champions.

Ben-Olivier Groulx	C	Halifax QMJHL	6-1	176
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Longtime QMJHL coach Ben Groulx's son was selected first overall in the 2016 QMJHL draft so the expectations were high for the talented center/winger who managed to notch 17 goals in his rookie season. Expect a larger role on Halifax next season, especially if Hirschier doesn't return.

Barrett Hayton	C	Sault Ste. Marie OHL	6-1	179
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Has found a regular role on a stacked Soo team and looks like one of the better prospects for next year's draft having accumulated 27 points in a limited role while bringing size competitiveness and smarts. He will likely join a long list of recent Soo centers who blossomed in their draft years.

Krystof Hrabik	F/LW	Tygrí Liberec	6-3	209
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Scouts are always excited to see an extra large prospect with skill cracking his national team roster and producing at the U-18's. Hrabik may well draw interest from CHL teams in the Import Draft given his size/skill combination.

2018 NHL DRAFT TOP 40

Quinn Hughes	D	USNTDP U-18	5-10	168
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When you score 53 points in 65 games playing defence with the U-18 US team the year before you are draft eligible scouts are willing to overlook being just 5-10. Extremely talented offensive blueliner with lots of dangle and strong skating skills.

Martin Kaut	RW	Padubice CZE	6-1	176
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Highly regarded in the Czech Republic having played 20 U-18 games and 26 matches in the Czech Elite League in the past nine months. Expect him to participate in the WJC and continue his solid two-way play internationally in a top-six role, most likely on a line with Necas and Zadina as was the case this season.

Alexander Khovanov	C	Irbis Kazan MHL	5-11	179
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The talented Russian pivot tied teammate Andrei Svechnikov for the goal-scoring lead at the U-17's with five goals and produced at a steady clip in the MHL as a 16-year-old. He'll play a top-six role at the Ivan Hlinka this summer.

Jesper Kotkaniemi	C	Assat U-20	6-1	180
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A 6-1 center scoring six points in the U-18's well before he turns 17 is a good way to get scouts' interest for the upcoming season. He'll be closely perused at the Ivan Hlinka and a large part of Finland's team, perhaps as the club's first-line center.

Rasmus Kupari	C	Karpat U-20	5-11	163
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He captured the interest of scouts by being a constant threat at the U-18 with his work ethic and speed. A very strong forechecker and competitor who may be a top-end pick in 2018 if he can add some muscle over the next 13 months.

Jakub Lauko	C	Czech	6-1	172
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The skilled forward turned heads at the U-17's last November with seven points in five games and then played 28 games in the Czech Elite League as a 16-year-old after tearing up Czech junior at both the U-18 and U-20 level. He'll be a go-to forward for the Czechs at the Ivan Hlinka.

David Levin	LW/RW	Sudbury OHL	5-10	172
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The former first-overall OHL pick and native of Israel will have to round out his overall game after finishing -38 this past season. No one disputes his offensive skills after scoring 53 points as an OHL sophomore. Missed the 2017 NHL draft by one day having been born on Sept. 16.

2018 NHL DRAFT TOP 40

Adam Liska	LW	Team Slovakia U-18	5-11	181
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He was the most dangerous Slovakian forward at the U-18's, producing six points in five games and providing plenty of scoring chances with speed and work ethic. Size may be the only thing that keeps him from first-round consideration.

Anderson MacDonald	LW	Sherbrooke QMJHL	6-2	203
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The burly left winger has proven to be the steal of the first round of the 2016 draft for Sherbrooke, netting 29 goals in 50 games this season. Good size and a powerful stride and shot... he'll be expected to net 40+ goals next season as he starts to dominate with his physical tools.

Jared McIsaac	D	Halifax QMJHL	6-2	209
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By season's end McIsaac was the top defender on the Mooseheads' blueline and will be a key piece on an up-and-coming young team next season. Stepped into Canada's U-18 lineup and played a top-four role in April. He'll need to keep working on his mobility and adjustment to the pace of the game.

Ryan McLeod	C/LW	Mississauga OHL	6-2	190
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There has been steady progress in the speedy forward's game his first two OHL seasons and by the playoffs he was on the Steelheads' top line beside brother Michael and compiling 20 points in 20 games. He should be employed on the top-line next season, likely at center if Mikey makes New Jersey.

Allan McShane	C	Oshawa OHL	5-11	190
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The stocky center had 43 points in just 56 games before cooling off at season's end and in the playoffs, collecting two points in his final 17 contests. He will need to find his offensive confidence again next season to stay in the hunt for the first round

Ryan Merkley	D	Guelph OHL	5-11	165
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The highly-skilled defenceman, who was picked first overall in the 2016 OHL draft has plenty of flash and dash, collecting 55 points in an exciting OHL rookie season. As his -41 mark will attest there is still work to do on the defensive end...if that comes he may be a top-five consideration.

K'Andre Miller	D	USNTDP U-17	6-3	182
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He has the potential to be a big, athletic offensive defenceman with a powerful skating stride. He has played both forward and defence up to this point but his pro future is on defence. A raw prospect who may work his way into the top-ten discussion given the natural abilities.

2018 NHL DRAFT TOP 40

Serron Noel	RW	Oshawa OHL	6-3	192
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While his stats as a rookie OHLer weren't eye-popping, Noel has the tools scouts look for in a first-round prospect, including a good size/skating combo, decent skills and some edge to his game. Impressed at the U-17's and will be expected to step into a top-six role on the Generals next season.

Merrick Rippon	D	Ottawa Jr. Senators CCHL	6-1	190
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The 2016-17 CCHL Rookie of the Year was a force on the Jr. Senators blueline by the playoffs, finishing second among all defencemen in playoff scoring while displaying a solid all-around game. He is not expected to return to the CCHL next season but also not expected to report to the OHL unless Kitchener trades his rights.

Jakub Skarek	G	Dukla Jihlava CZE2	6-3	196
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He was the talk of the Ivan Hlinka last summer as he backstopped the Czech Republic to a Gold Medal victory with elite goaltending. He also enjoyed a strong U-20 performance but to the surprise of many was subpar at the recent U-18's. Scouts will be more than willing to dismiss the one blip on the radar with a strong 2017-18.

Ty Smith	D	Spokane WHL	5-11	178
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The puck-savvy, smooth-skating blueliner showed scouts at the U-18's that he will be a productive defenceman next season that may push for a top-ten selection in the draft. Stepped into a top-pairing role at the U-18 and was quite possibly Canada's best defenceman.

Andrei Svechnikov	RW	Muskegon USHL	6-2	187
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Cale Makar may have been the talk of the World Junior Challenge among draft-eligible players but the 6-2 Russian winger was just as dominant (12 points in four games) and unlike Makar was just 16 years old. Svechnikov finished sixth in USHL scoring as a rookie and also tore it up at the U-17's so there is no denying that he enters the 2018 draft as the top-ranked forward and a strong bet to go top two.

Akil Thomas	C	Niagara OHL	5-11	165
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One of the gems of the 2016 OHL draft...several teams who picked in the top ten are wishing they had taken the talented center who blossomed as an OHL rookie, scoring 21 goals and 48 points on a young Niagara team and then playing in the U-18's in April.

Brady Tkachuk	RW	USNTDP	U-17/18	6-2
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He brings "hard skill" and is great down low and around the net. He projects as a big-game playoff goal scorer down the road that will tee off opponents along the way, much like his brother Matthew. Not overly creative and his skating needs to get better.

2018 NHL DRAFT TOP 40

Joe Veleno	C	Saint John QMJHL	6-0	181
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The first-ever QMJHL player to be granted exceptional status, Veleno hasn't quite lived up to the hype even though he almost scored a point-per-game this season. Nevertheless, he remains a solid candidate to be picked in the first round next season.

Giovanni Vallati	D	Kitchener OHL	6-1	185
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A skilled skater with good smarts who collected 21 points on the Kitchener blueline as a 16-year-old. Look for him to blossom in 2017-18 in a prime role. Impressed scouts with a solid showing at the U-17's, he will be in the running for a spot on Canada's blueline at the U-18.

Oliver Wahlstrom	C/RW	USNTDP U-17/18	6-1	198
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He's a high-end individual talent with great skating and skill who is very good offensively, but his play without puck leaves a lot to be desired. At this point the issue is a lack of accountability in his game... that can be worked on His offensive tools will intrigue scouts.

Bode Wilde	D	USNTDP U-17	6-2	193
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He turned a lot of heads with his offensive performance at the U-17's, finishing tied for fifth in scoring. He has legitimate NHL size/skating ratio and also hits the scoresheet due to his heavy point shot. Scouts will be hoping to see more competitiveness and better decision-making.

Jett Woo	D	Moose Jaw WHL	6-0	201
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Woo seized a top-four position on Moose Jaw's blueline this season, leading to a berth on Canada's blueline at the U-18 world championship where he showed enough promise to be played on a regular basis. Expected to seize an offensive role next season and possibly push for a top-15 draft slot.

Jesse Ylonen	RW	Blues U-20	6-0	160
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The crafty winger finished tied for third in scoring at the U-18's, giving scouts a strong dose of his skill, smarts and creativity. Every scout who attended the tournament left with a positive impression on his offensive upside. He is slated to play for Espoo next season in the Finnish second division.

Filip Zadina	LW	Pardubice CZE	6-0	198
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An early favourite to be a top-five selection in next year's draft thanks to his prolific production in every U-18 event, scoring 15 goals in 15 games. Unlike Necas, the stocky winger is not hesitant to go to the dirty areas to score goals... his style should be easily adaptable to the NHL game.
