



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022



## Hurricanes sign defenceman William Lagesson to one-year, two-way contract

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Lagesson tallied five assists in 33 NHL games with the Edmonton Oilers and Montreal Canadiens in 2021-22, and also played 11 AHL games with Bakersfield. He has earned seven assists in 60 career NHL games with the Oilers and Canadiens over the past three seasons.

The 26-year-old defenceman was drafted by Edmonton in the fourth round of the 2014 NHL Draft, 91st overall, and has tallied 39 points on 11 goals and 28 assists in 103 career AHL games with Bakersfield.

The Gothenburg, Sweden, native had also spent time with Djurgardens IF of the Swedish Hockey League and HC Vita Hasten and Kristianstads IK of HockeyAllsvenskan, Sweden's second-highest professional league.

## Hurricanes sign forward Ryan Dzingel to one-year, two-way contract

Ryan Dzingel is returning to the Carolina Hurricanes after signing a one-year, two-way contract with the club on Monday.

Dzingel, who previously played with the Hurricanes from 2019-21, spent last season with the Arizona Coyotes and San Jose Sharks and recorded eight points (five goals and three assists) in 32 games.

The 30-year-old from Wheaton, Ill., will earn \$750,000 at the NHL level and \$150,000 in the American Hockey League with a \$200,000 guarantee.

"We are obviously familiar with Ryan from his previous time in Carolina," Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "He is a skilled player who can provide an offensive boost to our forward group, and we are excited to have him back in the organization."

Drafted in the seventh round, 204th overall, by Ottawa in 2011, Dzingel has scored 188 points (87 goals and 101 assists) over six seasons with the Senators, Columbus Blue Jackets, Hurricanes, Coyotes and Sharks.

His best season came during the 2018-19 campaign when he set career highs with 26 goals, 30 assists and 56 points in 78 games split between Ottawa and Columbus.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022



**SB NATION**  
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## Hurricanes hoping a new role for Brent Burns will help him defy Father Time

Burns will fill a significantly different role with the Hurricanes than the one he's filled for the Sharks in past years. Could that help counteract the age-related downward curve he's been on the past few seasons?

By Brian LeBlanc

When Justin Williams returned to the Carolina Hurricanes at the start of 2017 free agency (related: how in the world has it been five years since Mr. Game 7 came back to Raleigh?!), I joked with him that more than any other member of the media, I might appreciate Williams' signing. You see, Williams is exactly one month older than me, and as such I was no longer older than every member of the team.

At the time, Williams was 35-years old, and that was enough for me and him to break out the AARP jokes. So if that was old, then what in the world is 37-year-old Brent Burns considered?

And more to the point, how big of a risk are the Hurricanes taking in bringing on board one of the ten oldest active players in the NHL in a key role, serving as the solution to perhaps the most important question the Hurricanes had to answer this season?

It's a risk, to be sure, but it's also one that I believe is worth taking. Age may be catching up to Burns, but he will also find himself playing in a role with the Hurricanes that he's rarely found himself in over the past decade or so.

The most obvious comparison to make is simply to look at Burns next to the player whose spot in the lineup he will most likely fill, Tony DeAngelo. And on the surface, it isn't too flattering:

Ooof. Burns has never been a defensive impresario — that - 15.8 game score value in 2019-20 sticks out like a sore thumb — but nor has DeAngelo. And there's no questioning that TDA had a career year offensively, but excluding the 2020-21 season that was over before it began for DeAngelo, he's been contributing at a higher level of offense than Burns ever since Rod Brind'Amour was in his first year as a head coach.

But wait a second. At no time during the past four seasons was DeAngelo his team's top defenseman. Last season, he was paired with Jaccob Slavin, who can make just about anyone look good. Burns, meanwhile, averaged more than 26 minutes per game this past season, two and a half minutes more than any defenseman the Hurricanes employed in 2021-22.

That's true number-one defenseman territory; in fact, not only was his average of 26:09 third in the league, behind Seth Jones (at 26:13) and Thomas Chabot (26:12), but his raw ice time total of 2,144 minutes was a more than a full

game — 88 minutes, appropriately — higher than second-place Victor Hedman.

And Burns did that while spending the majority of the season, as he largely was in 2020-21, with Mario Ferraro, who is, to be charitable, not Jaccob Slavin.

Let's go back a little further, to the time when Burns was regularly contending for Norris Trophies, and winning one in 2016-17. Prior to his two years with Ferraro, Burns was paired with Brenden Dillon (GSVA: 0.0) in 2019-20, and the motley crew of Radim Simek and old friend Joakim Ryan in 2018-19. I can't look up Ryan's GSVA because he was not in the NHL this past season, so I'll use Hockey Reference's point shares as a stand-in. Simek's point share that season was 1.9, and Ryan's was 0.9. Burns', meanwhile, was 12.0.

And in his high-water mark season, the 2016-17 masterpiece where Burns registered a point share of 15.35, he was paired with Paul Martin most of the time. Martin's point share that season was 5.8 - not bad, but nowhere near the same galaxy as Burns.

In fact, that season was so incredible that it was the sixth-highest point share of any player since the 2004-05 lockout, and the highest by a defenseman since that time. The only players ahead of him? Alex Ovechkin (twice), Evgeni Malkin, Nicklas Backstrom and Jaromir Jagr. That's some pretty heady company. Even Cale Makar, who made heads turn constantly this past season, only (!) hit 15.22. Burns was just that good.

Now, of course, time being what it is, the likelihood of Burns hitting those heights, next to Slavin or anyone else, at age 37 is microscopically low. But the larger point here is that Burns has spent the better part of eight seasons, since the Sharks switched him back from winger to defense prior to the 2014 season, needing to carry his defensive partner. At his age, asking him to do that is bound to result in decreased production.

And yet, Slavin's career-high point share is 8.9, registered this past season. Burns has surpassed that number in six of his 18 years in the NHL, including five years in a row from 2014-2019. Even last year, a season where the conventional wisdom says that he was well on the downslope of his career, Burns registered an 8.5 point share, just 0.4 less than Slavin.

No one's expecting Burns to win the Norris Trophy this season. But for the Hurricanes to be successful, he won't need to play to that level. For the first time in the past decade, Burns' role with the Hurricanes this season will not require him to be everything to everyone. That change in approach is absolutely a risk worth taking.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

As mentioned before, Slavin can make anyone look good. And the only other time he's played with a partner of Burns' quality, he and Dougie Hamilton led the Hurricanes to four playoff series wins in three seasons, if you count the "opening round" series win over the Rangers in the 2020 bubble.

It could be that the obituaries being written about Burns' drop in productivity were a bit hasty. On the contrary, adding Burns could provide the Hurricanes with one of the best sets of top-four defensemen in the game. What was a weak link could easily become a strength if this new phase of Burns' career works out the way Don Waddell and company certainly believe it could.

## Canes ink trio to two-way deals

The Carolina Hurricanes signed William Lagesson, Stelio Mattheos and Ryan Dzingel to two-way contracts Monday.

By Alec\_Sawyer

The Carolina Hurricanes were busy Monday in bolstering the Chicago Wolves' roster, signing three players to two-way contracts including a familiar face of old.

The Canes signed defenseman William Lagesson, who played 33 NHL games last year between Edmonton and Montreal, to a one-year, two-way deal worth \$225,000 at the AHL level, \$750,000 at the NHL level with a guarantee of \$275,000.

Lagesson has appeared in at least eight NHL games in each of the last three seasons, with a career total of seven points in 60 games. He has 39 points in 103 career AHL games.

Later Monday, the Hurricanes re-signed forward Stelio Mattheos to a one-year, two-way contract worth \$70,000 at the AHL level, \$750,000 at the NHL level with a guarantee of \$85,000.

Mattheos has won back-to-back Calder Cups in the Canes' organization, scoring 21 points in 92 career games in the NHL.

And then Monday evening, the Canes brought back an old friend in Ryan Dzingel, who signed a one-year, two-way deal worth \$150,000 at the AHL level, \$750,000 at the NHL level with a guarantee of \$200,000.

Dzingel had eight points in 32 games in the NHL last year between Arizona and San Jose. In 404 career NHL games, Dzingel has 87 goals and 101 assists, including 33 points over 75 games with the Hurricanes between 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Here are the full press releases for each of the three signings:

RALEIGH, N.C. – Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has signed defenseman William Lagesson to a one-year, two-way contract. The deal will pay Lagesson \$750,000 at the NHL level and \$225,000 at the American Hockey League (AHL) level with a \$275,000 guarantee.

"Lagesson provides a strong, physical presence on the blue line," said Waddell. "He has plenty of NHL and AHL games under his belt and adds to the experience of our defensive unit."

Lagesson, 26, tallied five assists in 33 NHL games with Edmonton and Montreal in 2021-22, and he has earned

seven assists in 60 career NHL games with the Oilers and Canadiens over the past three seasons. The 6'2", 207-pound defenseman also skated in 11 AHL games with Bakersfield last season, posting two assists. Selected by Edmonton in the fourth round, 91st overall, of the 2014 NHL Draft, Lagesson has registered 39 points (11g, 28a) in 103 career AHL games with the Condors from 2018-21. The Gothenburg, Sweden, native also recorded 13 points (1g, 12a) in 49 games with Djurgardens IF of the Swedish Hockey League in 2017-18 and earned 12 points (3g, 9a) in 14 games with HC Vita Hasten and Kristianstads IK of HockeyAllsvenskan, Sweden's second-highest professional league, in 2020-21. Lagesson has represented Sweden at numerous international tournaments and won a gold medal at the 2013 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge.

RALEIGH, N.C. – Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has signed forward Stelio Mattheos to a one-year, two-way contract. The deal will pay Mattheos \$750,000 at the NHL level and \$70,000 at the American Hockey League (AHL) level with an \$85,000 guarantee.

"Stelio has played key roles on championship teams throughout his junior and professional career," said Waddell. "He is incredibly resilient and hard-working both on and off the ice, and we are thrilled to keep him in our organization."

Mattheos, 23, recorded 10 points (2g, 8a) in 59 AHL regular-season games with Chicago last season and added four points (2g, 2a) in 18 playoff contests to help the Wolves win the Calder Cup championship. The 6'1", 196-pound forward also tallied four points (3g, 1a) in 14 AHL playoff games to help Charlotte win the Calder Cup in 2019, and he was one of just three players to skate in the postseason for both of Carolina's affiliates as the organization won back-to-back AHL championships. Mattheos has earned 21 points (7g, 14a) in 92 career AHL games with Charlotte and Chicago from 2019-22, and he also played three ECHL games with Fort Wayne in 2020-21. Prior to turning professional, he posted 278 points (127g, 151a) in 253 Western Hockey League (WHL) games with Brandon from 2015-19, winning the Ed Chynoweth Cup as league champions in 2015-16 and captaining the Wheat Kings in 2018-19. The Winnipeg, Man., native was selected by Carolina in the third round, 73rd overall, of the 2017 NHL Draft.

RALEIGH, N.C. – Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has signed forward Ryan Dzingel to a one-year, two-way contract. The deal will pay Dzingel \$750,000 at the NHL level and



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

\$150,000 at the American Hockey League (AHL) level with a \$200,000 guarantee.

"We are obviously familiar with Ryan from his previous time in Carolina," said Waddell. "He is a skilled player who can provide an offensive boost to our forward group, and we are excited to have him back in the organization."

Dzingel, 30, played with Arizona and San Jose last season, recording eight points (5g, 3a) in 32 NHL games. The 6'0", 190-pound forward previously earned 33 points (10g, 23a) in 75 appearances with the Hurricanes from 2019-21, and he

has recorded 188 points (87g, 101a) in 404 career NHL games with Ottawa, Columbus, Carolina, Arizona and San Jose since debuting with the Senators in 2015-16. Selected by Ottawa in the seventh round, 204th overall, of the 2011 NHL Draft, Dzingel also skated in 119 AHL games with Binghamton from 2014-16, posting 77 points (31g, 46a). Prior to turning professional, the Wheaton, Ill., native registered 108 points (45g, 63a) in 110 collegiate games at Ohio State from 2011-14.

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# SportScan

Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

1250379 Websites

Hockey Canada unveils action plan to 'address systemic issues' and improve culture

The Athletic NHL Staff4-5 minutes 25/07/2022

Hockey Canada released an action plan Monday in an effort to address "systemic issues in hockey," including the introduction of a "tracking and reporting system for all complaints of maltreatment, abuse and harassment."

As part of the plan, Hockey Canada will also increase training for players, coaches, employees and volunteers to teach them about consent, masculinity and toxic behavior.

A "comprehensive" review will also take place for training programs, and high-performance players will go through "enhanced character screening." A breach of its code of conduct, or not participating in any investigation, could result in a lifetime ban from Hockey Canada programs, the organization said.

Hockey Canada had also previously announced a third-party review to "fully examine our organization and make recommendations to ensure our governance is geared to the requirements of a national organization of our scope and influence."

The organization has been the subject of harsh criticism recently over its handling of sexual assault allegations from 2018 involving players in its world junior program.

Then on Friday, new allegations going back nearly two decades surfaced. Halifax Police announced they were opening a new investigation into a 2003 alleged sexual assault involving members of the 2003 Canadian World Junior team. Hockey Canada, the London Police service and the NHL are each investigating the separate alleged sexual assault from 2018 involving members of the 2017-18 World Junior team following a Hockey Canada event.

Hockey Canada said it learned of the 2003 allegations when through TSN reporter Rick Westhead, who informed the organization that he spoke to multiple witnesses about the alleged assault. Hockey Canada said it contacted Halifax Regional Police after receiving the email.

"Hockey Canada is committed to bringing an end to the culture of silence in hockey," a Hockey Canada statement said. "That is why we are publicly calling for anyone with knowledge of this incident to come forward to police, and we are being transparent in how we learned of this alleged assault and the steps we are taking to address it."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

The organization was also named in a lawsuit that alleged eight players sexually assaulted a young woman in 2018. The lawsuit, which was resolved via a settlement agreement between Hockey Canada and the woman who made the allegations, was filed in April and became public in May.

Since then, sponsors such as Tim Hortons, Scotiabank, Canadian Tire and Telus have said they will withdraw sponsorship and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called the organization's handling of the allegations "unacceptable." In the wake of the scandal, a committee of Canadian Parliament members is investigating Hockey Canada.

Additionally, The Globe and Mail reported last week that Hockey Canada used a multimillion-dollar fund, paid for by registration fees from youth players, to pay out alleged sexual assault cases. Hockey Canada has since announced it will no longer use the fund to settle sexual assault cases.

Players on the Canadian women's team said in a statement Monday they "join all Canadians in demanding a thorough and transparent investigation of the incidents in question as well as the structure, governance and environment that exists within the organization."

"We are encouraged by the Action Plan you announced earlier but this is only, as you acknowledge in your statement, a step towards addressing toxic behaviors. There is much more work to be done in order to ensure that a new Hockey Canada emerges from the crisis," the team added.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.26.2022

1250380 Websites

NHL predictions for 2022-23 season: Stanley Cup, Hart Trophy, dark horse, big trades, more

Scott Powers, James Mirtle, Dom Luszczyszyn, Scott Wheeler, Aaron Portzline, Max Bultman, Corey Masiasak, Arpon Basu, Marc Antoine Godin, Corey Pronman, Michael Russo, Jonas Siegel, Charlie O'Connor, Jeremy Rutherford, Eric Duhatschek, Allan Mitchell, Kevin Kurz, Josh Yohe, Murat Ates, Arthur Staple, Sean Shapiro, Shayna Goldman, Joe Smith, Fluto Shinzawa, Saad Yousuf, Eric Stephens, Matthew Fairburn, Tarik El-Bashir, Daniel Nugent-Bowman, Sean McIndoe, Mark Lazerus, Sara Civian, Jesse Granger, Rob Rossi, Harman Dayal, Sean Gentile, Peter Baugh, Joe Rexrode, Julian McKenzie 15-19 minutes 25/07/2022

Will the Colorado Avalanche repeat as Stanley Cup champions? Is there a dark horse out there, waiting to steal their throne? What will the playoff field look like when it all plays out in 2022-23? And which star players are going to be traded before it does?

With summer fully upon us, the Matthew Tkachuk sweepstakes concluded and only a few impact free agents left to sign. The Athletic asked our NHL staff those questions, plus who the first coach fired and major award winners will be and more. The following are our early 2022-23 NHL season predictions.

We've brought in senior national writer Sean Gentile, analytics guru Shayna Goldman and NHL betting expert Jesse Granger to provide context, analysis and some skepticism for the results.

Stanley Cup champion

Gentile: I'm not surprised by the top two here, though I wouldn't have guessed they'd be so close. On a lot of levels, I get it. The Hurricanes were really good last season, then went out and added the prime-time goal-scorer they needed (Max Pacioretty) and upgraded on Tony DeAngelo (Brent Burns). Also, I voted for them myself. But ... almost 32 percent overall? Crushing the rest of the Eastern Conference field? I wasn't expecting all that. Does that make sense?

Also, godspeed to whoever voted for the Oilers. Best team in Canada. Nobody denies this.

Goldman: See Sean, I actually think I understand why they're so close. Normally you'd assume the Avalanche would blow the Hurricanes away, but this is a team that 1) is currently without Nazem Kadri or a replacement of his caliber, and 2) has a new-look goalie tandem after Alexandar Georgiev replaced Darcy Kuemper. Colorado has shown that it really only needs league-average goaltending to get by, but it makes sense to see them come back toward the field and specifically a Hurricanes team that has made solid improvements (or at least strong side-steps to keep/slightly build on where they left off).

Granger: If you agree with the whopping 31.8 percent of the staff who believe in the Hurricanes, now would be the time to run to the sportsbook and put those bets in. They received the second-most votes, without a close third, but currently have the fifth-best odds to win the Cup at 12-1. That's excellent value considering Colorado is only +425 to repeat as champs. Carolina is also behind Toronto, Florida and Tampa Bay, according to the odds.

The longest shot that received a vote from the staff is St. Louis. You can get the Blues at 25-1 right now.

Runner-up

Gentile: The Rangers have "good enough to make the Final, not good enough to win it" energy, apparently.

Granger: Lots of love here for the Rangers, who have only the fifth-best odds to win the Eastern Conference at 9-1.

Goldman: Some of us are betting on the Maple Leafs to not only escape Round 1 but to reach the Final? It's bold, but hey it could happen ... maybe after an aura cleansing or 12. I do like the building blocks for the Oilers and the possibility of going a step further than last season — maybe if Leon Draisaitl has two functioning legs to go along with Connor McDavid's dominance.

The real team that deserved more votes, though, is the Lightning. Corey Perry's still there and still cursed!

Dark horse

A team that missed the playoffs in 2021-22 and could be a real contender in 2022-23.

Gentile: I didn't want to take Vegas here, but I did anyway — and so did a lot of us. On one hand, that's still a bizarre mix of players, and the cap problems will never go away. On the other, a run of injuries like the Golden Knights had last season is unlikely, and the Pacific Division is pretty suspect. I don't think I like them to advance all that far, but they should see the postseason.

Granger: It's no surprise the Golden Knights ran away with this vote despite missing the playoffs and then trading away their top scorer in Pacioretty this summer. Not only is Vegas slated to make the playoffs according to the oddsmakers, but it's also neck-and-neck with Edmonton to win the Pacific Division outright at +250.

Sean is spot on with his comment about the weak division. Even if the Flames stay afloat with Jonathan Huberdeau and MacKenzie Weegar helping offset the losses of Johnny Gaudreau and Tkachuk, the Los Angeles Kings are the only other team with under 10-1 odds of winning the division. Add in the fact that three teams are being given essentially no shot according to the odds — Ducks, Sharks and Kraken all at 80-1 to win the division — and it's a recipe for a bounce-back season in Vegas.

Goldman: Picking Vegas almost felt like cheating given how close it was to the postseason in 2021-22 and what we know held them back. New coaching and ideally a healthier squad should help — unless management keeps trading away players for nothing to fix their cap issues. The spicy thing here is having Ottawa, Columbus and Detroit ahead of the Islanders and, hell, even the Devils.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

### Biggest drop-off

A team that made the playoffs in 2021-22 but won't be back.

Gentile: For a glimpse into the process, we originally posed this question to the staff before Matthew Tkachuk Mania on Friday night. Way back then, it seemed like the Flames were guaranteed to either lose any trade or take a step back next season. Also, Gaudreau had already walked. Naturally, Calgary was the big winner in this category, at 54.5 percent of the vote. Then Brad Treliving turned Tkachuk into Huberdeau and Weegar, and everything changed. That — combined with the weakness of the Pacific Division, I'd imagine — changed the results. Sorry, Minnesota.

Goldman: Florida's an interesting one here. There was already doubt after key player subtractions this offseason and an overall live-by-the-blade, die-by-the-blade, high-octane style that Sergei Bobrovsky has to withstand (unless, of course, they forget how to play to their strengths in the postseason again). With the trade, they bring in Tkachuk, who is much better defensively than Huberdeau. But losing Weegar hurts, especially when you look at the rest of the blue line outside of Aaron Ekblad and Gustav Forsling. And if they're going to make a change there, it's going to cost assets — whether it's to bring players in or move contracts out — which they're already thin on. Good luck, Bill Zito!

### First-round flameout

A team that will finish near the top of its conference then lose in the first round.

Gentile: Sens-Maple Leafs in the first round is going to be a banger.

Goldman: Do you fold the team if the Senators somehow take out Toronto in Round 1? It makes all the sense in the world why they lead the vote despite actually having a good team. The math and the vibes will never add up. That's why it's not surprising that Edmonton is up there, too, even though the Oilers' offseason wasn't bad — especially compared to years past.

Granger: I realize most of these votes are based on historical narrative and not projected first-round matchups, but based on the odds, Toronto is actually a sensible pick here. There obviously aren't preseason odds for teams to lose in the first round of the playoffs, but one way to quantify that likelihood is by looking at the strength of the division. Teams with stronger divisional competition are more likely to face a tough first-round opponent, and no division is stronger at the top than the Atlantic. The division features three of the league's top four teams in terms of Stanley Cup odds (Maple Leafs, Panthers and Lightning).

If you're looking for a non-Leafs team to predict for this, the odds suggest the Rangers and Hurricanes could also be in for tough first-round matchups. The Metropolitan isn't as top-heavy as the Atlantic, but it's the only division with five teams within 9-1 odds of winning the division.

### Fewest points

Gentile: You're halfway there, Chicago. I can't wait until Patrick Kane starts missing games because he can't find his skates. Where did they go? He could've sworn he left them right by his locker.

Granger: These results check out. Chicago and Arizona are tied for the longest odds to win the Stanley Cup (or the President's Trophy) at 500-1.

Goldman: Watch Petr Mrazek have a bounce-back season and torch management's attempts to tank. The race to the basement between Chicago and Arizona State is on.

### First coach fired

Gentile: Is that Andrew Brunette's music? Expectations are rising in Newark, and Brunette took that associate head coach job for a reason. This one seems easy. The entire top four makes sense, actually. Lindy Ruff and D.J. Smith are about to take over improved rosters. Sheldon Keefe is in the Toronto pressure-cooker. And Dave Hakstol is going to have to start Philip Grubauer on most nights.

Goldman: Ruff makes all the sense in the world. If they struggle, it should be easy for management to point to the head coach who remains on the bench after the team parted ways with their assistants. D.J. Smith is interesting because he does have an improved roster, which has only raised expectations. The one that stands out to me has to be Peter Laviolette, since the Capitals' window is shrinking and coaches are usually the first to get the blame for a team regressing.

### Calder winner

Player      Percent of vote

Owen Power

43.2

Matty Beniers

22.7

Shane Wright

18.2

Mason McTavish

4.5

Ivan Miroshnichenko

2.3

Jake Sanderson

2.3

Juraj Slafkovsky

2.3

Marco Rossi

2.3

William Eklund

2.3

Gentile: It's impossible not to pick Owen Power; he was the No. 1 pick in 2021, looked great with Michigan and is about to be 20, on a roster that should be competitive. Still, I'm worried that it's illegal to give the Calder to a D-man in consecutive seasons.

Goldman: I think Shane Wright and Matty Beniers both being on Seattle could split the vote if they're both playing at the NHL level for much of the season, so Power it is. Like Sean said, he really great last season between his time in Michigan and short stint in Buffalo to end the year.

### Vezina winner

Gentile: It's unfair to expect any of us to say which goalies are going to be good in a given year. Sincerely thought about throwing a dart for this one. Juuse Saros? Sure. Why not?

Granger: Igor Shesterkin getting double the votes of Andrei Vasilevskiy is wild to me, considering the teams they play for. Most goalie stats are more dependent on the team in front of the goalie than they are the goalie himself. Vasilevskiy is a rare combination of an elite goalie behind an elite team. Shesterkin's 2021-22 was incredible, but behind a questionable Rangers defense, I wouldn't be surprised to see some regression. Not in terms of his talent — he's still going to be awesome — but in the stats that so many lean (too) heavily on when voting for this award.

Goldman: If Shesterkin's going to go back-to-back, he's probably going to have to match or exceed his 2021-22. The one drawback this past season was playing time, and if he's healthy, that shouldn't be a problem. Plus he now has a full-length season under his belt, which should help in the long run. Vasilevskiy or Saros wouldn't be surprising. But if Ilya



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

Sorokin or Thatcher Demko have a shot, they're going to have to get into the postseason since that tends to be necessary to even make the conversation.

Norris winner

Gentile: We've got a couple of years before Cale Makar fatigue sets in, right? That was the single biggest reason I thought Roman Josi could win this past season. Let's just let someone else get one before we spend a decade voting for this guy.

Granger: Wait, some of us didn't vote for Makar?

Goldman: If the Makar fatigue sits in, maybe his partner gets a look. Devon Toews did enough to earn a place in the consideration this past season. Charlie McAvoy's injury status could hold him back, which could open the door for a player like Miro Heiskanen to get a bit more consideration.

Hart winner

Gentile: Everyone say thanks to Connor McDavid for giving them a break last season. He's still only 25, just FYI.

Goldman: McDavid was outstanding in the playoffs and still fell short, so we have to expect him to take it up another notch to drag his team forward over the next year.

Granger: The Hart Trophy is the only award with odds currently available to bet, and McDavid is unsurprisingly the favorite at +300. However, if you're looking for value based on the staff predictions, there's certainly some on Makar. He received more than double the votes of any player not named Connor McDavid but has only the 11th-best chance to win it according to the odds (+2,000). Leon Draisaitl, Kirill Kaprizov, Nikita Kucherov, Mikko Rantanen, Huberdeau and Shesterkin are all above Makar on the board — and none received a single vote from our staff.

All-Stars most likely to be traded

We asked each voter for five members of the year-end All-Star team who were most likely to be traded. Here were the players 20 percent or more of our NHL staff thinks get moved.

Gentile: Why would the Blackhawks trade Kane? Is something going on over there?

Goldman: Huberdeau stays on the board even though he was already moved this summer to Calgary. If the Flames can't extend him, it may make the most sense to move him — otherwise it's Gaudreau 2.0, with no elite passer and no assets in exchange to recoup for him.

West playoff field

We asked each voter to pick the eight West playoff teams. Here is the percent of the vote received by each team. (Note: \* playoff team in 2021-22)

Gentile: For me, the big surprise here is that so few of us have talked ourselves into the Canucks. That's a flawed roster, and who knows what happens with J.T. Miller, and the Kings got better, and the Golden Knights can't be as bad as they were last season, and ... actually, I can see why the Canucks are a distant ninth. Nevermind.

Goldman: The Stars and Canucks really took a hit in our re-voting after the Tkachuk trade. The latter, as Sean said, makes sense. Dallas should stick in the playoff race, though. The Stars should be better than last year after adding Mason Marchment, which guarantees them at least four forwards, instead of three, who can generate offense. And there's another year of Jake Oettinger.

East playoff field

We asked each voter to pick the eight East playoff teams. Here is the percent of the vote received by each team. (Note: \* playoff team in 2021-22)

Gentile: That race for the second wild card really does seem like it'll be fun ... today. Because really, when has optimism over the Ottawa Senators ever blown up in anyone's face?

Goldman: And that optimism comes before there have been any adjustments in team defense! Where I'll disagree with you is that I think both wild card seeds could legitimately be in the mix. There are so many disruptors in the East who could take away key points. Detroit and Columbus are among them, along with Ottawa.

Granger: The betting market doesn't share the same optimism for the Senators, as they rank 20th in the league and 11th in the East, according to the odds. The Red Wings — who only 11.4 percent of the staff voted to make the playoffs — actually have considerably better odds than the Senators.

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NHL's 10 best contracts, 2022 edition: Johnny Gaudreau, Cale Makar and others

Dom Luszczyszyn 17-21 minutes 25/07/2022

A lot of discussion in pro sports revolves around contracts, for better or worse. Every player is reduced to a singular monetary value and in a salary-cap world that value is crucial in terms of which players are providing value — and which are not.

This list is about the "haves," at the very top of the salary efficiency spectrum where players are providing incredible surplus value to their teams. "How is this guy only making that much?" is the usual refrain. Across fan bases, it leads to some warranted jealousy — a hope that one day they, too, can have a player on a deal so good, it fills other fans with rage. It's an understandable feeling, but it's one that doesn't last forever. Contracts have terms and the best contracts of one year eventually make room for new selections.

Gone are the days of Nathan MacKinnon, David Pastrnak, Sean Couturier and Aleksander Barkov dominating the top of the best-contracts-in-hockey list. It's a new era now, one dominated in part by the next wave of elite defenders as well as some of the very best players in hockey.

There are a number of players worthy of the title of "best contract in hockey," and any list of this nature will surely be debatable. But by the basis of one specific player evaluation model, these are the 10 best contracts in hockey.

The goal here is to grade contracts empirically with the same context being applied to each player across the league: How much value does each player bring to the table and how likely will they provide positive value over the life of the contract?

The way that's measured comes from comparing a player's GSVA and the expected salary that comes with it to a player's current contract. Surplus value compares what they make with what the model believes they should be making, while positive value probability measures the certainty that a player will perform above his cap hit. The list of best and worst contracts is based on those two factors (with twice as much weight being placed on surplus value) looking outward. What players have already done holds no merit — this is about the future value of the deal. Contract clauses and bonus structure are important, but not considered in this assessment. Players on LTIR were not considered.

Best contracts in the league

1. Cale Makar



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

Contract: \$9.0M x five years

Surplus Value: \$53.4M

Positive Value Probability: 97.0 percent

Norris Trophy? Check. Conn Smythe Trophy? Check. Best contract in the world? Check.

It's been an absolutely incredible year for Cale Makar. He was already arguably the league's best defenseman going into the season, but he absolutely transcended that in 2021-22 with a season for the ages.

Cale Makar doesn't like attention, but his play sure brings him a lot of it.

Now his resume includes a Stanley Cup — the prize he desperately wanted — and the Conn Smythe Trophy, the signifier of his role in making it happen.

Now, it's absolutely no question who the very best from the back end is. Before last season, Makar was the first defenceman ever projected to deliver four wins of value before the start of a season. He obliterated that, playing at a 5.8-win pace. Now, he might be the first defenceman to eclipse the five-win projection, an unheard of tier from the blue line.

That's usually a mark reserved for the game's very best forwards and the fact Makar is that valuable from the blue line speaks volumes about his ability. He is one of just three players (Connor McDavid and Auston Matthews being the others) in the league whose long-term value is above the league maximum (\$16.5 million).

For the next five years, Colorado is paying Makar nowhere close to that mark. At \$9 million, Makar is an absolute steal. Consider who else signed for that number last summer — Seth Jones, Darnell Nurse, Dougie Hamilton, Zach Werenski, Charlie McAvoy, Adam Fox, Miro Heiskanen — and with all due respect to McAvoy, Fox and Heiskanen specifically, they're not even in the same stratosphere. Makar is on another planet and it's still baffling that Colorado was able to lock him up long term for under \$10 million. Even that would've still had him at the top of this list. Makar is that good.

### 2. Charlie McAvoy

Contract: \$9.5M x eight years

Surplus Value: \$43.5M

Positive Value Probability: 75.0 percent

Do not sleep on Charlie McAvoy, who may be the ying to Makar's yang. He is the league's premier shutdown defender, one of the best defensive defensemen on the planet who last year showed off his offensive flair. He is the complete package. Remember Erik Karlsson versus Drew Doughty from the last generation? This is that, only supercharged. In terms of value, Makar and McAvoy are reaching heights those two previously never reached. As previously noted, Makar was the first defender in the model's history to earn a projected value north of four wins. McAvoy is the second.

It's only natural then that the next two stars of this generation on defence land first and second on this list, both after securing long-term extensions last summer. There was a bit of sticker shock when McAvoy initially signed his deal, but given what he had shown to date, there was a lot of upside to a price under \$10 million. At \$9.5 million the expectation was 2.1 wins per season, a mark McAvoy had easily eclipsed in his previous two seasons. In 2021-22, he took that a step further thanks to incredible two-way impacts at five-on-five. Last season McAvoy had a 63 percent expected goals rate, the third-highest mark ever in the analytics era. Add a 59-point pace to that and you get a defender with very few flaws to his game. That's well worth the price of admission.

### 3. Connor McDavid

Contract: \$12.5M x four years

Surplus Value: \$29.5M

Positive Value Probability: 92.6 percent

The best player in the world led this list last season, but one fewer season left on his contract means one fewer season to put up massive surplus value. That makes it difficult to leap over the two defenders in front of him, but it was still really close due to the certainty that McDavid would deliver positive value on the remainder of his deal.

It's sometimes hard to wrap heads around the league's highest-paid player being underpaid, but in terms of relative value, McDavid brings so much more bang for buck than the majority of the league. He's a six-win player and that valuation puts him well above what it takes to be worth a max contract. You could pay McDavid \$20 million per season and still field a competitive roster. That's his power, and that makes \$12.5 million an absolute steal. In four years' time, it'll be extremely interesting to see how much McDavid goes for as an unrestricted free agent. It's going to set the bar.

And even then, he'll probably be worth it. Maybe not to this current degree where he's on one of the league's best contracts, but no matter what he signs for, he'll be underpaid. That's always the case with the league's very best. McDavid is no different.

### 4. Brad Marchand

Contract: \$6.1M x three years

Surplus Value: \$24.6M

Positive Value Probability: 86.5 percent

Over the years there has been a lot of turnover on this list as players age out or their contracts dwindle into their final years. But there has been one constant every season and that's Brad Marchand who will go down in hockey history as the owner of one of the best contracts ever. The Bruins sure made out like bandits over the life of his deal, and still should be going forward.

Marchand is 34 now and aging like a fine wine. When he first signed there was obviously plenty of risks involved with a contract that mostly covered his 30s. And yet, Marchand actually elevated his game shortly after signing, turning his deal into an absolute bargain from the get-go. Since raising the bar for his game, he's only gotten better each year, turning into a consistent 100-point threat. There aren't many players in their mid-30s who can say that.

Because of his advanced age, Marchand has a steep downward trajectory planned for his future. But because the bar for his game is so high, and his contract is so low, there's still a very high level of certainty that he'll bring a plethora of positive value over the final three years of his deal. He's a 4.5-win player, a rarity in this league, and is being paid like a high-end second-liner. That's an absolutely ridiculous bargain.

Marchand is a player who has done it all and can continue to do it all. Offence or defence, you name it. At \$6.1 million, it doesn't get much better. The only reason he isn't higher is because of term, meaning the day is coming when he's no longer a fixture on this list. That day isn't today.

### 5. Johnny Gaudreau

Contract: \$9.8M x seven years

Surplus Value: \$28.2M

Positive Value Probability: 76.0 percent

Ah, the newest contract on the block. It still boggles my mind that after an MVP-calibre season, Johnny Gaudreau got paid nearly \$2 million less than Artemi Panarin got a few years prior. Yes, pandemic and flat cap effects exist, but they shouldn't exist for one of the league's most dynamic wingers. Gaudreau was better this year than Panarin was going into a contract year. That alone makes this a bargain — one of the best contracts in hockey.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

Of course, that was the case with Dougie Hamilton last year too and he had a trying first season with the Devils. The thing is, you never really know with players switching teams and while Gaudreau looks like a real driver in every sense of the word, so too did Hamilton. It's a case where the model may be overrating Gaudreau's value — especially after a large one-year spike the year prior to signing. That's a bit of a red flag! It doesn't help that both players were so unique that they didn't have many comps to compare age curves with either.

Still, going beyond the model actually paints Gaudreau in a brighter light. His ability with the puck, especially transporting it up the ice and feeding it into high-danger areas, is almost second to none. He's a magician with the puck on his stick and is the kind of guy who makes linemates look substantially better.

Right now, he's being paid like last year didn't happen. Like he's still the same player he was prior. But last year did happen, and as the most recent season, it should be weighed most heavily. Gaudreau is back to looking like a franchise player, and getting that for under \$10 million on a long-term commitment is a strong investment.

Columbus got a good one, though it does remain to be seen whether he maintains that level of goodness in Columbus.

### 6. Roman Josi

Contract: \$9.1M x six years

Surplus Value: \$26.1M

Positive Value Probability: 76.9 percent

Last season Roman Josi scored 96 points as a defenceman. Enough said. He deservedly finished second in the Norris Trophy race as a result and even garnered more first-place votes than Cale Makar in a razor-tight finish. He is one of the league's very best defensemen and deserves to break the bank for that.

Like seemingly every No. 1 defenseman on the planet, Josi makes somewhere close to \$9 million per season, but as we know, there's a very big difference in the range of talent at that pay range. The expectation at that number is around two wins and Josi has been well above that in two of the last three seasons. His projected value has yo-yoed a bit due to a down year in 2021, but at the end of the day we're still talking about a top-five defenseman, and that's someone who should be paid handsomely.

Where there's a bit of trouble here is, as is the same with Gaudreau, a lack of comparables. That means using a standard age curve without any basis of historic context to compare to. That makes it hard to know exactly how Josi ages, especially with this deal going into his late 30s. So far, Josi is aging extremely well however and it's more than fair to expect the good times to keep rolling for the stud blueliner. Another near 100-point season is probably unlikely, but point per game isn't out of the question. Couple his strong play-driving ability with that and Nashville has an extreme bargain on its hands for the foreseeable future.

### 7. Adam Fox

Contract: \$9.5M x seven years

Surplus Value: \$21.6M

Positive Value Probability: 62.6 percent

Look at that — another big-name defenseman making \$9 million or more for an extended period of time. Adam Fox joins Makar, McAvoy and Josi on this list for all the same reasons they do: He's an elite point-producing defenseman that is one of the very best in hockey. The price tag for that should be in the eight-figure range, especially for all of Fox's prime years.

Fox is right there as one of the very best defensemen in the world, but he's just a shade below Makar and McAvoy which brings him a little further down on the list. He's not as offensively dynamic as Makar, nor is he as complete a player as McAvoy. Nothing wrong with not quite stacking up to those two — it's an exceedingly high bar to clear, and it's

one Fox is very close to. He wouldn't be on this list if he wasn't close and 3.6 wins of projected value are damn impressive.

The reason Fox isn't higher is that his ability to drive play at five-on-five slipped a bit over the past year, but that might have more to do with team effects than him. Regardless, this is a former Norris Trophy winner and one of the game's best young defensemen. Getting that kind of value under \$10 million is terrific for the Rangers.

### 8. Auston Matthews

Contract: \$11.6M x two years

Surplus Value: \$20.0M

Positive Value Probability: 98.8 percent

As mentioned above a few times, term length matters a lot. It means a player can stack surplus salary year-over-year. But shorter term also means more certainty that a player will deliver the goods — and it helps if a player is well above their salary to begin with. Auston Matthews, despite his high salary, fits the billing and just barely cracks the list despite only two years left on his deal. Thank an MVP-calibre season where he put up one of the best regular seasons in the analytics era, playing at a ludicrous seven-win pace.

Matthews just gets better and better every year and is now the highest valued player going into next season according to GSVA. I would still take McDavid over him (thanks to a ridiculous playoff run), but last year's regular season made it an actual debate, something that seemed impossible after McDavid's 2021 season.

When Matthews signed his deal, many viewed it as an overpayment. Fair enough, but it didn't take long for that to be demonstrably false as he continued to provide more and more value, blossoming into a freakish unicorn who scores goals better than anyone else, and drives play at both ends to an elite degree. There's no one like him.

That's where his strong valuation comes from, joining Makar and McDavid as players worthy of a max deal. His \$11.6 million cap hit is nowhere near that, and that means a lot of surplus value from the superstar center. It'll be extremely interesting what his next extension is worth, especially if he tests the open market. For now, he's extremely underpaid for what he brings to the table.

### 9. Miro Heiskanen

Contract: \$8.5M x seven years

Surplus Value: \$20.4M

Positive Value Probability: 62.5 percent

Last, but certainly not least on the "young superstar defender making around \$9 million on a long-term deal" list is Miro Heiskanen. He's not the offensive beast that Makar or Fox are and thus not as well-rounded as McAvoy either. But his defensive ability is through the roof and that more than makes up for his lighter offensive ability. There are very few defensemen in this league who can shut down the opposition's best better than Heiskanen can. His smooth-skating and puck-moving ability make him an incredible asset in that regard.

A lot of Heiskanen's value comes from the defensive side of the puck, which explains why his cap hit is the lowest of The Big Four. But with the likely departure of John Klingberg, the door is wide open for Heiskanen to add to his arsenal as he becomes The Guy offensively, too. He has all the tools to be a do-it-all defender and it wouldn't be a shock to see him climb up this list next year. He has a legitimate four-win upside once he starts producing like all the other big names. It feels like only a matter of time.

### 10. Kirill Kaprizov

Contract: \$9.0M x four years

Surplus Value: \$16.5M



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

Positive Value Probability: 70.6 percent

A lot of people thought it was absolutely wild (pun intended) that Minnesota gave Kirill Kaprizov \$9 million per year over five seasons after playing just 51 NHL games. There's not a lot of certainty with such a small sample size. But anyone who watched a lot of Wild hockey in 2021 would tell you Kaprizov deserved that and more — he was a future superstar in this league.

In his second season, he proved just that by scoring 47 goals and 108 points, all while turning into a dominant presence at five-on-five. The Wild heavily outplayed teams with Kaprizov on the ice as he proved he was the superstar fans expected he would be.

After all that, \$9 million feels like nothing. Kaprizov is now a player who can be counted on to reliably score 40-plus goals and 90-plus points in this league. That's a rare find and contributes to him being worth over four wins per season, something only 11 other skaters can also say. Over the next four years, he's expected to be worth closer to \$13 million in terms of on-ice value. Getting him under \$10 million has turned into a bargain.

Honourable Mentions: Mikko Rantanen, Devon Toews, Aaron Ekblad, Rasmus Andersson, Jaccob Slavin

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1250382 Websites

Who are the top NHL prospects under 23 years old? Scott Wheeler ranks top 50

Scott Wheeler 93-118 minutes 25/07/2022

Welcome, for a fifth consecutive year to my ranking of the NHL's best prospects at The Athletic.

This project is broken into two pieces, separating today's top-50 drafted skaters (forwards and defencemen) list from tomorrow's top-10 drafted goalie prospects ranking.

After publishing just one combined ranking in the first couple of years of this exercise, the switch to two lists was made in 2020 for a couple of reasons. The first was to better reflect the modern realities of prospect evaluation and scouting, which makes it difficult to contextualize goalie prospects under the same criteria and aging curves as players (we know that goalies enter the league later on average than skaters and are selected for different reasons in the draft). The second was about demand from readers for evaluations of a wider range of goalie prospects after there were only ever a small handful of goalies who I felt warranted inclusion in the top-50 ranking. Dividing the lists allows me to rank and evaluate a larger number of goalies, with a 50-skater, 10-goalie split that now aligns with the one-sixth share of the players on the ice that goalies represent.

A total of 16 prospects from last year's list have since graduated to the NHL. They are Cole Caufield, Trevor Zegras, Lucas Raymond, Moritz Seider, Alex Newhook, Matt Boldy, Jamie Drysdale, Anton Lundell, Cole Sillinger, Arthur Kaliyev, Philip Tomasino, Evan Bouchard, Connor McMichael, Seth Jarvis, Bowen Byram and Vasily Podkolzin.

If you're new to my work, it's worth noting that the criteria I use for defining an NHL prospect versus an NHL player does not align with the NHL's criteria for rookies. The NHL's definition says that once a prospect has played 25 games in a single NHL season, six or more NHL games in multiple seasons or has turned 26, he is no longer considered a rookie. My criteria differs on both the games played and the age front to better reflect what we know about developmental curves.

Under my criteria, for a player to be eligible for inclusion as a prospect, he must be:

Under 23 years old. We know that by the time a player turns 23, he is largely done with the steep progression we typically see in prospects and/or has begun to plateau.

Not currently in the NHL, with rare exceptions for players who I believe could still bounce between levels, aren't yet considered full-time NHLers by their teams or made their first appearances in the NHL as Black Aces in the preceding season. This is the arbitrary section of the criteria where I trust my judgment more than a games cutoff. Preference for exemption is always given to teenaged players rather than 22-year-olds. Here, I consider things like whether or not a player played more games in the NHL than any other league in the preceding season.

Either signed to an NHL contract or selected in the entry draft, without either of those rights having expired.

1. Owen Power, LHD, 19 (Buffalo Sabres — No. 1, 2021)

I debated each of the first three names on this list at No. 1, but I just kept coming back to how impressive Power was this season. He blew me away, and I was already higher on him than most. I saw him live four times (once in Ann Arbor with the Wolverines, twice in Edmonton with Team Canada, again in Boston at the Frozen Four, and additionally in practices in Calgary and at skates in Toronto) and he was outstanding in each — for my money, he was the best defenceman in college hockey last year.

There's not a lot he can't do these days, and even the areas where he was deficient he has made significant progress. He walks through traffic with such ease for his size (6-foot-6), side-stepping defenders to his backhand and then making plays off of his backhand to teammates as coverage caves in on him. He began activating to join the rush more frequently this year (even sometimes while short-handed). He understands when to sling a quick one-touch pass and when to hang onto it. He's now attacking off the line with comfort, and control, and intention. He hits seams as soon as they open. He makes a ton of little plays on outlets under pressure, spinning off of forecheckers unlike any defenceman his size that I've scouted.

His ability to play off of his heels and the push to his toes, given his size, is remarkable. He's got this uncanny ability to drag pucks through his feet and pivot in one smooth motion to escape and advance the play. He sees the ice beautifully in possession. He wants to be involved deep into the offensive zone whenever he can. He shapes play on his edges with his footwork and crossovers like a smaller player. He breaks down the play and executes east-to-west at an advanced level. His unique skating ability for his size allows him to cover the sheet quickly, though there are still times when I'd like to see him be more aggressive defending in neutral ice (he does a great job filling and taking space inside the defensive zone on the penalty kill). He does a wonderful job adjusting around the first layer. He consistently reads the play effectively, processing at high speeds when pace ratchets up.

Given the continued advancement of his game offensively, I'm extremely confident he's going to be a No. 1 in the NHL at this point. And I think between him and Rasmus Dahlin the Sabres will have two of them (it'll be interesting to see how they make that work, given that they're both lefties).

2. Luke Hughes, LHD, 18 (New Jersey Devils — No. 4, 2021)

A year ago, I put Hughes seventh on my final 2021 draft ranking and explained the reasons for it as twofold:

He needed to find ways to get off of the perimeter in possession and create more to the middle of the ice for himself.

He needed to improve his man-to-man and in-zone defence.

On both fronts this season, he passed with flying colours, fully realizing his gamebreaking, star potential and finding another echelon as a prospect as a result (all while playing as the youngest defenceman in



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

college hockey). So much so that I considered slotting him first here. A year later, he did such good job taking his game from roving around the perimeter to attacking the middle-third that he led all NCAA defencemen (regardless of age!) in scoring and points with 17 goals and 39 points, all while making significant strides in his game defensively (while often playing his off-side no less!).

He plays an effortless transition style, transporting pucks from A to B better than any D prospect on this list. He's got the stops and starts into a burst in a different direction. He's got the step-back into his stance before adjusting onto his toes to change pace.

He breezes through holes in the neutral zone. His skating makes him maybe the sport's most active offensive defenceman, while helping him snuff out more and more rushes so that he can lead them back the other way and then create inside the offensive zone with his feet moving.

Add in the instinct that he developed on the attack and he's nearly impossible to contain off the line or stop on entry at the blue line. The fluidity of his stride (which extends back fully when he's pushing forward) and the airiness of his edgework will always define his game. They allow him to draw attention, force opposing players into puck-watching, and then open up the play for him. And while he's still got some work to do to fill out his 6-foot-2 frame, he's the closest thing to Cale Makar outside the NHL and a true breath of fresh air to watch.

### 3. Shane Wright, C, 18 (Seattle Kraken — No. 4, 2022)

I think it's important to start by saying this: Wright was my top-ranked prospect before the draft and that doesn't suddenly change because he wasn't the first player picked. I think there are outcomes where each of the top-three picks in the draft (Juraj Slafkovsky, Simon Nemec, and Logan Cooley) as well as Matt Savoie become better players than Wright. But for now, he remains the best prospect in the age group for me.

Wright is a well-built kid who boasts a wide gait and boxy shoulders that balance him over pucks. Those physical tools are complemented by a powerful wrist shot release (which he can get off from several stances and pops off of his blade's heel or toe) and quick hands in traffic that allow him to take pucks off of the wall and create scoring chances to the interior.

He's also one of the most diligent three-zone players in the draft, with a powerful stride that helps him push play up ice (though its power is more evident the length of the sheet than from a standstill into a quick foot race) when he's done providing support low in his zone or above the puck.

While his shot is his biggest weapon inside the offensive zone (I actually think he was owed a few more goals than his 35 on 290 shots this season gave him), he played a much more creative game inside the offensive zone into the second half. He blends versatile skill with a heady, detailed game that will allow him to drive a line (despite not needing to have the puck all of the time) and be relied upon in all situations down the middle at the next level.

There are times when scouts want to see him play with a little more fire and feistiness to really take over games and impose himself on the forecheck/in battles, but his eye for detail off the puck puts him in a supportive role more often than an active chase, and that's fine.

I would have liked to see him hang onto the puck a little more this season, but he played with talented linemates where his ability to play into their strengths and execute off of give-and-gos worked. He's got pro tools and projects as an impactful top-six centre. I see a 30-goal, 70-point player who also functions as a defensive support valve and plays a premium position.

### 4. Simon Nemec, RHD, 18 (New Jersey Devils — No. 2, 2022)

This kid turned 18 in the middle of February and he's already registered 65 points in 112 games at a professional level as a defenceman! Nemec's statistical profile is as strong as any draft-eligible defenceman

we've seen in recent years — stamped by an exceptional, record-setting performance in Nitra's playoff run and into the men's world championships. This is a kid who has looked a class above his peers whenever he's played with them, has excelled against NHLers on the senior stage, and is already a top player at his position in his top domestic league (albeit a difficult one to evaluate).

Nemec is a calculated and poised three-zone defender who is capable of organizing play from the top of the zone, executing through seams in coverage at a high level, and starting and leading his fair share of rushes. He's got great edges and four-way mobility, which he uses to manipulate and steer play through intelligent routes on and off the puck.

And he also regularly flashes sneaky deception, which blends beautifully with his rare maturity for his age. Though I wouldn't say he's a dynamic, game-breaking type offensively, I see plenty of calmness and talent. He knows when and how to push (and when and how to sit back and defend). He's already got pro size, he plays a polished defensive game, and he's a righty. I expect him to become the best defenceman out of Slovakia since Zdeno Chara and a first-pairing guy who plays an effective, efficient, play-driving modern game. The game just comes easy to him, with everything happening in front of him and the ice tilted in his favour. His type of game is the direction it's going.

### 5. Logan Cooley, C, 18 (Arizona Coyotes — No. 3, 2022)

Cooley is a beautiful, flowing skater capable of beating defenders off the mark, circling the zone to get defenders watching him with the puck, and manipulating them with his footwork and maneuverability in tight spaces. He's got an uncanny ability to side-step and hop around oncoming players at speed.

He's got a great sixth sense for timing and spacing around the offensive zone which frees him to accept passes or jumps him onto rebounds. He regularly flashes skill to the inside, slicing to the middle and pulling pucks through or around defenders. He's also a Swiss Army knife player who combines NHL speed and skill with a working attitude to push the pace, make plays, win races, stay involved, and get onto the ice in all situations.

I love his tempo and feel for the game out there. His touch with the puck and hands both get high grades. His skating (particularly his change of pace) and energy level are both differentiators, and those things make for a pretty compelling package. You won't find a scout who doesn't like him, either.

The transition game into the offensive zone. The vision off the wall. He can play interior or exterior and protects the puck from sticks as well as any prospect on this list. He's incredibly crafty in control. He can stickhandle in a phone booth. He creates problems for defencemen attacking on angles and shifting at speed. He also has a scrappiness to his game that keeps him in the fight. He may have the highest ceiling among the forwards on this list if he hits.

### 6. Matty Beniers, C, 18 (Seattle Kraken — No. 2, 2021)

I wrote throughout last year's draft process that I believed Beniers' skill level had been either underrated or miscast due to all of the focus placed on the rest of the things he provided on the ice. This season, as a sophomore on a stacked Wolverines team and then in 10 games with the Kraken, that began to push to the forefront as he has consistently made high-skill plays at the same rates as his peers, peers who would only be described as skilled (Thomas Bordeleau, Brendan Brisson, Kent Johnson, etc.).

His game has developed a real crispness. He never seems to put passes into feet. He keeps a ton of plays alive with his ability to weave around bodies along the wall and play through bumps because he keeps his feet and hands moving in unison (which also helps him shade pucks in transition) when it looks like he's closed out. He's a high-level transition player who pushes paces and capably attacks on angles on entry. The strength of Beniers' game has always been his ability to pull his



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

linemates into the fight, drag them along through pace and effort, and make plays all over the ice.

But he has continued to add layers and dimension to his play with the puck (which included the progression of his shot into a real weapon) this year. He's just a good hockey player. The Kraken should be set down the middle for the next decade if they handle Beniers' and Wright's development properly and can keep them around. There are players with more skill lower on this list (see: Matt Savoie, Kent Johnson) or more strength (see: Mason McTavish) but there may not be any who are more complete.

7. Kent Johnson, C/LW, 19 (Columbus Blue Jackets — No. 5, 2021)

It's no secret that I'm high on Johnson. He's got some quirks. His skating can kick out from a standstill and he's got a thin, wiry build where he has struggled to add muscle. But Johnson has just about everything else you look for in a first-line player and he's one of a small number of drafted prospects in the sport who I believe has the potential to be a true star in the game, if it all comes together for him.

He's dynamic with the puck on his stick, both in his ability to pull and drag pucks through his wide stance and in his knack for pulling up into a more stilted position to handle the puck just inches away from his skates in traffic. His ability to dance with the puck and manufacture offence as a playmaker in possession is elite.

When he's under pressure, he doesn't have to play through much contact because of how effortlessly he makes soft, little plays through the triangles of sticks and into space for himself to skate onto (the kind that can shock a crowd with his craftiness when it looks like he's stuck in a phone booth without options).

I was impressed, watching him in Calgary, Ann Arbor, Calgary again, and Edmonton this year but his improved pace (trying to make one too many moves is something that he has been criticized for so it has been nice to see him pushing the tempo and moving pucks a little faster). I also saw progress in his one-timer this year, which with continued reps and practice could give him another weapon in his arsenal.

The reality is he consistently makes difficult plays at speed, his hands and his feet flow effortlessly together (and often out of sync to lose defenders), there are few young players in the sport who can draw defenders to them and make a play to the backside as he does, he's a PP1 lock, and there's just a breeziness and elusiveness about his game that captivates. I'm also not honestly worried about his competitiveness or engagement either.

He's not going to be a checker or a go-to D-zone guy, and there are going to be moments in games where he fades, but he's also going to find the highlight reel and produce — and staff who've worked with him will tell you he's a competitor. He's a unique talent and the Blue Jackets need guys who can create.

8. Cole Perfetti, C/LW, 20 (Winnipeg Jets — No. 10, 2020)

I remain bullish on Perfetti's upside as a top-of-the-lineup forward. The strength and skating will continue to come and I'm firm in my belief that neither are barriers even at their current levels. Everything else about his profile and his career arc thus far point in the same direction. He problem solves as well as just about any player in the game, constantly reading and identifying his options, whether that's space opening up for him to put a puck into for a moving teammate, a layer he can use as a screen for his shot, a lane he can take on an entry, or a way that he can bait defenders one-on-one to dictate their movements around his intended play.

He's a crafty, increasingly inventive (though sometimes I do wonder whether that's to compensate for his feet not moving fast enough), modern playmaking type who understands how to use the sheet to his advantage, blending his unique anticipation with excellent hands, a strong wrist shot, and "eyes in the back of his head" creativity. He has also worked to improve his one-timer and turn it into more of a threat, adding another weapon to his PP1 arsenal.

Then you add in great feel on his backhand (his comfort level here is special or very close), the way he adjusts his handling to sticks, reads that are one step ahead of most, his vision through layers, and his ability to play pucks into space for him to skate onto (some players burn wide with speed but others are just as effective sliding pucks under the triangles of a defender's stick to the same result).

I have very little doubt (even knowing that some others do have doubts) that his game will translate with opportunity and talented linemates. Now it's up to the Jets to put him in a position to succeed with linemates that he can make better. Opportunity will determine his development path more than it will for some of the other players slotted this high, but if he's handled right and can stay healthy, the ceiling is really high.

9. Matt Savoie, C/RW, 18 (Buffalo Sabres — No. 9, 2022)

Savoie's game has the potential to thrill as much as any player's on this list. Inside the offensive zone, he's strong. He's got extremely quick side-to-side hands that help him beat defenders one-on-one off of cuts. He's got an NHL shot (which he can place with pinpoint accuracy from a bad angle and rip by a goalie clean from a distance, but he also loves to change up and slide five-hole). He does an excellent job creating plays to the slot out of traffic. He's a burning skater with explosiveness and quick three-step acceleration that allows him to win races, separate in transition, and put defenders onto their heels, or dash through holes in coverage to the net (or draw a penalty). He's a soft small-area passer who blends deception into his movements.

And then on top of those things, he's got a bit of a chip on his shoulder. He's always engaged, he keeps his feet moving, he plays with a ton of energy, and he finishes all of his checks and knocks his fair share of players over despite being on the smaller side. He's also sturdier on his feet than his listed height might suggest, which helps him play between checks.

I see a dynamic, high-tempo, top-six, goal-creating package. He's an exciting talent, with clear PP1 upside due to his shooting/skill package and clear five-on-five upside because of his skating and motor. Even in games where the points don't fall, he's almost always dangerous and threatening on the ice — and he's seldom going to leave you wanting more. Because of the way he plays, I fully expect him to stick at his natural centre position in the NHL, too. His speed might even make him a useful penalty killer to give him all-situations value as well.

10. Juraj Slafkovsky, LW, 18 (Montreal Canadiens — No. 1, 2022)

Look: I think there's a real chance Slafkovsky becomes the best forward on this list. And being the seventh-ranked forward prospect is still a big deal. It suggests that he's got star upside. But some of the reservations I've had on Slafkovsky haven't suddenly changed now that he's a No. 1 pick. So I'm going to trust in my process on this one.

Slafkovsky is a tantalizing prospect, with a skill-size combo that scouts and coaches clamour for. He has already demonstrated against pro competition domestically and, more notably, internationally (across a substantial sample size). The nine points in five games and a historic silver medal for Slovakia at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. An Olympic bronze medal as that tournament's MVP. A Liiga silver medal with his club team, TPS. A team-leading nine points at the men's worlds.

Slafkovsky is a big winger (over 6-foot-3 and at 218 pounds) who plays the game with uncharacteristic finesse, regularly flashing hands you'd expect out of a smaller player one-on-one to pull pucks in tight to his feet. He's also got a rangy, fluid stride, which makes him a surprisingly dangerous rush player — and impressive confidence with the puck on his stick, which enables him to hang onto it (sometimes to a fault) and attack off the wall into the slot. He loves taking the puck from the half wall to the home plate area to shoot from his forehand.

I'm also a big fan of his approach. He's got the personality and the game to rise to the moment in Montreal, and he always plays his style, looking to attack in control (a lot of forwards his size become more deferential and fall back into give-and-go habits to fit a mould when they make the



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

jump to the pro level). There is, despite his makeup and success, some risk associated with his projection at his size (small players aren't the only ones who carry size-based limitations with them!) though, and that, combined with his so-so Liiga production, does leave me a little lower on him than where he was selected.

## 11. Jake Sanderson, LHD, 20 (Ottawa Senators — No. 5, 2020)

I debated ranking Sanderson as high as sixth here, so I wouldn't read too much into the number. Before his hand injury, Sanderson was one of the best players in college hockey and things were going about as well as you could have hoped for with him (and really have been since about midway through his draft year). Sanderson is an athletically gifted, pro-sized defenceman who skates at a high level, defends among the best prospects outside the NHL with his stick and gaps, and just has a rare presence about him.

He's going to be an excellent transition player (on offense and defense) and his play and confidence with the puck have elevated his game offensively to new heights. He always had the ability to lead exits and entries in control and blend his power and mobility to snuff out opposing rushes the other way. Most importantly, he has grown more ambitious with the puck, more often making finesse plays inside the offensive zone and roaming more freely than he once did, which have combined to give him the PP1 upside that distinguishes No. 1 defencemen from No. 2 defencemen.

He's still not the most creative player with the puck (he's not going to put up Cale Makar or Adam Fox levels of production) but his instincts and Grade-A tools in virtually every other area have him looking like he's going to be a three-zone monster.

## 12. Brandt Clarke, RHD, 19 (Los Angeles Kings — No. 8, 2021)

Clarke, one of my favourite prospects in the sport, is a player of quirks and faults, but also of talent and intrigue. His offensive-zone skill with the puck is rare. He's a roving, confident, attacking defender with an uncanny ability to beat opposing players side-to-side, find his way into dangerous areas and then execute NHL-level plays to drive offense.

He's got some oddities, too. His knees knock. He rides on his inside edges. He's not a natural athlete (though he has worked very hard to build out his frame and strength). But I don't think any of those things are prohibitive to his development and he's actually a better defender (the biggest misnomer about him tries to say otherwise) against the rush and inside his own zone than he gets credit for.

Different isn't necessarily a negative and I think that's the case with Clarke. All of his little quirks make him the weird, fascinating, gifted player that he is. And I expect his intricacies will make him a special player at the next level, just like they have at every level below it. He's got great east-west vision, which he uses to frequently change the puck's side.

He has this way of getting into the spots to make something happen. I've often referred to him as a bit of a unicorn. He looks, at all times, completely unbothered by the stage or the pressure of opposing players. I think there are times when that can result in him trying to do too much.

He's also a loud, positive voice in the room (which I think can rub some people the wrong way). That personality matches his bold game (he tries and often pulls off difficult spin or flip passes). There are things about his game that may scare off the odd coach (which I'd argue has less to do with him than hockey's misperceptions of what he is) but he can completely take over a game, and I admire his gumption.

I also expect him to make significant progress as he continues to get stronger and sturdier. His statistical profile is sterling after leading the Colts in scoring and producing at a high clip in Slovakia last season. And he's going to be a lot of fun to watch when he finds his body and game in the NHL.

## 13. Mason McTavish, C, 19 (Anaheim Ducks — No. 3, 2021)

McTavish is a sturdy, highly-talented goal scorer who plays a powerful, middle-lane game built on a competitive foundation. He looks to dictate play in puck protection, drive the net, and manufacture his own offence first, but he can also involve his linemates and use some of the attention he draws as a tool to facilitate.

Despite how big and strong he is over his skates, he's also capable of playing with speed and pace and has worked hard to add tempo changes to his game. There are still times when he can look a little slow-moving from a standstill, but when he's ramped up and engaged, he wins a lot of races, outmuscles opponents on retrievals, and pushes through checks and bumps with such ease (a huge part of his game). He's also a powerful skater when he gets a full head of steam, and creates separation in longer races and pushes down ice in transition (he really started to turn D consistently this year, turning his speed into a real strength).

He also finishes every check, knocks a lot of players over, wins lanes, and loves to be involved in the battles that happen on the ice. He's a menace on the forecheck, forcing rushed decisions. Nobody in junior wanted to bump him when he had possession this year because he would just stand over pucks and hold them. Offensively, he's a natural finisher who can overpower goalies and loves to shoot (occasionally to his detriment). Despite his game's hardness, he also boasts impressive soft skill, finding his way through traffic with quick dekes under sticks when the opportunity to drop his shoulder and push past the defender isn't there.

His game used to be all about force, and power, and tenaciousness, and bullshness. And while he still has that in spades, there has also just developed a crispness to his passes and handling that has taken him to another level. Everything is clean, flat, and in control (instead of out of it) now. Even the little things, like how he handles bad passes off his skates, are in line now. There are times when he looks like he's a man on a mission and just takes over.

He's going to need to work to stay in top shape throughout his career and there are still times when I think he can tunnel vision, but he's got just about everything else you look for in a power forward. His ability to make plays under the triangle of defenders' sticks in one sequence, draw a penalty hanging onto a puck on the cycle in the next, and get from the outside in with incredible ease on the next, allows him to make things happen in a variety of ways inside the offensive.

Plus he brings a physical element to a line on top of all of that.

## 14. Simon Edvinsson, LHD, 19 (Detroit Red Wings — No. 6, 2021)

Things went really well for Edvinsson this year. He played big minutes on a European giant in his first full season at the SHL level, he looked like a force in the short-lived world juniors, and the areas of his game that needed (and still need) some cleaning up got it for the most part.

His ceiling is extremely high and backed by a unique set of traits and skills for a 6-foot-5 player (let alone defenceman). These include his uncharacteristically soft hands and control of the puck, his fearlessness with and without it, and his strong foundational knowledge of how to use his towering frame to defend in a variety of ways (with an active stick, with step-up physicality when opportunities present themselves, on box-outs, etc.).

If he can develop his shot (one of those areas that still needs work), continue to smooth out his game, and make better choices (which he did this year), the potential is there in spades. It was also nice to see him make more play-ending passes and create a ton of chances (he should actually have a couple more goals under his belt) to add to his already-dominant transition game as a confident carrier and transporter.

I hate this cliché but you really can't teach hands like his at that size. He tries things, he usually pulls them off, and he's more comfortable handling the puck under pressure than just about any teenage defenceman I've scouted (regardless of size). He has also found greater control of his gangly frame (he's a good skater and always has been but



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

his stride can splay from the knees) and takes up a lot of space defensively. He's going to be a very good — and different — player if he can maintain his take-charge mentality on both sides of the puck and put it all together at the NHL level.

15. Quinton Byfield, C, 19 (Los Angeles Kings — No. 2, 2020)

Byfield's young career hasn't played out exactly like anyone had drawn it up. But he was also one of the youngest players in his draft class, the pandemic necessitated time in the AHL, and then he suffered a fluke injury. And there just isn't a young player in the sport quite like him through it all. But while the hiccups slot him lower here than you'd hope a No. 2 pick would land, I think there's also still reason for optimism that he can tap into his clear potential and become the top-end centre with size that he projected as when he was drafted.

He's too good a skater and too big and strong and talented for his size not to put it all together. I have minor concerns about his processing and some of the bobbles that happen in his game when pace is ramped up, but there aren't many 6-foot-5, 220-pound players who can skate and make plays like he can. Byfield's blend of athleticism, speed, power, and finesse is just so rare.

Are there kinks to his game that still need unwinding? Sure. He can get lost in no man's land defensively a little. He has been a work in progress in the faceoff circle. But there are also plenty of things that distinguish him. His ability to play at full speed offensively, provide defensive and puck retrieval value on the forecheck, and generally push pace on the inside of the ice, is pretty special.

He'll surprise you with his creativity for his size, too. His wrist shot is dangerous from mid range when he has the time to get it off (though I think he'll need to continue to improve on balancing his catch-and-release to get the most out of himself as a shooter in traffic when he's playing off the puck). The payoff is still there, it's just going to require a little more patience (as hard as that can be with a second pick, it's just as important if not more). He is still 19, even if it feels like he has been around for longer than that now.

16. Marco Rossi, C, 20 (Minnesota Wild — No. 9, 2020)

To see Marco Rossi look like Marco Rossi in his return to the ice in the AHL in 2021-22 was such a giant thing for him personally and for the future of the Wild organization. It's not surprising in the least. You won't find a kid who is more driven than he is, and who makes overcoming what he has seem so inevitable.

But it's still a very big deal. Rossi was mostly tremendous in the AHL and pretty clearly one of the league's best young players. He projects as a top-two, two-way centre who provides major value in all three zones of the ice. Despite his 5-foot-9 frame, he's built like an ox, with a sturdy and low centre of gravity that allows him to take bumps on offence and play his determined, detail-oriented, checking style on defence (on top of helping him be very good in the faceoff circle). Then he's also got slick skill in traffic, quick hands one-on-one with defenders and goalies, playmaking acumen through gaps in coverage, a sixth sense for how to use spacing, and impressive finesse and touch to his game as a passer.

He's also one of the smartest players on this list. He's going to be a heck of an NHL player and my belief in that is as strong now as it was before Wild doctors discovered that he had been playing with the heart condition, myocarditis, during the 2020 world juniors.

This speaks to the work he did to get back and stay on track as one of the game's top prospects.

17. Alexander Holtz, RW/LW, 20 (New Jersey Devils — No. 7, 2020)

Holtz has the makings of a potential first-line winger (and should be a top-six one at minimum). He's got a coveted blend of skill, power and shooting which allows him to create his own looks and then finish off of them with a variety of release points and shot types (or play off of the puck from a playmaker and get open with his timing). He's got a pro

frame and strength (6-foot, 195 pounds) which allows him to play through bumps, win battles, and get off the wall.

But he's also got underrated playmaking sense (I've often argued that his ability as a shooter is overstated and his ability in facilitation has been understated). He still needs to get a little quicker and play a little quicker to maximize those tools but if he can develop a little more pace (he's not slow!), he'll be the goal-scoring winger everyone believes he can be at even strength and he's always going to have power-play upside.

After an, at-times, bumpy post-draft season, he really began to figure out how to make his game work in North America in the AHL in 2021-22. His small-area skill improved. He was looking to hang onto the puck and attack more, and was getting to his spots with relative ease in the AHL. He still needs to work on his one-timer, which he doesn't always get the most of, but his wrist shot release and power are both high end. He's got soft touch off of his forehand and backhand, and he's a dual-threat inside the offensive zone.

He hasn't yet shown it at the NHL, and I'm sure he'd admit his nine games with the Devils didn't go like he'd hoped, but I expect him to find his way and figure it out and become an impactful scorer they need on their flanks in Newark.

18. David Jiricek, RHD, 18 (Columbus Blue Jackets — No. 6, 2022)

Jiricek has some extremely desirable attributes, marked by a booming point shot (it's a bomb, and he does a really good job keeping it on target and a few feet off the ice), a strong, athletic 6-foot-3 frame, and a commanding on-ice presence. He's a strong and sturdy defender who plays a staunch man-to-man style, moves his feet well for his size, and thrives in transition with his ability to both close out on gaps with his length through neutral ice and lead a ton of rushes as an eager puck transporter.

Offensively, he's also a capable handler and distributor whose point shot is complemented by an aggressive approach. There are also some subtleties to his game (passes that are almost never off-target, a sneaky-silky first touch, etc.). But his *modus operandi* is that he's a confident, active, engaged three-zone player who has all of the tools you look for in a top defender.

As he continues to smooth out and polish his game, it's hard to imagine he doesn't become, at the very least, an impactful top-four guy. And if he hits the right notes along his development path, his ceiling could be significantly higher than that.

19. Joakim Kemell, RW, 18 (Nashville Predators — No. 17, 2022)

Kemell is a highly-gifted, slick, play-creating winger who excels with the puck on his stick, carves teams up through coverage to take the play from the flanks to the interior, and possesses quick, light hands. Those tools enable him to take advantage of his dangerous wrister, which he can get off quickly from a variety of stances and at a variety of tempos. On the puck, he's agile through cuts and changes of direction and plays an intentional, attacking style.

Off of the puck, he also plays with some energy and doesn't shy away from the physical side of the game, which has endeared him to coaches to this point despite his 5-foot-11 frame. I'd like to see him slow down and utilize his linemates a little better than he does as he's actually a heady playmaker, but part of what makes him so exciting is his insistence on creating his own looks (even if that comes with some forcing it) with that shot of his.

He really can sling it, with a wrister and one-timer that both pop. Kemell projects as a top-six, PP1 winger who can break a game open inside the offensive zone.

20. Jonathan Lekkerimäki, RW, 17 (Vancouver Canucks — No. 15, 2022)

One of the most dangerous players on this list with the puck on his stick, Lekkerimäki had quite the draft year, with some beautiful goals in arguably the third-best pro league in the world, a Globe Trotters feel at the J20 level with linemates Liam Öhgren and Noah Östlund (who will



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

both also be first-rounders), and a brilliant 15-point performance at U18 worlds. He had one of the quickest catch-and-release motions in the draft.

He's dynamic in control and threatening from anywhere in the offensive zone. He can beat you in an instant or hang onto pucks and make things happen himself. He's got a knack for hitting holes in the net, frequently beating goalies low-blocker and five-hole. He's got A-level hands, a deceptive release, and a slyness to his game that allows him to get to spots to score with and without the puck.

With the right development and patience, he's got clear upside as a top-six creator and finisher. His game can drift to the perimeter at times, but he's got the skill to play that way. You want the puck in his hands. Mix in a late-July birthday, his rapid progression, and an ability to put the puck in the net with consistency from mid range and he's got both an exciting skill level and an opportunity to find another level.

21. Dylan Guenther, LW/RW, 19 (Arizona Coyotes — No. 9, 2021)

If you want to know how good Dylan Guenther was in the WHL this year, watch how the Edmonton Oil Kings' other stars (Florida's Justin Sourdis and St. Louis' Jake Neighbours) struggled to take over in his absence during the Memorial Cup (Guenther suffered a knee injury in Game 3 of the WHL Final) and contrast it against how good they looked when he was the one drawing all of the attention.

Guenther is a beautiful skating winger who slices through holes and explodes past flatfooted defenders with ease — against his peers. He's a flowing player who excels in transition, crossing over to build speed, attacking on angles across the line and breezing through neutral ice in possession to make plays off the rush. And while he uses a pretty high grip on his stick, his quick hands flash side to side, he catches pucks into a shooting stance out of cuts with silky touch, and his shot is threatening from mid range because of its accuracy and power (which has increased enough to be a weapon from long range fairly consistently now).

He has also gotten stronger, adding to his multi-faceted offensive package off the flank. Inside the offensive zone, his ability to handle the puck in traffic, play pucks into space, and shape and hide his shot all impress. So he's not only capable of transporting the puck and leading the rush, but he then has the offensive acumen to make things happen once the play slows down inside the offensive zone. Add in good control of his inside and outside edges and the ability to shoot from a variety of stances and there's a lot to like about his upside as a projectable, playmaking top-six winger.

22. Brad Lambert, C/RW, 18 (Winnipeg Jets — No. 30 2022)

Last year Lambert went through, injury, illness, struggles with his own play and a team switch. I think he was better than his numbers (four goals on 132 shots in Liiga, for a 3 percent shooting percentage reveal that much, and so does a close examination of his looks). I'll also be the first to tell you that he might be the best skater on this list, or certainly top three.

The same goes for the grades his hands get. Lambert's gifts are undeniable. When he's feeling good, he's fearless with the puck, makes a ton of plays in control, and looks to dictate in possession. He's got excellent control of his outside edges which allow him to carve up coverage on cutbacks and carries.

He's slippery because of his ability to spin away from his man and make a play. He's a good passer off his backhand. Some scouts worry about Lambert's game without the puck in terms of both his intensity off of it and his ability to make things happen offensively when he's not getting a ton of touches. With it, though, Lambert's a multi-faceted threat who blends impressive puck skill with standout all-around skating mechanics and an attack mentality that complements a dangerous curl-and-drag shot (which also complements the short stick he uses).

He plays pucks into space beautifully, gets to the interior (against his peers, at least), splits lanes, cuts off the wall aggressively (though again, more often against his peers than pros), and has a low base to his stride

that allows him to extend plays (though he does have a bit of a hunch to his posture, which can put him off balance). He's excellent on the point and half wall on the power play because of his puck skill, dangerous wrister off the flank and playmaking instincts.

There's now a boom or bust prognostication for him, because he's going to have to rebound next year to warrant this ranking, and he's going to have to play in a top-six role in the NHL, but I believe in his ability to do both of those things (likely starting as the top weapon on a strong Seattle Thunderbirds team in the WHL).

23. Danila Yurov, LW/RW, 18 (Minnesota Wild — No. 24, 2022)

Those who followed my draft coverage with a watchful eye will notice that Yurov has leapfrogged a couple of players from my final 2022 list here. They'll also notice, though, that I hinted in my ranking that that would be the case after he was selected, detailing that he'd slot a few places higher were it not for the uncertainty that loomed around Russian players in the 2022 draft.

The draft ranking was about the caution I would have taken on the day with Yurov, taking lesser prospects until I felt I could no longer pass on the gap between him and the next player. I don't have to consider that here anymore though. I do still have some worries about the lack of opportunity that he was afforded in the KHL last year, and the negative impact a repeat of those circumstances could have on his development.

Not all of the concerns about the politicking that could take place are suddenly reduced to nothing now that he's drafted, either. But I know the Wild are confident that they're going to be able to get him over here when the time is right, and that helps.

Yurov has already proven to be dominant player in the MHL and internationally (in part because of his December 2003 birthday but mostly because of his well-rounded skill level), driving play, chances, and results at both ends. He's a kid who has really impressed me almost every time I've watched him against his peers. If you were to fill up two buckets with his tools (one for the strengths, one for the weaknesses) and place them on a scale, the bucket with his strengths in it would be overflowing and the one with his weaknesses would be near empty.

He plays hard and fast, he pushes tempo, he's a strong and balanced skater, he's an excellent give-and-go player who excels at playing in and out of space without the puck, his shot comes off of his blade hard in motion (though it could use a little more versatility), he's got pro size and skill, he's diligent in all three zones, and he's almost always in the right position or reading the play to get back into it (on offence or defence).

Kids his age are often either advanced in the way they operate on the ice but lack the high-end skill to make the most out of it, or have the skill in spades but struggle to use it because they aren't processing the game fast enough. Yurov doesn't have any problems on either front. He may not become a star (though I think it's possible he does), but he's got projectable top-six tools.

24. William Eklund, C/LW, 19 (San Jose Sharks — No. 7, 2021)

It was a weird year for Eklund (a year after a bout with COVID-19 and an appendectomy also made his draft year a weird one too). Any time you score three goals in a full season (which Eklund did across nine NHL games, 33 SHL games, two J20 games, and three world juniors games), your confidence is going to take a hit.

It wasn't necessarily a bad year (he looked like he belonged in the NHL, he played big minutes in the SHL, and he was impressive in the short-lived world juniors) but I wouldn't say he has taken a huge step forward in his development either.

Eklund remains a well-rounded three-zone player who can do a little bit of everything offensively (he's strong and agile below the goal line, he's a capable transporter, and he's a plus-level finisher, handler and passer) and defensively (he supports the play well, takes smart routes to pucks and pinches along the wall, and engages effectively in battles to win more than you might expect from a 5-foot-11 teenager).



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

Eklund's biggest strength, though, is the way he navigates on the ice. He slides in and out of space to get open for his shot (a shot which, despite the lack of finishing last year, is a real mid-range threat) and play the give-and-go game effectively. He also makes a lot of small-area plays around the net to attack the slot or play a puck into it, with proper timing, for a teammate. He's just a clever problem-solver who knows his game and how to play within himself to make something happen from shift to shift.

I have little doubt that he'll be a second-line forward in the NHL. His floor is high that way. Whether he can be a first-line forward is the question. With the right development and the continued honing of his craft, I don't think it's out of the question. But it's not a sure thing either and this year didn't strengthen his case.

25. Isaac Howard, LW, 18 (Tampa Bay Lightning — No. 31, 2022)

This is the point in the list where I expect the fans of the teams that drafted players before him will begin to emerge with the same old "How can a kid that 30 NHL teams passed up on land 25th on this list? What does that say about you?" criticisms. And that's fine, but Howard was my 10th-ranked prospect on my draft board and he's my 11th-ranked 2022 draftee here (after Yurov moved up to where he belongs), and there has been no hockey played between then and now that would change that.

Howard's a player I know I diverge from the consensus on. He's also a player I've spent a lot of time watching and learning about, and one I'm confident sticking my neck out on due to both all that he has accomplished and his makeup as a player. He's a player that the more I watch, the less I understand the case for leaving him until 31st.

Though he's "short" at 5-foot-10 he's a long way from small, with a muscular build that makes him sturdy on his feet. That stocky frame doesn't slow him down either. He's got some of the quicker crossover acceleration in the draft, with a hurried stride that cranks its way up ice to give him translatable speed. And after arriving at the program as an all-offence player, his effort level and tenaciousness really became hallmarks of his game, further muting any (misplaced) size concerns that might exist.

He's also one of the more dangerous players in the offensive zone on this list with the puck and yet he's even more dangerous off of it, with a scorer's sixth sense for always arriving just on time in Grade-A locations (whether that's hiding in coverage or just staying around the puck at the net).

He makes a lot of plays under the triangles of defenders' sticks, he navigates in and out of holes in traffic like few others in this class in possession, and when he's in attack mode taking pucks from a standstill into the middle of the ice to create looks, he's a ton of fun to watch and forces opposing players to reach in on him (which draws a lot of penalties).

He's creative. He tries things (occasionally at the offensive-zone blue line that he shouldn't but gets away with) and usually executes. He's strong in the home-plate area and has some of the better hands and instincts in the draft. He's always going to have PP utility but he's also impactful enough offensively at five-on-five to warrant a top-six projection, even if he doesn't have the premiums of size or position.

26. Frank Nazar, C, 18 (Chicago Blackhawks — No. 13, 2022)

Few prospects dash around the ice and make plays like Nazar does. Nazar turned me into a big fan with the U17 team and he continued to add layers to his game with the U18 team. He's a threatening player from the hashmarks because of his wrist, which he pops off of his stick with power and precision thanks in large part to the balance he displays through his weight shift (he's not a particularly strong kid).

He's got quick hands, which help him deftly adjust in traffic to get shots off under pressure. He flashes creativity throughout his game. He plays pucks into space as well as anyone in the draft, regularly executing through tight gaps in coverage. And he's just a hungry, driven player who consistently targets the middle lane with his greatest asset — his skating.

Nazar's one of the fastest players on this list, not only in straight lines and winding up through his crossovers, but also adjusting tempos (a learned skill that he really developed at U.S. NTDP). This allows him to impact play both with the puck attacking in transition to turn defenders or creating breakaways, as well as without it, speeding into lanes to get open for his linemates.

He also consistently supports the play high in the offensive zone without possession when that's his role (another learned habit at the program that came a long way). He can be careless with the puck and try to do too much at times but he's also capable of going right into coverage to make something happen or breezing to the perimeter to pull eyes to him and facilitate.

He moves and does things on the ice that few can. He's also an extremely gifted natural athlete (which not all hockey players are). I think he's going to take a little more time to reach his potential than most of the players slotted ahead of him here, but I expect him to do that.

27. Olen Zellweger, LHD, 18 (Anaheim Ducks — No. 34, 2021)

Zellweger, who was just days away from being eligible for the 2022 draft when the Ducks took him at the front of the second round in 2021, was the best defenceman in junior hockey for my money last year — followed closely by another player I have ranked a little later here (who is a year and a half older).

He has become a bit of a marvel for his skating-transition package and the way it allows him to control play all over the ice (including, despite his 5-foot-10 frame, defensively). He's a one-man exit-entry machine. He almost never puts himself into tough spots but when he does and he needs to track back, his skating helps him recover.

Despite being the youngest defenceman to make Team Canada's world juniors team, I thought he was one of its most impressive players right through from the summer showcase and December selection camps in Calgary to the short-lived tournament in Edmonton.

He uses his feet to buzz around the ice and carry pucks off the line or in transition better than just about any defenceman on this list not named Luke Hughes. The way he hugs corners and rounds the net, or turns under opposing players, or spins off of pressure, is extremely impressive.

But he also just always seems to play well. I love how quickly he reads the play when he gets the puck. It's catch, survey, and quickly skate or outlet. Rinse, repeat. He almost never waits too long to make a decision.

His wrist showed improved pop with an earlier release off of his toe this year. He also played a feistier game and rose to the challenge in battles to keep sequences alive or skate them away from danger. He's got a silky first touch, catching difficult passes mid stride into a planned movement or a cross-ice pass. He's just an effortless four-way skater who uses his feet to be in constant motion with and without the puck offensively, as well as to swallow up carriers in the neutral zone with tight gaps, virtually gluing himself to the hips of opposing players.

He is also, by all accounts, a wonderful kid who cares about the details of the game and already has pro habits. Zellweger's got the ability to play a highly-active, roving style without sacrificing a disruptive defensive game. Between Zellweger, Jamie Drysdale and Pavel Mintyukov, the Ducks are well-positioned on the blue line long term.

28. Denton Mateychuk, LHD, 18 (Columbus Blue Jackets — No. 12, 2022)

Mateychuk has built quite the reputation for himself in hockey circles for his ability to direct play and drive results when he's on the ice. That style helped him work his way onto Team Canada's U18 worlds team as an underager and it made him one of the top defencemen in junior hockey this season (and my No. 1-ranked CHL defenceman for 2022).

He's already a plus-level skater, which helps him escape pressure with his feet, push up ice in control, trail in transition, walk the line, and steer opposing players into tough spots despite not being the biggest guy. He's the definition — or close — of the modern defenceman.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

Mateychuk pushes when he can and everything he does is done with poise and command. He plays a reliable and calculating game built around his mobility and sound decision-making. He defends at a high level and is strong over his 5-foot-11 frame. Plus he's a July birthday so he's got plenty of time to build on his strong foundation and develop his distinguishing qualities (namely his movement and control of the game).

He just always seems to be involved in all three zones. I see clear top-four upside and there's nothing in his game that gives me pause in saying that.

29. Liam Öhgren, LW, 18 (Minnesota Wild — No. 19, 2022)

Öhgren put together one of the most productive age-adjusted seasons in the history of Sweden's top junior level and two strong performances internationally for Sweden (first at last year's Hlinka Gretzky Cup, and then more recently at U18 worlds, where he was also the team's captain) in his draft year.

He's a bigger, stronger player than his two contemporaries in Djurgården and while he doesn't have Lekkerimäki's dynamism or Östlund's breeziness, that doesn't make him any less interesting as the shot-and-pass, power-and-finesse combination player that he is. I love the way he shades into and away from pressure in control. His shot comes off his blade quick, hard and naturally, rocking it back into his stance and letting it go (it really rattles off of his stick). His offensive arsenal is multi-faceted and he's got some really sneaky craftiness and evasiveness to his game to complement the tools of strength over the puck and through his shot that are obvious.

He'll need to pick up a step to translate his game to the pro level, but I wouldn't call his skating an impediment (it's better than he usually gets credit for) and he's always finding ways to get to pucks and/or get open around the home plate area inside the offensive zone, where his skill and shot take over.

Add in a commitment to the puck retrievals and battles, and a strong base knowledge of when to make the simple play and when to attack, and you've got one of the more complete wingers on this list. And don't confuse completeness for lack of talent, as I think that can often be misconstrued and that is not the case here.

30. Kevin Korchiński, LHD, 18 (Chicago Blackhawks — No. 7, 2022)

Long, smooth-skating, point-per-game defencemen are hard to find and I wasn't surprised when Korchiński was selected as high as he was as a result. Also, I know the Blackhawks loved him. I think he's in the same tier and conversation as Mateychuk as the top CHL D out of the 2022 class, even if he slots a couple of spots lower here.

He was one of the most improved players in the 2022 class this year, settling into an ambitious, free-flowing game that reminded a little of Stars first-rounder Thomas Harley at the same age, and his June birthday should give him even more runway next season. He handles the puck smoothly on his hip, his impressive footwork and maneuverability help him adjust to, away, and around pressure, and then he's a natural playmaker who can make something happen and facilitate out of all of his movement and carries.

I like his stick and his ability to use his feet to defend the rush and disrupt play (though he's a better transition defender than a defensive-zone one). His hallmark has become his balance over his skates (an area that, astoundingly, was once a major concern before a growth spurt somehow straightened his posture out).

He tries to guide play with and without the puck with his mobility, pivots and directional changes. He can take over a game with his ability to transport the puck and roam. He can stretch the ice on outlets. He reads the play quickly, which allows him to make hurry-up passes when a long carry sequence isn't there for him.

It was nice to see him look to attack into his shot (which isn't particularly hard) more in the playoffs. He's also an underrated competitor who is willing to take a hit to make a play and fearlessly pursue pucks into

corners. There's still some fine-tuning that needs to happen but Korchiński's ceiling is high.

31. Chaz Lucius, C, 19 (Winnipeg Jets — No. 18, 2021)

Lucius left the University of Minnesota after his freshman year even after lacking continuity in his play and health following two consecutive years of injury troubles. So that worries me, a little, that everything in his career has moved faster than his reps and development maybe have.

But Lucius is such a talented player and finisher that he can't be ignored on this list for too long. I grew fond of the player and the kid in his time at the program, and there were real stretches of last season, including a 12-points-in-nine-games run from late-November to late-January (which also included a five-shot, two-drawn-penalties single-game showing at the quickly-cancelled world juniors).

I still think he's got high-end goal-scoring upside. He's a strong, multi-faceted scorer. He's got natural mid-range finishing ability. He's got a unique ability to change his angles in a split second (thanks to lightning-quick hands) and shoot around sticks and feet. And he's got an opportunistic sense for spacing and timing so that he scores his fair share of goals — like every good goal scorer — by simply sliding into scoring areas, finishing rebounds, or getting open into pockets of space around the net just as his linemates are looking to pass.

He's not an explosive skater, which leads to apprehension among some scouts as to how his finishing ability will translate at NHL pace, but I think his feel for the game and talent will supersede that in the next stage of his development. He's also an underrated playmaker and passer who understands how to play pucks into space when he draws pressure. He can find pockets inside the offensive zone to get open into when he doesn't have the puck and uses opposing defenders as decoys when he does. If he can stay healthy and get a season of uninterrupted development in, I expect him to get back on track toward his top-six scorer upside.

32. Wyatt Johnston, C, 19 (Dallas Stars — No. 23, 2021)

I mean, what a year for Wyatt Johnston. It cannot be overstated how impressive it was for Johnston to go from a lost season due to COVID-19 to 60 goals and 165 points in a combined 93 regular-season and playoff games. He had my vote on both ballots for the OHL's Red Tilson Trophy (Most Outstanding Player) and I didn't even have to give it any thought.

He was the league's best player and he didn't turn 19 until the middle of May when the playoffs were already underway. He outproduced his nearest teammate by 39 points in the regular season and 10 points in the playoffs. You could see it coming following his introduction to the Stars organization as one of the best players at the Traverse City Prospects Tournament last fall, too. Really, outside of an underwhelming showing at Team Canada's summer showcase in Calgary in August (which I think was, in conjunction with his age, the reason he was excluded from the selection camp back in Calgary in December) it was a perfect season for him.

I think it's clear now that Johnston was a little miscast ahead of the draft because of how effective he was in a checking role for Team Canada — and because his skating can kick out a little too. While he is a versatile, do-it-all type who is always on the right side of the puck, moulds his game to his linemates, excels in the faceoff circle, works hard, doesn't make many mistakes, and comes up with a lot of lifts and steals, he's also super talented. There were clear signs of this in minor hockey and in the second half of his rookie season in the OHL, when he had started to look like one of Windsor's best players before COVID-19 hit.

His ability to make plays under pressure, play with tempo, and manufacture offence on his own has really shone through. The puck just finds him and then he just seems to make crafty, smart little skill plays with it. When you consider his 6-foot-1, 175-pound frame and the room he still has to get a little quicker and stronger, there's a lot to be excited about.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

He's a guy I spoke about in advance of the draft as someone who several scouts and OHL executives spoke highly of unprompted. This year, he made them — and the Stars — look good, improving his projection from probably middle-six centre to potential impact top-six center.

33. Brennan Othmann, LW, 19 (New York Rangers — No. 16, 2021)

Othmann silenced some critics in his post-draft season, becoming one of the OHL's most consistent (there were some, in his rookie year in the OHL and his draft year in the second-tier Swiss League who questioned his consistency and his habits, with suggestions of selfishness) and prolific forwards. He was one of the league's two 50-goal scorers, finishing second in goals behind the elder Luke Evangelista, and he did it on a Flint team where he outproduced his nearest teammate by a pretty remarkable 47 points (121 to 74) across the regular season and playoffs.

He's got a strong, masked release that he can shoot from his blade from multiple release points while still maintaining pinpoint accuracy. He's got a silky first touch into quick hands. He's got that sixth sense as a scorer, where he just finds holes in coverage and in goalies to finish plays at a higher rate than most.

He's got a heady spatial awareness inside the offensive zone and a good feel for where his teammates are on the ice. With the puck on his stick and quick hands one-on-one, he created a ton this year out of attacking cuts into the slot with Flint. He also wore the "C" which contrasts against some of the ways folks have talked about him in the past. Othmann plays a determined off-puck game that engages in battles even though he's not a power type.

And he has worked hard to get stronger and a step quicker so that he can make the most out of his natural gifts on the ice. He's got top-six, top power-play tools. Now it's just about continuing to hone and tap into them while continuing to round out his game. The talent is clearly there.

34. Rutger McGroarty, LW, 18 (Winnipeg Jets — No. 14, 2022)

McGroarty's one of those kids who just looks like a pro hockey player. If he walked into an NHL dressing room tomorrow, he would stand stronger and broader than most in it. Then you add in the charisma which made him the natural choice for the captaincy at the U.S. NTDP program, and the light and energy that oozes out of him, and you have to be careful not to put too much stock into the off-ice pieces of the puzzle that he already appears to have figured out. But I think he's a darn good hockey player too and the pieces of the puzzle fit together nicely on the ice.

He's a better skater (there are some kinks he still needs to work out in his mechanics from a standstill because it doesn't look the prettiest through his first few steps, but there's some power when he gets going nonetheless) than he gets credit for and his spatial awareness and effort level help him avoid losing short races. He's got raw skill that shows up in his great hands. His finishing touch around the net is there in spades, with a hard one-touch shot that he leverages his strong frame to power through from a low kick.

He has particularly mastered the net drive into a high rotation away from coverage that brings him back to around the net. And then when he gets there, he's got the strength to shoot from bad postures/off balance. He always put his shots into good locations (along the ice, low blocker, high short side) it seems, too. He's dexterous. I'm a big fan.

The ice normally tilts in his favour. He just understands where to be out there and how to put himself in positions to create offence. And he's got an impressive statistical profile, the kind that typically projects into a college scorer and beyond. If he can get a little quicker from the jump, he's got all of the other makings of a legitimate top-nine forward who can play up and down a lineup with a variety of player types and score.

35. Cutter Gauthier, C/LW, 18 (Philadelphia Flyers — No. 5, 2022)

While I'm not quite where most teams and scouts got to on Gauthier (Willing to take him in the top five of the 2022 draft), the appeal is obvious. Gauthier has always been a net-focussed shooter but he has

worked to turn himself into a net-driven one, playing a more intentional game that knows what it is.

On the puck, he uses inside body positioning to get to the middle off the cycle or the rush. Off of it, he finishes his checks and looks to help his line get it back.

I wouldn't say he's a menacing power forward type, but he has learned to play a very engaged, imposing, speed game. Gauthier's an above-average skater (without being a burner) and despite his heavy skew toward shooting and goals, I find he sees the ice well, hits seams when they're there, and makes a lot of short little plays as a passer off the wall (including off his backhand).

His greatest strength is his catch-and-release. He can sling it. I do think he shoots a bit too much (a lot of his shots miss the net or are taken from low-percentage areas), but you can live with that. He's a favourite among scouts for the readymade projectability of his tools and his ability to put the puck in the net. I do think he's better suited for the wing, where he can work along — and off of — the wall and doesn't have to have the puck quite as much as at centre (he's a good passer but I don't see him becoming a primary carrier on an NHL line), though.

I fully expect Gauthier to be an impactful NHL player and scorer. I'm just not convinced he's going to produce enough to live up to just how high he was selected.

36. Jack Quinn, RW, 20 (Buffalo Sabres — No. 8, 2020)

Outside of a snakebitten, goalless 10-game playoff run, which included 28 shots on goal (2.8 per game, just shy of the 3.18 per game he registered in the regular season), last season was a really positive one for Quinn (especially considering he did it returning from a serious hernia injury). He was the AHL's most productive under-21 forward (1.36 points per game) and looked like himself in a pair of one-game call-ups to the NHL club.

Quinn has an A-level shot (both through a standard shooting motion and off of curl and drags or catch-and-release sequences) that he can score with from medium to long range. He's a right-handed shot and can play both wings (though he prefers his off wing).

He's diligent and counted-upon off the puck as a detail-oriented winger. He's got a pro frame that he'll be able to continue to fine-tune. He has proved that his skating deserved better marks (especially through his crossovers) in the lead-up to the draft. He has proven that, despite his late birthday, he was early in his late-blooming development track in his draft year.

He has impressed me more and more in puck control getting from the outside to the inside. Quinn is a well-rounded winger who can play off of a variety of linemate types. He's got great off-puck anticipation to complement his shot. With continued effort to get stronger physically, there's a heady 30-goal guy in the NHL in there.

37. Kaiden Guhle, LHD, 20 (Montreal Canadiens — No. 16, 2020)

Guhle became an absolute force at the junior level last season, solidifying his track to a likely NHL promotion, which bypasses the AHL in the fall. When he chooses to close his gap and separate his man from the puck, he can overpower his peers physically.

He's also a very contagious, energetic leader who can play in all situations, eat minutes, and be counted upon to lead by example. There are still some kinks (he gets burned one-on-one from time to time and his game can break down a little under pressure) but he's a long, freakishly-athletic kid who skates at a high level, kills a ton of plays in the neutral zone, outmuscles players when he leans on them, has an NHL shot, and has become a dominant transition player (even if you're not likely to see him break down coverage with his feet once he gets the puck to the offensive zone).

There has been progress made with his hands and developing some more calmness to his game has gone a long way to taking a safe NHL projection to another level. He makes the right play, he takes what's



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

given without necessarily looking to create (and still manages to create because of the consistency of that approach).

His point shots are almost always on target where you'd like them to be. He's got a great stick defensively. He looks ready for the next step to me. And while he's never going to have the offensive ability to be a No. 1, he's got the makings of a potential No. 2 or No. 3.

38. Logan Stankoven, C/RW/LW, 19 (Dallas Stars — No. 47, 2021)

One of my favourite prospects from the 2021 draft class, the 5-foot-8 Stankoven, who ranked 18th on my board, was named the CHL's Player of the Year in his post-draft season after he scored 62 goals and 135 points in 76 regular season and playoff games as Kamloops' captain.

Despite his height, he plays a bulldog, competitive, driven, forechecking style that sees him consistently beat bigger, stronger, players in battles, or to loose pucks, or along the wall shedding past checks to keep the cycle alive and stay over top of pucks.

Stankoven's got this shuffled, compact stride that rattles him around the ice and requires a lot of energy exertion. But that energy defines his game. He's strong in puck protection, leaning on his lead knee and pivoting to push under bumps. He's a fire hydrant for his size, rarely getting knocked off balance.

The wide gait to his stride also helps him sidestep defencemen with a head of steam, even if he's not a speedster per se (though he does have legitimate perimeter speed and looked a step quicker to burn out wide more last season). And then from the top of the faceoff circles in, he's a threatening creator who can crack a game open in a split second and who is even more dangerous the closer he gets to the hashmarks.

He's got a strong release. He can break down defenders in traffic. He's a sneaky-good facilitator. He's got clear power-play upside, I think he's got legitimate penalty-kill upside, and it's not hard to imagine him as a third-line scorer who plays an honest game or high-skill top-six piece who has success with a playmaking linemate. He's going to endear himself to fans, too. I don't see his size as an issue. It's an advantage in more ways than a disadvantage.

39. Mavrik Bourque, C, 20 (Dallas Stars — No. 30 2020)

In his last season at the junior level, Bourque, who missed all of November due to a shoulder injury, was one of its very best players, registering 100 points in 51 games across the regular season, a QMJHL title run, and the Memorial Cup to nearly break the rare two-points-per-game mark (after impressing me in Traverse City in September and briefly Edmonton in December). He gets high grades for his ability to maneuver in possession, manage the puck in control, adjust to pressure to evade checks, and make quick skill plays out of carries.

He's also got great hands in traffic and around the net, he has started to show a real knack for improvisation, and I really saw his one-on-one skill flash more consistently last season. And all of those things have developed on top of a strong foundation of tools that he has always had. The trustworthiness off the puck defensively. The spatial awareness and his identification of where players are on the ice (with and without the puck). The consistency of the reads. His forechecking. His quick choices and his ability to play fast without necessarily being a burner. His light feet. His ability to play with the puck as a driver or play off of his linemates. His involvement level on the ice. His intensity and drive. Improved strength which has allowed him to add a step from a standstill.

All of those things, combined with his high-end skill, gives him legitimate, impact upside in the NHL, even if his 5-foot-10 frame and lack of a truly defining trait may prevent him from becoming a true star. He's equal parts slick and detailed and that's pretty rare.

40. Peyton Krebs, C/LW, 21 (Buffalo Sabres — No. 17, 2019)

One of two 21-year-olds on this list, Krebs played more games in the NHL last year (22 points in 57 games) than the AHL (31 points in 30 games) but has been included here after bouncing repeatedly between

the two levels and finishing the year by playing out Rochester's playoff run.

Krebs has always been a top player at every level he has ever played. He was the No. 1 pick into the WHL. He was, in my opinion, the best player in the WHL two seasons ago. He produced at a point-per-game level in the AHL at age 19 and 20. Then, the week of his 21st birthday in late January, he scored his first three NHL goals and looked like he belonged with the Sabres.

Krebs isn't going to ever score a ton of goals, but he's the kind of player who could well score 15-20 goals, add 30-35 assists and be a good 50- or 55-point player who adds speed, pace and playmaking near the top of a lineup. Tools-wise, it's almost all there. Krebs doesn't have a great shot and that may be the difference between him becoming a second-line player versus a first-line one, but I'd argue the rest of his tools are enough to safely project into the former.

Krebs is a brilliant skater, both through his north-south acceleration and his changes of direction on spins, cutbacks and stop-ups. That speed helps him forecheck effectively, play at a high tempo, involve himself in the game, and make plays in transition or in quick bursts from a standstill within the offensive zone. He also has the finesse skills and the processing skills needed to play with dexterity and touch at that speed.

He quickly reads and reacts to the play, knifing through lanes and hitting seams as a plus-level passer. He's got excellent hands in tight which help him play in traffic and adjust to defenders. He's going to be able to win back possession and then create space for himself at the NHL level. And he can play multiple forward positions. And his effort level matches his skill.

41. Lukas Reichel, LW/RW, 20 (Chicago Blackhawks — No. 17, 2020)

Loyal readers here will know that I'm a fan of Reichel's and his play as a rookie in the AHL last season did nothing to dissuade me. (He led the IceHogs in scoring by 15 points and was the league's only under-20 prospect who broke a point per game (his 1.02 points per game narrowly bested Alexander Holtz's 0.98 and JJ Peterka's 0.97). Reichel plays a modern, play-driving style on the wing, excelling with the puck on his stick, handling it with finesse, and using a smooth, almost effortless skating stride to transport it up ice in transition or attack on angles. He's also a delicate handler inside the offensive zone, using impressive footwork to navigate in and out of pressure and bait defenders.

He's a multifaceted offensive player who is as effective playing off his linemates and using space as a tool to get open as a shooter as he is creating his own chances or using his ability to weave through pressure to draw attention and then facilitate. He also never looks bothered by pressure, solving problems easily and asserting himself on games with poise and confidence. There's footwork, puck control, confidence and just an ease to his game that you don't typically find in young players.

He's always trying to use what's available to him and his ability to manipulate and adjust makes it possible for him to do just that. He's not going to be a game breaker unless he develops one of his several high-end tools into the elite stratosphere that allows some players to differentiate themselves, but I still see a top-six winger who will thrive in today's NHL. I'm excited to see what he does with the opportunity that it looks like he'll get with the now-rebuilding Blackhawks next season.

42. Matt Coronato, RW/LW, 19 (Calgary Flames — No. 13, 2021)

Coronato's one of those rare scorers who is defined as much by his scoring touch around the slot as he is by his work ethic. After winning a Clarkson Cup and the USHL's forward of the year award (after he led the league in goals and five-on-five goal differential), Coronato stepped right into college hockey and led Harvard in goals (18) and points (36) as one of the country's top freshman forwards.

He wasn't necessarily the guy there because Harvard also had two Olympians in Leafs prospect Nick Abruzzese and Habs prospect Sean Farrell, but he continued to produce in their absence and that was telling of what's to come for him in his return as a sophomore (especially now



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

that Abruzzese has turned pro). There's has never been any questioning Coronato's effort level or his ability to make something happen in the home plate area.

He's a determined, competitive player with the small-area skill package, detail and skating (he's got good speed, for sure) needed to play that kind of game. He's also got rare spatial awareness which helps him understand where he is in relation to pressure and play off of it.

And then he's got a hard, quick release which rattles off of the heel of his blade and great feel around the net. There's a belief among many scouts and folks around the USHL and NCAA that even if he doesn't become a dynamic, top-of-the-lineup guy, that his floor bottoms out as a diligent, hardworking middle-six scorer. That's a darn good player. I think he's got a chance to be more than that, too. He's an impressive player who can play it any way you'd like and could have value on both special teams at the next level.

43. Conor Geekie, C, 18 (Arizona Coyotes — No. 11, 2022)

Geekie is a big centre with clear skill as a handler, passer and shooter, and a boldness to his game that I admire and you don't often see in players his size. He's got impressive hands and body control for his size, which helps him control pucks inside the offensive zone and make plays while also getting the upper hand in board battles.

He plays through bumps (and will be able to play through more once he fills out) and thrives taking pucks from the cycle to dangerous areas, pushing through the guts of the ice in control, or even drifting to the perimeter in control to facilitate. He also skates well enough for his size. It's certainly not going to be a strength but I don't see it as the huge issue that some do and I think he moves better than his big brother Morgan (now with the Kraken) did at the same age, and creates his fair share pushing up ice in transition as a result.

I do find he forces things too much by trying to go one-on-one and create something that's not there, and there's a hunch to his stride that will need straightening out. He's got some work to do in the faceoff circle, too. But it's hard to deny the impressive size-hands combination he has considering his length. He's got a real ability to hang onto the puck, draw players into him, and then play-make through or around them.

He makes an unusual amount of soft little plays for a player his size, and can attack into coverage because of his hands. He's really quite comfortable in control of the puck. He's also got a hard, talked-about wrist. Geekie's a legitimate prospect with a desirable set of skills. Once he fills out his lanky frame, he's got the touch and skill to really take off and become a pretty unique player. Modest production last season and some kinks do keep him a little lower here than where his ceiling might land him if all goes well though.

"There's not too many people that have the chance to come out of a town of 120 people and do what I'm doing."

44. Lukas Cormier, LHD, 20 (Vegas Golden Knights — No. 68, 2020)

When I said I thought Zellweger edged another player on this list as the best defenceman in junior hockey this year, I wasn't talking about Guhle (though he was in that conversation too), I was talking about Cormier. That won't come as a surprise to longtime readers. He ranked 28th on my draft board when Vegas selected him 68th in 2020 and he has only continued to impress me since.

In fact, the first time he has ever disappointed me was last December in Calgary for Team Canada's selection camp for the world juniors, where one of his two games left me wanting more and the other was the worst I've ever seen him play. The good news is that that followed a summer showcase performance, also in Calgary, where he looked like the most dangerous defenceman in camp, stood out on the penalty kill, and played disruptively and surprisingly feisty defensively.

And the even better news is that after looking like he was back to himself in Edmonton at the short-lived world juniors, he returned to the QMJHL where he was a two-way force all year and put together one of the most

impressive statistical seasons in the league's recent history, scoring an astonishing 41 goals (!) and 102 points in 77 games. He might not have just been the league's best defenceman, but also its best player.

He's a tremendous power-play quarterback who has led the league's best unit two years running, he logs huge minutes (often pushing 30 minutes per game), he's a go-to penalty killer for Charlottetown, and his statistical profile is obviously projectable and then some (players who've done what he has almost always hit). With the puck, he drives play to high-danger areas as a playmaker individually to look to create chances for himself and as a playmaker who regularly puts pucks through layers to his teammates.

He has also grown an inch since he was drafted and is now listed at 5-foot-10 and 176 pounds. He can occasionally chase a little too much in his own zone, losing players behind him in coverage, but that's really my only nitpick with his game. He's got NHL hands in transition, under pressure, and across the offensive zone blue line, rotating and pivoting in and out of lanes to get open or make space for himself. He doesn't back down from physical engagements despite his size.

And while his approach is aggressive and he has the skill to execute when he tries to make something happen offensively, he rarely makes poor decisions or attacks without support. When he's sliding down the wall to make plays in the offensive zone, stopping up to evade forecheckers in the defensive zone, pulling pucks past and around opposing players in neutral ice, and attacking off the line, it's impressive to watch.

He has added dimension and dynamism to his already strong offensive game since the draft, elevating himself to a new stratosphere as a prospect in my books. It'll take the right coach and development team to take him to where he's capable of getting, as is always (unfairly) the case with smaller defencemen, but despite his size, I see a ceiling as a potential top-four defender and power-play quarterback. I think there's a chance he's never allowed to become that and is not made to be a square peg in a round hole as a third-pairing guy, but it's not my job to rank based on the way others see him but on the way I do.

45. Bobby Brink, RW, 21 (Philadelphia Flyers — No. 34, 2019)

The second and last 21-year-old on this year's list, Brink, who I put 14th on my final draft ranking in 2019, led college hockey in scoring by seven points and was a finalist for the Hobey Baker last season, before closing his three-year college career with a national championship to remove any of the doubts that had crept in when the injury bug followed him through his freshman and sophomore seasons.

You could see the progress he made in his forward acceleration and speed, which was once his biggest barrier (he's actually always been an excellent skater on his edges in terms of his ability to change directions and open up his hips), even though there's still some work to do on his recoveries. And the rest of his skill level matches up with his increasingly feisty, net-driven disposition to really shine in the offensive zone.

Brink is a superb perimeter player who makes a ton of plays off the flank with his ability to lead passes, stickhandle through sticks, and see the ice. But he also plays in the guts of the ice and he's at his best when he's going to the net, using the space around the slot to get open as a shot threat (his wrist shot release is dangerous from mid range), and making small plays from below the goal line. Brink's game is primarily about anticipation and playing a step ahead of the play, though, which also helps him support the puck defensively and win races.

I see legitimate NHL potential as a player who, with the right linemates given his size (5-foot-8, 166 pounds), could really thrive in a top-nine role immediately and top-six one in his prime. He's a competitor and multi-faceted offensive-zone player with real power-play utility.

46. Lane Hutson, LHD, 18 (Montreal Canadiens — No. 62, 2022)

The reality is there aren't many defencemen Hutson's size (5-foot-8, 158 pounds) who play in the NHL, even as the game changes. But there aren't many players who play like Hutson in hockey either. I often get



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

asked just how high he'd go if he were 6-foot-3 and the reality is that he wouldn't be able to do a lot of what makes him so interesting, at least at that size. He's a unique player who uses a light (though not powerful) stride to create entries and exits, weave past coverage, escape pressure, and find or create seams.

He sees the ice as well as anyone on this list, regularly identifying plays a step ahead of the opposition. He reads opposing forwards better than any defenceman on this list, anticipating their movements and then exposing them. He's got an uncanny knack for executing long east-to-west plays, whether that's feathering high, leading saucer passes with perfect weight across ice or flinging a hard pass to a streaking teammate's tape.

He makes a ton of plays under pressure when other players would panic (though sometimes he could actually use some hurry-up to his game). Inside the offensive zone, though his shot lacks power, he acts as a fourth forward with his ability to slide off the line and create. He's got shakes and shimmies to spare, routinely making opposing defenders miss one-on-one in all three zones. He's one of the most clever players in the draft sport.

And while his size will continue to make evaluators pause, I actually quite like the way he defends. He gets back to so many loose pucks that he doesn't have to rely all that much on engaging in battles and even when he does, his positioning, timing and active stick help him disrupt opposing carriers and break up plays.

But above all else, he's the kind of player where when you think you've put him in a difficult spot or you've got him cornered, he'll show you that he isn't with a spin (or a spin into a spin!), a fake (with his eyes, or head, or shoulders, or hands, or feet, or each) or his sublime vision through layers. He just looks right past what's in front of him. I'd stake my reputation on him becoming one-of-one and climbing up re-drafts.

47. Nick Robertson, LW, 20 (Toronto Maple Leafs — No. 53, 2019)

When Robertson has been healthy, his career has progressed along a pretty steep incline towards the NHL. But the injury bug has plagued him. It was his wrist and ribs in his draft year. Then it was a knee injury suffered in his first regular-season games with the Leafs. Then there was the fractured fibula he hurt in his second game of 2021-22 with the Marlies.

The good news is that his skill set, statistical profile, and Sept. 11 birthday (which made him the youngest player in the 2019 draft) all suggest that they'll limit the adverse effects of the injury issues. It's a shame, too, because he looked unbelievable in Traverse City (where he was one of the best players in a tournament that featured Raymond and Cole Sillinger, who both went on to make an impact in the NHL) before the injury. He created on every shift, his energy was sky high, his shot was beating goalies or hitting the post, he made NHL skill plays for his linemates, and he was a transition monster on exits and entries.

Robertson has a pretty unique composition. His curl-and-drag release comes off his blade heavy and can cleanly beat goalies from mid range. He's got superb hands and footwork, helping him spin off checks, pull back against pressure, adjust around close-outs, and play under sticks or through feet. And then he's also got some of the skills needed to complement that package and get the most out of his 5-foot-9 frame. He's fearless in puck pursuit, he doesn't back down from board battles, and his feet are always moving to stay involved on the forecheck (he can actually occasionally chase the play a little too much) and get open off the puck.

I've also liked (when healthy) the way he has opened up his vision to involve his linemates and take better advantage of his good playmaking feel in the AHL, so that he's not so net-focussed and tunnel-visioned as a shooter. The Leafs haven't afforded him the opportunity he likely would have already received on less-competitive teams, but there now appears to be openings for the fall and I wouldn't count him out of taking one and running with it to become a fan-favourite worker with skill and scoring.

48. Dylan Holloway, C/LW, 20 (Edmonton Oilers — No. 14, 2020)

As with Robertson, injuries (including two wrist surgeries) have stunted Holloway's trajectory to impactful top-nine NHL player. When healthy, Holloway has proven himself to be a fast, powerful, physical, forechecking presence with a third-line floor and the skill to push into a top-six role as the complementary scorer and go-getter that the Oilers searched for high and low for Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl before they found Zach Hyman and Evander Kane.

Holloway has always been an explosive skater who is normally the most athletic player on the ice. But he's also got quick-twitch hands that keep up with his feet and a powerful wrist shot release which help him manufacture offence both off the rush and cutting off the wall to the slot to power past checks and get to dangerous spots to create chances. I'm still of the belief that he's better suited for the wing than centre, but his versatility at both positions doesn't hurt either.

He's going to give his line a different look and provide value and punch in all three zones, on both special teams. He stays in every battle, supports play, plays hard, and can beat defenders to his spots. But he has always been much more than that, too, and the kind of player who is more impactful in practical on-ice ways than his production suggests (which has also always been strong!).

49. Xavier Bourgault, C/RW, 19 (Edmonton Oilers — No. 22, 2021)

Bourgault was one of the QMJHL's best forwards this year and in the double-digit live viewings I had of him this year split between three Hockey Canada events and the Memorial Cup, the more I watch him, the more I fall in love with his game.

Though his late-October birthday (and what it means for this being his fourth year in the Q already) is a factor in contextualizing where he's at, Bourgault's tools almost all grade out highly. He does a great job improvising under pressure to slide pucks around defenders, switch from a two-hand carry to a one-hand carry, or pick up his pace. His handles and edges as he adjusts to pressure both look easy (he was one of the better stickhandlers in the QMJHL last year).

He has developed into a really quick skater in straight lines. I'm consistently impressed by his change of directions with the puck. And his game with the puck has become quite deceptive, with little stutters in his release that force the goalie down early and fake passes that force defenders to bite.

He hides the puck on his stick and sends mixed signals beautifully because his hands, feet and eyes do different things. He's dangerous in a variety of ways, with a release that comes off of his blade early in his shooting motion and stance to surprise goalies (off of either foot or from awkward postures, too), a hard one-timer, and smart instincts inside the offensive zone.

And though he's neither big nor small, his detail makes him an able penalty killer, he holds his own defensively, and he plays through contact consistently thanks in part to good core balance over a wide skating stance. He's fun to watch when he's getting touches and often looked like the most comfortable carrier/playmaker on a Shawinigan team that won the QMJHL title.

He can play both centre and the wing, too. I remain a big fan. There's a pretty clear path for him to develop into an impactful playmaker.

50. Thomas Harley, LHD, 20 (Dallas Stars — No. 18, 2019)

I thought long and hard about ranking Oilers prospect Philip Broberg (one of my final cuts) here, which would have closed the list with three Oilers. But I kept coming back to my belief in Harley's package. I stuck to my belief in Bouchard when it got harder and I'm prepared to do the same with Harley, whose time with the Stars at the NHL and AHL level has been a bit of a roller coaster.

It can be easy, as you wait for Harley to break through, to sour on him. It can also be easy to forget that he's a late-August birthday, so while it feels like he has been around a long time now, he's still quite young.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

Harley's game exists and is evaluated at two polarities, where the highs are really high and the lows can be quite low, which doesn't help come to a sensible conclusion about him on the whole.

Harley is a long, highly-talented puck transporter who is at his best when he's playing a free-spirited, roving style that involves him in the game in all three zones (even when it comes with some mistakes). He can use his feet to escape, his length to flow up ice, and his gifts in control to pull pucks past opposing players in neutral ice or off the point. When he's active, you notice him. But he's a high-risk, high-reward player who for everything he gives you in transition offensively, or while using his skating to carry pucks deep into the offensive zone, or showing off excellent outside-in hands, or using his mobility to get back when the puck goes the other way — he can give back in misreads, mistiming, and the inconsistency of his decision making.

He's got the ability to play an effective flow game defensively, sticking with opposing puck carriers and relying on his footwork and stick to compensate for mistakes. But his game lacks polish and he has struggled at the pro level with his identity (I actually find him too restrained at times, almost as if he doesn't trust himself to make the plays he's capable of making because he hasn't been instilled with that confidence and leash from his coaches).

His style isn't for everyone but I think he's going to have to play loose to reach his ceiling as a play-creating top-four defenceman in the NHL. I want to see him hanging onto the puck and delaying until he can hit the second or third option. I want to see him taking space. Once he begins to do that, his ceiling will be high in the prime of his career.

### The Ranking

This edition of my top-50 drafted prospects ranking includes 19 players from the 2022 draft, 16 from the class of 2021, 11 from 2020, and four more from 2019 (splits which line up well with expected annual graduation rates).

This year's list is made up of 36 forwards and 14 defensemen (of which 11 are lefties and three are righties). Despite the fact that three of my top four ranked skaters are defencemen, the 14 in total is a few defencemen short of where it normally is for this project. It's worth noting, though, that 12 of my 30 honourable mentions (the 40 percent you'd expect) are defencemen.

The Stars, Sabres, and Jets lead the way with four ranked prospects apiece. Eight teams don't have a prospect on the list. They are: Hurricanes, Bruins, Islanders, Panthers, Penguins, Capitals, Avalanche and Blues.

Here is the full ranking, broken down into tiers for a better sense of the proximity within groups of players. This year's ranking is divided into four tiers. They are: 1-3, 4-15, 16-30, 31-45, and 46+. I debated swapping each of the five players I have ranked 46-50 with most of the 30 players I have listed as honourable mentions below. Those players are largely interchangeable and I'd listen to arguments for each at the bottom of the list. Consider it a 45-80 tier.

### Top 50 drafted NHL prospects

Honourable mentions (sorted alphabetically): Calen Addison (MIN), Jonathan Berggren (DET), Zachary Bolduc (STL), Brendan Brisson (VGK), Philip Broberg (EDM), William Dufour (NYI), Luke Evangelista (NSH), Brock Faber (MIN), Sean Farrell (MTL), David Goyette (SEA), Jordan Harris (MTL), Ville Heinola (WPG), Zac Jones (NYR), Marco Kasper (DET), Matt Knies (TOR), Jiri Kulich (BUF), Carson Lambos (MIN), Nils Lundkvist (NYR), Fabian Lysell (BOS), Filip Mesar (MTL), Pavel Mintyukov (ANA), Noah Ostlund (BUF), Jakob Pelletier (CGY), JJ Peterka (BUF), Shane Pinto (OTT), Joshua Roy (MTL), Victor Soderstrom (ARZ), Jordan Spence (LAK), Alex Turcotte (LAK), Cam York (PHI).

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Sportsnet.ca / With Weegar and Huberdeau open to a future in Calgary, Flames' re-tooling is underway

Eric Francis

July 25, 2022, 5:17 PM

CALGARY – They talked about cowboys, they talked about mountains, they talked about Stampede and they talked about winning.

But what everyone wants to know is whether Jonathan Huberdeau and MacKenzie Weegar are ready to talk about extensions.

"I'm open," said Huberdeau, less than 72 hours after having his dream-like existence in Florida upended with a blockbuster trade to Calgary.

"We've never really talked about that. But I'm open to staying in Calgary for a long time. We've only been there 48 hours and we haven't got to go to Calgary to see everything, but I'm open for it and I'll kind of leave that to the GM and the agent. They already started talking about it. We'll see what's going to happen. I'm open, for sure."

And you, Mr. Weegar?

"Same here," said one of the most underrated top-pairing blueliners in the league. "I'm open to sign a long-term deal. It's been quick and it's been short so far, but the city and the team, there's no reason not to be open about it. I'm looking forward to my agent talking to Brad and seeing what's going on. I'm very open to it."

Sure, talk is cheap.

Putting their (long-term) money where their mouths are will ultimately dictate the true winner of a deal that has the hockey world lauding Brad Treliving for procuring the two stars, Cole Schwindt and a lottery-protected first rounder for Matthew Tkachuk and a fourth.

Both players' agents have had preliminary talks with Treliving, but it would be foolish for anyone to expect either to commit to anything without sampling the city, organization and a winter.

After all, both can write their own ticket anywhere they'd like after this season, a la Tkachuk and Johnny Gaudreau.

They're that coveted.

What's different here is both are Canadian-born, adding intrigue to their new destination despite still reeling from a trade neither wanted.

"I never thought I would play in Canada," said Huberdeau, 29, a native of Quebec, who was blown away by the response from fans online, welcoming him.

"Obviously a lot of history on this club and watching ... this year we watched a little bit more of the playoffs and saw the atmosphere in the building. Passionate fans and community. It's good to see the warm welcome. Everyone's excited. They lost the two best players on the team and it was tough for the fans and the community, and now we can rejuvenate everyone and it's cool to see we can bring that to the Flames and the fans. For me, I'm excited to get going and step on the ice and play in front of the fans."

Weegar concurred.

"This is super cool for me, playing in a Canadian market," said the 28-year-old Ottawa-area native who played junior in Halifax.

"I never really thought I would play in a Canadian market. This is going to be super exciting for me and my family. Lots of history with Calgary. I got to watch them growing up, obviously a lot and seeing them on (TV) all the time. The fans here are so passionate. They're loud. When Johnny and I have come to Calgary, and played against the Flames, it has been



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

crazy. Watching the playoffs and seeing the Sea of Red and stuff like that. Now to be part of it, it's a really cool feeling. It's very surreal for myself, obviously Johnny and I being Canadian kids. I'm glad that maybe we can make the blows a little bit softer on the city."

After two weeks of hell for the fans and their team, they've cushioned the blows for sure.

Their arrival has allowed the team to re-tool, not rebuild.

For now.

If neither is keen to extend their stay, it's a different story.

Money likely won't be a factor — the Flames are poised to have plenty of cap space to sign both players next summer. So, what sort of things will influence their decision to sign and prevent any debate over whether they'll have to be traded at the deadline?

"If you're talking hypothetically and checking some of the boxes, it's 'are we a winning team? How is the city? How are the teammates? How are my coaches?'" Weegar said. "I think those are a lot of boxes you check to sign a long-term deal with a team. I'm open to it. I've heard great things about all those things I just said. I guess it's just coming down and getting down there and experiencing it myself, and Brad [Treliving] and my agent as well just talking, negotiation talks, seeing if it works for both sides. Those are some of the things."

No, neither saw the deal coming, yet they carried themselves well in their opening Zoom availability.

Huberdeau endeared himself to Calgarians by reporting he'd attended the Stampede a few years ago, even going as far as to gussy up in Wranglers and boots.

"Who doesn't have a good time at the Stampede?" laughed Huberdeau, who cites Jacob Markstrom as the only Flame he's ever played with.

"You can see the vibe in the city. It's pretty cool. When I went there, I got dressed as a cowboy. It was a cool experience.

"We know the fans are passionate. When you play there it's always loud and the people, they know their stuff. I think that's the most exciting part, getting to know the city. We're probably going to go there in the summer and see what's going on and where we're going to live. For me, I'm excited. It's a new chapter and I'm excited to get going and meet the guys."

After years playing on the left side of Selke Trophy winner Aleksander Barkov, he should fit right in with Selke finalist Elias Lindholm, a 40-goal scorer.

"Hopefully he can score 50 with me," smiled the 115-point playmaker who just broke the NHL record for a left winger with 85 assists last season. "He's a great player. I'm the type of player that's a playmaker and I try to set up the guys and try to make people better around me. I think he is the guy who goes to the right spots and obviously he can get the puck and put it in. It would be a great fit.

"But I haven't really thought about who I'm going to play with. It's going to be Darryl (Sutter's.) That's his job. I'm going to go there and play with whoever he wants me to play with."

Weegar will almost certainly play the left side with Rasmus Andersson, but his ability to play either side gives Sutter options with a defensive group that was already one of the league's best last season.

"I think the team looks really good," said Weegar, whose former club won the President's Trophy last year.

"It's obviously been an emotional week with the ups and downs and losing two great players, but to have Huby and I come in and get a little bit more excitement around the city again. I don't think it's a rebuild either. When you bring in Johnny and I, we're here to win. I think Brad knows that. He wants to win now and the team wants to win now. I think

we've got a really good chance at winning the Stanley Cup. Johnny and I are ready to start winning with this team."

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Sportsnet.ca / Tkachuk on first hearing of Panthers trade: 'I was the happiest person ever'

Sonny Sachdev July 25, 2022, 2:33 PM

Wearing the Florida Panthers logo on his chest for the first time on Monday, Matthew Tkachuk couldn't help but wear a wide grin, too, as his new club unveiled its newly-signed star winger.

"Very surreal. It hasn't fully sunk in yet, if I'm being honest with you," Tkachuk told the media from FLA Live Arena Monday, in his first press conference as a Panther. "It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable waking up here. You just get that little bit more excitement knowing where you are."

It's been a whirlwind few months for the 24-year-old winger. Just this past April, the Scottsdale native clinched his first 100-point campaign in his sixth NHL season, before his Calgary Flames embarked on a wild two-round playoff run. Then came July, and the news that linemate Johnny Gaudreau would be leaving Calgary to sign with the Columbus Blue Jackets. Soon after that news broke, word came that Tkachuk was moving on from Calgary, too.

After working with Flames GM Brad Treliving to try to facilitate a deal that could benefit both he and the organization that drafted him into the big leagues, Tkachuk heard the news of his next destination not too long before the rest of the hockey world did.

"I got a call from my uncle (Craig Oster), who's the best agent in the world — he called me Friday in the afternoon. ... He said, 'We might have something done with Florida.' I was the happiest person ever," Tkachuk said, recapping how the deal materialized late last week. "He said, 'Don't tell anybody.' I went to my parents hotel room, told them. And then [I was] just thinking about everything, logistics — I said, 'We can't say anything, don't want to jinx it.'"

Later that night, while the Tkachuks were out for dinner, the new contract came through and No. 19 officially became a Panther.

Speaking with Sportsnet's Eric Francis on Saturday, Tkachuk shed light on how difficult the decision to leave Calgary was, on the memories and the friends he's leaving behind. On Monday, he elaborated on why the allure of Florida pulled him away from the club he began his NHL career with.

"When I made the list [of teams], first and foremost it was winning," Tkachuk said. "It was not just winning now but it was winning in the future. ... All the guys are from my age to 28, 29, or the majority are. So that was first and foremost a very attractive part for me, is the win-now mode and the win-in-the-future. Number two is lifestyle — I'm 24 and I had six unbelievable years in Calgary and it was the best place for me to be at that time. Looking ahead, I signed for eight years, but in my mind I'm here for eight-plus. So however many that'll be, I want to be here for the rest of my career. And number three, I think they have a bunch of elite players that I can play with and be surrounded by.

"I want to be here. Like, this wasn't me just getting traded and me having no say — I chose this. I really want this to work, and I'm just excited for the possibility of winning here in South Florida."

While much of Tkachuk's decision was tied to the fact that the Panthers have become one of the game's most dangerous clubs — taking another step in 2021-22 with a dominant regular season that saw Florida claim



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

the Presidents' Trophy — there was also a bigger-picture reason for the move Stateside, the winger explained.

The chance to help the game continue to grow in South Florida.

"I was born in Arizona, grew up in St. Louis — both, at the time, weren't the Minnesotas, Michigans, Bostons, not the huge hockey markets. And from what I've seen, even since I came to play Florida in 2016, my rookie year, it's grown a lot," Tkachuk said. "I think one of the things I can help [is], you know, on the ice, I have a different personality, the way I play. I bring a certain swagger that I think will really help this team. And off-ice, I have the same personality. So I think that I'm excited for the chance to get to grow the game down here.

"I hope that, in a few years, nobody on the team can walk outside without somebody saying something to them, kind of like it is in some of the other places around the league. I think that winning definitely helps that, so we'll take care of it on the ice, and I'm sure it's going to attract the next wave of Florida hockey players. That's a really big goal of mine as well."

For the Panthers faithful, the excitement of Tkachuk's arrival is tempered by the disappointment of losing a franchise icon in Jonathan Huberdeau, along with top-pairing defender MacKenzie Weegar — two key pieces that played a massive role in helping the team reach the heights it did last season.

But while comparisons will surely be made between the team's new star winger and the one who previously made waves on Aleksander Barkov's wing, Tkachuk made clear he isn't coming to Florida to be the new Huberdeau.

"I don't feel it," he said of the pressure of replacing a player with a legacy like Huberdeau's in Florida. "I'm a different type of player. Another guy that was traded in that [deal] was Weegar, who's an unbelievable player as well — I bring different things than what those guys bring, I think.

"I don't feel pressure. I'm here to win. Personal stuff, throw it out the door, I don't care. I'm here to be the last team standing. That's it. ... I don't care about the personal stuff. I'm not comparing myself to anybody."

If his new fans needed a first taste of what Tkachuk figures to bring to his new squad, he offered a glimpse when asked about the Panthers' cross-state rival, the one coming off three straight Cup Final appearances. While he was diplomatic in his praise for the perennial contender Tampa Bay Lightning, the newest Panther made sure to fire an early shot, too, drawing on his half-decade of Battle of Alberta experience to stir the pot.

"I hate Edmonton," Tkachuk said, "but I hate Tampa more now."

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Sportsnet.ca / Not as easy as yes or no: Dubois leaves his future in Winnipeg open to interpretation

Ken Wiebe July 25, 2022, 4:23 PM

WINNIPEG — Pierre-Luc Dubois doesn't like how high the speculation machine has been cranking up, yet he did little to pump the brakes or quiet the concerns of a fan base that is downright scared he's not interested in a long-term commitment.

When it comes to the relationship status of Dubois and the Winnipeg Jets, it's fair to say it's a tad complicated, but not necessarily for the reasons you may have initially thought.

As Dubois took more than half an hour to try and set the record straight in both official languages on Monday, he left plenty of things open to interpretation.

One thing he took great pains to point out was that he didn't accept the Jets one-year qualifying offer for \$6 million because it makes him a more tradeable asset.

"You hear so many things that I apparently said or I apparently did and a lot of it is frustrating to read some things that I didn't even know that I did — or I didn't do or I didn't say," said Dubois. "There was never a doubt of holding out or forcing anything. You read stuff, like 'he wants out of Winnipeg.' If I wanted out of Winnipeg I would have asked for a trade. I didn't ask for a trade. There was no doubt in my mind that I was going to show up for camp.

"Now that's taken care of, my contract is signed, I'm ready to go for the season. And next summer will be next summer. Next summer I'll be a restricted free agent again and then it'll be another decision. But for now, I don't have to think about this anymore."

So there you have it.

Even if Dubois isn't ready to go to the altar on a long-term deal at this stage of the game, he's committed to having a strong season and doing his part to help the Jets rebound.

He's appreciative of the way the organization and his teammates supported him after his arrival, when by his own admission, he didn't deliver.

He would neither confirm nor deny that he has his heart set on testing unrestricted free agency in the summer of 2024, nor did he rule out changing his mind on considering sticking around Winnipeg beyond this contract.

This is where things begin to go sideways for members of Jets Nation.

If Dubois isn't ready to declare his outright love and sign on the dotted line, there has been ample overreaction on social media about shipping him out immediately and many assumptions are being made.

Here's the thing, Dubois isn't afraid to march to the beat of his own drum at times and that's part of what's allowed him to have success at the NHL level.

He's a curious individual by nature and he wants to think long and hard about where he's going to spend the prime years of his career.

That's not necessarily a slight on Winnipeg either.

Dubois said part of the reason he's taking his time before locking in is that his next contract could be his last.

The immediate reaction from the fan base is how can someone who recently turned 24 be thinking of retirement before he's even hit his prime?

Again, that's not to say Dubois doesn't love hockey, even if he's not a guy who wants to squeeze every ounce of the game out of him before he decides to hang up the blades.

Nor does that mean he's going to check out long before the end of that long-term contract, whenever — or wherever — it gets signed.

As for the open flirtation — and subsequent speculation that followed comments from his agent Pat Brisson that left open the possibility of one day playing for his hometown Montreal Canadiens — Dubois seemed to suggest that wasn't orchestrated by him and he felt those words took on a life of their own.

At the time, Dubois was a free agent and could speak to any team, as he pointed out in another one of his answers.

"I think people took a little thing and blew it up times 20, and it's fine. People can read into it what they want," said Dubois. "To be honest, I didn't think anything too much of it. What's said sometimes and what



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

actually happens and what's actually being said in these meetings can be taken out of context and that's how I see it. I just thought it was overblown, the reaction, and I think some people just ran with the two seconds that they liked or didn't like to hear.

"I understand that's your guys' job at the same time. And, when I don't give you much, it's easier to speculate on what I want and what I don't want. Nowadays with social media it goes so fast. Articles come out every second, and some of them are 99 per cent wrong. You still read it and still wonder if it's true. There's been a lot, a lot, a lot of speculation. So now I'm finally happy you get to hear it from me, from the source. The man himself."

But when asked a follow-up question about Brisson's comments and how rare they seemed to be, Dubois said he trusts his agent, that he's the best in the business and that he's always acting in his best interest.

So while Dubois didn't necessarily put those words in Brisson's mouth or ask for them to be made public, he didn't ask him to back track either.

"Yeah. See, just right there, the question was 'is Montreal a market he'd like to play in one day', and he (Brisson) said maybe it's a place he would see himself playing in," said Dubois. "He never said...your question was what was blown out of proportion, him saying did you want to play for the Canadiens. He said it's a place that, maybe one day, he could play. I think people took that and blew it up times 10 and said he's trying to force this, he's trying to force that."

"If you asked any player that comes from a city that grew up watching a team in their city or province, yeah, they probably at some point in their life thought of that option. It's no different than guys from Winnipeg or guys from Washington or guys from Boston or guys from Los Angeles. It's no different than that. Sometimes it happens. Sometimes it doesn't. That's just life."

So yes, there could certainly be a time when Dubois is interested in playing for the Canadiens and it might not be far down the road.

As it stands right now, Dubois isn't worried about that possibility and it isn't at the top of his mind.

There are plenty of players who have shown the ability to compartmentalize situations like this one, some even flourish and play their best hockey.

What about the crowd that says the Jets should try and get ahead of things, that if Dubois won't sign long-term that they should move him now and give the acquiring team an opportunity to have him for at least two playoff runs?

It's a valid point, but the value of Dubois on the trade market will only go up if the third overall pick of the 2016 NHL Draft takes the next step as a player.

For all of the people pointing to the recent deal between the Calgary Flames and Florida Panthers as a comparison for what the return should be if the Jets reach that point with Dubois, remember that Tkachuk was one year away from UFA status and was coming off a 104-point season.

Dubois had 28 goals and 60 points last season and while he plays a premium position, he's going to need to produce a point-per-game campaign or better before attracting a similar haul and the best chance of that happening is by having Kyle Connor and/or Nikolaj Ehlers ride shotgun with him next season.

Could Dubois have been a bit more direct in answering some of the questions sent his way on Monday afternoon?

No doubt about it.

He also provided a glimpse behind the curtain as to why things currently sit the way that they do and why the future is going to be cloudy and questions will continue — whether it's during the season or by the time the one-year deal is up next summer.

"I understand what you're saying, but I'm pretty sure you've, at some point, changed your mind or not been sure about something in your life," said Dubois. "Who knows, a year later, maybe six months later, maybe 30 minutes later, you change your mind or you've thought of something different or you've thought of a different idea. Look, I don't even know what I'm eating tonight at dinner. I don't know what I'm going to do in two years. I don't know what I'm going to do in six years."

"I don't know what I'm going to do in six months. There are a bunch of different opinions and there are a bunch of different ways of thinking. I'm not somebody that has one idea and settles on it for the next six years. It's just human nature to change your mind sometimes. That's why I get you guys have articles to write, but these questions, sometimes these questions, the answers to the questions aren't as easy as yes or no."

Ultimately, the Jets and Dubois will have a decision to make.

Will they stay together for this season, beyond this season or will they cut ties before the summer of 2024.

Given the magnitude of the deal made to acquire him and the players involved, the Jets obviously can't risk losing Dubois for nothing, so this is a short-term solution.

Currently, the Jets have cost certainty and Dubois knows where he's going to be — barring something unforeseen.

"Look, at the end of the day guys get traded, guys sign long term, everything's on the table," said Dubois, noting he's had a couple of productive calls with new head coach Rick Bowness. "Everything on the player's side and on the team's side is up in the air sometimes. There's guys that sign long-term deals and get traded two years into their deal while they're on vacation, while they're just enjoying life, and they thought they were going to play somewhere for the rest of their career and you get a call and you're shipped off the next day."

"And then you see guys like Johnny Gaudreau leaving through free agency. It's a business and sometimes people think the business side is just the team but it's both ends of the spectrum. There's never easy decisions to make on players' or GMs' side, but at the end of the day it's a business for everybody and the more you can work together and try to be on the same page and try to work in the same direction, obviously it's the best way to do it. If every side can be happy with the outcome, that would be the perfect way of doing it."

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TSN.CA / Huberdeau, Weegar open to long-term deals in Calgary

Salim Valji

6-7 minutes

Calgary Flames fans can exhale.

After going through the emotional rollercoaster of losing star forwards Johnny Gaudreau and Matthew Tkachuk (no team has ever lost two 100-point players in the same off-season), newly acquired Jonathan Huberdeau and Mackenzie Weegar both said Monday that they are open to continuing their careers in southern Alberta.

The star winger and stalwart blueliner, acquired by GM Brad Treliving in a blockbuster deal with Florida on Friday night for Tkachuk, met Calgary reporters via Zoom on Monday.

"We didn't really expect it," Huberdeau said of the trade. "Late on Friday night, I mean, you don't think you're going to get a call, but we did. I think it's part of the hockey business...I was [in Florida] for a really long time."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

That where I obviously got drafted, so it was a big shock for me and my family.

"...I'm excited to be a Flame. I'm excited to meet the guys and get going in this new city."

One of the first questions thrown their way was if the duo would consider committing to the team and city after their current deals expire in 2023 and they can become unrestricted free agents.

"I'm open to staying in Calgary for a long time," Huberdeau said. "...I leave it to the GM and my agent, and they already started talking about it. We'll see what's going to happen."

"Same here," Weegar said, adding that he was looking forward to his agent having conversations with Treliving. "With the city and the team, there's no reason not to be open about it."

When asked what goes into a player's checklist for a long-term contract, Weegar elaborated on what he values.

"Are we a winning team?" he said. "How is the city? How are the teammates? How are the coaches? Those are some of the boxes you check to sign with a team. I've heard good things about all those things in Calgary."

Before any extensions get finalized, the Flames have a regular season where expectations are suddenly raised. Earlier in the off-season, the possibility of losing Gaudreau and Tkachuk – two thirds of the top line in the NHL in 2021-22 – led many to believe the Flames would take a step back.

Now, having replaced Tkachuk with a 115-point player in Huberdeau and added a solid defenceman in Weegar, Calgary might just be the favourites to win the Pacific Division again. Treliving also managed to add a first-round draft pick and prospect Cole Schwindt in the trade.

"Obviously, it's a really good team. I'm excited to join these guys," Huberdeau said. "They want to win. It is not a rebuild. This team is good. ...We're coming in and we're going to help them to get to the next level."

"Obviously, it has been an emotional week with the ups and downs of losing two great players," Weegar added. "...I don't think it's a rebuild either. I think when you bring in Jonny and I, we're here to win. I think Brad knows that. He wants to win now, and the team wants to win now. So, I think we've got a really good chance at winning the Stanley Cup."

As for roster fit, it's easy to slot Huberdeau alongside centre Elias Lindholm. While his linemates got plenty of attention, Lindholm finished second in Selke Trophy voting behind Patrice Bergeron while adding 42 goals.

"Hopefully he can score 50 with me," Huberdeau joked. "He's a great player. ...I'm a playmaker. I try to set up the guys and try to make people better around me. He's a guy who goes to the right spot and can obviously get the puck and puts it in. I think it would be a great fit, but I haven't really thought about who I'm going to play with."

Weegar, meanwhile, can play either his strong or weak side on the back end.

"I'm comfortable with both sides. I'm open to anything," he said. "Wherever the coach wants me is where I'll play. That's my mentality."

Calgary's defence of Weegar, Noah Hanifin, Rasmus Andersson, Chris Tanev, Nikita Zadorov, and Oliver Kyllington (an unsigned restricted free agent) is one of the best bluelines in the game and play in front of a Vezina finalist in Jacob Markstrom.

While the team may be down a 100-point winger, they might be even tougher to play against with this lineup – especially considering the playoff experience so many young Flames got during the 2022 playoffs.

Huberdeau and Weegar were both on a squad in Florida that, like Calgary, did not quite get over the playoff hump. The Panthers were

swept by the Tampa Bay Lightning in the second round, and both players are eager to use that experience in their new sweaters.

"The playoffs are a totally different season," Huberdeau said. "...Obviously, we played a good team in Tampa. They pay attention to detail. You can see the experience they have. That makes a big difference. Me and Mackenzie learned a lot about how you play in the playoffs. I think we can bring that to Calgary."

"It's a different beast," Weegar said of the postseason. "It's completely different than the regular season. You gotta pay attention to everything, and it comes down to who is going to be the more desperate team. ...I'm looking forward to joining this team and getting over the hump together."

Huberdeau hails from Saint-Jerome, Que., while Weegar is from Ottawa. Both spoke about how special it was for two Canadian kids to play north of the border.

"This is super cool for me," Weegar said. "...The fans here are so passionate. They're loud. I know when Jonny and I have come to Calgary and played against the Flames it's been crazy. Watching you guys in the playoffs and seeing the Sea of Red and stuff like that, now to be part of it is a really cool feeling."

"I never thought I would play in Canada," Huberdeau added. "There's a lot of history with this club. ...They lost their two best players on the team, and I think it was tough for the fans and the community. Now we're kind of rejuvenating everyone. It's cool to see that we can bring that to the Flames and the fans."

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TSN.CA / Creating the All-Canadian Team lineup for 2022-23

Travis Yost

9-11 minutes

The goal of this column is to take a crack at creating the best All-Canadian Team lineup for the 2022-23 season. The rules are straightforward: three forwards, two defencemen, one goaltender, and a head coach. The caveat: you can only select one representative from each of the seven Canadian NHL teams.

We had a lot of fun playing with different combinations last season, and this year will be no different. With the sheer star power in cities like Edmonton and Toronto, and with the significant roster turnover in places like Ottawa and Calgary, the lineups figure to be quite different. Only being able to select one representative per team forces you to optimize the lineup in ways that leave elite options out of the mix.

I'll take the lead and create my optimal seven-man team, but I'm fascinated to see what others think is the best setup possible. I'll take a (surprise!) data-driven approach to try and optimize these lineups, and we'll see where it succeeds and where it may miss the mark.

Two housekeeping notes:

- There are any number of skaters who may have multiple position eligibility (think Leon Draisaitl at centre and wing); it's dealer's choice when you are making your picks.

- The data tables reflect even-strength production (individual and on-ice) for apples-to-apples comparisons.

Let's start in net.

Goaltender: Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022

This was the first time in a few years where I had to wrestle with the decision in the crease. Thatcher Demko is a very good goaltender and selecting Demko would have allowed me to consider either of the famed Jets wingers in Kyle Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers when that position came around.

But it's hard to pass up on the consensus best goaltender amongst the seven Canadian teams, and still one of the three best goaltenders in the National Hockey League. Despite being buried in heavy shot volumes – often from dangerous areas – Hellebuyck has been the ultimate eraser for an otherwise mediocre Jets franchise over the past couple of seasons.

His 28.4 goals saved above expected trails only Igor Shesterkin (New York Rangers) and Andrei Vasilevskiy (Tampa Bay), which is an impressive class. Plus, the luxury of elite goaltending is that it can steal games when your skater group is struggling. Demko made it interesting, but I'll go with the safe pick here.

Next, left wing.

Left wing: Jonathan Huberdeau, Calgary Flames

This was an extremely difficult choice between Ottawa's Alex DeBrincat and Huberdeau, who is officially a Flame after last weekend's blockbuster trade. You could flip a coin between these two.

DeBrincat has developed into an elite scorer, nabbing 41 goals last season with the Chicago Blackhawks. Huberdeau is a wondrous playmaker and setup man. His 85 assists last season in Florida tops in the NHL, even ahead of the venerable Connor McDavid. For as much as we talked about the explosiveness of Florida's attack last year, it'd be hard not to give Huberdeau a big piece of the credit – his line, primarily featuring Sam Bennett and Anthony Duclair, was unstoppable en route to the franchise's first President's Trophy.

The unfortunate part of choosing between DeBrincat and Huberdeau is that both of their teams have most of the defenders I want on my blueline. Calgary has no less than four incredible options on defence, and despite the loss of both Matthew Tkachuk and Johnny Gaudreau, gives them real credibility in a weaker Western Conference; Ottawa, of course, possesses the youngster in Thomas Chabot.

This takes all the Calgary defensive options off the table later, but Huberdeau's playmaking is impossible to pass up.

Onto right wing:

Right wing: Mitch Marner, Toronto Maple Leafs

Of all the judgment calls that had to be made, this was the easiest. Not only is Marner the surefire best right winger across the seven Canadian teams, but it also takes away any temptation, however miniscule it may be, to consider Auston Matthews at the centre position ahead of Connor McDavid.

The thought of playing Huberdeau and Marner on the same line is also tantalizing. If Huberdeau is one of the league's best setup men, Marner isn't far behind, and he also is an exceptionally agile skater with and without the puck.

The ability to pierce the interior with his lightning-quick mobility makes him one of the league's best scorers, and he absolutely is that. Over the past three seasons, Marner ranks ninth in the NHL in total points (231), and the Maple Leafs are a whopping 43 goals better than their opponents with him deployed at even strength.

That brings us to the centre position, and with Matthews off the board, another easy call:

Centre: Connor McDavid, Edmonton Oilers

First, it'd be sacrilege to not have McDavid on the All-Canadian Team. If I'm going to make sacrifices, it's going to be somewhere other than the consensus best player in the world – a player so good, I spent nearly a month explaining how he was breaking the sport of hockey.

He's easily the most talented hockey player I've seen since peak Eric Lindros, and even that feels like a weak comparison on McDavid's best nights. It's impossible to replicate the pace at which he plays, and no defence has figured out a way to contain the way he attacks the centre of the ice beyond hoping and praying their goaltender can stand on his head the entire night.

The only time McDavid looks mortal is when he's playing against a juggernaut team like the Colorado Avalanche that can dominate the puck and limit Edmonton's chances by burying the Oilers in their defensive zone. And even that can be fleeting.

I'd be remiss to not mention how hard it is to leave Matthews out of the lineup. He's indisputably the second-best player in the league and surely the second-best amongst the Canadian teams. The American phenom happens to play the wrong position for this exercise.

At this point, we have two defenders and a coach to grab across the Vancouver Canucks, Ottawa Senators, and Montreal Canadiens.

To the blueline:

Defence: Thomas Chabot, Ottawa Senators and Quinn Hughes, Vancouver Canucks

The blueline in Canada isn't exactly saturated with talent outside of Calgary, and because of our Huberdeau selection, the Flames are out. It does leave us with two very gifted (and young) puck movers, though – Ottawa's Thomas Chabot and Vancouver's Quinn Hughes will sync up for a dynamic, offence-minded pairing.

What I think is alluring about both players is how they have been able to flourish in otherwise difficult situations.

Ottawa is finally looking to exit a five-year rebuild, one that extends throughout the career of Chabot as a professional. And yet, the Senators were break-even in goals with Chabot on the ice last season. Said differently: for what everyone remembers about Ottawa being a struggling team last season, a lot of it had to do with their depth players getting annihilated on a nightly basis. The top of their lineup was quite good, and Chabot's ability to transition the puck and ignite the young offence there was instrumental in keeping that group competitive.

For Hughes and Vancouver, it was much of the same. Vancouver's been more competitive than Ottawa, and certainly were last season when the Canucks missed the playoff cutline by five points. Hughes finished third in team scoring (eight goals and 60 assists), and at even strength, the Canucks outscored their competition 67 to 57 (+10) with him on the ice.

Hughes benefits from playing with high-end talent – his most common teammates last season included J.T. Miller, Brock Boeser, and Elias Pettersson. But look at the production of those forwards when Hughes is away, and it drops off a cliff. Having a defender unburden forwards from the exit and transition game when in the defensive zone isn't just good defence, it's the ignition for productive attacking sequences. Colorado's Cale Makar may be the gold standard, but Hughes is exceptionally capable in his own right.

That leaves us with a coach.

Head coach: Martin St. Louis, Montreal Canadiens

I would be lying if I didn't recognize that Montreal's aggressive rebuild had thinned out available options in the skater ranks, but I am optimistic about what St. Louis after seeing him in limited duty last season.

When the Canadiens made the decision to fire Dominique Ducharme, the team was an appalling 8-30-7. The front office would undergo a similar gutting, and the Canadiens spent most of the rest of the season purging the roster and blending some younger players into the lineup under St. Louis as an interim coach.

St. Louis went 14-19-4 with a roster devoid of real talent. Expectations were very low for St. Louis and may be for another season or two, but the



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 26, 2022**

team definitively improved under his watch and the organization seems excited to give him the keys to the operation for a longer period of time.

I'm excited to see what St. Louis brings to Montreal next season and beyond. On our phony All-Canadian Team, he has access to endless talent.

Have fun building your lineup!

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