

2022 NHL DRAFT GUIDE

By Draftin Europe

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2022 ENTRY DRAFT CLASS

This has been another imperfect scouting season, still affected by the pandemic and furtherly hampered by the tragic events underway in Ukraine. While it's been nice to go back scouting in the rinks more often, there has been some frustration when attending a diminished U18 tournament. With the ban of Russian teams from international competitions, ranking Russian players has become more complicated. Still, it has to be noted we ranked them accordingly with our evaluation of the players without taking into account the reservations surrounding their status. We know most of them will go lower in the NHL draft than where we have them on our list, several won't even get drafted.

The situation makes this draft even less predictable than we figured halfway through the season. To add on that, one of the top prospects available, Ivan Miroshnichenko, has been dealing with a serious health issue that makes him a real wild card.

Uncertainties aside, as this draft season progressed we've been hearing comments about this draft class' supposed weakness. At least as far as the top 3 rounds go, we don't think that applies to the European class. Unless you are discarding Russian players, but that wouldn't make for a fair comparison with previous years.

At the top, we have two Slovaks coming off outstanding seasons. Both Slafkovsky and Nemec showed everything we were hoping for, and more, to the point it was inevitable to have them #1 and #2 on our list, no matter how much we like Swedish center Noah Östlund.

By the way, even if he has been rising on everyone's ranking after the U18s, we still consider Östlund to be really underrated. In fact, we think Östlund is the best pound-for-pound prospect in Europe. Noah's game is a perpetual dance where he hunts the puck, wins possession and gracefully skates away with it.

"he reads the play, jumps on the opponent with the puck, lifts his stick and immediately delivers it to an open teammate"... that's been a recurrent note in his games already in the past and it's just a standard play for him.

Not only we feel his skills are underestimated, his defensive game is another aspect where in our opinion he is not getting enough credit.

Some of our strongest opinions are traditionally not very popular, but that hasn't made them less reliable in the past. It happened with Elias Pettersson, it happened with Moritz Seider, and we believe it might happen again with Noah Östlund, regardless of where he will be selected. To that point though, we would be surprised to see him slide to the last part of the 1st round.

Ironically, where Östlund has a bit of a weakness, this European draft class as a whole has its main strength: goal scorers with a high-end shot.

Miroshnichenko, Lekkerimäki, Kemell, Trikozov, Jiricek (all right-handed), Kulich, Ohgren, Nyman... just to name the main ones. Even among the less known prospects we can find outstanding shooters, like Raul Yakupov and Matias Rantonen.

A role where instead things got a bit murkier over the season is that of prominent defensemen. Some of those with the best tools (Salomonsson, Salin, Odelius, Bichsel...) showed warts that made them fall in our rankings.

To follow, we share some quick notes on a few prospects that we have on our draft list but didn't manage to profile.

Right after, you can find our rankings and then the players' profiles.

An important note about the rankings: in the table there is a column named "value" which indicates where we would be on board drafting the player. It is not in any way our expectation of where the player will actually be drafted.

Before all that, something to point out beyond the 2022 draft:

Right after it our focus will shift dramatically to the future draft classes, in the hope to release our pre-season rankings ahead of the Hlinka. The earlier date for this year's event certainly doesn't help, but a Summer Blue Dispatch is expected out around those days, introducing the new up-and-coming talent from Europe and presenting where we stand, hopefully before the new draft season goes underway.

NOTES ON NON-PROFILED DRAFT PROSPECTS

Top 3 Rounds

We think **Aleksanteri Kaskimäki** (#25) is a pretty complete forward in the making. He doesn't have special skills and he isn't particularly dynamic, but owns a good shoot, is dangerous around the net and can finish his chances. On top of his goal-scoring ability, he has good understanding of the game and is reliable defensively.

He could become a versatile player able to fit in different roles.

His first game vs Sweden at the U18s was cut short by a hard high hit he suffered early on, but he was able to play through the rest of the tournament (whether at 100% or not).

Dmitri Buchelnikov (#29) is a second-time eligible very undersized goal scorer whose improved skating has brought a new dimension to his game. He is smart, can play with pace, has an accurate wrist shot, competes and he is not a soft player despite his small stature. He had his playoffs cut short by an injury and given the situation he could be passed over again, but he is still 18 and an interesting prospect to follow.

Viktor Neuchev (#30) is another late-03 born Russian prospect that has made a name for himself this season. Yet another dangerous shooter in this year's class, he likes to use his edges and stickhandling prowess to dangle with the puck and keep it away from the opponents.

He is highly skilled and a one-on-one threat, but we wonder if his skating is dynamic enough to make his slick stickhandling moves effective at the next level, with less ice available to circle around.

Also, his efforts off the puck need to become more consistent.

Artyom Duda (#32) is a Russian defenseman that enjoyed a very productive season with CSKA junior team. He has a legit chance to develop in a complete blueliner, reliable defensively and effective at moving the puck. However, we would not count on his good-looking offensive numbers to be a fair indication of his future production at higher levels. While he can make the odd impressive rush, and is a very good shooter from the offensive blueline, we feel they were partially due to the usage and it's not a given he'll prove to be good enough to run a powerplay in the NHL. We could see him becoming a two-way defenseman, but hardly someone who creates offense on a consistent basis.

A reservation we have about his otherwise solid game comes with his reaction time and reads around the net. Oddly enough, he seems to get less competitive the closer to his net the play is.

Kasper Kulonummi (#33) is an unspectacular but reliable Finnish blueliner that carried a heavy load for his national team at the U18. He reads the game well, has good adaptive footwork and pretty good hands for a D-man. With these qualities he seems to have things consistently under control, and he is always ready to take over on broken plays, showing good anticipation.

Jani Nyman (#34) is yet another goal scorer with a heavy shot. A winger with a powerful frame who also has good puck skills. He is dangerous with possession in the offensive zone, and he nicely targets the slot off the rush or coming off the boards. Nyman is however less effective when the other team has the puck, despite an above-average compete level. The problem lies in his skating. He can actually build up decent speed on the rush, with his skates looking strongly set on rails that usually target the opponents' net, but he lacks agility. It's not that much of a problem during possession, when he dictates the play, it becomes more of a struggle for him when he has to go after the puck, especially when he has to adjust quickly. His feet can look heavy when he would need some agility to keep up with the play.

Also, not being a natural skater, late in the shifts his stride tends to become heavier and not effective anymore.

Later Rounds

Late-03 born **Vladimir Grudin** (#38) is an undersized D-man with nice edge work and lateral mobility. He can defend well vs the rush but is not as effective when defending closer to the net and doesn't qualify as an offensive defenseman.

Miko Matikka (#39) is a toolsy right-handed winger with size who will need to improve his pace and learn to play with more urgency.

Dominik Rymon (#45) is a small Czech forward with notable skating ability and good competitiveness. He plays smart and still holds some bottom six potential should his offense fail to develop further.

Daniil Orlov (#48) is a strong-skating D-man that uses his very good lateral mobility to be aggressive in the defensive zone. He has a powerful slapshot and posted good numbers, especially considering the team he was on, but his game could use more poise.

Tommi Männistö (#49) is a tough competitor with fast skating who really excels on the forecheck. He may offer limited upside, as he projects as a likely 4th liner, but we can't help but like him.

Eligible for the 3rd time and known for his puck handling ability, **Nick Malik** (#51) is coming off a good Liiga season. The Raleigh-native quick Czech goalie has started to look steadier in the net, but he still looks smaller than he is listed at (6'2").

2022 DRAFT FINAL RANKINGS – TOP 100

RANK	NAME	POS.	NATION	TEAM	VALUE	CSB
1	JURAJ SLAFKOVSKY	LW	SVK	TPS (LIIGA)	top 5	1
2	SIMON NEMEC	D	SVK	NITRA (S. EXTRALIGA)	top 5	3
3	NOAH OSTLUND	C	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	top 5	18
4	MARCO KASPER	C / W	AUT	ROGLE (SHL)	top 15	5
5	JONATHAN LEKKERIMAKI	RW	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	top 15	6
6	DANILO YUROV	RW	RUS	M.MAGNITOGORSK (KHL)	Top 20	7
7	IVAN MIROSHNICHENKO	LW	RUS	OMSK KRYLIA (VHL)	Top 20	11
8	DAVID JIRICEK	D	CZE	PLZEN (EXTRALIGA)	Top 20	4
9	JOAKIM KEMELL	RW	FIN	JYP (LIIGA)	Top 20	2
10	GLEB TRIKOZOV	LW	RUS	OMSKIE YASTREBY (MHL)	1st Round	15
11	JIRI KULICH	W / C	CZE	KARLOVY VARY (EXTRALIGA)	1st Round	13
12	FILIP BYSTEDT	C	SWE	LINKOPING (SWE JR)	2nd Round	17
13	BRAD LAMBERT	C / W	FIN	PELICANS (LIIGA)	2nd Round	10
14	ALEXANDER PEREVALOV	W	RUS	LOKO YAROSLAVL (MHL)	2nd Round	14
15	TOPI RONNI	C	FIN	TAPPARA (FIN JR)	2nd Round	31
16	JULIAN LUTZ	LW	GER	MUNCHEN (DEL)	2nd Round	30
17	ARSENI KOROMYSLOV	D	RUS	SKA-1946 (MHL)	2nd Round	50
18	FILIP MESAR	RW	SVK	POPRAD (S. EXTRALIGA)	2nd Round	20
19	CALLE ODELIUS	D	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	2nd Round	16
20	LIAM OHGREN	LW	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	2nd Round	8
21	LIAN BICHSEL	D	SUI	LEKSAND (SHL)	2nd Round	9
22	MATTIAS HAVELID	D	SWE	LINKOPING (SWE JR)	2nd Round	19
23	ADAM SYKORA	W	SVK	NITRA (S. EXTRALIGA)	2nd Round	42
24	ELIAS SALOMONSSON	D	SWE	SKELLEFTEA (SWE JR)	2nd Round	12
25	ALEKSANTERI KASKIMAKI	C / W	FIN	HIFK (FIN JR)	3rd Round	25
26	SIMON FORSMARK	D	SWE	OREBRO (SHL)	3rd Round	33
27	OTTO SALIN	D	FIN	HIFK (FIN JR)	3rd Round	23
28	KIRILL DOLZHENKOV	RW	RUS	KRASNAYA ARMIYA (MHL)	3rd Round	22
29	DMITRI BUCHELNIKOV	LW	RUS	SKA-1946 (MHL)	3rd Round	N.R.
30	VIKTOR NEUCHEV	LW	RUS	AVTO (MHL)	3rd Round	34
31	TOMAS HAMARA	D	CZE	TAPPARA (FIN JR)	3rd Round	21
32	ARTYOM DUDA	D	RUS	KRASNAYA ARMIYA (MHL)	3rd Round	28
33	KASPER KULONUMMI	D	FIN	JOKERIT (FIN JR)	3rd Round	29

RANK	NAME	POS.	NATION	TEAM	VALUE	CSB
34	JANI NYMAN	RW	FIN	KOOVEE (FIN-2)	3rd Round	24
35	ALEXANDER SUZDALEV	LW	SWE	HV 71 (SWE JR)	3rd Round	26
36	ELIAS PETTERSSON	D	SWE	OREBRO (SWE JR)	4th Round	37
37	DENNIS HILDEBY	G	SWE	FARJESTAD (SHL)	4th Round	N.R.
38	VLADIMIR GRUDININ	D	RUS	KRASNAYA ARMIYA (MHL)	4th Round	53
39	MIKO MATIKKA	W	FIN	JOKERIT (FIN JR)	4th Round	32
40	ADAM ENGSTROM	D	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	5th Round	38
41	ANTON JOHANSSON	D	SWE	LEKSAND (SWE JR)	5th Round	68
42	THEO WALLBERG	D	SWE	SKELLEFTEA (SWE JR)	5th Round	N.R.
43	RAUL YAKUPOV	W	RUS	REAKTOR (MHL)	5th Round	N.R.
44	VEIT OSWALD	W	GER	LANDSHUT (GER JR)	5th Round	108
45	DOMINIK RYMON	W/C	CZE	KARLOVY VARY (CZE JR)	6th Round	90
46	FABIAN WAGNER	C	SWE	LINKOPING (SWE JR)	6th Round	27
47	FILIP NORDBERG	D	SWE	SODERTALJE (SWE JR)	6th Round	52
48	DANIIL ORLOV	D	RUS	SAKHALINSKIYE AKULY (MHL)	6th Round	36
49	TOMMI MANNISTO	RW	FIN	TAPPARA (FIN JR)	6th Round	109
50	LUDVIG JANSSON	D	SWE	SODERTALJE (SWE-2)	7th Round	35
51	NICK MALIK	G	CZE	KOOKOO (LIIGA)	7th Round	N.R.
52	OSKAR PETTERSSON	RW	SWE	ROGLE (SWE JR)	7th Round	43
53	TOPIAS LEINONEN	G	FIN	JYP (FIN JR)	7th Round	1-G
54	LUDWIG PERSSON	LW	SWE	FROLUNDA (SWE JR)	7th Round	46
55	ILYA IVANTSOV	C	RUS	SKA-NEVA (VHL)	Worth Considering	N.R.
56	JANNE NAUKKARINEN	W / C	FIN	SAIPA (FIN JR)	W. C.	N.R.
57	ILYA KVOCHKO	C	RUS	STALNYE LISY (MHL)	W. C.	81
58	OTTO HOKKANEN	C / W	FIN	SAIPA (LIIGA)	W. C.	55
59	SERGEI IVANOV	G	RUS	SKA-1946 (MHL)	W. C.	N.R.
60	MAXIM KROVYAKOV	C	RUS	SKA-1946 (MHL)	W. C.	N.R.
61	ALEXANDER PELEVIN	D	RUS	CHAIKA (MHL)	W. C.	78
62	JERE LASSILA	C	FIN	JYP (FIN JR)	W. C.	40
63	YEGOR SAVIKOV	D	RUS	SPARTAK MOSKVA (KHL)	W. C.	76
64	DANIL BASHKIROV	W / C	RUS	SALAVAT UFA (KHL)	W. C.	N.R.
65	DANIIL IVANOV	D	RUS	MHK SPARTAK MOSKVA (MHL)	W. C.	71
66	MARCEL MARCEL	LW	CZE	PLZEN (CZE JR)	W. C.	77

RANK	NAME	POS.	NATION	TEAM	VALUE	CSB
67	HUGO HAVELID	G	SWE	LINKOPING (SWE JR)	W. C.	2-G
68	ONDREJ BECHER	C	CZE	HAVIROV (CZE JR)	W. C.	74
69	NIKITA GREBENKIN	W	RUS	STALNYE LISY (MHL)	Worth Monitoring	51
70	LINUS SJODIN	C / W	SWE	ROGLE (SWE JR)	W. M.	N.R.
71	SEMYON SINYATKIN	RW	RUS	DYNAMO STP (MHL)	W. M.	87
72	NIKITA KIRYANOV	C	RUS	LOKO YAROSLAVL (MHL)	W. M.	N.R.
73	JAN SPUNAR	G	CZE	OLOMOUC (CZE JR)	W. M.	3-G
74	YAROSLAV YAPPAROV	LW	RUS	MAMONTY YUGRY (MHL)	W. M.	49
75	KASPER LUNDELL	C	FIN	HIFK (FIN JR)	W. M.	48
76	RASMUS RUDSLATT	RW	SWE	AIK (SWE JR)	W. M.	99
77	NIKITA BLEDNOV	RW	RUS	GORNYAK (VHL)	W. M.	56
78	MAXIM MAYOROV	G	RUS	DYNAMO STP	W. M.	N.R.
79	AARON HAKALA	W / C	FIN	TPS (FIN JR)	W. M.	N.R.
80	ERIK PAHLSSON	C	SWE	HV 71 (SWE JR)	W. M.	70
81	MAKSYMILIAN SZUBER	D	GER	MUNCHEN (DEL)	W. M.	N.R.
82	GUSTAV KARLSSON	C / W	SWE	OREBRO (SWE JR)	W. M.	59
83	MATVEI AVEROCHKIN	C	RUS	KRASNAYA ARMIYA (MHL)	W. M.	N.R.
84	MATYAS MELOVSKY	C	CZE	VITKOVICE (CZE JR)	W. M.	121
85	ADAM BARES	W	CZE	PELICANS (FIN JR)	W. M.	N.R.
86	TIM ALMGREN	C / W	SWE	OREBRO (SWE JR)	W. M.	N.R.
87	JAKUB ALTRICHTER	C	CZE	AIK (SWE JR)	W. M.	N.R.
88	MAXIMILIAN KILPINEN	LW	SWE	OREBRO (SWE JR)	W. M.	61
89	ILYA ROGOVSKY	W / C	RUS	LOKO YAROSLAVL (MHL)	W. M.	N.R.
90	HUGO FRANSSON	D	SWE	HV 71 (SWE JR)	W. M.	N.R.
91	DANIL AIMURZIN	C / W	RUS	TOROS (VHL)	W. M.	N.R.
92	NOAH MEIER	D	SUI	GCK (SUI-2)	W. M.	N.R.
93	JOEL JONSSON	RW	SWE	MORA (SWE JR)	W. M.	N.R.
94	NIKLAS KOKKO	G	FIN	KARPAT (FIN JR)	W. M.	9-G
95	TOMAS HEBEK	D	CZE	PARDUBICE (CZE JR)	W. M.	113
96	ELMERI LAAKSO	D	FIN	SAIPA (FIN JR)	W. M.	66
97	DANS LOCMELIS	C / W	LAT	LULEA (SWE JR)	W. M.	N.R.
98	GREGORY WEBER	RW	SUI	BERN (SUI JR)	W. M.	115
99	LUCA AUER	C	AUT	RED BULL JR (ALPS HL)	W. M.	129
100	MATIAS RANTONEN	LW	FIN	KARHU-KISSAT (FIN JR)	W. M.	N.R.

PLAYERS OUT OF SWEDEN - Ranked by Jeff Rea - @DraftinEU_Jeff

RANK	NAME	POS.	NATION	TEAM	VALUE
1	NOAH OSTLUND	C	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	1st Round
2	MARCO KASPER	C / W	AUT	ROGLE (SHL)	1st Round
3	JONATHAN LEKKERIMAKI	RW	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	1st Round
4	LIAM OHGREN	LW	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	1st Round
5	CALLE ODELIUS	D	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	2nd Round
6	FILIP BYSTEDT	C	SWE	LINKOPING (SWE JR)	2nd Round
7	LIAN BICHSEL	D	SUI	LEKSAND (SHL)	2nd Round
8	MATTIAS HAVELID	D	SWE	LINKOPING (SWE JR)	2nd Round
9	ELIAS SALOMONSSON	D	SWE	SKELLEFTEA (SWE JR)	2nd Round
10	SIMON FORSMARK	D	SWE	OREBRO (SHL)	3rd Round
11	DENNIS HILDEBY	G	SWE	FARJESTAD (SHL)	4th Round
12	LUDVIG JANSSON	D	SWE	SODERTALJE (SWE-2)	4th Round
13	ANTON JOHANSSON	D	SWE	LEKSAND (SWE JR)	4th Round
14	ADAM ENGSTROM	D	SWE	DJURGARDEN (SWE JR)	4th Round
15	FABIAN WAGNER	C	SWE	LINKOPING (SWE JR)	5th Round
16	THEO WALLBERG	D	SWE	SKELLEFTEA (SWE JR)	5th Round
17	ELIAS PETTERSSON	D	SWE	OREBRO (SWE JR)	6th Round
18	LUDWIG PERSSON	LW	SWE	FROLUNDA (SWE JR)	6th Round
19	OSKAR PETTERSSON	RW	SWE	ROGLE (SWE JR)	7th Round
20	ALEXANDER SUZDALEV	LW	SWE	HV 71 (SWE JR)	7th Round

PLAYERS OUT OF CZECHIA - Ranked by Štěpán Kryška - @skyr_bd

RANK	NAME	POS.	NATION	TEAM	VALUE
1	DAVID JIRICEK	D	CZE	PLZEN (EXTRALIGA)	Top 10
2	JIRI KULICH	W / C	CZE	KARLOVY VARY (EXTRALIGA)	early 2nd
3	DOMINIK RYMON	W/C	CZE	KARLOVY VARY (CZE JR)	6th Round
4	MARCEL MARCEL	LW	CZE	PLZEN (CZE JR)	W. C.
5	ONDREJ BECHER	C	CZE	HAVIROV (CZE JR)	W. C.
6	JAN SPUNAR	G	CZE	OLOMOUC (CZE JR)	W. M.
7	MATYAS MELOVSKY	C	CZE	VITKOVICE (CZE JR)	W. M.
8	ADAM BARES	W	CZE	PELICANS (FIN JR)	W. M.
9	TOMAS HEBEK	D	CZE	PARDUBICE	W. M.
10	YAKUB RYCHLOVSKY	C	CZE	LIBEREC (EXTRALIGA)	W. M.

RATING CATEGORIES DEFINITION

Possession rate

Several aspects are weighed into this parameter. Everything involved in maintaining and gaining puck possession goes into this. In essence, it measures how much help the rated player brings to his team's puck possession. For example, supporting the play, breakouts, controlled offensive zone entries, puck protection, turnovers, takeaways and puck battles are relevant specifics that go into this parameter. The ability to break up other team's controlled possession and cycles also factors in, particularly for defensemen.

Tough/Soft index

The lower this index, the softer the player. This goes beyond bringing a physical element to the game. Not getting scared (disappearing) by the rough stuff and keeping usual effectiveness in physical games (possibly showing push-back) is a key element that factors in. Obviously playing physical on opponents and being an intimidating presence add to that (however, please note this index is not necessarily proportional to the number of hits a prospect makes, something we don't find to be of any help as a source for prospect's evaluation). This is also where being strong (or not) on the puck is taken into account.

Specific to forwards: willingness to go through tough areas and remaining effective while doing so, playing hard on the forecheck (making life tough for defenders)

Specific to defensemen: play (how tough) in front of the net against screening forwards and on rebounds. Puck retrieval under pressure: does the player give up the puck under physical threat? Is he willing to take a hit to make the play?

Skating

All the different elements that contribute to a player's skating effectiveness go into this: acceleration, top speed, balance, agility, lateral mobility, stride, first steps, edge work, pivots, backwards skating, amount of ice covered, efficiency etc.

Quickness of play

This is more related to how quickly a player is able to react and execute than to how 'fast' he regularly plays. Players who don't play an up-tempo, rushing game, can still get high marks here if when needed they show the ability to react and execute quickly.

Compete level

Consistency of effort and performance in crucial moments/big games go into this, along with the compete the player habitually shows off on the ice. This is not related to hitting and not necessarily related even to general physical play, rather more so to the effort a player exhibits playing in all three zones with and without the puck, and how consistently he does it.

Head for the game

Hockey sense, feel for game situations (like knowing what the score is and how to adjust your game and decisions in relation to it), vision and reads (in terms of positioning and decision making) combine into this comprehensive category.

Puck handling

This is a combination of stickhandling ability, quality of hands and puck control (under pressure, in tight spaces, with range, receiving passes).

RATINGS: 0 --> 6 (3.5 = average among legitimate NHL prospects)

01. JURAJ SLAFKOVSKY - LW, 6'04", 218, 30-Mar-2004

Type of Player

Powerful, skilled winger who rises to the occasion and wants to the puck to make a difference.

Path to the Draft

While recognizing his potential and having him on our early rankings, Slafkovsky wasn't a Draftin Europe's favorite early on. The first time we were really on board with the hype train was after his strong showing at the 2021 senior World Championships 2021.

This year, in spite of a not very productive first Liiga season, he had truly outstanding performances at both the Olympics and the World Championships that eventually pushed him to the top of our list.

Strengths

To say Slafkovsky is strong on the puck would be an understatement. We feel like to find an 18-years-old player that opponents had more troubles stripping of the puck at the senior World Championships you'd need to go back more than 30 years, when Jaromir Jagr made his debut on that stage.

Juraj is big, powerful, with a low center of gravity and a strong handle on the puck. These qualities allow him to keep possession and pursue plays even when tangled up by defensemen.

His play along the boards often provides evidences of that ability, he can win battles, attract two players and dish the puck out to the supporting teammate, showing that he remains aware of his surroundings in those situations. He is capable of separating defensemen from the puck at the end boards, and he has always been good at setting up chances in front right away after winning possession, showing some passing ability to find open teammates. When Slafkovsky manages to carry away the puck himself from those situations, he drives the middle of the ice without hesitation and quickly becomes a scoring threat. Coming off the cycle or the right side boards he will circle towards the high slot in a way that is hard to defend given his reach a puck protection, and if needed he'll out-wait his opponent in front to find a shooting lane from a dangerous spot.

The Slovak has always been strong on his skates, but the best part of his development for us has been watching his skating getting better and better over the last two seasons.

With those improvements, he has become more dangerous on the rush. He can use his stickhandling ability to beat opponents one-on-one and follow through with pace.

Without the puck he makes good use of his long reach to disrupt plays, gets involved and has a strong stick to win possession.

With the way he repeatedly stepped up in big moments on the big stage, it's easy to consider his competitiveness a relevant plus. He has shown that when the adrenaline is pumping his whole game clicks and reaches another level. He wants to be a difference maker and he steps up in those situations.

Weaknesses

In the past our concern has always been with his skating. A couple of years ago Slafkovsky's feet looked heavy and he didn't keep them going nearly enough, often looking flat rather a dynamic force.

He mentioned the need to improve his skating as perhaps the main reason for his move to Finland at a young age, and as said above that has certainly worked out very well. Still, when he's not putting in his best effort or is not as excited by the situation he can still forget to move his feet and when that happens his skating stagnates. That's something that could easily show up over the 82-games NHL schedule.

Another possible reservation is about his positioning away from the puck when his team has possession. He wants to get involved in the play and he focuses on the puck, but there are times where he should pay more attention to get open instead, spacing himself from the play and from his opponents. In order to be a consistent scorer in the NHL he'll need to make life a bit easier for himself by making himself more often an available option in scoring areas before getting the puck. In other words, it's hard to keep scoring in the NHL if you have to earn all your shots, it's more realistic to do that if a good chunk of your shots from dangerous areas are set up by your linemates.

The main reason for his underwhelming offensive production in his first Liiga season probably lies elsewhere though. He was playing on a conservative, defensive team where he didn't have a big role and apparently didn't feel confident to play his game to the full extent of his capabilities. Which brings us to the fact his best performances so far have all happened with the men's national team under Canadian coach Craig Ramsay.

Key

Slafkovsky won't have his favorite coach in the NHL and will have to prove he can play with the same confidence and flair no matter who is behind his bench.

NHL Role Projection

Top-six winger who can maintain possession and make plays under pressure.

JURAJ SLAFKOVSKY						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4	5	4	5	4	5	4.5

02. SIMON NEMEC - D, 6'01", 192, 15-Feb-2004, Right

Type of Player

Defenseman who anticipates the play and keeps the puck safe on his stick once he gets possession.

Path to the Draft

Nemec already debuted in the top men's Slovak league in 2019/2020 and this was his second full season at that level. Surprisingly enough, it took him four months to score his first goal, but in the second half his offense came to live, especially in the playoffs.

On the international stage, he opened his draft season with a strong showing at the Hlinka, made the Olympic team in a limited role and had a better showing at the World Championships in May.

Strengths

Nemec reads and anticipates the play like few others can do. These qualities help him actively support the play in all three zones. He uses his hockey sense to make guesses without the puck and he ends up on the right side of things pretty regularly, moving in a way that allows him to jump into the play at the right time. He can extemporize with and without the puck, finding himself in unusual positions and situations for a defenseman, and still somehow fit into the play.

He likes to step up to close down space for his opponents and it's hard to find someone better at his age at making pinches in the offensive zone. He is not conservative when there is a chance to go for it and the number of times he gets caught is surprisingly low when taking that into consideration.

His play along the boards is strong even if he usually doesn't get physical play, as he rather overwhelms the opponent with tight checking and advanced stick work. He makes timely poke-checks and with better range than his size would suggest. Defensively he shadows his opponents, limiting their options and staying ready to anticipate the next chance to get the puck.

His puck skills (and stick work in general) might be the most underrated part of his game. He has very sound puck control, you rarely see him mishandle it and he can come up with the odd non-obvious stickhandling move to get out of troubles. That, combined with how well he reads the game (he consistently checks out the play before getting the puck), makes it pretty easy for him to remain poised under pressure in most situations.

As a result, he is a reliable option to start the breakout, through smart passes or carrying it up himself.

Skating was the question mark when Nemec showed up on our radar years ago, typically playing as an underager.

He always had the ability to effectively glide into the puck when needed, like on puck retrievals, but overall his skating looked pretty flat early on, with an underwhelming stride. That's changed. On top of displaying an improved stride, Simon is able to generate some speed with his edges to react to the play without the puck (or, with it, to surprise his opponent). With better mobility and ability to recover, Nemec has become more and more willing to join the rush.

He understands when to jump into the play without the puck and he can be active from the offensive blueline as well. He owns a legit shot and the passing ability to contribute on the powerplay.

Nemec is a reliable player not in the sense that he won't find himself occasionally on the wrong side of things, but in the sense that overall he'll regularly make a throughout positive impact on the game.

Weaknesses

With defensemen like Nemec, who appear regularly in control, it's common to see them taking a 'calm' approach at defending. You can use the term "aggressive" in reference to his positioning all over the ice, but not so much when it comes to engaging his opponent in his own zone. That is to say, sometimes we'd like to see more sense of urgency from him in the defensive zone.

Key

Nemec will have to prove he can stay ahead of the play in the NHL as well and that he is quick enough when facing the top players in the world.

NHL Role Projection

He can be a top-four NHL blueliner as soon as next season, and has the makings of a defenseman that down the road will be able to handle heavy minutes and make an impact all over the ice.

SIMON NEMEC						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4	4.5	3.5	4.5	5.5	4	3.5

03. NOAH OSTLUND - C, 5'10", 164, 11-Mar-2004, Left

Type of Player

Quick, competitive and very skilled two-way centerman who makes his linemates better.

Path to the Draft

A Draftin Europe's big favorite since 2020, Östlund has not let down our high expectations since. He had to fight through different injuries during this year and one could argue he didn't take as much of a step forward as some of his peers, but finished his draft season in style with a strong showing at the U18s despite a sore shoulder (a carryover from the Swedish junior playoffs), leading his team to an unlikely Gold Medal.

Strengths

Östlund is a natural, he's one of those players that have an instinctive and thorough understanding of the game. At 15 he was already showing on-ice awareness that most pros don't possess. It's an easy trait to recognize, not only in his play with the puck, but also in his play without it. Noah uses his IQ and vision to be a consistent defensive factor despite limited size, displaying tremendous on-ice attitude and work rate. He is relentless in his efforts and that attitude is, in fact, what we feel really separates Östlund from other prospects. It's particularly rare to find a teenager who plays such a skillful game and at the same time possesses the will (and the cardio) to go after the puck time after time. The combination of that innate perseverance with his ability to read the play and his deft stick work allows him to take away many pucks from the opposition.

Östlund is capable of setting up his teammates as soon as he gets possession. Alternatively, he can go to work himself building up the play. His skating agility and stickhandling prowess make him an elusive puck carrier. He can find his way through traffic when attacking the offensive blueline. When being chased with the puck, he regularly relies on fakes and quick turns to create separation. He shows good instincts to protect the puck (positioning his body well to complement his puck handling), usually keeping it out of his opponent's reach. As he buys himself some time with the puck, Östlund can find open teammates in the offensive zone, even when they aren't an available option at first.

He remains a deceptive player when he gets closer to the boards as well. He doesn't play scared in any way, and is able to turn in tight spaces to find a way out (between the wall and the pressing opponents), often drawing two players before quickly dishing out the puck to a supporting teammate, who got open as a result of Östlund's movement. Noah plays with his head up and dances on top of the ice. He has a low center of gravity and wide base and can explode out of tight turns. He makes deep cuts and abruptly shifts his weight and changes direction. He is nimble, slippery, creative, and highly skilled.

He is opportunistic around the net and contributes in all three zones. He can be relied on in all situations including first unit powerplay and penalty kill. His traits make him a prime option for top duties on both special teams and at 3-on-3 in overtime. He is the kind of player who still brings a positive contribution to his team overall in his less effective games. He can grind and make his presence felt on the forecheck. His motor, quickness of play and compete level are truly remarkable. He can move the puck in stride within milliseconds, as he processes the game like a chess master steps ahead of his opponents.

Weaknesses

We feel like most shortcomings in Östlund's game come from his current lack of strength and power. He has good shooting mechanics including a deceiving release, but will need to add power to become a respected shooter at the senior level. He is probably never going to be much of a long-range shooting threat, but becoming more of a threat from mid-range would make it more difficult to defend him off the rush.

Noah is effective one on one as he usually finds his way around his opponents, but once physically engaged it becomes difficult for him to keep going. He gets bounced around pretty easily.

While he is capable of finding his way through to the middle of the ice with the puck, we feel he doesn't do this as often as we'd like. Trying to get to the inside more regularly, however, is another thing that may go hand-in-hand with physical growth. Attacking wide in smaller NHL rinks may prove to be more complicated and could expose him to frequent checks along the side boards.

Östlund will need to physically develop before making a significant impression in professional hockey. We are positive this will happen, however, given his character and work rate.

Key

In his case it's all about developing his body and physical play. If Östlund manages to add the needed power and to become stronger on the puck, he is going to be a very good player.

NHL Role Projection

All-around top-six center who can complement and set-up the team's best triggerman.

Ratings Notes

His Possession Rate is not even higher only because he is not strong on the puck. His lack of strength affects him when protecting the puck and vs stick checks.

The same applies to the T/S index: he is far from a soft player in terms of how he plays the game, but as of now, despite his efforts, he is not tough enough when engaged in physical battles.

NOAH OSTLUND						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
5	5	5.5	5	5.5	5	3

04. MARCO KASPER - C/W, 6'0.75", 187, 08-Apr-2004, Left

Type of Player

Inspired, competitive and intelligent forward who can play at different paces.

Path to the Draft

When we started following Kasper, the first trait we appreciated was his understanding of the game as a young kid. As the other parts of his game were coming along, we hoped to see his skating reach another level to make him a more dynamic player and a legit top prospect. That's what we saw happen through the second half of this season, culminated with impressive showings in the SHL playoffs and at the senior World Championships.

While he was successful as a winger against men, we also liked him as a center at the junior level.

Strengths

Marco Kasper is an exceptionally responsible hockey player with a keen sense for the game. He moves well on the ice and gets into positions before the puck arrives. His first steps are explosive and he has a fully extended and powerful stride. He can play at pace or slow it down depending on the situation. He stops and starts well and changes direction quickly. He recognizes when he has support and where there is an open ice he can attack. He makes quick decisions when passing the puck and processes the game instinctively. His puck management is impressive, as he makes clean entries, establishes the cycle, and generates offensive chances. His movement in the offensive zone is intelligent. He plays with his head up, takes the line, curls, comes up high, and manipulates defenses to create space for teammates to establish a cycle.

When put under pressure he appears unfazed, and uses soft and perfectly weighted layoffs, subtle board play and elusive maneuverings to escape. He is dangerous around the net, on deflections and even more so on rebounds. He takes the puck to the net and has a strong sense of timing on net drives. His offensive zone awareness is terrific. He knows what is going on around him.

Defensively, he is impressive as well. He covers well for pinching defensemen and can handle defending odd man rushes. He comes down low with his man on the backcheck and stays between his man and the goal. He releases at the right time to make himself a passing option on breakouts. He gets into the right lanes, uses his stick, picks up his man, and breaks up play. He finishes his checks hard on the forecheck.

Kasper plays with an excellent attitude. He looks as at place on the wing as he does at center. It is hard to find a first-time draft eligible player with a better floor for his projection. His transition to professional hockey was virtually seamless.

Weaknesses

There aren't too many weaknesses to Kasper's game. He's under strength and can be pushed off the puck on the half wall. Likewise, he is too often manhandled along the boards in the offensive zone and pushed off his feet. He misses the net occasionally and could become a more accurate shooter off the rush. Some of his shots are blocked or non-threatening and he misses the net a bit too often.

While we are fairly certain of his ability to become a strong complementary forward in the National Hockey League, Marco Kasper is not supposed to evolve into an electric, play-driving star, nor into a top scorer at that level.

Key

How much goal-scoring and pure offensive ability is there? That's probably the main question with Kasper

NHL Role Projection

Middle-six forward who competes. brings a complete game and can fit with different playing styles and teammates.

MARCO KASPER						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	3.5	4	4	5	5	4

05. JONATHAN LEKKERIMÄKI - RW, 5'11", 172, 24-Jul-2004, Right

Type of Player

Smart skilled winger whose shot can be a threat from all over the ice.

Path to the Draft

The reason why we didn't have Lekkerimäki already high in our early rankings at the end of the 2019/2020 season was his skating. Since then, he improved a lot his stride and straight speed, skyrocketing through our rankings as a result, rising to where his talent demands. He had in fact a strong draft season, earning a spot on his club's senior team until mononucleosis sidelined him in March. He recovered just in time for the U18 Worlds where he led the tournament in scoring.

Strengths

Jonathan Lekkerimäki has a number of intriguing skills and characteristics. Most significantly, Lekkerimäki has a keen sense of how to manipulate defenses in order to create offensive chances. He is patient on the build up and calm on the puck. He can rag it around the offensive zone, using deception moves, opening his hips, changing directions, pivoting and slipping away. He reads the play whilst carrying the puck and can make smart delays to deceive his check to gain time and opportunities for himself and his teammates. His movement creates space behind him, he looks for trailers and he can change pace. His poise often draws penalties. The ability to toy with defenses in such a manner is only possible due his elite skill set.

He is a remarkable puckhandler, he reads the game extremely well and has a dangerous array of shots which he can release at a moment's notice. Lekkerimäki is good at taking advantage of defensive lapses, recognizing space and getting into scoring areas where he can make the most of his finishing abilities. Lekkerimäki has amazing whip on his release. With a quick move to the inside, he changes the angle and finds better shooting lanes. He's willing to take all the shots he's afforded. He can open fire on the powerplay in multiple ways (one-timer from the left wing half wall included) or he can pick the top-corner far-post with a quickly-released in-stride shot whilst rushing down the right wing. He always seems to find an open lane to his right and is willing to throw heavy low percentage shots on net. He has a bevy of dekes, including a nice forehand backhand move, and he goes to the net hard and then wraps it around effectively using his well-developed mohawk turn. He uses his reach to protect the puck, outstretch the goalie, and change his release points. He can also pull the puck in close and muscle it on net. He crashes the crease looking for rebounds and loose pucks and leans into defenders using power forward mechanics.

Lekkerimäki is a well-rounded offensive threat.

Weaknesses

Our biggest question mark with Lekkerimäki is determining if his game will translate in its full capacity to the next level. Lekkerimäki is not yet ready to play the same confident game with the puck at the senior level. He is not strong enough on his skates to hold off opponents that engage with him. Although we feel his skating is at least on par with the average of most legit prospects now, in some aspects it's still subpar against top professional players and something he needs to work on. Lekkerimäki will also find it more difficult in NHL rinks to find space out wide; which will likely mean less opportunities to carry the puck. Smaller rinks will also mean better shooting angles, however, which will most certainly work to his advantage when it comes to scoring goals.

Unsurprisingly for a goal scorer, an area of his game that he will need to develop to earn more minutes early on in his pro career is his defensive game. More in general, we expect him to improve his efforts when the other team has possession.

Key

Against pro, adding some more strength and agility is needed to enable him to keep the puck on his stick more and play like he does at the junior level.

NHL Role Projection

Top-six skillful winger that is the primary shooter on the powerplay

JONATHAN LEKKERIMAKI						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
3.5	5	4	3.5	4.5	3.5	3

06. DANILA YUROV - RW, 6'01", 179, 22-Dec-2003, Left

Type of Player

Reliable two-way winger that brings a very good mix of power, skills and awareness.

Path to the Draft

Already a widely appreciated talent, Yurov probably went into his draft season with hopes to establish himself as a top 10 pick in this year's draft. Unfortunately, a frustrating KHL season made a top-ten selection less likely than anticipated. Yurov only averaged around 4 and half minutes over 21 KHL regular season games, exactly like in his D-1 season. During his team's long playoff run his icetime was halved. In total last year he had 3 points in 24 games, this year 0 in 40 games. To address some of the reader's inevitable concerns about a lack of offense, at the junior level he had the best point-per-game production on his team and in the entire league among U19 players not named Michkov.

Strengths

Yurov's game is mature beyond his age, which only makes more frustrating the fact he spent the majority of his draft season sitting on his KHL team bench.

He relies on notable puck protection and a large skating base that helps him to be strong on his skates and pursue plays under duress, remaining effective when opponents engage him.

Danila hunts the puck with a purpose, and is consistent in his efforts. While he doesn't outright steal possession as often as Noah Ostlund, he contests pucks, using his smarts and stick dexterity to eventually create opportunities for his team out of those situations. In fact, not only he wins battles at a good rate, he is also able to quickly take advantage of pucks coming out of those battles to ignite his supporting teammate with smart little passes, the type of play that should translate well to the NHL game.

Yurov can generate offense but plays a safe game, completely different for that matter from someone like Joakim Kemell, who is flashier and more dynamic but less reliable during puck possession (and beyond), but that's one of the key reasons Yurov sits ahead of him in our rankings.

His main assets to create opportunities are his ability to win possession in the offensive zone and his strong passing game. He is also a dangerous passer when on the rush, maintaining a high level of awareness at full speed. He doesn't play on the periphery (unless you consider as such his consistent efforts along the walls), he competes through traffic during possession and he is able to recognize when there is a lane to drive the net, taking advantage of it.

He makes his awareness and compete count on both sides of the puck.

When you consider his passing ability, his defensive game and his overall work off the puck, you get a winger that makes life easier for his linemates.

Weaknesses

He got very limited minutes in the KHL, but one could argue in those minutes he didn't do much to earn more.

As of now, when going up against pro players he loses the edge he has in juniors in terms of skating and winning battles. It's not clear how much offense he can generate without those advantages, so he needs to build that edge on senior competition too.

An area where he could use some improvement is his shot and we haven't noticed any this season. This could limit him to be only a short range scoring threat at the NHL level.

Key

Yurov needs to play quality KHL minutes consistently to learn how to elevate his strengths over that level of competition.

NHL Role Projection

Winger that does the little things well, supports the play and can benefit his linemates on any of the top 3 lines and special team units.

Ratings Notes

We expected his skating to look better than it did at the KHL level this season, but we rely on the fact it was again as good as usual against his peers.

DANILA YUROV						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	4.5	3.5	5	4.5	4.5	4

07. IVAN MIROSHNICHENKO - LW, 6'01", 185, 04-Feb-2004, Right

Type of Player

Natural goal scorer who can play a physical game to go along with his elite offensive skills.

Path to the Draft

Ivan was the #1 prospect on our 2022-draft board in past years and again after the 2021 Hlinka Gretzky Cup. Last season he was supposed to move to the USHL but eventually couldn't because of bureaucratic issues, this season he played 31 games in the Russian second-tier men's league before getting diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma in early March. A couple of months earlier Miroshnichenko was cut from the WJC team because of his physical conditions.

It's worth noting that in his marred draft season he still scored 10 goals at the men's level and Val Nichushkin is the only player to ever have a better point-per-game production in the VHL in his draft year.

Strengths

A dangerous goal scorer, Miroshnichenko is a threat for goalies from all sorts of areas.

He can finish in tight in several ways, out-waiting the goalie to beat him one-on-one, with a sudden backhand, or just being opportunistic around the net.

Things don't get much safer for goalies when he is farther away from the net. It takes little room for him to release threatening shots. Has a quick, short wind-up on his powerful one-timer and he needs very little time and space to load up and release his sharp wristshot.

Just like Miroshnichenko can surprise the opposition releasing dangerous shots from distance with little notice, he can stay patient with the puck on his stick and remain shift-y when he is apparently ready to shoot, reassessing the release point or using the threat of his shot to beat opponents one-on-one and get to a better scoring area.

His game could actually benefit from the smaller North American rinks and the different shooting angles.

He doesn't consistently show off his skating quickness and one-on-one ability, but when it's needed to make a difference in the play his skills can become apparent and they go well beyond his shooting arsenal.

He has the stickhandling to make plays in tight and while he is primarily a shooter he is also able to set up linemates in the offensive zone. This makes him more than a goal scorer, he is also a good passer that can use his offensive instincts to set up plays.

His overall game has developed over the years and, when he is on, he is a strong all-around contributor.

Brings a strong physical presence by delivering crushing hits along the boards, when dialed-in we've seen him play with a level of intensity and two-way effort that bodes well for his chances to adapt to the NHL game.

Weaknesses

The main concern with Miroshnichenko is obviously health related.

The recent news have been really encouraging, but making a 100% recovery and staying healthy are two essential things we can't predict. We have inevitably to take into account the relevant risk this player carries at this point, which affects his ranking.

Health and injuries aside, already before this season lack of consistency has been the main reservation for us with Miroshnichenko. Even within the same game, he can look "on" or "off" at different points of the game.

As for not looking like his usual self in some games this season, it's likely his issues played a role and we feel it would be unfair to downgrade his game-to-game consistency beyond what he showed in previous seasons.

Key

Health and consistency.

NHL Role Projection

1st line winger and primary shooting option on the powerplay. When on top of his game his style can be reminding of Alex Ovechkin.

Ratings Notes

Powerful skater with strong balance, but not a consistent one, could get a higher rating in his best moments. Lack of consistency affects other ratings too, his compete level in particular.

IVAN MIROSHNICHENKO						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	5	4.5	4	4.5	4	4.5

08. DAVID JIRICEK - D, 6'03", 187, 28-Nov-2003, Right

Type of Player

Aggressive defenseman who can make his presence felt with both physical and skill play, a scoring threat from the point and doesn't hesitate to join an offensive opportunity.

Path to the Draft

Jiricek has been on our radar ever since the 18/19 season, when he suited up for his first international games for the Czech Republic. He was already tall, but skinny. His stats didn't suggest anything extraordinary, but he showed flashes of quality play, even though overall he wasn't nearly as impactful against his peers as he is now. The following season he however took off, became a force in his age group, appeared in Extraliga as a 16 year old multiple times and emerged as a potential 1st round talent. His progression in Extraliga has been steady, eventually becoming a heavily relied on defenseman for his team in the draft season.

He suffered a significant knee injury at the aborted WJC that sidelined him for about four months, but still managed to make the Czech team for the senior World Championships.

Strengths

Jiricek has always oozed high compete, willingness and readiness to make a play. He wants to be on the puck and make a difference. As we wrote in the past, he doesn't seem to get dazed by mistakes and he goes back to business pursuing plays all over the ice.

Joining the rush is nothing unusual in Jiricek's case, he tries to play a high tempo game and put pressure on the opponent whenever he is on the ice. He has a good set of hands to go along his offense-oriented game. Although David presents the biggest threat from the point, he has shown a desire to activate and skate up the puck in the O-zone, trying to get the opposition moving, setting up plays from deeper in the zone if the opportunity arises.

The biggest weapon David owns is his shot, being able to put impressive power in his attempts. In fact, his slap shot likely ranks among the very best in this year's draft class and that area of his game could be considered NHL ready. His wrist shot would be considered above average for a forward prospect, so it goes without saying it's also a strength of his.

He is able to run a man advantage well, even if perhaps a bit too much straight forward at times. He is able to swap positions with teammate forwards, getting even better one timer opportunities, and as mentioned above, he is also able to play a skating game, which is even more effective with more space on the ice.

Defensively, Jiricek has made good progress throughout the year. While he isn't a defensive stalwart just yet, he stands his ground, positions himself well and tries to react to the play in advance. Compared to past viewings, he has toned down his aggressiveness in the D-zone, meaning he doesn't find himself out of the play nearly as often. Thanks to his long reach he is usually effective when challenged one-on-one.

He has always had a bit of a mean streak and it shows. Despite still having some filling left to be done, he can be punishing along the boards, but also with an open ice hit. Still needs to find the fine balance between playing the body and playing the puck, but he's getting there.

Weaknesses

Something that so far hasn't developed as much as we were hoping for is his strength. Although Jiricek has grown over the past few years, his lack of more significant weight gain is somewhat disappointing. For a player that likes to be aggressive and engage in physical battles, that's been a bit of a limitation for his game's effectiveness. Despite having the height advantage more often than not, he can be out-muscled still. Although you don't want Jiricek to lose in agility and swiftness, you can't help but think adding more weight and power would make a difference for his style of play in the defensive zone.

Skating is another area Jiricek should be looking to further improve. He is quite mobile when we only consider his agility and top-end speed, but it takes him a while to get there. That is an issue when defending speedy forwards. Despite David's best efforts, he is prone to getting caught flat footed and not being able to catch up, which results in

either a scoring opportunity against or a penalty. Given his style of play, turnovers are going to happen and in such situations, it's going to be hard for him to get back in time. But with improvements, he would do better when defending rushes, which is an area he can currently be exposed in, even when 'ready' for the play. His decision making can be questionable at times as well. While improvements were made, as mentioned above with particular reference to his D-zone play, he can still be prone to overplaying situations and being unnecessarily aggressive. He needs to tone that down a bit further, be it when aggressively pinching or overconfidently handling the puck at the blue line. Related to this, despite the ability to offer a wider variety of plays in the O-zone, Jiricek often finds himself almost forcing shots. Especially during powerplay time one might think a more collected approach could be beneficial, even if blasting everything at net is rarely a bad decision as long as it's from proper areas.

Key

Forcing less plays and not being overly aggressive. That's likely the key for Jiricek in order to become a strong NHLer. A lot of areas of his game that he is lacking in are workable, changing mindset and approach to the game can be difficult however. If David wants to be a top line player one day, he needs to adjust to more structured play.

NHL Role Projection

Physical, intense, do-it-all 2nd pair defenseman, who can play on both PP and PK.

Ratings Notes

One of those defensemen that owns the frame and aggressiveness to break up cycles along the wall. He can also help his team by making controlled exit with his breakout passes. Doesn't get a higher Possession Rate only because he is not the quickest getting to lose pucks.

DAVID JIRICEK						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
3.5	3.5	3	4	3.5	5	4.5

09. JOAKIM KEMELL - RW, 5'09.5", 185, 27-Apr-2004, Right

Type of Player

Shooting winger that plays with a lot of jump and can get creative with the puck.

Path to the Draft

Kemell made the initial Top 5 for the 2022 NHL draft that we released with the 2019 Summer Blue Dispatch. It took him a while to generate some hype, but his showing as an underager at last year's U18 Worlds made him a popular name and the hype hit another level when he scored 12 goals in the first 16 Liiga games this season. However, after missing the entire month of November with an injury he went through a scoring drought of 14 games, without recording a single point and not looking at his best. He finished his campaign with only 3 goals in his last 23 Liiga games.

He had another chance to shine at the U18s, and despite missing a game with a cold early on he didn't disappoint, scoring a hattrick to defeat Canada in the quarterfinals, a performance that certainly helped his chances to get selected high in the upcoming draft.

Strengths

Kemell can play with a lot of pace, is willing to challenge the opposite defense and loves to shoot the puck.

He likes to use his puck skills to get creative and with his remarkable skating ability he is a legit one-on-one threat off the rush. To make for an even more entertaining package, he can deliver open ice hits that you wouldn't expect from a skill player of his size.

The fact he doesn't mind the physical play helps his projection, but his best trait when thinking of his game translating to the NHL remains his shot. He can execute with a lightning fast release on the rush, and his powerful one-timer on the powerplay is a weapon that should do some damage at the next level too.

Another thing that could be important for Kemell at the next level is that, while he likes to carry the puck, he can use his speed to get open without it.

Weaknesses

We wrote in the past how Kemell needed to learn to pick his spots better moving forward, adding a bit more discipline and structure to his 'junior game'. We can say he has been getting better for that matter, but he still has a tendency to over-handle the puck, sometimes for example trapping himself high in the offensive zone.

Given the challenging, risky game that he plays, it's inevitable that possession is not safe on his stick, but there are situations where he could do a better job at recognizing the right play.

Speaking of which, being a happy shooter is not a bad thing when you have kemell's shot, but there are times where he shoots even if it's not the most sensible play to make. Oddly enough, he can be at fault of the opposite when rushing down the middle, as he still tends to focus on challenging the backtracking D-man one-on-one when he is approaching the slot with enough room to shoot the puck from a dangerous position.

Also, for his skill level he still makes too many unforced mistakes. The bottom line is Kemell still makes a few too many avoidable turnovers.

While dangerous, his one-timer is less accurate than desirable.

Lastly, there is some lack of discipline with his stick work in battles and on the forecheck that can lead to offensive zone penalties.

Key

Further clean up his game and his decision making.

NHL Role Projection

Top-six winger who fearlessly challenges defensemen and is a threatening shooter in all situations.

JOAKIM KEMELL						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
5	4.5	4.5	3	3.5	4	4

10. GLEB TRIKOZOV - LW, 6'01", 185, 12-Aug-2004, Right

Type of Player

Powerful and highly skilled goal-scoring winger who can disappear for stretches.

Path to the Draft

Years ago Trikozov caught our attention for his ability to pull off impressive one-on-one stickhandling moves, surrounded by shifts dominated by lack of intensity and effort. We thought last season things started to trend in the right direction with him, and this year he took another step towards putting it all together and taking advantage of his potential. That was evident in some of his MHL playoff performances, although inconsistency still negatively affected his overall post-season performance.

Saying Trikozov was not always on his game this season would be an understatement, but with that in mind his offensive numbers look even more impressive.

Strengths

Trikozov is an impressive player with the puck on his stick.

He can be a one-on-one threat whenever there is room, which makes him very effective in transition.

His skating offers the explosiveness needed to create separation with the defenders. Not many forwards can quickly carry the puck out of the reach of the defenseman like he can do with his skating and stickhandling.

And once he gains that step he's a very dangerous player with his shot and the way he can exploit open lanes, by passing the puck or moving into them to pursue a better shooting position.

While his shot is not always a 'hit', it can really do damage when he gets it off right. He has a tremendous release, and is the kind of player that can put the puck in the back of the net right away, before the defense can adjust.

The feeling is there is room to improve on how he can take advantage of his stickhandling prowess to prepare the release, changing the angle to evade the shot blocker, especially in 5 on 4 situations. He has the potential to become hard to defend for penalty killers if he learns to move with the puck to pursue a shot from the middle after he gets the puck on the left side. He can activate quickly from standing still, especially for someone who is not a small, light player. He has a strong reach on the puck and can maintain control while maneuvering it pretty far from his body (and from his opponent).

He shows nice intuition and offensive awareness on his passes. He can deliver crisp long-range passes, his impressive release helps him in that department as well.

Weaknesses

The main issue with Trikozov has always been his inability to stay more consistently involved in the play. While that has improved over the years and through this season as well, his play off the puck remains puzzling and reason for concern.

In the defensive zone he is often caught watching the play, barely moving. The closer you get to the neutral zone, the more chances you have to get lucky and see him really commit to a defensive effort. It's a shame it doesn't happen more often, because when it does Trikozov can be really effective on the backcheck or by putting pressure on the defenseman that is handling the puck in his zone along the blueline.

There are mind lapses in his game that go beyond his defensive duties though and there is a frustrating lack of consistency. It's a bit disappointing that his worst version can still show up in decisive games as well. He had a putrid showing in an elimination game before turning it on in the MHL semifinal vs CSKA.

How much of all this is just bad junior habits and how much serious lack of competitiveness? he does compete very well in some shifts, so there is that to build off. It's not like he can't do it, it's not like he is a soft player.

On the rush he could use his teammates more, rather than just setting on the idea of earning the offensive blue line by himself. With his tools he's capable of doing that regularly, but as the level of defense he faces improves he'll need to adjust and share the puck earlier when the opponents effectively close up on him.

Key

Using his strengths also when the other team has possession, staying aggressive to be more consistently involved in the play.

NHL Role Projection

Top-six goal-scoring winger and triggerman on the powerplay.

Rating Notes

Really powerful skater, but at this stage he doesn't skate nearly enough when he doesn't have the puck. His Possession Rate is inevitably affected by his only occasional work on the defensive side of the puck, but at least at the junior level he is very effective at carrying possession from the defensive blue line into the offensive zone.

GLEB TRIKOZOV						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	5	4	3	4	2.5	3.5

11. JIRI KULICH - W/C, 5'11.25", 178, 14-Apr-2004, Left

Type of Player

Opportunistic scorer who attacks with speed, owns a swift release and is competent defensively.

Path to the Draft

Kulich appeared on our first country-based list of 2022 draft eligibles in Summer 2020. Fair to say he wasn't a lock for that ranking back then, as we have felt the top 3 was in a tier of its own (he wasn't part of it) and the rest of the field was relatively even. It was however obvious back then already that Kulich has a nose for the net. Despite the pandemic taking away a lot of play time from him, he was able to start his draft season in Extraliga right away in a solid role. At the end of the season, Kulich did himself a favor and became a scoring sensation at the U18 tournament.

Strengths

Kulich's release is what should give him consideration at relatively high picks come draft time. He wastes no time getting his shots off. At the Extraliga level he was scoring at a more modest level and his goals weren't necessarily highlight reel worthy, but whenever he would suit up for his county and be relied on heavily, he has shown promising potential as triggerman on the man advantage. He can truly rip it. What's perhaps more important than the velocity of his shots, however, is the fact he still maintains a solid accuracy, and doesn't miss the net much. As a result, his shots can result in favorable rebounds and eventually a goal, even if his initial shot went 'only' to the goalie pads.

Mobility is another strong asset he owns. Strong first multiple steps and acceleration makes him a dangerous player on the rush, especially when combined with his scoring ability. Although he is not that agile or elusive with the puck, his top-end speed will give fits to even the most mobile defensemen.

When he is not relied on to be the puck carrier or the difference maker, he likes to move to the front of the net without the puck, looking for deflections, that's a tendency that should come handy in North American rinks.

Smart player overall, good awareness without the puck, his past in juniors suggests he could be able to play down the middle when necessary, depending on his development.

Weaknesses

While Kulich is not scared by traffic, at the men's level his ability to make plays with the puck when defenses close-up on him has left us wondering if there is enough pure skills and playmaking ability to create in those situations. He is more dynamic on the rush (his skating too) than when the play is developing in the offensive zone, and he should probably rely on his linemates more consistently.

While his willingness to shoot is overall a positive for his projection, we have seen him pass up more effective plays in order to shoot, which puts a bit of a question mark on his vision.

Kulich backchecks relatively well and we don't find his compete to be lacking, but his style of play makes him look a bit of a floater at times and he could engage in battles more consistently.

When he is not scoring goals his impact can be a bit underwhelming for a 1st round prospect.

Key

To become a legit top-six player at the NHL level he'll probably need to fine tune his game, improving his playmaking ability in tight spaces and passing game overall. Sharing the puck quickly in the offensive zone to then try to get open is probably the best way for him to remain effective at the next level.

NHL Role Projection

Strong 3rd liner with a scoring touch who can slot in the top six if necessary.

JIRI KULICH						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	4	4	3.5	4	3.5	3.5

12. FILIP BYSTEDT - C, 6'3.75", 204, 04-Feb-2004, Left

Type of Player

Big forward with a unique skating style and the skills to potentially become a complete two-way center, able to help his team in all situations.

Path to the Draft

Bystedt was part of the first ranking (Top 5) we released for the 2022 draft back in Summer 2019. Since then, he has been trending in different directions a couple of times, but his draft season has reaffirmed his status as legit candidate for a top-2 rounds selection. In our experience, he is a player that impresses more in live viewings than through video, and he is coming off a tournament where he played a good role for a Gold-Medal team. Filip also got his first taste of SHL hockey, although as a winger.

Strengths

Filip Bystedt is a big, heavy center. He plays high usage and is lanky with a long reach. He skates well, flowing across the ice with advanced skating mechanics and a wide base. He possesses a really powerful engine and can generate tremendous power with his legs. He keeps his weight oddly shifted towards his rear, but can still generate deceptive speed. He is able to skate by opponents as a result, or turn away from them along the boards in impressive fashion considering his frame. He uses his body, awareness and reach, and turns effectively based on where he feels his opponent is. He can activate himself pretty quickly for a big kid and he uses crossovers well. Although Bystedt is inconsistent in his puck protection (he sometimes leaves the puck exposed), when he commits to it he can be a force. He has soft and pretty quick hands for a big man. He often activates the player supporting him through soft short touch and has enough vision to set up a scoring chance. He gets to the net and can absorb hits and drive wide.

Filip has a decent shot which he uses to score from the slot with a fairly quick release or to put it on net off the rush, typically from the left side.

While he has yet to put it together, Bystedt possesses remarkable tools that make for fascinating potential, something that raises his ranking beyond his current effectiveness.

Weaknesses

Although there is a lot to like about Filip Bystedt, he's still a work in progress. This makes him a difficult prospect to rate. While his best plays can be impressive, he still makes too many mistakes. When he carries the puck, he sometimes runs himself into trouble. He can get caught flat footed in his own zone and be poor in defensive transition. He can be at fault for turning the puck over at the offensive blueline, getting stripped on exits, or taking too long getting shots off on the powerplay. Most curiously, however, there is no consistency in applying his strengths. Bystedt can be particularly strong in one physical battle and then look soft in the next one. He can get stripped of the puck easily on one occasion, and then show off his elite puck protection ability later in the period. At times he looks quick and threatening, but at other times he looks lethargic, off the pace and unable to shift gears. He's big and strong, but he doesn't always take a good angle versus the puck carrier, he's often soft on the forecheck, and he's not consistently using his body to pin his man against the boards.

Key

If he manages to build and define his game around his strengths he could be a force in a few years

NHL Role Projection

Middle-six center that can contribute in all areas of the game

Ratings Notes

His footwork without the puck can still look raw on occasion and we aren't exactly enamored of his wide stride, but not many 6-foot-4 players offer the skating ability to free themselves up from their opponent in different situations. His compete level and toughness have been trending in the right direction since when we started scouting him. With his tools there is definitely room for his T/S index and his Possession Rate to grow into a strength.

FILIP BYSTEDT						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	4	3.5	3.5	3	3.5	3.5

13. BRAD LAMBERT - LW, 6'00.5", 183, 19-Dec-2003, Right

Type of Player

Flashy, extremely skilled puck carrier who doesn't target the slot nearly enough.

Path to the Draft

Lambert has changed club several times in the last few years (and would do it again if moving to N.A. to play major junior next year), this is already an indication of the struggles he's been going through in his development.

After playing a full season in the Liiga last year we hoped to see him adjust and become more effective this season, but his numbers actually regressed, leaving him with a total of 11 goals in more than 100 Liiga games overall. In the last two seasons we have seen him play his best hockey at the WJC, small samples where he still only accumulated 2 goals in 9 games.

To be fair with him, if he were a few months older and eligible for the U18s, we have little doubts he would have been one of the best players in Germany, but his trajectory, unresolved issues and lack of production have made for legitimate concern at this point.

Strengths

From a technical standpoint Lambert is a top-end player.

His skating may not impress as much when he needs to rush straight forward in races for the puck, but it is brilliant overall and Brad is one of those players whose skating looks even better when they have the puck on their stick.

He can carry it with notable speed and agility, maintaining full control. He has the skills to make plays and moves while going at full speed.

He is able to create room for himself down low in his own zone by circling back with the puck, to then launch himself forward, going end-to-end, skating around opponents with relative ease.

His qualities make him an obvious standout when it comes to controlled offensive zone entries.

Lambert can also deliver some impressive passes, showing quick recognition or even intuition on those plays.

Weaknesses

Lambert excels on the rush, can achieve impressive O-zone entries at high speed, but his rate of turning all those clean entries into safe O-zone possession is far from ideal. In fact, you could say that's where the problems start for him. Too often his puck carrying quickly turns into passes back to the offensive blue line, even when that means forcing the play and putting his defenseman in an uncomfortable situation.

We wrote in past years how his decision making did not look impeccable, especially for a high-end prospect, and that's been a growing concern. When a player of his talent and technical abilities fails to produce accordingly, the suspects turns to his hockey sense. In his case, it can't be a vision issue, as he can see seams to deliver passes, quick ones too. The fact you can't make some of his passes without vision only makes some of his decisions more puzzling though.

We think the problem lies in some of his instincts and bad habits that will need to change.

The thing is, Lambert seems set on the play he wants to make (usually on the periphery) more than on using his skills and quickness to react to what the opposition is giving to him, and this way he makes himself more predictable in the O-zone than he should be with the skills he possesses. It's a bit like if he is in his own world, where he wants to do something he already has in mind and doesn't always react/adjust to what unfolds. Unless he anticipates the play, he won't react to it in time if it goes against what he had planned.

And there is the unfortunate, aggravating fact that the play set in his mind rarely pursues the scoring areas.

One of the main issues behind his scoring struggles was on full display in the last Liiga game of his we scouted. In three different instances he received the puck in a perfect position to immediately drive the slot and shoot, what he did in all of them was instead controlling the puck outwards, driving himself away from the scoring area. All three plays should have been scoring chances and turned instead into nothing plays that ended with lost offensive-zone possession.

That was a bit discouraging and only confirmed the decision we made in our pre-U18s list of dropping him out of the 1st round.

To further handicap his goal scoring ability there is the fact that at this stage his shot lacks some more power and deception to regularly beat quality goaltenders.

Also, without the puck he doesn't always space himself from the defender once covered, which reduces the opportunities to get open.

It's like being so far ahead of his competition in technical skills at younger junior levels made it so easy for him to generate offense that he didn't have to strive to find other ways to be successful. But he will need to, especially when translating his game to the NHL, with less time and space available, and more chances for bigger defensemen to get physical on him.

It's not like Lambert shies away from contact, without the puck he is even willing to initiate himself, it's just that as of now he isn't particularly effective when there is contact involved. You could speculate that he was so good at skating around opponents at younger junior levels that he didn't need to learn how to complete plays under duress and he's trying to learn that the hard way now.

Key

Lambert needs to drive the slot more and keep an open mind (i.e. read the play) while he's carrying the puck inside the offensive zone to promptly react to the defensive coverage. He clearly has the skills to be able to do that.

NHL Role Projection

Middle-six forward that excels in transition and sets up chances for his teammates on the powerplay.

BRAD LAMBERT						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
5	5	5	3	3	3.5	3

14. ALEXANDER PEREVALOV - W, 6'00", 191, 16-Apr-2004, Right

Type of Player

Dynamic winger that is a hungry goal scorer and competes on both sides of the puck.

Path to the Draft

Perevalov was one of the best stories in the first half of this draft season. We were hoping he would look something like that in a year or two, and he basically was there already in a couple of months, even earning his first appearances in the KHL. His second half was however underwhelming and culminated in a disappointing playoff. His icetime dropped from more than 16:30 to less than 11 minutes, with the reduced role his production dropped to 4 points in 9 playoff MHL games and his shooting rate even more so, from about 4 shots per game down to 1.6.

Strengths

Everyone likes to score goals, but Perevalov does it a little more than most, especially when thinking about most hard working two-way forwards (we didn't expect to call him a two-way forward entering the season, but his best efforts showed he can be one). There is no hesitation when he has a convenient chance to shoot the puck, and that's a likeable trait when projecting his game.

Another good trait is that he is not afraid of traffic, he powers his way through, driving the net if possible. At the same time, without the puck he understands when to space himself from opponents to make himself available. He can score with swift skill moves from in close, or using his accurate shot from mid range. He also owns a quick one timer he can do damage with.

While he can score with snap finishes, when needed he can stay poised too. That is an example of how Perevalov can read the play, maintain good awareness and adjust.

He is a pure winger with a change of gear that he can display to accelerate down the wing. This is something we really like about his skating, not only he has the motor to keep skating hard on both ways of the ice, he has the ability to adapt and change his speed while he carries the puck.

Perevalov is able to play a North-South game better than most Russian forwards and remains effective when it comes to dump it in and chase.

Weaknesses

Our main issue with Perevalov is his game-to-game consistency (lack thereof). When he's playing on top of his capabilities he clearly looks like a 1st rounder to us (Russian factor aside), but in the second half of the season that rarely happened in our viewings.

While we like on paper how his game could translate to the NHL, the other concern is whether he will develop enough strength (on his skates in particular) to remain effective when playing at the NHL level the same game he plays in juniors.

The two above qualms kind of fuel each other to raise some questions about him possibly struggling to earn a significant enough role on an NHL roster once in North America, something that could make him consider his options to go back to the KHL. Like for most European prospects, it would probably be better for him to move to N.A. only once fully developed, rather than trying to make an NHL roster early on.

Key

If he manages to become strong and consistent enough to play his game against top competition, he is going to be a good and fairly productive NHL player.

NHL Role Projection

Top-9 winger who can score and play a North-South style, contributing at both ends of the ice.
2nd powerplay unit from left side half wall.

Ratings Notes

From a technical standpoint his skating might not be worth this rating, but we really like his motor and there is room to fine tune other aspects as well.

ALEXANDER PEREVALOV						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	4	4	4	4	4.5	4

15. TOPI RONNI - C, 6'2", 181, 05-May-2004, Left

Type of Player

Complete centerman that competes hard at both ends of the ice, drives possession for his team and can set up his linemates

Path to the Draft

As our 2020 Summer Blue Dispatch can testify, we've been pretty high on Ronni for a couple of years now and it's been a fairly steady development for him since, without big peaks and valleys. While Topi didn't grow much taller (if at all) over the last two seasons, he managed to start filling out his frame and becoming stronger. As a result, this season he got to see action in a bottom-six role at the Liiga level. We would have liked to see his offensive numbers increase more in the Finnish top junior league this year, but he wasn't on a high scoring team and he was quite productive on the international stage, finishing his draft season with a pretty convincing effort at the U18 Worlds in Germany.

Strengths

In our initial viewings almost three years ago, Ronni immediately showed traits of a potential two-way center in the making and that's what he seems on the verge of becoming.

He shows the willingness to contribute in all areas of the ice, putting in the needed effort both on the forecheck and the backcheck. Those are two areas where he excels, and we struggle to think of other forwards in this class that have been as effective against their peers at putting pressure on the opposite defensemen that try to build up the break out, often generating turnovers deep in the offensive zone.

His strong compete level is a key element of his game and was clearly on display on the big stage at the U18s. Combining it with decent reads, responsible play and a good reach, Topi brings notable contribution in all three zones when the opposition has the puck.

In his own end Ronni can help his defensemen by retrieving the puck off battles deep in his zone, then staying calm with it under pressure to find an open lane to start the breakout.

While he doesn't appear to be dynamic enough to be a consistent one-on-one threat, he can pull off the stickhandling move needed to maintain possession while challenging defensemen and possesses quick enough hands to complete plays when there isn't much time to maneuver.

Offensively, Ronni relies on his passing ability to generate scoring chances. His passing game in the offensive zone is in fact one of his main strengths and he typically exploits it right after supporting the play or generating a turnover, promptly setting up a better positioned teammate. He is quick at spotting open teammates and shows good timing in delivering his passes. That's the main quality he can offer on the powerplay, for example to set up plays from behind the net.

Weaknesses

The main concern with Ronni is that he may never be much of a goal scorer. His struggles to put the puck in the back of the net don't seem to be strictly related with his shot either. He could become quicker in its release, but his wrist shot from mid range is still decent and improving his shot overall could help but not solve the issue. It's more about learning to stay more goal-oriented in some areas of the ice and be ready all the time for the scoring opportunity that may ensue. Two plays from this season comes to mind and can hopefully provide a clearer picture:

- there was a situation where he didn't activate right away to jump in the open space in front of the net on a developing broken play, the puck eventually crossed the goal crease but he was late to the party.
- on another play he had a clear scoring chance off the rush, but instead of driving the net to earn at least a shot from the slot he chose to shoot from the side. For a player that competes hard and doesn't play scared at all that was a puzzling decision.

Other than that, it's hard to identify real flaws in Ronni's game.

Key

Can he become a bit quicker and more resolute than a guy like Lars Eller when it comes to take advantage of offensive opportunities? He is a better passer, but the answer to that question is probably the key when trying to project him for more than a 3rd line C role.

NHL Role Projection

Middle-six center that can contribute on both special teams and make life easier for his wingers - Lars Eller type of role, unless he manages to develop a better scoring instinct

Ratings Notes

While adding some power, at times this season his skating has looked a bit heavier and less coordinated, but in the past it's been consistently better than average and we feel it's more likely than not that will still be the case in the future.

TOPI RONNI						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4	3.5	3.5	5	4.5	4.5	4.5

16. JULIAN LUTZ - LW, 6'02.25", 187, 29-Feb-2004, Left

Type of Player

Very skilled winger who can be electric and exciting to watch in some shifts.

Path to the Draft

Lutz's development has been impacted by shortened seasons and an injury-riddled draft year. It's quite possible he explodes post draft in a way similar to former Red Bull Academy graduate JJ Peterka.

Strengths

Lutz's game is characterized by his wide base, smooth feet, fluent strides and impressive edgework. He leans into his turns and explodes out of them. He darts into lanes and weaves through the neutral zone with controlled speed and precision. He's shifty, dynamic, and dangerous in one-on-one situations. He uses half strides well to maintain speed and he executes crisp start-and-stops.

Lutz utilizes his soft and swift hands effectively to make quality plays. He's creative with the puck, sees the ice well and moves in ways which manipulate defenses. He goes to the net, finds soft spots in a defense and calls for the pass. He makes subtle slip passes to linemates and cushions the puck well when receiving the puck. He has the ability to lead a rush, take shifts over, and finish. He has a quick one-timer, which is a legitimate weapon on the powerplay from the right faceoff circle.

Talent wise, Lutz clearly possesses the tools of a first rounder.

Weaknesses

Lutz has a tendency to disappear or fail to impact games. He can sometimes struggle to get possession and look out of sync with his linemates. He often puts his teammates offside with east/west moves in the neutral zone and too often passes into high traffic areas. He can over handle pucks or unnecessarily bobble them and lose control. He often turns the puck over high in the offensive zone and has a habit of skating himself into trouble.

Whilst Lutz is capable of providing pressure on the forecheck, his game lacks physicality. He is too easily pushed off the puck and often is knocked off his feet. He bounces off checks and is outmuscled in puck battles. At times he over-pursues on the forecheck and gets caught behind the play. Lutz over-commits with this stick in battles, which sometimes results in unnecessary penalties. When comparing with our early viewings of him from a couple of seasons ago, it's clear playing vs men he has improved his work rate away from the puck, but his involvement on the defensive side of the puck is still hit and miss. Despite the increased sense of urgency and loose-puck intensity, Lutz's defensive play and decision making are still inconsistent and a cause for concern.

Key

Lutz needs to play off his linemates more effectively. He would benefit from playing with an elite two-way center.

NHL Role Projection

Middle-six winger who can be a one-on-one threat and score some goals.

JULIAN LUTZ						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
5	4.5	5	3	3.5	3.5	3.5

17. ARSENI KOROMYSLOV - D, 6'03", 180, 03-Nov-2003, Left

Type of Player

Steady defenseman who can play a good, calm puck possession game and is aggressive on his opponents.

Path to the Draft

The late 03-born Russian defenseman built on his previous year and in our viewings kept improving throughout the season, with no specific red flags in his game to point out.

Some convincing showings in the last third of his MHL season helped him to rise in our final rankings, but that could be different within NHL teams, considering his minimal international exposure and even more so the circumstances currently surrounding Russia.

Strengths

Koromyslov is a defenseman that, to us, has looked more and more reliable in his own half.

We noted significant progress throughout the last two seasons in how he handles forecheckers' pressure down low in his zone. He now seems able to remain poised with the puck in all areas of the ice, including the offensive zone, and is resilient with it along the boards. He can absorb a hit and keep the puck blocked, remaining calm and maintaining possession, at least at the MHL level.

Rare turnovers, good defensive stick, solid along the boards to retain possession or to break up the cycle. If not truly beaten to the puck on dump-ins he finds a way to keep it on retrievals, can step up in the neutral zone to cut down space for his opponents, can keep the play alive in the offensive zone by pinching along the boards.

These are all qualities that clearly contribute to making him a strong Possession-Rate player.

He likes to use the side boards to complete safe breakouts, but can be quite elusive with the puck, usually not to really beat his opponent but to create an opening for himself to move it.

He is able to comfortably maneuver the puck tight to his body or with a wide range instead when needed, like for example to evade an opponent or even outwait the goalie one-on-one. He showed to be a pretty good finisher in tight, the rare times he had that opportunity. His good hands are often on display on his passes as well.

Most times he moves the puck in a convenient, unspectacular way, usually keeping it to short simple passes.

The foundation of his game is his footwork, which is remarkable for a 6-foot-3 defenseman and helps him to adjust and get on pucks. He also shows more urgency without the puck than with it, we like how he's calm with it but not slow jumping on loose pucks.

He reads the play to anticipate it and cut down space for his opponents before they get the puck.

Solid competitor, he fares pretty well in battles with his stick, and not a soft player. Can get physical, block shots, and consistently box out his opponent in front.

At the offensive blueline he doesn't take much time or space to put pucks on net. His wrister could have more zip but he still finds ways to do occasional damage through traffic, more rarely uses a pretty hard slapper with a short, low wind up.

Weaknesses

There was no apparent progress in his offensive department this season. On a team that didn't really need defensemen to take risks to generate offense we didn't get to see him make plays in the offensive zone as much as we hoped.

It's been a bit more of a struggle for him when thrown into higher paced contests, like in his few KHL appearances or in pre-tournament action with the WJC team. He made the team as an underager, but was scratched in the only two games Russia played before the tournament was shut down.

With things happening around him faster than he is used to, he didn't look as solid defensively anymore. We feel like it's just an adjustment type of thing, but it's worth pointing it out.

Although as mentioned above his wrister is pretty effective when it gets through, he gets it blocked a bit too often. He should work on that, trying to add some deception when there is no time to beat the shot-blocker in front of him by simply shooting right away, like he likes to do.

So-so speed and acceleration were the main reason he didn't make our pre-season top 20, Koromyslov improved on that through the year, but might need to take another step for them to reach a convenient level for KHL/NHL action.

Key

Adjusting to high-paced games. Adding some more explosiveness in his legs could make his play more dynamic, opening up more opportunities to take advantage of his skills in all situations.

NHL Role Projection

Middle-pair defenseman who can manage tough assignments and help settle things down.

Ratings Notes

With the way he can use his feet and edges to adjust and escape pressure, we feel with further development his skating has a decent chance to become above average (4) overall.

ARSENI KOROMYSLOV						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
3.5	4	3	4.5	4	4	4

18. FILIP MESAR - RW, 5'09.5", 174, 03-Jan-2004, Right

Type of Player

Speedy winger with nose for the net, good skillset and skating ability that gives him advantage over his opponents.

Path to the Draft

Mesar has been a highly regarded prospect for multiple years now, producing at high rate in the Slovak junior leagues, before getting promoted to the top Slovak league as only 16 year old. After a very promising production in his D-1 season, his numbers stagnated somewhat in his draft season and he was inconsistent game to game in our viewings, particularly late in the season. All things considered however, Mesar's numbers should still be considered a good output from a player of his age.

Strengths

The first thing we liked about Mesar when we started scouting him was his ability to be a play catalyst while playing the wing. With his mobility and sense off the puck he would end up with it more often than not, showing confidence once in possession.

Filip's game revolves around his skating ability. First step, acceleration, top-end speed, agility - it's all there. In the club play he would literally stand out among the rest in that regard. But even on international ice, his mobility would always rank among the best in the rink. He uses this advantage whenever he can. Be it when on the rush, when cycling in the O-zone or even when defending, skating always plays a huge role for him.

The combination of quality skating and solid skills makes him capable of completing clean offensive zone entries, often dictating his path before the defense can adjust.

He can play at a high-tempo and his executions remain sharp while doing so. This makes him a viable option to complement high-quality players.

Weaknesses

Mesar isn't the largest guy out there and he plays like it. Especially when he is not at his best he could be called borderline soft. Occasionally shows the will to play the body, but it's not particularly effective at that. His frame is certainly limiting him in that regard, he will never be a punishing physical menace, but plenty of smallish players can cause havoc simply by going for it full force. That's something we haven't seen Mesar do despite an overall good compete level.

At times his decision making in the O-zone can be questionable to say the least. A too common play of his seems to be a low-danger shot from outside the circles, even when holding onto the puck and making a better play could be possible. Liking to put pucks on net is not a bad thing, but we would expect Mesar to assess more consistently how much time he has and how much traffic is there in front of the net. Even a floater off the boards might not be a bad shot to take as long as there are enough players to screen the opposing goalie or to tip the puck, there is no reason however to pull that play when the goalie has a clear view.

Somewhat related to the two previous points, with the puck Mesar tends to play on perimeter a bit too much. He has the ability to challenge opponents and try to gain room in the slot possibly, but at this stage he doesn't do that enough, more often reverting to operating from the outside, where he doesn't have to engage anyone physically, but also can't create nearly as dangerous scoring opportunities.

With his tendency to attempt shots from angles rather than pursuing a more dangerous play, he seems to trust his shot beyond its current effectiveness. His wrist is adequate, with decent accuracy, but it only becomes dangerous when released from scoring areas. His one-timer needs to improve significantly if he wants to be a respected shooter with the man advantage in the future.

While the smaller rinks could help making a higher percentage of his shots dangerous, he will have less ice at his disposal to carry the puck around in transition and even less so in the offensive zone, that poses a bit of a question mark on how effective of a puck carrier he will be at the next level.

Key

Getting physically stronger to become more willing with the puck on his stick to pursue areas of the ice where he can make a bigger impact from (buying some time by holding onto the puck when there are no dangerous options available).

NHL Role Projection

Second/third line tweener, who can complete an offensive line or bring some secondary scoring.

Ratings Notes

His shot selection this season has made us shake our heads several times and doesn't match with the fact he reads the game well in other situations. Hopefully just a bad habit.

FILIP MESAR						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
5	4	4	3.5	4	4	2.5

19. CALLE ODELIUS - D, 6'0.25", 188, 30-May-2004, Left

Type of Player

Smooth-skating, puck-carrying defensive, who features on both special teams.

Path to the Draft

Calle Odelius had a strong draft season. He was a bit part player at Swedish Development camps which took place during last season's Covid-shortened season, but after a relatively strong showing at the Hlinka Gretzky, Odelius continued to evolve. He was arguably the top defenseman for Sweden in Monthey at the U18 Five Nations tournament. His 30 points in 43 games were good enough for 5th in scoring amongst defenseman in the J20N. He played 7 games for Djurgardens IF in the SHL and featured in a pivotal role for Sweden's during their gold medal run at the WJ18s.

Strengths

Odelius is a great skater. He moves like many modern defensemen, quick, instinctively and in a flowing motion. His lateral mobility is strong and he changes direction in flowing all-in-one motions. He walks the line well, opening up his skates, curling and pivoting. His skating ability allows him to carry the puck into open areas and complete non obvious breakouts. He has the potential to carry play and take a shift over, as long as there is ice available. He skates the puck out of his own zone and attacks in transition. When options close on him, he is capable of making turns, cuts, and change his point of attack. He has the ability to attack north/south or change lanes and attack using east/west rush patterns. He can change his pace, slowing the game down, and then attacking. Odelius has decent puckhandling skill and hands. He has a good reach which he uses to keep the puck away from opponents' sticks. He uses his stickwork to strip pucks from opponents. He likes to go D-to-D and has enough vision to make effective stretch passes. Odelius engages in the offensive. He quickly transitions onto offensive after creating a turnover and jumps into plays to join a rush.

He has a liking for shots from the middle of the ice and he has a nice curl and drag wrister. He combines fake shots with footwork to freeze defenders. How his hands and feet work in coordination cause problems for opponents.

Odelius works hard on the defensive end of the ice, too. He blocks shots and takes hits to make plays. He steps up on opponents in the neutral zone and finishes his checks along the boards. He closes space quickly on his opponent, from all four directions.

Weaknesses

While Odelius is unquestionably blessed with exceptional raw tools, there is a lot in his game he needs to address. With his tools, he should be more effective than he currently is on puck retrievals. He is too nonchalant and often beaten to the puck. He can get caught out of position defending the rush. When he wins races to the puck, he often coughs it up or carelessly turns it over.

Often he will follow a series of elusive moves by needlessly throwing the puck away. He makes too many incomplete passes and takes some seemingly needless risks.

Which bring us to our main concern: Odelius has questionable decision-making skills. At times, he over handles the puck and turns it over without much thought; whilst at other times he seems to be guilty of overthinking a situation.

We have seen him look clueless when attacking the offensive blueline, making poor dump-ins, and too often he skates himself into traffic. How deeply ingrained are these decision-making flaws, is the question.

Key

In order to become a more reliable defenseman, Odelius needs to simplify his game, cutting down on unnecessary turnovers and picking his moments to rush the puck more carefully.

NHL Role Projection

If Odelius is able to develop a more professional and responsible game, he has the physical ability and skill level to play in a top four role in the NHL.

CALLE ODELIUS						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
5	4	3	3	2.5	4	3.5

20. LIAM ÖHGREN - LW, 6'0.75", 201, 28-Jan-2004, Left

Type of Player

Rushing goal scoring winger with enough skills to pile up points in junior leagues.

Path to the Draft

Öhgren had outstanding production at the J20 level (usually playing on a line centered by Östlund) and is the first draft-year player in the history of Swedish junior hockey to average more than 1 goal per game while playing a significant amount of games. Liam featured in a limited role in 25 games in the SHL this season for Djurgårdens IF, as well. He couldn't practice much ahead of U18s as he was nursing an injury, and he wasn't 100% in the tournament. Regardless, he got better as the tournament progressed and scored two goals in the final as the team's captain. His overall offensive production in the U18s was a bit of an outlier however, as it did not match his performance and was helped by his linemates.

Strengths

Liam Öhgren is a quality skater with strong straight-line acceleration and top-end speed. He is well-balanced, his strides are long and fluid. He has a knack for earning himself breakaways or finding himself on odd-man rushes, as was demonstrated in the Hlinka-Gretzky Tournament.

He has quick hands that he can use to beat his opponent one-on-one on the rush and that allow him to complete plays with high pace. He possesses a goal-scorer's release and natural offensive instincts. His shots are well-placed, deceptively released and accurate. He has a nicely released toe-drag, he times his arrivals to the net well, and elevates the puck over stretched goalies going post-to-post.

Depending on what a situation demands, Öhgren can either show quickness of thinking or poise to put the puck in the back of the net. He thinks creatively and finishes when in alone on the keeper, using a range of shots and dekes.

Öhgren can also take advantage of his offensive instincts to instantly set up linemates who are open in the offensive zone. Whilst he is primarily a shooter, his passing ability is a seemingly underrated part of his offensive game.

Weaknesses

Despite his quick hands and natural goal-scoring instincts, Liam Öhgren's puck control is far from flawless. He loses control far too easily, often when he's preparing to release his dangerous wrist-shot. He is hit-and-miss in terms of his ability to receive a pass cleanly, as well. Pucks can bounce off his stick and chances are lost.

At times, Öhgren is at fault for forcing difficult passes in the offensive zone as well.

Whilst physically stronger than linemates Östlund and Lekkerimäki, he gives up possession much more easily than them. Öhgren has the tools to be an effective north/south player, but his frequent giveaways force Liam and his linemates to chase the play way too often. Even worse when they happen in the neutral zone and result in the other team immediately turning the play, leading to dangerous rushes against.

Playing alongside Östlund and Lekkerimäki, it also became evident that Öhgren is not as quick on his skates when it comes to react to plays. Whilst his vertical skating is quick and strong, his lateral mobility is not as impressive.

Defensively, Öhgren can get lost on the backcheck. At times, he looked like a passenger in his own zone, behind the play and making poor reads. He has a tendency to puck-watch and get out of position, straying too far from his defensive responsibilities. He showed a lack of engagement and compete in some puck battles. He allows his point men to slip in behind him and can be sloppy in offensive transition when the puck comes to him. Öhgren sometimes over-pursues or gets wrong-sided on the forecheck, which can result in him getting stuck behind the play (he does, however, a good job coming down low to pick up open men, when necessary).

Key

Öhgren will have to work on becoming more responsible in possession, limiting the number of turnovers. He will also need to become more defensively aware in his own zone.

NHL Role Projection

Middle-six winger who can play on the powerplay and score. He would benefit from playing alongside a skilled two-way centerman, such as Noah Östlund.

LIAM OHGREN						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4	4	4	2	3.5	3.5	3

21. LIAN BICHSEL - D, 6'05", 225, 18-May-2004, Left

Type of Player

Big, mean, and imposing left-shot defenseman. The type of player who defends teammates and is hard to play against.

Path to the Draft

At Draftin Europe can proudly say we were one of the first scouting organizations (if not the first) to mention the name Lian Bichsel. The U16 SUI captain was playing up an age level against a stacked Zug U20 team in the late summer of 2020. Bichsel was a monster, tossing around draft-plus-two prospects like rag dolls. He was involved in the game-tying goal late, and Biel eventually ran out surprise winners in overtime. Bichsel continued to develop over the course of the 2020-21 season in the U20-Elit, before starring for the Swiss as an underager at the 2021 WCJ18s. A few months later, Bichsel was featuring in the Champions League for Leksands IF, firmly establishing himself on the radar of most scouting organizations.

Strengths

Lian Bichsel is a beast. He's big, strong, mean and imposing. At 6'5, 225 lbs, the left-handed D-man uses his body well to win board battles and rub attacking forwards out. What sets Bichsel apart from most big defensemen is his elusive nature. Bichsel loves to skate with the puck and can attack the neutral zone, spin out of trouble, reverse the direction of play, or lay the puck off the boards for a winger to skate onto. He gets low in the offensive zone and engages off the line. He is surprisingly nimble for such a large man. Having said that, he also does the things most prototypical big defensemen do. He blocks shots, using his reach well, and smoothers opponents with his long wingspan. He steps up at the blueline and makes monstrous hits in the neutral zone. He maintains good gap control on the rush and staples forwards to the boards on offensive zone entry.

He has a threatening slap shot from the point (which he uses on the PP) and he plays a nasty game characterized by after the whistle skirmishes and dirty stickwork. He is not easy to match up against.

Weaknesses

Our main concern about Bichsel is his ability to manage pucks and make decisions in confined space.

With less time to choose a passing option in the NHL, and space to move with the puck, we wonder if he'll be able to make plays in the defensive zone. He may be able to shield the puck and skate away from the first forechecker, but we wonder if he'll understand where to go with the puck and how to actually skate it out of trouble.

The risk is that Bichsel may turn into the type of defenseman who just chips it out or over to teammates. If that's the case, the hope his other strengths will allow him to play a regular role in the NHL as a complementary player who relies on his partner for puck movement.

Although Bichsel skates well once going, his legs can still be uncoordinated and he lacks explosiveness. His first three steps need work and awkward tendencies when changing direction need to be ironed out. He needs to ensure his feet move quick enough to contain dynamic forwards who pose a greater threat than those who play junior hockey. When he gets beaten, he gets beaten badly.

Finally, for such a large and physical player, we were surprised by how often Bichsel is bumped off his feet and knocked to the ice. It seems that some adjustments may be needed to his training and conditioning program, to help his balance and improve his stamina towards the end of shifts and games.

Key

Bichsel needs to improve his footwork to become more agile and, perhaps more importantly, needs to better recognize the best route available where to move with the puck once he picks it up in the D-zone.

NHL Role Projection

Whilst Bichsel has the potential to become a puck moving defenseman, we feel he may evolve into a physical and menacing partner for a more skilled and dynamic puck mover. He has obvious top 4 potential, but may find himself on a bottom pair.

LIAN BICHSEL						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4	3	2.5	3.5	2.5	4.5	5.5

22. MATTIAS HÄVELID - D, 5'10", 172, 01-Jan-2004, Right

Type of Player

Small but compact risk-taking defenseman who likes to skate with the puck on his stick and dictate the play.

History/Path/Draft-Season

Mattias Hävelid has been a main-stay in the Swedish development system since his U16 season. He has always been a mobile and dynamic offensive defenseman, but this year he managed to take a large step in development. He had a big role on the national team, featuring on the powerplay and making the first all-star team at the U18 Worlds. Hävelid also appeared in 23 games for Linköping in the SHL, playing more than 18 minutes in an early February game against Skelleftea. A draft riser.

Strengths

Hävelid is an offensive defenseman who plays the game with flair. He is a good skater who is able to use his edges to evade, change the point of attack, or successfully find shooting lanes. He is small but compact, and has a low center of gravity. He uses a succession of quick and flowing crossovers to walk the line and drive play from the point. He opens up his edges to give himself a better view of passing options. He makes quick turns and accelerates quickly when regrouping and skating the puck up the ice. Hävelid plays with aggression and tempo, he pushes the pace.

He is quick and effective at firing it to the net through lanes from the offensive blueline. He can do damage with both his one-timer and his wrister, which has a quality release. He times it well and can release at different points. He effectively featured as the powerplay quarterback for Sweden at the WJ18s.

Hävelid has strong puck skills, but it's more than about pure skills with him. It's about the way he pursues plays. He is used to pursue them under pressure and that helps him to identify the way to achieve them.

He likes to take on responsibilities to impact the game during his team's possession. He's a confident puck carrier that can manage it quickly under pressure and transition it up, finding his path through the opponents in the neutral zone. He is a highly engaged player. He joins the rush, takes hits to get the puck over the redline and deep, and battles hard all over the ice. He's feisty, engaged in the offensive zone and an important player in offensive transition. He has nice neutral zone gap control and activity.

Mattias skates well backwards as well. His backward crossovers are pretty explosive and his lateral mobility is excellent. Pound for pound, Hävelid has notable strength. He plays physical and steps up on his men. He wins a good share of board battles for his size and contains his man using good leverage techniques.

Weaknesses

Whilst Hävelid is a dynamic force on the offensive side of the puck, he can quite frankly be a liability without it. Even if less frequently than in the past, he can still look lost in the defensive zone. He lets players get inside of him on net drives and he struggles to pick up his man on the cycle. He makes some poor reads and gets caught out of position, often leaving his responsibilities in the slot unattended. Sometimes he simply gets his timing off, while at other times he goes for a hit and misses. After being left behind his recovery is usually poor.

Mattias tries to do too much, at times. He often over handles the puck on exits, which leads to some lost possessions at the defensive blueline. He has a tendency to overcomplicate things and then freeze. There are times where after a mistake he pulls up and watches.

Hävelid has troubles assessing the rush and defending it properly when there are more players involved than just the puck carrier. More concerningly, he is often beaten wide one-on-one.

Lastly, we fear he won't have much success at protecting the puck under contact at the NHL level, and with the way he likes to play that's something he often needs to do to complete his plays.

Key

He's 'persistent' on the puck in juniors, but playing that way vs NHLers is less easy. We are doubtful his tools (size included) are enough to carry the puck and dictate the play that much at the next level, so he'll probably have to adjust and learn to be effective while playing a more conservative game, becoming more reliable in his own zone.

NHL Role Projection

Puck moving defenseman relied upon more on offensive zone starts and able to contribute on the powerplay.

MATTIAS HAVELID						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4	4	4	3.5	4	4.5	3.5

23. ADAM SYKORA - LW, 5'10.25", 172, 07-Sep-2004, Left

Type of Player

An honest grinder with solid skill who will do all he can and more to help his team win.

Path to the Draft

We first spotted Sykora in his U17 season, and while he left a positive impression, not a lot was expected from him in terms of NHL potential. He never truly stood out against his peers in his country and it wasn't till his draft season when his stock sky rocketed, really putting his name on the NHL draft radar. His progress throughout the season has to rank among the highest ones in his draft class and, with his less impressive previous seasons, it's also what makes him difficult to rank. It was great to see him make the team for the men's World championships and have such a strong showing there, but we also have to remember ourselves it is still a small sample.

Strengths

There actually aren't many technical areas of Sykora's game that warrant to be called a real strength. He is around the average in majority of skills a hockey player can have, be it scoring ability, playmaking ability, or play in the D-zone. It's fair to say he is a strong skater with good speed, agility and overall mobility, but even that gets overshadowed by the one aspect that Sykora is extremely good at, which is not a technical skill. It's his compete level, his will to walk through a concrete wall if it helped his squad in some capacity, with a seemingly never ending motor at disposal.

His relentless activity on the ice makes good things happen every other shift. And as a result, he gets his points despite not being the most skilled guy out there.

Weaknesses

It was more or less mentioned above - Sykora makes up for his shortcomings with hard work, but that will never erase the need for natural talent if a player is to ever become a legit scorer at pro level. He hasn't shown the puck skill necessary to be a difference maker against his peers. Hard to imagine Sykora's compete level can overcome skill deficiencies to be a consistent producer at the next level, even if his sudden progress this past season could suggest otherwise.

Also, while not Sykora's fault, for all the energy and willingness to play physical and battle, his smallish stature might prevent him from making a consistent impact in that area against big, strong and fast NHLers.

Key

It's one thing to play at a crazy level of intensity for a few minutes a game in a short tournament, it's a different one to do it day in and day out, with a heavy schedule, when you're required to play more than 4th line minutes. Would he remain effective under those circumstances?

NHL Role Projection

Energy bottom-six forward who can play up the lineup if necessary.

ADAM SYKORA						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	3	4	4	4	6	3.5

24. ELIAS SALOMONSSON - D, 6'01.25", 183, 31-Aug-2004, Right

Type of Player

Smooth defenseman who can look enticingly good with the puck in transition.

Path to the Draft

After a 2020/21 season that was in line with our expectations (we ranked him as the 4th best prospect in Europe in the 2020 Summer Blue Dispatch), and where he managed to debut in the SHL at 16, this year Salomonsson's play was quite disappointing and raised some concerns on his ability to make the most of his skills. For someone who was already a regular for Sweden at last year's U18 Worlds we'd have hoped to see him show more confidence at this year's event (didn't take responsibility in line with his skills and was far from poised with the puck).

Strengths

One of the youngest players in this year's class, Salomonsson entered the season with much fanfare. He offers in fact an attractive package of qualities. He is a very well rounded skater, with good balance, who moves smoothly in all directions. He can transition well from skating forward to backwards and rarely gets caught flat-footed. He has the tools to defend top forwards on the rush.

Salomonsson can execute hard tape-to-tape passes with ease, but also dish softer ones. He can carry the puck out of his zone and through the neutral zone with speed, finding his way into the offensive zone. He looks for lanes to attack and soft spots to sit in, and he collapses to the net when he senses an offensive scoring chance. He has swift hands that allow him to complete plays in tight spaces.

When he is on his game, Salomonsson is capable of reading plays and shows a sense of calm, ability to control the pace, strong puck movement and gap control. He surveys the ice well whilst backpedaling and uses slap passes in the offensive zone.

Salomonsson is often used on the left wing half wall on the powerplay. He can change the angles on his shots and catch and release in one motion. He has a decent one-timer which is well-timed and smoothly launched (he would benefit from getting a higher percentage of his shots on net, though).

Weaknesses

Salomonsson's game did not progress as expected this year. He became less impactful and more prone to making unforced errors. His defensive game lacked urgency. He lacked explosiveness in his movements and he failed to show the same evidence of strong critical thinking he had shown in the past. He took a bit too much time on the puck and often rushed clearing attempts, rather than resolutely skating with the puck. It's difficult to speculate about the reason, but the timing on his passes didn't look as good this year. Elias could also use more deception in his passing game, especially on the powerplay.

Salomonsson was guilty of turning the puck over too much this season. Furthermore, some of these turnovers took place in dangerous places and when no support was available. At times he appeared noncommittal on the cycle and unable to stay with players who were driving to his net.

Against better competition, Salomonsson was unable to excel as he does in Swedish junior games. In the J20 National, he's usually able to complete plays before opponents can get a hold on him. As soon as that happens instead and he gets engaged, Salomonsson doesn't appear comfortable anymore and his effectiveness drops in a way that might be our primary concern when projecting his future success.

Development is going to be crucial. He may have top pairing potential from a technical standpoint, but he never really looked confident and dialed-in this season in our viewings. He's a player whose game could flourish if he improves on his weaknesses and rebuilds his confidence.

In terms of technical skills we still have Salomonsson in high regards, it's the toolbox (or his heart and head, if you want) that has become a bit of question mark at this point.

Key

Growing his compete level and confidence to take full advantage of his technical abilities. Not looking strong enough on his stick in battles or when he has the puck and gets challenged, we hope that building a stronger upper body could be a difference maker for him.

NHL Role Projection

Top-four defenseman that can move the puck, contributes in transition and plays on the 2nd powerplay unit.

Ratings Notes

The boarding major penalty at U18s was not an exhibit of someone who plays tough, more like someone who crossed the line as he is not used to be physical and when for whatever reason he tries to be he doesn't have a feel for the line not to be crossed.

Skating is an obvious strength, but as most of his peers improved theirs from last season, he doesn't seem to have as big of an advantage on them anymore. He hasn't looked as fast as we hoped when he needs to get from point A to B. It might just be a side effect of the lack of resoluteness and determination in pursuing plays he showed this season, from a technical standpoint his skating would easily warrant a 5.

Compete Level and T/S Index looked better in his limited appearances at the senior level.

ELIAS SALOMONSSON						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	4	4	3.5	3	3	3

26. SIMON FORSMARK - D, 6'02", 194, 17-Oct-2003, Left

Type of Player

Calm, composed and poised "old school" defenseman, who's able to join the rush, regroup, or slow the pace of play down.

Path to the Draft

Simon Forsmark is a well-known defensive prospect in the Swedish system that entered the year as a potential candidate to be selected in the first round. Forsmark had an extremely productive season in the J20 National. He averaged 1.17 points per game in 20 games for Örebro. Simon played most of the season in the SHL however, averaging less than 10 minutes per game across 41 games. As a late 2003-birth year, he was ineligible to play for Sweden at the WJ18s.

Strengths

Already at an early age, Forsmark showed tremendous poise in his game, even when going up against older competition.

He has a sound handle on the puck and his standout quality is the way he manages it under pressure, remaining effective under duress. He plays with his head up and has notable ability to protect the puck. He can carry it up smoothly, with an air of confidence, surveying the ice and reading the play. He handles unpredictable situations well and demonstrates a strong sense of situational awareness. His smarts show up on 50/50 pucks, as he finds simple ways to come up with possession more often than not, using anticipation and surprising problem-solving ability. Whilst not a physical player, he is not soft on the puck, he doesn't shy away from physical challenges.

There is some concern around his ability to make plays quickly, but with the way he plays he rarely needs to. He can usually buy some time for himself when he doesn't have a simple play already figured out to get out of troubles. He is reliable on the breakout, making responsible outlet passes, and on retrievals if not beaten cleanly to the puck. Defensively, he uses his body well and takes good angles on opponents. He competes well along the boards, gaps well, picks up his check in the slot, and takes good positions in support. He comes up on his man to force a play and holds the line well. He uses his reach to poke the puck away and separates the man from the puck using effective stick work.

He makes timely pinches in the offensive zone and joins the rush when a good opportunity presents itself. Has a decent wrist shot from the blueline.

Weaknesses

Forsmark is not quick in his executions nor likely to make dynamic plays. He slows the game down to his pace, which could present problems for him at an NHL level. He needs to play with more controlled desperation. At times, he's poised to a fault, which has been exposed in the SHL. His skating on the rush is decent, however a lack of change-in-pace and explosive movement causes him problems on retrievals and in races to the puck. He needs to improve his footwork and pivots in order to better contain agile forwards and become more capable to recover when caught behind the play. A cerebral player for the most part, Forsmark has struggled at times in the SHL to properly support his partner or read the play in the defensive zone. He has been caught flat-footed and with the puck relied too frequently on dump-ins, off-the-board-and-outs, flips and chips.

He needs to add strength and get used to the pace of the pro game. Once he does that, we'd expect him to get things more under control and to be able to play more consistently his puck possession game at that level too.

Key

Becoming quicker and more reactive is probably the main challenge he faces to become an NHL player

NHL Role Projection

Forsmark has the potential to become a useful 2nd-pair defenseman, likely to be paired with someone who takes more risks and needs support.

SIMON FORSMARK						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
3	4	3	4	4.5	3.5	3

27. OTTO SALIN - D, 5'11", 205, 07-Mar-2004, Right

Type of Player

Enigmatic rover defenseman that can transition the puck up the ice with flair, displaying good instincts and offensive abilities.

Path to the Draft

We considered Salin a bit of an enigma going into his draft year, and the season he had only made the enigma bigger rather than helping to solve it.

To be fair with him, injuries really spoiled his season. After making his club's senior team and a decent showing at the Hlinka, Salin suffered a concussion in his first official game at the senior level (late check to his head) in the Champions League opening game. Once he recovered, he went down with a knee injury after getting checked into the boards in his Liiga debut and was sidelined for almost three months as a result. In the new year he reportedly struggled with a bad case of Covid-19 and ended his campaign with a disappointing showing at the U18 Worlds. Late in the 2nd period of the quarterfinal he apparently got hurt again when checked into the side boards by a Canadian forward and didn't play his team's last two games. To add on that, last year there were no international competitions for him because of Covid-19 and his junior team's season was shut down early on for the same reason. Overall Salin played less than 50 games over the last two seasons combined.

Strengths

A pretty smooth skater, when on his game Salin can zoom around the ice with apparent ease and is consistently willing to join the rush.

That's when he can really excel on the breakout, taking things into his hands to transition the puck up the ice like maybe no other defenseman in this draft class can do (when he is on, he can be more dynamic than Havelid). The puck may not be safe on his stick, but he has the ability to fake out forecheckers or drive through/around opponents in the neutral zone, carrying possession in the offensive zone at even strength and shooting off the rush if given the chance.

He can also stay poised with the puck and show some vision with it, mainly displaying these qualities on the powerplay. He can move the puck from the offensive blueline, or move with it to create good shooting opportunities for himself.

Salin likes to anticipate the play and where the puck will end, in some games he was impressive at that last season. When his team has possession and moves forward he actively seeks the right openings without the puck. When he feels like it, he can also be physical on his man in the corners and separate him from the puck.

Weaknesses

Salin didn't prove to be ready for the senior game, as he was not able to protect himself physically while completing plays under pressure.

More in general, he is not resolute enough in completing risky plays, which further increases the risk of turnovers. There is no sense of urgency in his game, to a fault even when he has the puck, gets pressured and would need to complete the play as quickly as possible.

While he can evade opponents, when he fails to do so and they manage to engage him he is soft on the puck. Baffling is a word that often comes to mind when looking at his play. He can tease the viewer with a physical play but his nonchalant demeanor prevails more often than not, making you wonder about his compete level (lack thereof). His anticipation can turn into wishful thinking, that means making optimistic, risky guesses without the puck, but that applies to some of his icings as well (low-percentage hopeful passes from the D-zone).

While he can show very good sense for the game, he looks too often disconnected, making careless plays, frustrating the high hopes he is able to generate with his best plays.

Sometimes he makes you wonder whether he is more about playing with a good-looking style than about substance.

On some of his nice rushes he's at fault for trying to do too much in the end. On the other hand, at the U18 Worlds it was the opposite, as he didn't look comfortable enough to make an impact with the puck and showcase his best abilities.

Key

How much were the weaknesses he showed this season magnified by Covid and the injuries? The talent is there, but competing harder, protecting himself better from forecheckers' hits and getting stronger on the puck will all be necessary steps to be made in order to have a good pro career.

NHL Role Projection

One of the main wild cards of this draft. Interviews will likely play a big role in determining where Salin will be selected.

He projects as a mid-pair defenseman who can help his team to start and pursue the transition, as well as contribute on the powerplay.

Ratings Notes

Depending on if you can get his sleepy version or his flying version, your impression of his skating and some other categories will change. This makes assigning ratings for Salin a difficult, probably inaccurate exercise.

OTTO SALIN						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4	4	3.5	3	4	2	2.5

28. KIRILL DOLZHENKOV - RW, 6'06", 234, 20-Apr-2004, Left

Type of Player

A gigantic winger equipped with smooth hands, who can deliver skillful plays and be dangerous around the net.

Path to the Draft

Because of his potential and the numbers he posted in past years in Russian lower junior levels, Dolzhenkov was one of the players we were more curious to watch progress this season. Our first viewings at the MHL level were quite discouraging (his skating in particular), but through the season Kirill managed to raise his efforts enough to earn a decent role and have an impact, to the point he was relied upon on the penalty kill in playoff action. It would have been really interesting to see him compete against his peers on the U18 Worlds stage.

Strengths

Something those ratings at the bottom do not measure is the room for grow (there are flashes here and there that suggest there is potential for more in each of those categories) and his offensive ability.

Dolzhenkov has good offensive instincts, with decent timing and execution on his offensive zone passes, and when he feels it he can really snipe the puck. His wrist shot can occasionally do damage from mid range already, and from in close he's got the hands to finish his chances. Despite his humongous size, when he is on he's able to quickly adjust and fire the puck. He is dangerous in front of the net not only to screen the goalie, he is able to deflect shots and to make his stick available by angling/turning his body in a convenient way.

His hands remain the most impressive trait though, sometimes he can drive through traffic without apparent effort thanks to those nifty hands. When you happen to witness some of his most impressive plays, it's hard not to wonder about what he might be able to do one day with that frame and those skills.

Not many players can maneuver the puck with one arm while they keep the opponent away with their body, and make a one-handed pass from behind the net to set up a scoring chance in front. That's the kind of intriguing stuff Kirill can do sometimes.

His skating stride is cumbersome, but he can generate good speed and carry it over nicely.

Weaknesses

Dolzhenkov can be frustrating to watch. When playing at lower levels in the past, he often put forward a lazy effort, especially away from the puck, and when challenged along the boards he didn't always compete enough to maintain possession, often failing to do so despite the size advantage.

His loose puck intensity has always been a big issue, it improved a lot as his first MHL season progressed, but after it was over and he went back playing at a level below he let the lower intensity games draw him back to his bad habits.

Despite his good stick, for the most Dolzhenkov still struggles at winning pucks on the forecheck and can be soft when he has possession, mainly because of a tendency to play like a finesse player in situations where he should go to work and use his body first.

He needs to keep his legs going and engage in battles without always thinking offense. He usually tries to generate a scoring chance in all situations, that attitude probably comes from his younger junior days where he was used to dominate offensively, now he is still in the process of adjusting and getting used to assess each situation for what it is. Like just working to protect the puck along the boards when that's the most useful thing for his team rather than trying to come out of it with the puck the risky way, something that against quality opponents often leads to losing possession and counter attacks. He needs to use his body more consistently in battles. He didn't really need to do that at lower levels but he'll need more and more moving forward. Now, is it only a matter of will and getting used to do it, or how much does he struggle to engage and stay engaged physically in battles because of slow footwork? Seeing him fall like a big sack of potatoes has been a regular experience, but to be fair with him that has definitely become a rarer occurrence lately.

Key

Dolzhentkov might have the potential to have a post-draft development as big as Red Wings' prospect Elmer Soderblom, but does he have the attitude and work-rate to achieve that? Does he have enough will to work hard to improve on his current deficiencies? Figuring out when to play like a finesse player and when to go to work and use his body instead may partially come with experience, but it's also an attitude thing as well. And that's the 'easy' part. As the pace of the games will go up at higher levels, the biggest challenge for him will be showing he can keep up with it.

NHL Role Projection

PP around the net, to screen goalies and finish. Despite his reach, we feel to contribute on the PK at the NHL level he would need to improve his agility significantly, not something you should be betting on at this stage.

Ratings Notes

For several of these categories (SK, PR, CL, T/S) the ratings are an average between conflicting moments/aspects that can hardly represent the spectrum of Dolzhentkov's efforts. In particular, for Toughness/Softness you could be tempted to give him a much lower or much higher rating depending on the play you're watching. His compete level was much worse than "3" at times, and still often so early this season, but was fine (3.5) later on in MHL. In the Spring Skating looked better overall, with a more effective stride and quicker footwork, but his past and his bad moments would clearly deserve a lower rating.

KIRILL DOLZHENKOV						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
3	5	3	3	3.5	3	3

31. TOMAS HAMARA - D, 6'00", 185, 09-Mar-2004, Left

Type of Player

Calm puck-moving defenseman who is comfortable handling the puck under pressure.

Path to the Draft

We ranked Hamara high in our initial rankings, dating back to 2020. He was able to tilt the ice against his peers, was good both in the club and internationally and was the major standout in the lone U17 international action he was part of as an underager. This past season has been up and down for Hamara, coming off an arm injury he suffered at the 2021 U18 tournament. Struggled to get much Liiga time and even in the juniors his scoring was underwhelming to start the season. Eventually, he picked it up and finished the season with a strong U18 tournament in Germany.

Strengths

Hamara is a defenseman that can recognize the available time and space to handle the puck. That, paired with decent puck skills and good puck protection allow him to remain poised under pressure and to be reliable when he has to deal with forecheckers. In fact, despite not being the quickest skater, Hamara is able to generate controlled zone exits for his team on nearly regular basis. Using deceptive moves and body fakes, he can take advantage of the split second the opponent gets confused in. When skating the puck himself is not a viable option, Hamara offers a precise passing ability, which combined with his vision allows him to make sound breakout passes. In fact, he reacts quickly to the situation and if a chance arises, he doesn't hesitate to send an eye-seeing pass through the whole ice.

He is an overall smart player, when he isn't faster than the opponent he doesn't force the play and curls back instead, looking for a better play.

Hamara plays a competent game at both ends of the ice. He can contribute during puck possession beyond his own zone as well. While not a dynamic presence on the powerplay, he uses some deception to be effective at moving the puck to teammates that are more threatening shooters than he is.

Be it in the defensive zone or offensive zone, he doesn't force fancy stuff and when he needs to, is content with making the simplest of plays, as long as it's the right one.

Weaknesses

Hamara doesn't have the size nor mean streak to be a physically intimidating defenseman, and frankly with his style of play he doesn't even need that to make an impact. He could however be more aggressive, especially when along the boards. He doesn't go full force and battle, which doesn't need to be a negative as long as he does his job defensively, but for a defenseman the ability of wearing down his opponents is always handy and Hamara lacks in that regard.

Despite his skill and deceptive moves, we question whether Tomas has enough speed in his game to be as effective going forward, when moving to tougher leagues. His impact this past season was not nearly as big as it was two seasons ago, usually not being able to outskate the opponent and having to curl back and make a simple play rather than skating the puck out himself.

It's like his competition has caught up to him and he doesn't have an edge in skating anymore. His sound puck handling skills haven't improved further either, and while he is still a decent stickhandler, he no longer seems able to make a difference through that, although that may be a side-effect of his lack of separation speed.

Tomas has shown solid ability to quarterback a power play, however in order to be even more dangerous from the point and to be a legitimate option for that position in the future, he needs to improve his shot. The power behind it in particular. Also needs to develop a better one-timer ability, which goes a long way on the man advantage.

Key

Whether he can get his skating to be as effective as in the past, which would allow him to be a valuable puck carrier even at the NHL level.

NHL Role Projection

Dependable two-way defenseman on the bottom pair, who is a regular.

TOMAS HAMARA						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
3.5	4	3.5	4	4	3.5	3

35. ALEXANDER SUZDALEV - LW, 6'1.75", 177, 05-Mar-2004, Left

Type of Player

Talented pass-first winger who likes to stickhandle and get creative.

Path to the Draft

Suzdalev represented both RUS and SWE U16 NT in the past. After a shortened Covid season in 2020-21, he saw himself fall down the lineup for Sweden this year. He was unable to make the second line right wing spot his own, and eventually barely played in a marginal role on the fourth line in their run to the gold medal. A star in J20 National, where he finished 10th in scoring, Suzdalev made his professional debut in the HockeyAllsvenskan for HV71 this season.

Strengths

Suzdalev is an extremely skilled forward, and is definitely one of the best stick handlers in the draft. As we wrote already a couple of years ago in the Summer Blue Dispatch, he "displays the stickhandling ability needed to make plays in tight spaces. In particular, he is capable of finding his way through traffic to complete offensive zone entries that would not be achievable by most. He can use his good hands, frame and reach to find his way through opponents. He can have them chasing him and the puck for a while".

Suzdalev might also be the best in this class at executing difficult, creative passes. He can complete non obvious backhand blind passes (between his legs too), can open up lanes with his stickhandling by changing the angle or delaying, and he can do that on the rush or on the powerplay. He has vision and even imagination to set up his teammates. While more passing oriented, he is a potential dual threat as he is able to pick corners with his shot from mid range. Add decent size and good skating ability, and you get the base for a potentially exciting player. Suzdalev is a candidate to become a complementary player in a top six role. His flashes of skill, size and skating are enticing.

Weaknesses

Although Suzdalev is a gracious puck carrier, he struggles to determine when is the optimal time to move the puck. Sometimes it seems like he's playing for personal enjoyment more than for his team's benefit, as he wants to carry the puck around before making a pass. In those situations, he will pass up good passing opportunities to keep dangling with the puck until he feels satisfied. At that point he'll make a pass even if it means forcing it (into a low percentage play). He makes decisions with a high risk of turnover, something which becomes increasingly concerning later in shifts. While he is less likely to make those plays in high-level games, we are still concerned over what these types of actions mean in terms of character and Hockey IQ. At the very least, he still has a junior attitude in his game.

Suzdalev was a frustrating player this year. At this stage, his game away from the puck is not good enough. He is not used to playing with intensity and his compete level will need to improve for him to be impactful at a pro level. Right now he offers weak coverage in his own zone and is too soft in battles. He was not strong enough on the puck when he had possession either. His play with the national team this year was marked by failed entries, forced passes and lost battles. He struggled to exit his zone, made poor reads in the offensive zone, and was careless on the puck. He has a bad habit of disappearing for large periods of time.

Key

Suzdalev needs to become more of a team player and learn to use his remarkable skills in more effective ways. Whichever NHL team selects him will likely need to invest hours into video analysis and coaching to develop and clean up his game.

NHL Role Projection

Middle-six offensive winger to be used in sheltered situations.

ALEXANDER SUZDALEV						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	5	4.5	3	3.5	2.5	2

36. ELIAS PETTERSSON - D, 6'02", 184, 16-Feb-2004, Left

Type of Player

Quality-skating defenseman that can make impressive plays against the forecheck.

Path to the Draft

Through his draft season, Pettersson has been teasing us with impressive plays, alternating with careless ones. He had some encouraging showings at the SHL level, but he didn't show much of his strengths at U18s. He looked less comfortable with his U18 national team than with his SHL club.

Strengths

Elias Pettersson is a calm and quite dynamic defenseman. He is a stylistic skater, who skates backwards well and has great edgework and turnover. He is quick to turn and retrieve. He wins races to the puck, positioning his body well and using the net to fend off the forechecker. He is still willing to go in first on dump-ins when he knows he is about to get hit by the forechecker.

With his mobility and physical presence, he can be aggressive, closing up gaps on his opponent and staying with him. Pettersson has nice gap control and holds the line well. He has the ability to force a forward on the rush to curl back or be pushed wide.

Elias' best trait is probably how, when he plays with confidence, he can use his skating ability to elude the pressure and open up the play on the breakout. He handles the puck well and is able to turn, curl or cutback with it. He makes subtle and effective outlet passes to his center on the breakout. He has the tools to potentially beat the first forechecker at the next level and initiate the rush.

Although he's not an overly physical defenseman, he is capable of laying legitimate hits both along the boards and in open ice, including hip checks.

He is chirpy and agitating, scraping to defend teammates after the whistle, and he likes to use his stickwork to unsettle opponents.

Weaknesses

Pettersson is calm to a fault. He needs to play with more urgency and forethought. He is too casual with some of his passes in the defensive zone, and should pay more attention to not turning it over. He makes passes to teammates which put them under pressure. On the breakout, he throws pucks off the boards up the ice to teammates who have no support and he can force passes into tight spaces. He looks carefree even after a giveaway.

He doesn't seem consistently aware of where his partner and support are. He can misread coverage, abandoning his teammate when support is needed.

He likes to put pressure high in the defensive zone, but he doesn't always pick his spots well, leaving open ice behind him for opponents to skate into and receive a pass.

For a player his size, Pettersson needs to better engage in battles. He fails to regularly contain his opponents and his not consistent in his willingness to lay a hit. He seems disinterested at times.

Many of his shots don't get through and he makes risky passes he could stay away from.

He leaves you wondering whether he is oblivious to his shortcomings or just not particularly worried. His attitude did look better and more assertive in SHL action.

Key

He is raw, but bringing consistently to the ice the attitude he showed in some SHL games would go a long way.

NHL Role Projection

#4/5 defenseman who can beat forecheckers without deferring to his D-partner.

Ratings Notes

His possession game benefits from his ability to keep possession on retrievals and from the fact he can close in quickly on the puck carrier, but at this stage becomes average when factoring in the turnovers.

As of now, his straight forward acceleration doesn't look on par with the rest of his skating, which makes us hold back from considering an even higher rating.

ELIAS PETTERSSON						
Skating	Puck Handling	Quickness of Play	Possession Rate	Head for the Game	Compete Level	Tough/Soft Index
4.5	3.5	3	3.5	3.5	3	4

37. Dennis Hildeby - G, 6'06", 234, 19-Aug-2001, Left

Dennis Hildeby stands at 6-foot-6 and 197 lbs. Born in August, 2001, he is 20 years old and thus eligible for the NHL draft for a final time. We don't expect him to become a free agent on July 8, but should he, he'll likely be signed quite quickly as a free agent. Albeit in limited samples, Hildeby stood out for Färjestad this season, posting identical .931 save percentages in both his twelve J20N games and his seven SHL appearances.

Hildeby impressed us this season, it was a breakout year for him. He has not yet appeared on the national scene for Sweden and he had only played two professional games in the HockeyEttan (on loan to Linden Hockey) prior to this season.

Not only does he have decent athleticism for such a big goalie, but he plays composed too. He made incredible improvements from his past seasons, becoming more technical and dynamic than we can remember him being in the past. He moves sharply across his crease and absorbs pucks nicely into his body. He tracks pucks well and has a good eye to stop shots from the blueline through traffic. His glove is reliable and he's capable of making blocker saves from high danger areas through screens. His pad movement is quick and he centers himself well in the net. His down and up movements are fluent and he recovers well.

When moving from his left to right, Hildeby tends to lose his angles a bit. He seems to overplay to the right. He would benefit from coming out of the net to challenge the shooter more, decreasing the shooter's angle. Hildeby sometimes he lets rebound sit in front of him. He's too deep in his net to pounce. He needs to become more aggressive in his crease and use his stick more effectively. On breakaways, he backs in too deep and makes himself appear smaller than he is. He's sometimes inexplicably beaten from low percentage shots from the distance and struggles with pucks wrapped around or coming from behind the goal-line. He also needs to improve his rebound control on pad saves.

He leaves too big a gap between himself and net front forwards, which allow deflections to become even more threatening.

We feel that Hildeby doesn't get out enough to take advantage of his size. His weaknesses are hopefully correctable through coaching and video analysis. He does not appear to lack fitness or competitiveness and he is most definitely trending upwards.

40. Adam Engström - D, 6'02", 185, 17-Nov-2003, Left

Engström is a defenseman that is comfortable carrying the puck from behind his own net to the other side of the ice. He stays calm upon crossing the offensive blueline, waiting for passing options to present themselves, and he gets offensive zone possession going

He skates well enough and nicely jumps into play in the neutral zone. He covers well for teammates, showing good range, loose puck intensity, and urgency in the case of a defensive zone turnover. His game is not necessarily based on finesse; he's more an effective and rangy defender. He plays with his stick on the ice in the defensive zone and uses his reach more effectively than expected. He contains his checks against the board, separates the man from the puck, makes simple D-to-D and reverse passes behind the net, picks up his man in the slot, and passes assertively on both his forehand and backhand. He uses his edges well to open himself up when walking the blueline and uses crossovers well to get up to speed. When there are no good options on the breakout, he turns back and starts the breakout over. He has a strong understanding of timing. Engström plays a simplified game and is trusted on special teams, on his off side, and at three-on-three in overtime situations.

We have some concerns with regards to Engström's ability to think quickly in certain situations. On occasion, he throws the puck away in the slot when put under pressure. At times, he holds the offensive blue line too long and fails to recognize transition movements coming through the middle and far lanes. This sometimes results in odd man rushes.

Engström skates well but is not a burner. He struggles to recover when caught behind the play and is put under pressure on dump-ins and in races to the puck. This could be further exposed at a professional level. Comparing Engström with games from last season, we were slightly disappointed with his development progress. He was playing up as a 16 years old and being used in 3-on-5 situations already last year. Although he's still regarded as a decent prospect, his shine has been somewhat tarnished this season, as he's been outplayed by other higher-profile prospects in the Djurgårdens system.

41. Anton Johansson - D, 6'04", 179, 10-Jun-2004, Right

Anton Johansson is a player that has really intrigued us as the season progressed. He's a tall right-shot defenseman that moves smoothly around the ice, gets to places quickly and can close space on his opponents. Despite his size he is light on the ice. He understands the flow of play and uses his intelligence to get places before the puck arrives. His footwork is clean and his mobility and balance are advanced.

He uses his stick to cross check and pressure opponents along the boards and in front of the net. He can get physical and is able to deliver some well-timed and hard hit, revealing a bit of a mean streak, which is somewhat surprising considering his overall 'relaxed' approach to the game. He keeps his man wide on the rush, can quickly move laterally to finish his check against the boards and uses his reach to control the direction of play or deflect shots. He closes down passing lanes and has his head on a swivel in the defensive zone.

Johansson is calm and composed on the puck. He has pretty quick, slick hands. He can swiftly throw shots on net from distance and holds the line with aplomb.

When he carries the puck, his head is up and he makes informed decisions. He can fly up the ice with the puck, demonstrating good puck skills and an ability to lead the rush.

He moves the pucks well to his defensive partner, softly laying it off the boards, crisply going over, or patiently regrouping. He can nicely deliver short backhanded passes to supporting forwards to beat the forecheck and shows a good eye to spot openings for a breakout pass.

Johansson is young for this draft class and a bit of late bloomer. Two seasons ago he was playing U16 Division 1 hockey in his age group, this season he was looking promising in a couple of SHL appearances.

Not surprisingly, Anton Johansson looks green and underdeveloped. He could stay more poised with the puck at the offensive blueline and his shot could become more menacing. He has a nice zip on his wrist shot, but developing and pursuing a wider range of shots would serve him well.

Defensively, he clearly needs to bring a more consistent and competitive effort. Also, his gap control seems to be a recurring problem. He can be too passive in his positioning, backtracking towards his own net and affording attacking forwards too much space. He can appear vulnerable defending the rush.

Johansson needs to add muscles and physically develop. Once he activates he can look competitive on some plays, but overall he plays with low intensity. At 6-foot-4 (that's how he's listed these days, we are not guaranteeing that's correct though) and just turned 18, he has a lot of time and room to grow, at the same time he also has a lot of work to do to fill out that frame and build a more competitive game.

Still, we consider him to be a highly intriguing project and a prospect with significant upside.

42. Theo Wallberg - D, 6'04", 187, 23-Dec-2004, Left

With his head up, Wallberg can carry the puck up the ice pretty impressively for such a big defenseman.

He is surprisingly quick maneuvering the puck on his stick and he has mobile feet. He has a powerful stride, good acceleration, and he uses forward and backward crossovers well.

He makes confident zone entries, dishes, and gets low into the offensive zone to create space and support the play. Theo makes decent reads under pressure, properly relying on short passing to his supporting teammate when he doesn't have the time and space to skate with the puck. He makes clean overs behind the net and can calmly skate the puck out, waiting for a passing option to emerge. He has soft enough hands to distribute backhand flip passes on the breakout.

Something encouraging off the puck is that Wallberg shows the willingness and strength to pin opponents along the boards and break up the cycle. He uses his size and reach effectively, and is imposing. He throws around a nice hip check.

Wallberg's use of his stick in defensive situations could be better or at least more consistent given his reach. His positioning needs work, both in support when his team has control of the puck or in coverage when the opponents have the puck. Sometimes, he seems unsure of where to position himself in defensive coverage. He needs to react more quickly in defensive situations. For example, sometimes he looks hesitant in net front and slot coverage. He is working on his ability to defend the outside on the rush and stay ahead of the play.

With the puck, his long range passing execution needs some refinement.

In offensive possession, he is sometimes guilty of unnecessarily throwing the puck away. At this stage he has a tendency to creep forward in all three zones and can get caught.

Wallberg has committed to play college hockey next season.

43. Raul Yakupov - RW, 6'01", 178, 21-Jun-2004, Left

Raul is cousin of former Oilers' 1st overall pick Nail Yakupov, and with him he shares the ability to score goals. At this stage he is a very raw winger who is far from good enough to be consistently effective at the highest levels of competition, but even with his current limitations, Yakupov can be a very dangerous player in the offensive zone. Among U18 players, only Matvei Michkov scored more goals in MHL this past season, which is remarkable considering how little offense there was on Yakupov's team. Aside from his team's struggle, Raul's own main problem is his skating. While not as poor as it looked at times last season, there are still moments where it just doesn't look good enough to play professional hockey, and it often makes him a liability when the other team has possession. Once Yakupov gets the puck though, it's a different story. He immediately becomes much more effective, he turns up his competitiveness and even his skating gets better. Despite the technical issues, he can get up to speed by getting his feet going at a higher rate, and he shows surprising footwork when challenged.

There are three things that could make Yakupov a pretty special offensive-zone player down the road.

His terrific offensive instincts are the first one. He is smart and hungry for goals, he targets the net with and without the puck, and once he gets possession in the offensive zone he turns it on. While he is a shooter first, he quickly recognizes the most effective options available, even when that means setting up a linemate.

The second key factor is his shot. It's accurate and displays a very quick release. Yakupov is lethal from short range, with the fitting bonus that around the net is where he navigates and gets open more often than not.

But the third factor is actually what would make us willing to spend a pick on such a project of a player. Not only he likes to initiate contact, Yakupov seems to thrive when defenseman make contact or engage him in battles. When you consider how far he seems from the finished product, it's surprising to see how he manages to maintain possession under pressure in the offensive zone and down low. While a poor skater overall, when involved in battles he can surprise the opposition with quick moves, using his footwork to come out with the puck and drive the net in a hurry. Along the boards he protects the puck well and often times finds a way to come out on the right side against bigger opponents.

At this stage Yakupov is too inconsistent in his play and behind in his skating to see him getting drafted in Montreal. At the same time, his best attributes should translate well to the North American game and we feel he has a chance to become a legit goal scorer in the future.

44. Veit Oswald - RW, 6'01", 178, 31-Aug-2004, Left

Eligible for this year's draft by only two weeks, Veit Oswald was probably a late riser on several lists. He was in fact one of the most pleasant surprises of the WC18s, playing a confident two-way game in front of his own fans in Landshut. We were impressed with how well he fared at the tournament, considering the low level of competition he usually faces in the DNL. Oswald led the DNL in scoring his year, but we feel his performance at the WC18s, though less productive offensively, was way more significant than his achievements in the DNL. Oswald proudly wore an A for Germany and he stood out, albeit on a weak German team, for his remarkable work ethic and relatively skilled game. He was used on the powerplay and on the penalty kill.

Veit has good speed and likes to rush the puck up the ice. He uses creative edgework, including his outside edges to scrub speed and time arrivals. His footwork can look a bit raw on occasion, but his skating is a clear strength and will only get better as he physically develops.

He has decent hands as well, can pull the puck into his body and release the puck from in tight. He has an array of drag moves he can use to change the shooting angle or to create shooting lanes for himself on the rush. He likes to carry the puck and attacks the offensive zone with speed. He creates scoring opportunities for himself and his teammates and takes up good positions at the far post for tap-ins, rebounds and cross crease passes.

Oswald uses smart approaches to win the puck from opponents. He takes good angles on the defensive side of the puck in both the neutral zone and the defensive zone, showing decent awareness and understanding of the developing play.

He plays with intensity, works hard throughout his shifts and can help his team on the penalty kill.

On the powerplay, he showcases a nice shot from the right wing half wall and plays a leading role to drive play.

Our biggest concern with Oswald is based on his level of competition. The DNL rarely produces NHL draft-year talent, so he is fighting against the odds for that matter. As much as we like Oswald, we're still concerned about certain aspects of his game, as well.

How his game will translate into a small rink is a slight concern for us. Oswald takes risks which sometimes backfire. He is too accustomed to having copious amounts of time and space in the DNL.

While he has some moves with the puck and can challenge D-men in a one to one situation, his puck control is not flawless and puck protection seems to be an inconsistent aspect of his game that needs more development.

His ability to handle the puck in confined space is a bit of a question mark at this point, but he's an interesting project.

46. Fabian Wagner - C, 5'11.25", 185, 07-May-2004, Left

Fabian Wagner is a defensively responsible center. He has strong awareness in his own zone and supports his defensemen well. He possesses a good motor and effective skating mechanics which he uses on the counter attack. He's a bit of a scoring threat on the penalty kill too, where he probably does his best work. Wagner is especially effective as the second layer on the PK-forecheck. He uses his stick well to defend.

Fabian has some lesser known offensive qualities as well. He uses his legs and body to shield the puck on the cycle. He can pounce on pucks and quickly release a shot. He can accurately time his net drives to the far post and bury his chances. Wagner is capable of driving play through the neutral zone and entering the offensive zone.

When he's at his best, he's buzzing around the offensive zone, cycling the puck, and getting into the dirty areas.

He moves the puck to teammates on exit and does the simple things to clear the zone. When he's not an offensive threat, he's still a trustworthy center who takes pride in his defensive work.

Wagner's stock however dropped as the year went on. Once viewed as a two-way centerman with intriguing upside, Wagner ended the year looking more like a bottom six pivot who'd lost a step over the course of the year. He seemed less agile, less threatening, and oddly, less skilled.

We have questions over Wagner's ability to handle the puck at speed now and are rethinking what his offensive potential may be. We're increasingly concerned that he may not have the hands to make it at the next level.

47. Filip Nordberg - D, 6'04", 207, 05-Mar-2004, Left

Filip Nordberg is a big, aggressive defenseman that likes to play with authority.

He wants to put pressure on his opponents and force the play. He brings a physical presence in the corners and along the boards, showing good urgency on the penalty kill.

He can however be at fault for being over-aggressive and gets burned, as his agility and footwork are not good enough to keep up when he takes a bad angle on a quicker forward.

Nordberg also struggles to defend the rush. His lateral mobility is suspect and he often takes penalties to nullify chances created from being beaten wide or by agile forwards along the boards. He is occasionally dangled or turned inside-out by more skilled forwards, as he was by Kaskimäki at the Five Nations in Monthey.

He doesn't look comfortable when he needs to transition quickly from skating backwards to forward, often losing a step on the opposition.

In terms of defensive responsibility, Nordberg seems slightly unsure at times. He fails to get his stick into the correct lanes on the penalty kill. He needs to become more aware in the defensive zone and survey more effectively. He reacts to plays more than reading them, hopefully as a result of a lack of experience rather than low Hockey IQ.

Nordberg transferred from a small club to play with Linköping last year, but only ended up playing 8 games because of the pandemic, so this with Sodertälje is his first full season playing at the top tier junior level. That probably plays a factor in how raw his game is. He needs to get coached and trained out of his issues.

What makes him a potentially worthwhile investment is the ability he demonstrates to make plays with the puck. He shows some flair moving forward with it, can make nice simple and crisp passes in transition and effective short range outlet passes. More surprisingly, he displays quick hands and the stickhandling ability needed to beat opponents one-on-one. When he suddenly activates from the offensive blueline, beating the forward in front to then drive the middle and release his threatening shot, he can look really impressive. Those moments are evidence of his upside, and his intriguing numbers back up that feeling.

At the same, he doesn't play a reliable game during possession either, as he has a tendency to nonchalantly release risky passes in the D-zone that can result in dangerous turnovers.

To say Nordberg is a work in progress would be an understatement, but he certainly is an intriguing prospect.

50. Ludvig Jansson - D, 6'00", 176, 27-Dec-2003, Right

Jansson is a defenseman that moves the puck well, is quick to respond to situations and engage, and walks the line with ease. He moves well in all four directions, using long, fluid slides and quick crossovers. He turns his feet over quickly and uses mohawk turns to open evade opponents. Jansson enjoys leading and joining the rush. He makes effective offensive zone entries, pushes D-men back using net drives, and attacks the net for rebounds. He is capable of weaving through the neutral zone, drawing players to him, and dishing to open wingers. He moves the puck with confidence. He features on the powerplay and uses his partner well, reversing with a deft touch and making crisp D-to-D passes. He makes flip passes on both his forehand and backhand on the rush. He reads play well and pinches to keep pucks in the offensive zone. Jansson thinks quickly and instinctively reacts. He uses his body well to pin opponents to the boards and he plays aggressively with his stick, making life difficult for his opponents.

Whilst Jansson plays the game at a quick tempo, it could be argued that he plays it faster than he can compute. He is often too quick to make decisions, and his impulsivity often leads to a loss of possession or a giveaway. He

blindly clears pucks when passing options are available and he rushes into a crowd of traffic and turns the puck over. His possession rate needs to improve. At times, he seems to lack a feel for what's happening around him. Backside pressure and forechecking seems to catch him off guard. In his own zone, he often affords his check too much space in the slot. He runs around in his own end and lacks poise. Jansson needs to slow the game down and become more aware of his environment. Whether it's on the rush, where he sometimes blindly throws passes into the slot; in the neutral zone, where he often selects the wrong option; or in the defensive zone, where he is too quick to clear pucks and sometimes struggles to control overs, Jansson needs to simplify the game and play with more accuracy and composure. He needs to become more accountable on retrievals, take better routes to the puck in order to win it, and be more effective in sealing his opponent off in defensive zone battles and races for loose pucks.

Overall, we were hoping to see more improvement in Jansson's game this season, in our viewings he looked similar to the year before.

52. Oskar Pettersson - RW, 6'02", 198, 04-Feb-2004, Right

Oskar Pettersson is a strong kid who plays on the edge. He's capable of making vicious open ice hits, stapling players against the boards, and he is often involved in altercations after the whistle. Pettersson agitates opponents and hits to hurt. His knee on knee hit on Matteo Reinard late in the game in Monthey brought the home crowd out of their seats. Pettersson followed it up by roughing up the Swiss players who came to Reinhard's aid. Oskar plays with a good complete level, finishes his checks, goes to the net and opens up space for his linemates through his physical play. He has a solid, accurate wrister which he gets off quickly. He is a force when powering down the wing at full flight. Pettersson is hard on the forecheck, putting pressure on defensemen retrieving pucks.

Pettersson featured mostly as a top six winger for Sweden this year, but struggled at times to keep up with his linemates. His top end speed is good, but his pace of play in general is still developing. He makes effective slips and outlet passes and can score on the rush, but he lacks the necessary skill and playmaking ability to make plays on a regular basis in a top-six role.

For a player of his stature, Pettersson is too easily beaten off the wall. Most concerningly, Pettersson was undisciplined at bad times this year. Late in the gold medal game against the United States, for example, he took an unnecessary boarding penalty (a hit from behind) which could have allowed the Americans to get back into the game.

53. Topias Leinonen - G, 6'05", 233, 25-Jan-2004, Left

Topias Leinonen started all of Finland's games at the WC18s, helping his country to capture bronze after a heartbreaking loss to eventual winners Sweden in the Semi-Final. At 6-foot-5 and 233 lbs he has the size and pedigree to be considered a legitimate prospect. His legs are quick and he takes away most chances along the ice. He's composed and disciplined, and kicks the majority of his rebounds safely into corners. He gets good extension on his legs and his pads remain flush to the ice when he's going post to post or staring down loose pucks in the slot. For the most part, his movements are controlled, smooth and flowing. His edge control is strong and he mostly remains square to the shooter. He is capable of recovering well and shows glimpses of athleticism. Leinonen tracks play well and has good anticipation. He makes good decisions in terms of when to keep play alive. He is a positional goalie and he plays with a calm and professional demeanor.

Leinonen is however a raw goaltender. He has the physical package and opportunity (in terms of usage) to become a starting goaltender in the NHL, but for him to reach that level he will need to address a number of things.

Leinonen's numbers were unimpressive this season. He is wildly inconsistent and somewhat unpredictable. Although tall and heavy, Leinonen appears thin in his net. He is too easily beaten above the pad and inside the posts. This is especially true when moving post to post. He starts at the top of his crease cutting down angles, but backs in far too quickly. He shows a lot of net in his high corners. His glove is not particularly strong, either. It can be leaky or he can be beaten clean glove side/high glove-side shoulder. When play is behind his net, he drops to one knee. Likewise, when play enters the slot he is far too quick to drop onto both knees. As a result of playing deep and on his knees, he is often beaten high. Compounding this problem, is the fact that high shots often bounce off his chest and into high danger scoring areas. Leinonen can struggle with shots from the outside. He stands up tall and tries to look over net front coverage, and is often unset when point shots are released. Although his edge control is mostly good, he can get caught going one way on a deke and sometimes can lose his bearing under pressure and appear desperate and out of control. We'd also like to see Leinonen's stickwork improve. He is not aggressive enough on the poke check or when clearing rebounds. For a goalie of his size, he's not very imposing and too easy to play against.

54. Ludwig Persson - LW, 6'00", 185, 08-Oct-2003, Left

Ludwig Persson flies down the left wing and pushes defensemen off the line. He goes wide on D-men and gets shots off on the rush. He glides across the ice, darting through the neutral zone and choosing effective rush routes. Against junior players he can look impressive on the rush. Persson has a quality shot. He looks for opportunities to get it off and releases it quickly. Persson can drive play, circling in the offensive zone with the puck and driving to the net. He creates space for teammates and makes passes into high danger areas. He uses his stick to strip the puck, get his stick into lanes, and create turnovers. He has pretty soft hands, which he uses both as a puck handler and as a defender. He can play in a variety of roles on the powerplay, sometimes featuring net front, buffer and both half walls. He covers well for his defensemen.

However, despite his gaudy statistics and regular appearances on Swedish national teams, there are many reasons we have cause for concern with Persson. Persson struggles in a number of our Scouting categories. His quickness of thinking is questionable. He's likely to make poor decisions in puck management. For example, he's vulnerable to turning back on the rush when pressured and being stripped of the puck and poorly timing his breakout rush patterns. His compete level is not good enough, or at least not consistent. He too often loses board battles and often struggles to get pucks into the offensive zone. His puck management under pressure is suspect. He is primarily a perimeter player who is too easily pushed wide. When pressured, his seam passes in the offensive zone are sometimes intercepted and turned over. He can become complacent, standing and waiting for passes from teammates. Sometimes, he fails to identify whom to pick up on the backcheck. Physicality is lacking from his game. Aside from the odd hit, he tends to avoid contact, refraining from entering dirty areas and struggling to engage in battles. He is too easily knocked off his skates.

61. Alexander Pelevin - D, 5'11", 185, 16-May-2004, Left

Pelevin may look smaller than he is listed at, but you can say he plays much bigger than whatever his real size is. He is a very aggressive defensive defenseman and an extremely tough competitor, especially along the boards where he will fearlessly go in first no matter the situation, dodging hits to come out with the puck. He puts a lot of pressure on his opponents all over the ice and he works very hard in his own zone to do that consistently, displaying a rare level of intensity. While we'll never like his 'seated-back' stride, overall mobility was already a

strength last year and has reached a new level this season, allowing him to promptly recover his position after applying pressure.

Pelevin loves to stand up at the defensive blueline against the rushing forward, but when he doesn't manage to hit him he gets caught flat footed. He should be more conservative and rely more on his backwards agility.

His play during puck possession is certainly more concerning however. He has no poise with the puck in the defensive zone, he seems to get anxious when he gets it and he rushes the play even when it's not needed.

He also seems reluctant to carry the puck up when he has room to lead the breakout himself.

Perhaps another effect of the same issue is that he often fails to make himself available to his defensive partner to support the retrieval (like if he doesn't want the puck).

67. Hugo Hävelid - G, 5'10", 174, 01-Jan-2004, Left

Hugo Hävelid has been on the Swedish scene since his U16 season. This May, his U18 career culminated by helping Sweden capture their second gold medal at that level. He was a tournament all-star and arguably the difference for Sweden in the Final against the USA. Physically, Hävelid is the opposite of Topias Leinonen.

He plays a compact game and is very flexible and quick. He has lightning fast legs and an excellent level of competitiveness. He makes stretch saves looks easy and is explosive in some of his movements.

Hugo tracks the puck well and comes out of the net to play the puck. He makes controlled crease movements, uses his edges well and he manages to get square to the shooter consistently.

He has shown the ability of making huge saves when his team needs it, holding his team in a game for long stretches, or even carrying his team on his back. He is a natural leader with good bloodlines and a history of winning.

Whilst Hävelid has put up good numbers at virtually every level, he still needs to refine a few things. At times, he loses track of rebound. Pucks can bounce off him and into dangerous areas, such as the slot. He is sometimes beaten by soft shots from the point. This may be because he has trouble seeing over or around traffic. Although he's an aggressive goalie, on occasion he sits far too deep in his crease. During scrambles, he often loses his stick. Hävelid sometimes goes down too early, exposing the top half of the net. Although mostly compact, pucks have a tendency of squeezing through his five-hole. He is prone to being scored on above his pad on the catching side. He needs to pick his glove up slightly when going into the butterfly. On the rush or when faced with a rebound he can become rooted, stationary, and be cleanly beaten.

The biggest knock on Hävelid is, of course, his size. It's rare for a 5-foot-10 goalie to become a starter in the NHL, it seems more likely that Hävelid will become an impactful goalie in the SHL or an NHL backup, at best.

82. Gustav Karlsson - C/W, 6'01", 165, 31-Oct-2003, Left

Gustav Karlsson can score goals. He gets into open space and quickly gets an array of shots off. He scores goals from the right wing half wall and times his net arrivals well. He jumps onto loose pucks in the slot and buries rebounds bouncing around the crease. He has excellent hands which allow him to create space for himself in tight. Karlsson shows excellent commitment on the backcheck. He has a good motor and shows commitment to his responsibilities. Karlsson can play on either wing. He plays on the PK as well as the PP, and he uses his stick effectively to break up passes and close passing lanes.

Although Karlsson is an effective goal scorer, his game range is somewhat limited and lacks a strong shot from outside. He scores the majority of his goals from the slot or inside the crease. He likes to cut from his right to left to get shots off from the slot; this may become more challenging when he graduates to pro hockey.

Karlsson struggles to manage the puck at times and can make sloppy and ineffective offensive zone entries. He's more of a finisher than a playmaker.

Karlsson lacks strength and, more importantly, competitiveness. He loses board battles and is too easily pushed off the puck. His skating technique needs some refinement, he skates in an upright manner with rapid leg turnover. His stride rarely extends in full and he's unable to brace himself for impact, as a result he is not strong enough on the puck. In general, his game lacks physicality. He avoids contact and passes on opportunities to finish his check.

99. Luca Auer - C, 6'01", 185, 17-Jul-2004, Left

Luca Auer is a defensively responsible two-way center who can be used on either special team units or on the wing. With his numbers, he started earning consideration through the season. He was a focal player for the Red Bull Juniors and was named to the Austrian team at the WJC U20's in December. Auer continued to excel in the AlpsHL before being called up to play in the ICEHL for EC Salzburg. After an impressive stint in a defensive capacity with Salzburg, we were disappointed by his underwhelming performance at the D1B U18s. He put up decent points, but failed to make the impact we hoped to see.

Luca Auer is an interesting case. He racked up an all-time AlpsHL record for a draft eligible player with 20 goals and 48 points in 35 games, leading Red Bull Juniors in scoring as a rookie and first year pro. For comparison's sake, 2021 2nd rounder Francesco Pinelli had 11 points in 13 games during his draft year in the AlpsHL, before going on to add another 11 points in 7 games for Canada in a gold medal effort at the U18s in Texas. Of course, we're not implying that Auer should be drafted just because of that, we're simply recognizing how impressive his statistical output was. What makes these stats even more impressive is the fact that Auer's outstanding strengths are on the defensive side of the puck. Auer displays rare defensive instincts for a 17-year-old draft prospect. He's consistently responsible in supporting play low in his own zone and when covering for defensemen. He makes excellent reads in defensive transition, uses his stick to effectively close lanes and pokes puck free and he is surprisingly effective at winning board battles behind the red line. He plays with his head on a swivel and even directs teammates on the backcheck and in defensive zone coverage. Offensively, he is a net front presence who likes jam plays, wrap-arounds and net drives. He gets off quality shots from the right circle on the powerplay. He plays all three forward positions and kills penalties as well. At 6'1, 185 lbs, he has decent size and matchup potential. What makes Auer interesting is the growth potential in his game.

He has a number of weaknesses that need addressing, however all are potentially fixable. His skating is really poor at this stage. Once up to speed he flows, but his acceleration is weak, he stands too upright, and his stride does not fully extend.

He lacks strength, which limits his ability to battle for position in the slot, win board battles, absorb hits, or shoot with power from the outside. Whilst willing to finish his checks on the forecheck he isn't effective doing so and he is outmuscled on faceoffs. Some of his decision making on rush patterns also concerned us. Sometimes he skates into outnumbered situations and loses the puck on entry and he has a tendency to be pushed wide on the rush. His vision is ok, but there is most certainly room to improve as a playmaker. He can also work to find better offensive-zone positions to make himself a more dangerous pass option.