

# AHL Prospect Preview 2020-21

By Jon Litterine & Steve Kournianos of [TheDraftAnalyst.com](http://TheDraftAnalyst.com)

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- 197 individual prospect profiles with personal data, transactions, draft position, and summaries
- Updates on recent AHL graduates currently on NHL rosters

# San Diego Gulls (Anaheim Ducks)

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**Max Comtois (LW, 6'2, 215 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {50<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Comtois is the most NHL-ready prospect in the Anaheim system, having performed well a season ago with both the Ducks (11 points in 29 games) and in San Diego (24 points in 31 games). Comtois is a big body with an underrated offensive skill set. I had him pegged as more of a bottom-six type in his draft year, but his skating has improved, and his hockey sense is strong. Comtois has appeared in all 13 of Anaheim's games through Sunday (5 goals, 1 assist) with an average of 14:09 per match. It's safe to say Comtois is done with the AHL.

**Jack Kopacka (LW, 6'3, 192 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {93<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2016):** Kopacka is no longer part of the organization as he was recently traded to San Jose for older minor-league defenseman Trevor Carrick. Kopacka once stood out as a potential late bloomer due to the fact he played a depth role on some loaded Sault Ste. Marie teams back in his OHL days, but it just hasn't clicked for him at the professional level. He split last season between San Diego (15 points in 37 games) and Tulsa in the ECHL.

**Isac Lundestrom (C, 6'0, 187 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {23<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2018):** Lundestrom's detractors heading into the draft pointed out a potential lack of long-term upside. I thought he could eventually fill a second-line role for Anaheim, but it appears I gave him too much credit. Lundestrom is still just 21 years old but he has shown nothing in his two seasons in North America to make me believe he's anything other than a supporting piece. He has 1 goal and six assists in 36 career NHL games, and although he's once again up with the parent club (1 goal in 6 games), the reality is that Lundestrom

**Josh Mahura (D, 6'0, 186 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {85<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** I truly believe Mahura can run an effective NHL power-play, but I have doubts about his ability to handle defensive minutes at even-strength. The fact Anaheim felt the need to go out and sign soon-to-be 32-year-old Kevin Shattenkirk to a three-year deal when they already have Cam Fowler and Hampus Lindholm on their roster tells me a lot about what the Anaheim brass thinks of Mahura's chances. In his second season with San Diego, Mahura posted a respectable 21 points (4 goals, 17 assists) in 44 games and was an NHL fill-in for 11 games (1 goal, 3 assists). He made the club out of training camp but has yet to dress, bouncing around from the taxi squad to the minors then back to Anaheim. The likelihood is that Mahura for a third straight year will spend most of his season in the minors.

**Antoine Morand (C, 5'11, 184 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {60<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Morand is an extremely difficult player to get a read on. There were times in his QMJHL career when he looked like the best player on the ice and others in which he was totally invisible. Time is on his side considering he won't turn 22 until later this month, but he didn't exactly light the world on fire (16 points in 54 games) in his first AHL campaign. Still, Morand is a feisty player with good playmaking skills who could develop into a serviceable checker.

**Trevor Zegras (C, 6'0, 174 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {9<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** A brilliant playmaker with exceptional vision and hockey sense, Zegras 'is looking more and more like a steal after the Ducks grabbed him with the ninth pick in the 2019 NHL draft. Not only is the native New Yorker one of the most prolific scorers in the history of the under-20 world junior hockey championship (27 points in 12 games), but Zegras also crushed the NCAA circuit as a freshman for Boston University (36 points in 33 games). The AHL spotlight should be on him from start to finish, but the rebuilding Ducks have shown a willingness to quickly promote their youngsters during their ongoing rebuild.

**Jamie Drysdale (RHD 5'11, 180 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {6<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** Like Zegras, Drysdale is a top-10 pick (sixth overall in 2020) who is extremely creative with the puck. He's also an excellent skater with a hard wrist shot, but Drysdale is starting to increase his potential as a two-way type who can be counted on for good positional play in his own end. San Diego's power play for this upcoming season should prominently feature both Drysdale and Zegras.

# Tucson Roadrunners (Arizona Coyotes)

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**Cam Dineen (D, 5'11, 184 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {68<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Dineen played well at times during his OHL days, but his offensive game hasn't really translated to the professional ranks. He was used on special teams last season but not as the primary option, which makes him more of a middle-pairing Steady Eddie type. Dineen's produced 26 points in his 117 career AHL games but the one thing that he should be acknowledged for is his versatility and consistency. He didn't make the taxi squad out of training camp as the Coyotes have a bunch of 30-somethings already established on their blue line. He's only 22 years old so another full season in Tucson is far from detrimental.

**Ivan Prosvetov (G, 6'5, 176 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {118<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** A native of Moscow, Prosvetov has spent the last four seasons playing in North America. He began in the NAHL before moving to the USHL, OHL and finally, the AHL. He has elite size and finds himself in an organization that lacks goaltending depth. He's still a way's away from joining the ranks of the top goalie prospects in hockey, but he's certainly one to keep an eye on. He posted a respectable 14-10-1 mark and .909 save percentage, and he placed in the top-10 in shootout save percentage by stopping 18 of 20 attempts. Prosvetov should be Tucson's No. 1 for most of this season.

**Brayden Burke (LW, 5'10, 165 pounds, acquired: UDFA):** Always known for his playmaking skills, it shouldn't have surprised anyone that Burke placed eighth in AHL scoring (52 points in 51 games) and was the Roadrunners' focal point on offense a season ago. What did come as a bit of a shock was that he was one of the league's top goal scorers on the power-play with 13 tallies. Burke rarely looks indecisive or lacks confidence when controlling the puck inside the offensive zone, and it was good to see him use his underrated shot more during the man advantage. A lot of big-time scorers in junior hockey flame out after a year or two against older and quicker professionals, but Burke proved he belongs. It's just a matter of time until he makes his well-deserved NHL debut.

**Kyle Capobianco (D, 6'1, 196 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {63<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2015):** A ideal-sized puck mover from the left side who has been nothing short of productive in the AHL, Capobianco in 2019-20 posted his third consecutive season of 30 or more points, and his 0.88 points-per-game average led all defensemen. He's appeared in at least one NHL game in each of the last four seasons but has only 14 appearances in that span, including two this season. His play with or without the puck is far from erratic and Capobianco is only 23 years old, so it could be a simple matter of depth that is keeping from an everyday NHL job (four of Arizona's top-five minute eaters are veteran left-handed defensemen).

**Tyler Steenbergen (LW, 5'10, 187 pounds, acquired: 5<sup>th</sup> Rd {127<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Steenbergen was an overage mid-round draft selection who turned 23 in January and is expected to spend a third full season with Tucson. He's a dependable two-way type who can play center or wing and he's refined his game since his days as a high-volume scorer in the WHL. The point production has been average — 17 goals and 48 point in 120 career AHL games — but Steenbergen is very coachable and can handle any role while giving maximum effort. The highlight of his career up to this point was scoring the gold-medal winning goal for Canada at the 2018 world juniors, but his hard work and desire to go the net should help continue his climb towards an NHL gig.

**Victor Soderstrom (RHD 6'0, 190 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {11<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** Soderstrom was Arizona's top pick (11th overall) in the 2019 draft and made the club out of camp, appearing in two games before being sent down to join the Roadrunners. He is one of the better puck managers among prospect defensemen and he's been playing well against adult-age competition each of the last three seasons. His development into a potential No. 1 franchise defender likely starts with at least one year in Tucson, but Soderstrom's heady defensive play plus his impressive skating and puck distribution shouldn't keep him down on the farm for long.

**Jan Jenik (C/W 6'1, 181 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {65<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** A big-bodied playmaker who missed a chunk of time following a knee injury at the 2020 world junior championship, Jenik is now healed and ready to challenge for an NHL roster spot. He was drafted 65th overall in 2018 and spent the last two seasons with the OHL's Hamilton Bulldogs, where he ranked among the league's top scorers before being sidelined. Jenik's lengthy rehabilitation period is now complete and he looked solid in his few weeks in Finland's adult-age Mestis league (5 goals, 3 assists in 7 games). It will be interesting to see him perform in a quicker circuit like the AHL, especially since his skating is quite average.

# Providence Bruins (Boston Bruins)

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**Trent Frederic (C, 6'2, 214 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {29<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Frederic was a big-time scorer in his two seasons at the University of Wisconsin but his expected NHL role appears to be as a bottom-six winger. He made the Bruins out of training camp and is playing over 12 minutes a game but for his career has only one assist in 25 matches. With a contending Providence squad a season ago, Frederic was second with 24 assists and had a prominent role during critical late-close situations. He has plenty of size and decent hands, so he could eventually develop into a useful depth piece for Boston. Frederic is still just 22 years old.

**Jakub Lauko (LW, 6'0, 190 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {77<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Lauko was effective in 22 games for Providence (nine points in 22 games) and is expected to be a key player with this year's squad. He left for the World Juniors in December of 2019 and was injured during the Czech Republic's first game before he made it back for the AHL at the tail end of the season, playing a handful of games before the stoppage. Lauko is an underrated prospect, as he's shown occasional flashes of natural offensive abilities and gets chances because of his speed. He spent the first half of the 2020-21 campaign with Karlovy Vary in the Czech Extraliga (five goals, five assists in 25 games) and has already been released to take part in the Baby B's camp.

**Jeremy Lauzon (D, 6'1, 215 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {52<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2015):** Lauzon has been on the Providence-to-Boston shuttle each of the past two seasons and finally earned a full-time job in Beantown for the 2020-21 campaign, where he's averaging nearly 20 minutes a night of a contending Bruins squad. Granted, the loss of free agents Torey Krug and Zdeno Chara created enough of a gap for Lauzon to use his nearly three seasons of AHL experience to his advantage, but he already had 35 NHL games under his belt to help make the transition smoother. He was a critical piece to Providence's dominance last season so it goes without saying that Lauzon more than earned his AHL degree.

**Zach Senyshyn (RW, 6'1, 205 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {15<sup>th</sup> overall} 2015):** I was all over Senyshyn in his OHL junior days with Sault Ste Marie, thinking he would be, at a minimum, an effective middle-six forward. It hasn't happened. Senyshyn can really skate but I overrated his hockey sense. He looks good flying around the ice but not a lot gets done, which probably explains why a 15th overall pick from nearly six years ago has only six NHL games to his credit. He'll continue to get chances because of his draft pedigree but he's just about out of time — the Bruins placed him on waivers in mid-January and don't have any room for him with the parent club. The only thing left for Senyshyn at this point is to do something he hasn't done in three full seasons with Providence — dominate his peers and be a team focal point.

**Oskar Steen (C, 5'9, 185 pounds, acquired: 6<sup>th</sup> Rd {165<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Steen exploded in his final SHL season, posting 37 points in 46 games for Farjestad. He found his first year with Providence a bit more difficult (seven goals, 23 points in 60 games) but I remain optimistic. I wouldn't call Steen a game-breaking offensive talent but he's a crafty player with at above-average puck skills. This season, Steen was loaned back to Sweden where he was one of the top goal scorers in the adult-age Allsvenskan (12 goals in 16 games) and actually led the circuit with an impressive 30.8 shooting percentage. He crossed the pond in January for training camp but has been dealing with an undisclosed injury.

**Jack Studnicka (C, 6'1, 176 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {53<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2017):** I look at Studnicka and I think of Tampa Bay forward Anthony Cirelli. Cirelli might be a bit better defensively but Studnicka dominated offensively in his first year as an AHL pro. He posted 23 goals and a team-best 49 points in 60 games while being named to the AHL All-Rookie Team. He appeared in two games for the Bruins a season ago and this year made the club out of camp (one goal in six games). He's also dealing with an undisclosed injury but the Bruins had been playing him close to 14 minutes a game as a top-nine winger, which means the chances of a return to Providence are slim to none.

# Providence Bruins (Boston Bruins)

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**Urho Vaakanainen (D, 6'1, 190 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {18<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Vaakanainen is on a longer curve than most expected. I thought he would have been an NHL regular by now, although Vaakanainen has played just seven NHL games to date. He was loaned to SaiPa in the Finnish SM-Liiga, where he appeared in only two games in late November before heading back to North America to join the Bruins for training camp. Although Vaakanainen did not make the parent club and is currently on the taxi squad, he was one of the better Bruins defensemen in camp and should be one of the first call-ups in the event of an injury. He's already had two AHL seasons so you have to think the graduation of others coupled with his experience will make him an easy No. 1 defender for the Baby B's if the Bruins decide to send him down.

**Dan Vladar (G, 6'5, 195 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {75<sup>th</sup> overall} 2015):** Vladar's breakout 2019-20 season saw him lead the AHL in both GAA (1.79) and save percentage (.936). He made his NHL debut in the playoffs against Tampa Bay after Jaroslav Halak was pulled in Game 3. Keep in mind that Tuukka Rask's future is seemingly up in the air and Halak isn't getting any younger. There's little chance the Bruins would give Vladar a starting gig in 2020-21 but I could see a scenario in which his \$728K cap hit comes in handy as a backup. He made the taxi squad out of camp but may be sent down to Providence on occasion to avoid rust.

**Jakub Zboril (D, 6'0, 195 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {13<sup>th</sup> overall} 2015):** It may have taken him some time, but Zboril is now the closest he's ever been to an NHL top-four mainstay. He was nothing short of consistent with the P-Bruins, amassing nearly 200 games and playing over 20 minutes a match. He fought his way onto Boston's 2020-21 roster and through his first eight games has averaged almost 19 minutes a contest. Barring something catastrophic, it's safe to say Zboril's AHL days are finally over.

**Curtis Hall (C, 6'4, 212 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {119<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** What a shocker — the Bruins have yet another prospect who is physical two-way forward with size and New England ties. Hall, who led Yale in scoring as a sophomore, can fill a variety of roles and his combination of speed and size makes him an effective player off the puck and in his own end. Providence will ice one of the AHL's younger groups of forwards so Hall should see enough ice time to acclimate to the league's increased levels of speed and physicality.

# Rochester Americans (Buffalo Sabres)

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**Rasmus Asplund (C, 5'11, 190 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {33<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2016):** I thought Asplund projected as a high-floor, low-ceiling prospect upon his arrival in North America in the fall of 2018. He's scored at a reasonably high clip (60 points in 108 games) at the AHL level but showed little (one goals, three points) in a 29-game trial with Buffalo which would lead me to believe there is more offense on the way. He's useful in defensive-zone faceoff and penalty-killing situations, but all the moves the Sabres have made to provide Jack Eichel with center support are begging to squeeze Asplund further down the depth chart.

**Casey Mittelstadt (C, 6'1, 203 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {8<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** I remain a firm believer in Mittelstadt's long-term potential despite a pair of seasons that could charitably be termed as inconsistent but probably lean more towards disappointing. Mittelstadt is a brilliant offensive player but he struggles with consistency in addition to his play away from the puck revealing the lack of a motor and acceptable foot speed. He split last season between Rochester and Buffalo, notching a respectable 26 points in 35 games with the former. The issues facing Mittelstadt beyond the lack of NHL production is that he's now playing under his third general manager, and his last two each used their top-10 pick on a skilled forward — Dylan Cozens in 2019 and Jack Quinn in 2020. The good news is that he showed up to training camp quicker and leaner, and Mittelstadt now has one assist in his two games with the Sabres.

**Arttu Ruotsalainen (C, 5'8, 181 pounds, acquired: Free Agent):** One of the more productive Finnish prospects in the adult-age SM-Liiga the last few seasons, Ruotsalainen is a crafty playmaker with a high hockey IQ who has already appeared in several Sabres' training camps after he was signed as an undrafted free agent in May of 2019. He's on the smallish side but has played in five full seasons in Finland's premier league, including a ridiculous 19-game stretch with Ilves in 2020-21 where he was leading the league with a 1.42 points-per-game average. Nonetheless, Ruotsalainen has been ensconced in his European comfort zone and has yet to be tested in the smaller North American rinks against physical and tougher opponents.

# Stockton Heat (Calgary Flames)

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**Eetu Tuulola (RW, 6'2, 224 pounds, acquired: 6th Rd {156th overall} 2016):** A power winger with soft hands who likes to throw his weight around, Tuulola had a fairly successful rookie AHL season after spending the previous two seasons in his native Finland, where he was one of the better point-producing youngsters in the league. He's a dual threat who can fill a variety of roles, and last season Stockton used him on both the power play and the penalty kill. He spent this past offseason in Europe between Vasterviks in the Swedish Allsvenskan (2 goals, 2 assists in 11 games) and SaiPA in the elite SM-Liiga (0 points in 4 games). Tuulola came over for training camp but was quickly sent down to Stockton in early January to make room for others following the world juniors. He plays a North American style and should figure prominently in Stockton's attack.

**Glenn Gawdin (C, 6'1, 190 pounds, acquired: signed as free agent):** Gawdin led the WHL in plus/minus (+61) in addition to being named WHL playoff MVP in his final junior season back in 2017-18. He has since played in the AHL, posting 85 points in 117 games. Gawdin's an average skater, but his hockey sense is excellent and he can play both an abrasive and physical brand of hockey. He might not be an NHL regular but Gawdin makes for an ideal depth piece for the Flames. He was signed to a two-way contract in October before he went to Europe to play for Visp in the Swiss NLA, albeit for just one game. He led Stockton in scoring a season ago and some feel his energy would be welcomed with the struggling Flames.

**Adam Ruzicka (C/W, 6'4, 202 pounds, acquired: 4th Rd {109th overall} 2017):** A towering 200-foot center from Slovakia, Ruzicka is developing a cult following within the fan base for the way his offense snuck up on everyone as an AHL rookie last season. Although 10 goals and 27 points in 54 games is nothing earth shattering, the belief was that Ruzicka was a limited prospect who was hampered by limitations in quickness and agility. How he makes up for this is by playing smart positional hockey where his anticipation and awareness can not only wrestle possession away from opponents but also keep the puck on his blade for long stretches. Ruzicka may never become a star in any league but he's as versatile a center as you'll find considering his size and experience.

**Tyler Parsons (G, 6'1, 185 pounds, acquired: 2nd Rd {54th overall} 2015):** Once considered a potential franchise goalie, Parsons posted a suboptimal 10-13-1 mark over two brief AHL seasons before spending all of 2019-20 with Kansas City in the ECHL (.911 save percentage in 25 games). Parsons got a vote of confidence from the Flames, however, when they signed him to a one-year deal in the offseason. Unfortunately, the Michigan native missed training camp with an ankle injury and was not added to the taxi squad. The most important thing for Parsons at this point is to get healthy and prove to the Flames that he still has the big-game reputation he once had in junior hockey. He better hurry, however, as Dustin Wolf has already jumped him in the depth chart and is considered one of the better goalie prospects in hockey.

**Jakob Pelletier (LW, 5'10, 170 pounds, acquired: 1st Rd {26th overall} 2019):** A hard-nosed winger who makes up for a lack of size with a ton of bite, snarl, and impressive shot creation, Pelletier was Calgary's first-round pick in 2019 and at this point is their premier wing prospect. He's played his entire pre-AHL career in the QMJHL, where he accumulated an impressive 262 points in 201 games between Moncton and Val-d'Or. Although Pelletier has yet to play in the AHL, he turns 20 in March and should at a minimum play for Stockton in the second half of this season. Considering his solid play at the last world juniors plus the fact that the NHL Flames have a sputtering offense could make Pelletier's rookie AHL season shorter than expected.

**Emilio Pettersson (C/W, 5'10, 180 pounds, acquired: 6th Rd {167th overall} 2018):** A prolific scorer with Denver University, Pettersson is a native Norwegian who has the scoring potential to make a lot of rival general managers and scouting directors regret letting him slide to the sixth round of the 2018 draft. He registered 65 points in 76 college games in two seasons before turning pro. His hard wrist shot and aggressive nature on the forecheck combine to make him one of the more opportunistic you'll see in the league this year.

**Dustin Wolf (G, 6'0, 175 pounds, acquired: 7th Rd {214th overall} 2019):** When it comes to smothering scoring chances, few goalie prospects make it look as easy and calculated as Wolf — Calgary's seventh-round pick in 2019 who was both the WHL and CHL Goalie of the Year in 2020 for his backstopping efforts with the Everett Silvertips. He's a California native who isn't big like most goalies, but his net presence is too advanced for some of the better shooters in junior hockey to exploit. He'll probably have several eye-opening experiences as an AHL rookie, but Wolf has proven the doubters wrong for years.

# Chicago Wolves (Carolina Hurricanes)

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**Jake Bean (D, 6'0, 175 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {13<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Bean won the Eddie Shore Award as the AHL's top defenseman this past season. He led all AHL defenders in scoring (48 points in 59 games). Bean would almost certainly already have substantial NHL time under his belt if he was in any organization other than Carolina. There was no room for him with the Hurricanes to begin the season and there is even less now after Carolina acquired Brady Skjei from the Rangers at the trade deadline. Bean is clearly ready for a full-time NHL role and he's cheap (\$850K), so he will have significant trade value if Carolina decides to go that route. He was named to Carolina's taxi squad after training camp.

**Morgan Geekie (C, 6'2, 190 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {67<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Geekie has spent the majority of the past two seasons with Charlotte, posting 41 goals and 88 points in 128 games. Yet by the time the NHL playoffs rolled around this summer, Geekie was a full-time player for Carolina. Not only did Geekie play, but he stood out. He's still just 22 years of age but Geekie appears ready to fill a bottom-six role for the Hurricanes as soon as next season. He too made the taxi squad out of camp but quickly went into the Canes' lineup as a bottom-six center and has appeared in five of their six games.

**Joey Keane (D, 6'0, 187 pounds, acquired: Trade with NYR):** In a rare prospect-for-prospect trade, Keane was acquired from the Rangers straight up for Julien Gauthier in February. After being passed over entirely in the 2017 draft, Keane was the No. 88 overall selection by New York in 2018. He posted 37 points in 58 games and was named to the AHL All-Rookie Team this past season. Keane moves exceptionally well and is good offensively. He's also a right-handed shot. He can probably help Carolina in 2020-21 if injuries strike.

**Roland McKeown (D, 6'1, 195 pounds, acquired: Trade with LA):** McKeown was a big prospect early on in his OHL days, but he's stalled out as a pro. He's spent the past four seasons with Charlotte, not counting 10 games with the Hurricanes in 2017-18. He makes for decent AHL depth, but that's about it at this point.

**Stelio Mattheos (C, 6'1, 195 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {73<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2017):** Mattheos has battled numerous health issues, mostly notably, being diagnosed with testicular cancer last year. He was limited to 16 regular season games with Charlotte, posting six points. He's still just 21 years of age and I have long thought he had the potential to be a solid, bottom-six forward at the NHL level if he can remain healthy moving forward.

**Alex Nedeljkovic (G, 5'11, 190 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {37<sup>th</sup> overall} 2014):** Nedeljkovic has been a solid AHL goaltender for years but has faltered in the rare instances in which he received NHL playing time. He's technically sound, but he's small. You can count the number of NHL goaltenders below 6-foot these days on one hand, but Nedeljkovic remains with the organization and will now serve as the Canes' backup until starter Petr Mrazek is healthy.

**Ryan Suzuki (C/W, 6/1, 180 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {28<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** An impressive performance as a depth player at the last under-20 world junior hockey championship was yet another example of Suzuki's promise after the Canes drafted him 28th overall in the 2019 draft. Quick, skilled, and the owner of a nasty shot, Suzuki likely takes a bit longer to make an impact at the NHL than his brother Nick, who currently stars for Montreal. Although Ryan will be an AHL rookie competing within one of the league's deepest talent pools for forwards, there's no reason to think he won't see a fair amount of time in the top six and on the power play.



# Rockford Ice Hogs (Chicago Blackhawks)

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**Collin Delia (G, 6'2, 200 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** Delia was signed as an undrafted free agent in the summer of 2017 following three seasons at Merrimack College. Delia was forced into action for 16 games with the Blackhawks this past season. His record was somehow above .500 (6-4-3) but the underlying numbers (3.61 GAA, .908 save percentage) weren't as pretty. Delia seems likely to play NHL games again this coming season, but little should be expected.

**Mackenzie Entwistle (RW, 6'3, 193 pounds, acquired: trade with Arizona):** Entwistle has plenty of size and at least above-average skill but his lack of foot speed figures to torpedo any chance he has of playing NHL games. In many ways, he reminds me of former Arizona/Edmonton prospect Henrik Samuelsson. It's a shame, cause Entwistle is quite a good player otherwise. He posted 11 goals and 26 points in 56 games in his first AHL campaign.

**Chad Krys (D, 6'0, 185 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {45<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Krys was all over the place during his three seasons at Boston University. At times he looked like a sure-fire NHL regular and others like a non-prospect. The early AHL returns weren't great, as Krys posted just eight points in 41 games last season. He has time but needs to show improvement this coming season.

**Kevin Lankinen (G, 6'2, 190 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** Lankinen was an AHL All-Star last season, although his numbers (8-10-3, 3.03 GAA, .909 save percentage) certainly don't mirror that. Lankinen was productive enough in his native Finland that I think there is hope for him in the right situation, but I can't imagine standing behind Chicago's poor defensive corps is a recipe for success. I do think he's a bit better long-term bet than Delia. Both should battle for playing time this season.

**Philipp Kurashev (C, 6'0, 190 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {120<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Kurashev really put himself on the map following a standout performance for his native Switzerland at the 2018 World Juniors. He spent the entirety of last season in the AHL as a 20-year-old and was productive enough (19 points in 36 games) for consideration for an NHL job this season. Injuries to several expected starters certainly helped Kurashev's case, but he has developed into a Blackhawks' regular through the first quarter of the season.

**Tim Soderlund (LW, 5'9, 163 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {112<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Soderlund has enough speed and smarts to fill a depth role but it's difficult to see him succeeding there given how tiny he is. Players of Soderlund's size generally need to have some dynamic offensive qualities in order to succeed at the NHL level. Think Johnny Gaudreau.

**Evan Barratt (C, 6'0, 170 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {90<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Barratt was a top scorer for Penn State in each of his last two seasons before he signed his pro deal after his junior year. The Bristol, PA native was drafted in the third round (90th overall) in the 2017 NHL draft after two successful seasons at the U.S. National Team Development Program. He is excellent around the net but has sharp vision that allows him to play the role of playmaker as well. Barratt is strong on his skates and is versatile enough to play center or wing. He has recorded one assist in his first two games with Rockford.

**Andrei Altybarmakyan (RW, 5'11, 192 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {70<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Altybarmakyan was one of Russia's notable neophytes who played in the adult-age KHL and even was invited to the league 2017 All-Star Game, where he scored the game-winning goal. He's a powerful skater with a low center of gravity who can dip into a deep bag of tricks to create time and space. Drafted 70th overall in the 2017 NHL draft, Altybarmakyan will be playing in a North American league for the first time, but he already has one assist in his first two games.

**Michal Teplý (RW, 6'3, 187 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {105<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** Teplý is a thick-framed winger who was one of the Czech Republic's more consistent forwards at the last under-20 world junior hockey championship. A fourth-round pick (109th overall) in 2019, Teplý spent all of last season with the WHL's Winnipeg Ice, notching 29 goals and 34 assists in 53 games. Teplý has deceptive quickness for his size and can wire the puck with authority.

# Rockford Ice Hogs (Chicago Blackhawks)

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**Alec Regula (RHD, 6'4, 207 pounds, acquired: Trade (Detroit):** Regula is a big-bodied puck mover with a strong reputation in North American hockey circles for several reasons, namely for the way he dominated the Ontario Hockey League a season ago. A native Michigander, Regula was one of the top goal-scoring defensemen in all of Canadian major junior, potting a whopping 27 markers in only 56 games for Dale Hunter's London Knights. He originally was drafted by Detroit (67th overall in 2018) but was later moved to Chicago in a one-for-one swap for forward Brandon Perlini.

**Michal Krutil (RHD, 6'3, 203 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {110<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** Much like his fellow countryman Tepy, Krutil also was a fourth-round pick of Chicago, albeit a year later at the 2020 draft. A mobile two-way defenseman with leadership qualities who can log a ton of minutes, Krutil was the go-to guy for both the Czechs at the under-18 level and for his Sparta Praha U20 club team in the top Czech junior league. Krutil is big, strong, mobile, and versatile, as he was used in every situation to include the primary quarterback on the power play.

# Colorado Eagles (Colorado Avalanche)

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**Shane Bowers (C, 6'2, 180 pounds, acquired: Trade with Ottawa):** Originally a first-round pick (27<sup>th</sup> overall) of Ottawa back in 2017, Bowers was acquired in the three-team Matt Duchene deal. I almost always advocate for a player turning pro instead of going back to school, but I felt Bowers could have used a third year at Boston University. Instead, he signed with Colorado and posted a respectable 27 points in 48 games in his first full AHL campaign. His potential as a point producer at the NHL level seems limited, but Bowers does possess decent hands, two-way play, and ideal size for a center. I'd be shocked if he developed into anything more than a third liner with the Avalanche, but he's performed reasonably well thus far given his age. Bowers had a strong camp but has yet to appear in an NHL game. He's bounced around from the taxi squad to the Avs and then back to the minors without ever seeing an NHL shift. You would think Tyson Jost's struggles and recent bout with COVID would open the door for a similar center like Bowers to prove himself, but head coach Jared Bednar has opted to head in a different direction.

**Martin Kaut (RW, 6'2, 180 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {16<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Kaut is a hard-working player with some playmaking abilities but the fact that he was a first-round pick doesn't always mean there is a ton of upside here. He did show well in a nine-game trial with the Avalanche at the end of last season, posting two goals and an assist in just over 10 minutes a match. In his two seasons with the Eagles, Kaut increased his point production from 0.41 points per game in his first season to 0.53 in 2019-20, thus increasing the likelihood he'd grab a regular shift in the NHL. A native of the Czech Republic, Kaut split his offseason between Pardubice (1 goal in 4 games) and MODO in the Swedish Allsvenskan (5 points in 8 games) before joining the Avs for camp. He's only appeared in one NHL game this season and like Bowers should be considered a prospect who likely shuffles between the Avs and Eagles throughout the campaign.

**Conor Timmins (D, 6'2, 185 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {32<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2017):** Timmins was one of the better prospect defensemen in the AHL last year thanks to 27 points in 40 games and reliable play in his own end. There's little doubt he will develop into an NHL regular, with the lone concern at this point being the concussion issue that caused him to miss the entirety of the 2018-19 campaign. Timmins seems likely to spend the better part of this season as a defensive defenseman on a young Avs blue line. He's already appeared in eight games and recently played a career-high 17:56 in a win over Minnesota on Jan. 30.

**Jean-Luc Foudy (C, 5'11, 175 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {75<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** The COVID-related lifting of the age restriction levied on Canadian Hockey League prospects that normally prevents teenagers from playing in the AHL allowed the Eagles to invite this speedy two-way playmaker for the upcoming season. Foudy, whose brother Liam is a regular for the Columbus Blue Jackets, has the same impressive speed and agility but is more of a pass-first type with sharper vision. Selected in the third round of the 2020 draft following solid seasons with the OHL's Windsor Spitfires, Foudy recently played in seven games (1 goal) for Mörrums GoIS IK in Sweden's third-tier HockeyEttan before returning to North America.

# Cleveland Monsters (Columbus Blue Jackets)

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**Trey Fix-Wolansky (RW, 5'6, 176 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {204<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** A former WHL scoring star, Fix-Wolansky produced offensively (12 goals, 26 points in 43 games) in his first professional season. The odds are firmly against him due to his lack of size but Fix-Wolansky is a legitimate prospect considering the Jackets' thin depth pool and his ability to score above the junior level. Wolansky is a seventh-round pick who turns 22 in May and he didn't make the team or taxi squad after an impressive camp, so one should expect him to be a force for Cleveland's attack for the second year in a row and move closer towards his first piece of NHL action.

**Matiss Kivlenieks (G, 6'2, 180 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** A former undrafted free agent, Kivlenieks has provided nice depth for Columbus. He got into six games with the Jackets last season (2.95 GAA, .898 save percentage) in addition to 20 games (2.96 GAA, .904 save percentage) with Cleveland. Any undrafted free agent who makes it to the NHL is a major success story and one could argue that anything Columbus gets out of Kivlenieks from this point forward is just gravy. He made the club's taxi squad following an impressive camp, which means something considering the jackets have one of the league's deepest goalie pools.

**Veini Vehvilainen (G, 6'1, 183 pounds, acquired: 6<sup>th</sup> Rd {173<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2018):** Vehvilainen emerged as Cleveland's No. 1 goalie this past season following several professional seasons in Finland's SM-Liiga. The numbers weren't great (2.76 GAA, .901 save percentage) but Vehvilainen is just 23 years old and time is firmly on his side. His offseason could have gone better, as Vehvilainen's worrisome offseason stint in Finland with JyP (.890 save percentage and 3-7-3 mark) was followed by his Cleveland backup Kivlenieks making the taxi squad over him.

**Carson Meyer (RW, 5'11, 181 pounds, acquired: 6<sup>th</sup> Rd {179<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** It's tough to not be intrigued by a good old story about a local boy who stayed close to home to further his development, which is why the Powell, Ohio native is going to have plenty of attention sent his way as he makes his Cleveland debut. Not only was Meyer 'born and raised in Ohio, but he played for the state's two premier college hockey programs: first with the Miami Redhawks and then the last two seasons with Ohio State. It was with the Buckeyes where Meyer became one of the top wingers in the Big-10, leading the team with 17 goals. He was drafted by Columbus in the sixth round in 2017.

# Texas Stars (Dallas Stars)

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**Joel Kiviranta (LW, 5'10, 176 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** Kiviranta introduced himself on the world stage with his stellar playoff performance (five goals in 14 games) for Dallas but he played reasonably well (12 goals, 23 points in 48 games) for the duration of his first AHL campaign. His long-term role is probably that of a solid third liner who can contribute a dozen goals a season.

**Adam Mascherin (LW, 5'10, 205 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {100<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Mascherin was originally the 38<sup>th</sup> overall pick by Florida back in 2016 but he didn't sign with the team and re-entered the 2018 draft. Mascherin is a thick, stocky kid with a big shot, but again, his foot speed is in question and his path to effectiveness at the NHL level would appear to be rather limited. Mascherin scored just four goals in 30 AHL games last season but should be leaned on as a team leader in 2020-21.

**Jake Oettinger (G, 6'5, 205 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {26<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** The numbers have always showed it, but Oettinger has played well in his three-plus years in the Dallas organization. He's big, calm in net, and athletic and those are traits that generally lead to success among goaltenders. Oettinger was slated to serve as Anton Khudobin's backup with Ben Bishop out due to injury, but he already has appeared in five games with an impressive 2-0-2 mark, stellar 2.19 goals-against average, and a .919 save percentage.

**Jason Robertson (LW, 6'2, 200 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {39<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Robertson would be a top-25 prospect were it not for the concerns regarding his skating. He alleviated many of those worries by posting 25 goals and 47 points in 60 games in his first AHL campaign. Robertson is a cerebral offensive player with elite hockey sense. He's going to do a ton of damage for Dallas with the man advantage.

**Riley Tufte (LW, 6'6, 230 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {25<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Tufte played so poorly during his three years at Minnesota-Duluth that he may not have deserved an entry-level deal based upon merit. Of course, there was never any doubt he was getting a contract offer after Dallas blew a first rounder on him in 2016. Tufte has plenty of size and some physical gifts but I simply don't think he's a very good hockey player. His numbers during his first AHL season (three goals, 15 points in 53 games) were not inspiring. I'm out here barring something unforeseen changing.

**Thomas Harley (LHD, 6'3, 190 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {18<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** A smooth-skating puck mover with quintessential power-play quarterbacking skills, Harley placed in the top 10 among OHL defensemen in every major category and suited up for Team Canada at the last world junior tournament, where he posted only one goal in seven games. Far from a shutdown type, Harley isn't very demonstrative on the ice but seems to let his puck skills and wheels do most of the talking. Harley has all the makings of yet another point-producing machine off the blue line who was drafted and developed by Dallas.

**Antonio Stranges (LW, 5'10, 168 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {123<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2020):** Stranges once was considered a potential first-round pick in the 2020 draft before he ultimately slid down to Round 4, and it's probably because he never got going in Dale Hunter's high-octane attack with the OHL's London Knights. But there is no denying Stranges' puck skills and vision, and his ability to use his "Mohawk" skating technique should continue to help him create time and space for himself regardless of the level or quality of competition. Texas doesn't need him to be a dynamic offensive force just yet, so look for Stranges to make improvements off the puck and in the defensive zone.

# Grand Rapids Griffins (Detroit Red Wings)

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**Dennis Cholowski (D, 6'2, 197 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {20<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Cholowski has been around for seemingly ever despite the fact he's only been in the Detroit system for two full seasons and is still just 22 years old. He's proven to be an offensive asset at the NHL level, but his struggles defensively figure to limit him to a depth role for the Red Wings moving forward.

**Michael Rasmussen (C, 6'6, 230 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {9<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):**Rasmussen 'spent the vast majority of the 2018-19 season in Detroit, playing 62 games and posting eight goals and 18 points. Because of that, it's not a great sign he spent the entirety of the 2019-20 campaign in Grand Rapids. Rasmussen's production was fine (seven goals, 22 points in 35 games) for a kid who played the entire year at age 20 but his game hasn't developed much the last couple seasons. Rasmussen is a massive kid who carves out space in the offensive zone with ease but you're seeing less and less of those type of players as the years go by.

**Moritz Seider (D, 6'3, 209 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {6<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** Detroit President Steve Yzerman surprisingly popped Seider at No. 6 overall in 2019 and the early returns have been positive. Seider spent the entirety of this past season in the AHL despite being one of the youngest players in the league. He produced offensively (22 points in 49 games) and logged significant minutes. It was great for his development. Seider has the look of a two-way horse who can contribute to all facets of the game. I expect him to spend a good portion of the coming season in Detroit after a dominant performance with Rogle in the SHL.

**Evgeni Svechnikov (LW, 6'3, 208 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {19<sup>th</sup> overall} 2015):**Svechnikov played 51 games for the Griffins last season in addition to four with the Red Wings. His numbers (11 goals, 25 points) were irrelevant because he missed the entirety of the 2018-19 season due to injury. The fact Svechnikov came back healthy is all that matters. This is the year where we look for further improvements in his game.

**Joe Veleno (C, 6'2, 200 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {30<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Veleno was in discussion to be a late lottery selection back in 2018 before tumbling all the way to the end of Round 1. Detroit appears to have gotten a steal, as Veleno has the look of a high-floor middle-six center who can contribute some offense while helping his team in all three zones. He's another candidate for NHL time this coming season, but for now he's the second-line center for a surging Malmo squad in the SHL, notching nine goals and six assists in 32 games.

**Gustav Lindstrom (D, 6'2, 190 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {38<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Lindstrom was another surprising high-round choice made by the Red Wings back in 2017, but he was one of Sweden's better shutdown defenders who was available. His first season in North America didn't yield impressive numbers (6 assists in 61 games between Detroit and Grand Rapids), but Lindstrom showed enough promise in spurts to give fans an inkling of what he might develop into once he reaches his prime. Lindstrom is a physical defender who rarely plays around with the puck and can be counted to kill penalties and help with lead holding late in periods.

# Bakersfield Condors (Edmonton Oilers)

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**Tyler Benson (LW, 6'0, 192 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {32<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2016):** A former first-overall selection of the Vancouver Giants in the 2013 WHL Bantam Draft, Benson is an above-average offensive talent who was held back by injuries early in his career. He appears to have shaken that bug and has gone on to post an impressive 105 points in his first 120 AHL games. He made a brief seven-game cameo for the Oilers a season ago, picking up an assist and averaging 10:23 of ice time on a squad that contended for the division title. Benson played with the GCK Lions in Switzerland during this offseason (13 points in 15 games) but did not make the taxi squad out of training camp. He looks like he's ready for a full-time role in the NHL as a productive two-way, middle-six winger, but the reality is that he's likely destined for his third full AHL season.

**Evan Bouchard (D, 6'2, 198 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {10<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Bouchard 'has yet to live up to expectations and some consider his development to be deliberate since being selected 10th overall in 2018. The Oilers have had issues on their blue line for several years since yet Bouchard came into 2020-21 with just seven NHL games — all of which came in the 2018-19 season. He is an offensive defenseman, a position Edmonton addressed last offseason when they signed Tyson Barrie to a one-year deal. Bouchard's long-term ceiling hasn't changed much but I do wonder if the Oilers as an organization are down on him for one reason or another. He made the taxi squad out of training camp and later made his season debut on Feb. 2 against Ottawa, picking up an assist in nearly 17 minutes of ice time.

**Ryan McLeod (C, 6'3, 200 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {40<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** McLeod managed just five goals in 56 games in his first full AHL campaign, but I never expected him to generate all that much offense as a pro. McLeod is a terrific skater and should be able to carve out a career in a depth/checking role where he can lean on his speed to create havoc on the forecheck. He too went to Switzerland during the break in play, picking up four goals and seven assists in 15 games for Zug. Bakersfield looks like its icing an older forward group so McLeod will be one of its handful of high-round draft picks with a legitimate shot at an NHL job.

**Dmitri Samorukov (D, 6'3, 197 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {84<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Samorukov is a Russian import who became increasingly more offensive-minded as his OHL career progressed, including a staggering 10 goals and 28 points in 24 playoff games for Guelph in 2018-19. His two goals and 10 points in 42 AHL games a season ago seems underwhelming at first glance but they're perfectly respectable numbers for a kid who played the entire year at age 20. It may come in a third-pairing role, but I continue to believe there is an outside shot Samorukov could develop into an NHL regular for Edmonton. He plays physical and has a booming shot, and for now Samorukov is back in Russia with CSKA, where he's registered two goals and eight points in 17:38 a game for the KHL's top defensive team.

**Olivier Rodrigue (G, 6'3, 197 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {62<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2018):** A second-round pick (62nd overall) in the 2018 draft, Rodrigue is one of the QMJHL's winningest goalies in recent memory, compiling a sparkling 97-32-3 mark over his last three seasons. Listed at 6'1 and 170 pounds, Rodrigue made his professional debut this offseason with the Graz99ers in the Austrian League, appearing in 23 games and seeing close to 32 shots a game with a leaky defense before him. He was summoned from Europe when Mike Smith was placed on long-term injured reserve, and it appears that Rodrigue and 2016 fifth-rounder Dylan Wells will share the Condors' netminding duties this season.

# Syracuse Crunch (Florida Panthers)

\*Florida's affiliate in Springfield opted out of the 2020-21 season. Their prospects will play in Syracuse.

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**Henrik Borgstrom (C, 6'3, 199 pounds, acquired: 1st Rd {23rd overall} 2016):** Borgstrom has been on the radar as a top prospect for several years, but it's gotten to the point where he may need a trade to salvage whatever value he has left. Borgstrom has been a pro in North America since leaving the University of Denver as a star sophomore at the end of the 2017-18 season. Since then, Borgstrom spent 73 games with Springfield and 58 with Florida. The belief is that he still has the potential to be a top-six forward rather than the depth player for the Panthers, who are off to a great start to their 2020-21 season while Borgstrom plays well with HIFK in his native Finland. Considering Springfield is one of the three teams to opt out and Borgstrom remains an unsigned RFA, the chances of him seeing any time in the AHL this season are slim.

**Aleksi Heponiemi (RW, 5'10, 148 pounds, acquired: 2nd Rd {40th overall} 2017):** I was as high on Heponiemi as anyone entering his first professional season, but his performance last year in the AHL was disappointing. Slight of frame and more of a finesse type than anything else, Heponiemi managed just three goals and 14 points in 49 games. Obviously, the main concern here is the lack of size, although there was the sense that he was shifty and creative enough to succeed in the NHL as a smaller player listed at nearly 150 pounds. Heponiemi was loaned this season to MODO in the Swedish Hockey League, where he was one of the team's top scorers with 14 points (six goals, eight assists) in 14 games. He was later invited to Florida's training camp and made the taxi squad before he worked his way to NHL action, and Heponiemi scored his first career goal against the Red Wings on Jan. 30.

**Eetu Luostarinen (C, 6'3, 179 pounds, acquired: Trade with CAR):** Luostarinen joined the Panthers in the deal that sent Vincent Trocheck to Carolina. He's a big-bodied kid with a decent set of hands who posted a solid rookie AHL season with Charlotte (25 points in 44 games) and even appeared in eight NHL games for the contending Hurricanes. With Florida, Luostarinen has already established himself as a regular top-nine center and scored two goals and an assist in his first six games of 2020-21.

**Chase Priskie (D, 6'0, 192 pounds, acquired: Trade with CAR):** Originally a sixth-round pick of Washington in 2016, Priskie declined to sign with the Caps, played four years collegiately at Quinnipiac, then joined Carolina as a free agent. He too was dealt to Florida from Carolina in the Trocheck deal, and his combined 35 points between Charlotte and Springfield ranked him 11th among AHL defensemen. A finalist for the Hobey Baker Award in his final collegiate season, Priskie is a mobile, offensive defenseman, who at the very least, provides high-end AHL depth. Judging by Syracuse's initial training camp roster, the job of power-play quarterback should be Priskie's to lose.

**Owen Tippett (RW, 6'2, 205 pounds, acquired: 1st Rd {10th overall} 2017):** Tippett gets paid to score goals and he did a nice job of that in his first full AHL campaign scoring, tallying 19 times in 46 games, which ranked sixth among AHL newcomers. There are consistency issues to work with here but Tippett's ceiling is very high and his play in the AHL helped make him a legitimate candidate to not only make the Panthers out of camp, but potentially replace one of Mike Hoffman or Evgeny Dadonov; both who left via free agency. Tippett has barely played with the Cats, however, as his ice time ranks among the lowest on Florida's roster. In the end, the decision will be to either keep him in Florida as a Black Ace or send him to Syracuse to serve as a top liner.

**Grigory Denisenko (LW, 5'11, 176 pounds, acquired: 1st Rd {15th overall} 2018):** : One of the top goal-scoring wingers from the 2018 draft class, Denisenko signed his pro contract last spring and opted not to play in Russia for the 2020-21 season. He was one of the KHL's better teenagers in his two previous seasons with Lokomotiv and isn't far off from becoming an NHL regular. There's always the chance that Denisenko may struggle initially with the transition to North American hockey (see Vitaly Kravtsov), but his electrifying skill and multitude of ways to score can keep any opponent on notice whenever he's on the ice. He has two goals and an assist with nine shots over his first four AHL games.



# Ontario Reign (Los Angeles Kings)

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**Jaret Anderson-Dolan (C, 5'11, 195 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {41<sup>st</sup> overall} 2017):** Anderson-Dolan is a coach's dream, a leadership type who can play both center and wing and is responsible in all three zones. It may not result in gaudy numbers, but his style of play should be a welcomed fit for a Kings team with countless high-level skill prospects on the way. Anderson-Dolan already had brief NHL call-ups in each of the last two seasons (1 assist in 9 combined games) and last season led an improved Ontario squad with 20 assists in 53 games. He made the Kings' taxi squad out of camp and was promoted to the active roster, scoring his first NHL goal in a Feb. 7 loss to Vegas. If he ever makes it back to the farm, consider Anderson-Dolan a strong candidate to be one of Ontario's top scorers yet one who also earns a longer look with the Kings than in his previous two seasons.

**Kale Clague (D, 6'0, 180 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {51<sup>st</sup> overall} 2016):** Clague was a reliable point producer in his junior days with the WHL's Brandon Wheat Kings and that production carried over to his first two AHL seasons as he has posted 54 points in 101 games. Clague's play away from the puck remains a work in progress but he never figures to be the type of player to log tough defensive minutes. He's appeared in 11 NHL games between the last two seasons, but his contributions to the Kings' blue line are far more noticeable in 2021 — Clague averages nearly 18 minutes a game through his first nine matches.

**Mikey Anderson (D, 6'0, 197 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {103<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2018):** A hard-hitting Minnesotan who was one of Ontario's most dependable defensive defensemen a season ago, Anderson did more than enough to play his way onto the Kings' 2020-21 roster. Although he has a thick frame and can play physical, Anderson can skate fairly well and be a calming presence on the blue line. He's played at least 20 minutes in eight of his 11 games through Feb. 7, so there's basically no chance he'll return to the AHL. The Kings hit a home run with this mid-round pick who won't turn 22 until late May.

**Carl Grundstrom (LW, 6'0, 201 pounds, acquired: Trade with Toronto):** Grundstrom and defenseman Sean Durzi both arrived from Toronto in the Jake Muzzin deal from the 2019 trade deadline. Grundstrom plays a simple, direct game and is ready for a greater role, as proven by his 70 points in 97 AHL games, plus another 12 in 35 NHL contests. His ceiling is low, but his floor is extremely high. Grundstrom had a solid offseason playing with Bjorkloven in Sweden's Allsvenskan, posting five goals and eight assists in 18 games. I wouldn't be surprised if he spent the entirety of this coming season in Los Angeles, where he already has two goals in his first nine games. Expect Grundstrom to be a top-line option if he ever heads back to Ontario.

**Rasmus Kupari (C, 6'1, 185 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {20<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Kupari has been one of my favorite prospects the last couple years but there's no denying his stock had fallen in recent years. Some of that is his own doing and some is due to the fact he suffered a torn ACL in Finland's opening game at the 2020 World Junior Championship. Kupari, however, is only 20 years old and his recent eye-opening performance in Kings' training camp makes it seem like he's a lot closer to the NHL than one may have thought earlier last year. Much like Anderson-Dolan, however, Kupari is caught behind a logjam at center that now includes 2019 first-rounder Alex Turcotte and last year's No. 2 overall pick Quinton Byfield. He's a playmaking center with a tricky shot who has top-six upside but the key to this coming season is simply proving he's back to full health.

**Tobias Bjornfot (D, 6'0, 202 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {22<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2019):** Bjornfot had a strong enough training camp last season to not only make the club but also appear in three games before heading back to Ontario and producing six goals and 13 assists in 44 games. He went back to Sweden this offseason to play for Djurgardens (3 points in 15 games) and was one of the top performers for Sweden's under-20 squad at the world juniors. He returned to North America thereafter and made the taxi squad, and the aforementioned rash of injuries to the Kings' blue line means he's going to see NHL action one way or another. He's got good size and strength, and Bjornfot's mobility and crisp first pass are key facets to playing relatively mistake-free hockey.

**Sean Durzi (D, 6'0, 185 pounds, acquired: Trade with Toronto):** Essentially everything I said about Clague applies to Durzi, as well, minus the NHL experience portion. Although Durzi was drafted as an overager (52<sup>nd</sup> overall in 2018), it could have been argued a season or two ago that he had the higher ceiling than Clague since he is a big-time playmaker and is only 23. The graduations of Clague and Anderson didn't bode well for Durzi's shot at an NHL job, however, but recent long-term injuries to Matt Roy and Sean Walker may force the Kings to give him a look or two this season.

# Ontario Reign (Los Angeles Kings)

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**Alex Turcotte (C, 6'0, 202 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {5<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** An impressive under-20 world junior tournament after a brief stint at the University of Wisconsin primed this 2019 fifth-overall pick for his first taste of professional hockey. Although Turcotte 'hasn't played in league action in nearly a year since he left college, the Kings have high hopes for him to be an impact player with the Reign. It won't be easy, however, as the Kings' prospect depth at center is the best in the entire league. Still, his playmaking and vision are elite, plus he plays the tough grind-it-out style Los Angeles demands from all its forwards.

**Quinton Byfield (C, 6'4, 215 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {2<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2020):** The second pick in the 2020 draft, Byfield is a mammoth 6'5, two-way center who has drawn stylistic comparisons to Evgeny Malkin. He hasn't played much since his OHL season with Sudbury was shut down last March outside of his seven points in seven games for Canada at the last world juniors, but the Kings expect him to be in the AHL most of this season. One must consider that Byfield didn't turn 18 until last August, meaning he'll be one of the youngest forwards to play in the league in quite some time.

**Tyler Madden (C, 5'11, 180 pounds, acquired: Trade with Vancouver):** As if the Kings needed more premier center prospects, they were able to snag this speedy two-way dynamo from Vancouver in last year's Tyler Toffoli trade with Vancouver. Madden posted a pair of standout seasons with the Northeastern Huskies of Hockey East but is versatile enough to play the wing if necessary. Selected by the Canucks in the third round in the 2018 draft, Tyler is the son of John Madden, a three-time Stanley Cup winner who was one of the NHL's top defensive forwards for over a decade.

# Iowa Wild (Minnesota Wild)

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**Nico Sturm (C, 6'3, 210 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** The Wild beat out countless other teams for the services of Sturm in the spring of 2019. Sturm raised his stock considerably following three productive seasons at Clarkson University. Sturm looked pretty good (32 points in 55 games) in his first AHL campaign but his long-term upside is severely limited. If he's an NHL regular, it's of the fourth line variety. He's more likely an up-and-down guy. Of course, that's a perfectly reasonable outcome for both parties given the fact Sturm cost nothing to acquire other than a contract spot.

**Calen Addison (D, 5'9, 170 pounds, acquired: Trade with Pittsburgh):** One of the top power-play quarterbacks in Canadian major junior during his time with the WHL's Lethbridge Hurricanes, Addison was Pittsburgh's second-round pick (53rd overall) before they shipped him to the Twin Cities in the Jason Zucker deal. He spent all of last season in the WHL, posting 50 points or more for a third consecutive campaign. He'll probably have to work harder on his defensive-zone efforts to improve his chances at an NHL gig, but his first full AHL season should provide Addison with plenty of opportunities to showcase his skating and playmaking.

**Will Bitten (C, 5'9, 170 pounds, acquired: Trade with Montreal):** A speedy two-way center who was drafted 70th overall by Montreal in 2016, Bitten was later moved to Minnesota over two years ago for defense prospect Gustav Olofsson. He's been a solid worker bee for Iowa, posting consecutive 20-point seasons for head coach Tim Army and serving as more of an energy type. Bitten has yet to make his NHL debut, but he made the taxi squad and might get a long enough look to show how valuable his penalty killing and motor can be for any team at any level.

**Dmitri Sokolov (RW, 6-foot, 216 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {196<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Sokolov is a former 50-goal scorer in the OHL who makes up for below-average skating with an outstanding shot-release combination. This marks his third AHL season with Iowa and he's already posted respectable campaigns of 16 and 15 tallies. With two goals and an assist in his first three games this season, Sokolov is once again showing that he was worthy of being drafted and should continue to find ways to bury the puck.

**Connor Dewar (RW, 5'9, 170 pounds, acquired: Trade with Pittsburgh):** Dewar is a two-way type with good speed who can impact a shift off the puck with heavy forecheck pressure and smart defensive-zone coverage. He played within a tight-checking system for the WHL's Everett Silvertips for four full seasons, but it wasn't until his last two where he developed into a legitimate scoring threat and playmaker. Dewar was their leading scorer in 2018-19 (81 points in 59 games) and also proved to be clutch in the postseason. His first season with Iowa was more of a learning experience than anything else, as he picked up six goals and 13 assists in 52 games while operating in the bottom six. Much like Sokolov, Dewar is off to a quick start in 2020-21, posting two goals and two assists in his first three games.

**Adam Beckman (LW, 6'1, 173 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {75<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** Beckman was the WHL's leading scorer just one season after the Wild drafted him 75th overall in 2019. He tallied a league-best 48 goals — 16 on the power play and nine game winners — and his 107 points was the most by a Spokane Chief in six years. He'll have to work his tail off to get prime minutes on a team already loaded with strength on the flanks, but few AHL prospects are as deadly as Beckman from in between the hash marks.

**Daemon Hunt (D, 5'11, 195 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {65<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** Hunt is a promising two-way defender for several reasons, and at one point he was considered a strong candidate for Round 1. His scary skate-cut injury notwithstanding, Hunt's draft year was pretty solid for the WHL's Moose Jaw Warriors and he played the role of No. 1 quite well. He's a fluid skater who can go end to end and also quarterbacks the power play, but he'll likely spend this season as middle or bottom-pairing understudy with Addison running the unit during the man advantage.

**Ryan O'Rourke (LHD, 6'2, 182 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {39<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** O'Rourke's overall game is clean as a whistle, as was evident in the way he helped stabilize a leaky Sault Ste Marie defense corps in the high-flying OHL. He is a complete three-zone defender who quickly switches from shutdown responsibilities to puck rushing. There was legitimate reason to think he was going to go in the first round, and for what it's worth, O'Rourke is the first North American-trained rearguard the Wild drafted in either of the first two rounds since taking Matt Dumba 12th overall in 2012.

# Laval Titan (Montreal Canadiens)

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**Josh Brook (D, 6'1, 192 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {56<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** To be perfectly honest, I expected more from Brook in his first professional season. He led all WHL defensemen in scoring (75 points) in his final junior season and the AHL production (13 points in 60 games) didn't carry over upon arriving in Laval. There wasn't much room for promotion to Montreal for any of the Habs' notable blueline prospects, but Brook was jumped by the younger Alexander Romanov a few months after Montreal drafted lefty rearguard Kaiden Guhle with the 16th pick in the October draft. It should be noted that neither Guhle nor Brook made the taxi squad out of camp but both will be starting out the season with the Rocket. Although Brook still has promise and is only 20 years old, but he also played the entirety of this past season at age 20 and it would be foolish to write him off so soon.

**Jake Evans (C, 6'1, 186 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {207<sup>th</sup> overall} 2014):** I've always liked Evans more than most, thinking he could be a nice complementary piece who could chip in some offense here and there. He's proven that through his first two seasons with Laval, posting 83 points in 118 games. Combine that with Evans' ability to play both center and the wing and you have a nice bottom-six option on your hands.

**Noah Juulsen (D, 6'3, 191 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {26<sup>th</sup> overall} 2015):** Given Montreal's horrible luck with several of their recent first-round picks, it should not have come as a surprise that Juulsen is one of the few top-30 picks from the vaunted 2015 class who has yet to live up to expectations. Juulsen was eventually claimed off waivers by Florida this offseason but still has a ways to go in his development, with being healthy the priority. A big defenseman who understood the game and was capable in his own end, Juulsen played just 91 AHL games (21 with Montreal) over the course of the past three seasons.

**Ryan Poehling (C, 6'2, 204 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {25<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Poehling burst on the scene in the finale of the 2018-19 season, posting a hat trick in his first NHL game. Oddly enough, Montreal never seemed to give him a realistic chance this past season. He played 27 games with the Habs, posting just one goal and one assist. Poehling's long-term offensive upside may be somewhat limited but he's clearly ready for NHL duty. The fact Montreal did not entrust him with a significant role this past season despite their depth issues was somewhat concerning. Now with the parent club winning, there seems to be little reason to consider Poehling anything but a minor-leaguer who may or may not be summoned as a fill-in.

**Cayden Primeau (G, 6'3, 200 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {199<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Primeau was named to the AHL All-Rookie Team in his first professional season after posting a 2.45 GAA and .908 save percentage in 45 games for Laval. Primeau is big, calm, and athletic, and clearly projects as the heir apparent to Carey Price in Montreal. In fact, Primeau split his two NHL starts last season, with the win being a 35-save effort in a win over Ottawa on Dec. 11, 2019. The decision to acquire veteran backup Jake Allen in the offseason means the Habs are more serious about playoff contention, so expect Primeau and veteran Charlie Lindgren to shuffle between the taxi squad and Laval throughout the season.

**Jan Mysak (C/W, 5'11, 175 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {48<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** A lot of hype surrounded Mysak heading into the 2020 draft season thanks to his impressive Extraliga production against men the campaign prior. But he slipped into the middle of Round 2, and the reality is that he did not put forth the kind of wire-to-wire effort we've seen from other notable Czech prospects such as Martin Necas, Filip Chytil, and Filip Zadina — all recent first-round picks of whom are currently NHL regulars. Mysak spent half of last season with the OHL's Hamilton Bulldogs so this isn't his first foray into North American hockey. He can play center or wing and boasts a plus-plus shot in addition to being an effective penalty killer.

# Chicago Wolves (Nashville Predators)

\*Nashville's affiliate in Milwaukee opted out of the 2020-21 season. Their prospects will play in Chicago.

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**Jeremy Davies (D, 5'11, 187 pounds, acquired: trade with New Jersey):** Davies was acquired from the Devils in the P.K. Subban trade. He doesn't possess any dynamic physical traits but he's a smart player and solid puck-mover who spent most of his time at Northeastern as their power-play quarterback. I could see him as a sixth or seventh defenseman for an NHL club but for now he should be talented enough to share top-four minutes with Chicago's deep combined roster. Last year, the 24-year-old Quebec native had four goals and 24 assists for the Admirals, which under Davies' watch operated the AHL's second-best power play.

**Connor Ingram (G, 6'1, 200 pounds, acquired: trade with Tampa Bay):** Ingram was hands down one of the best goaltenders in the AHL last season, posting a 21-5-6 record along with a 1.92 GAA and .933 save percentage for the Admirals. It was quite a bounce back for a guy who spent a good portion of the 2018-19 season in the ECHL. I could see Ingram as the long-term backup to Juuse Saros if Pekka Rinne retires when his contract expires following this coming season. Ingram's 2020-21 campaign, however, has yet to take off. He spent the offseason in Sweden with Bjorkloven of the Allsvenskan, posting a 5-4-0 mark and .898 save percentage. Ingram is now in the NHL's Player Assistance program for personal reasons and is unavailable until further notice.

**Rem Pitlick (C, 5'11, 202 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {76<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Pitlick was one of the AHL's more productive rookies this past season, finishing with 20 goals in 63 games. He's not particularly quick and I'm not convinced he will be able to generate consistent offense at the NHL level but he's a legitimate prospect worthy of a look or two this season. Pitlick is once again playing like a difference maker, scoring three goals in his first three games for the Chicago Wolves.

**Eeli Tolvanen (LW, 5'11, 181 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {30<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Tolvanen 'was a top-five prospect in the league a couple years ago, only to see his stock totally crater as he bounced around from league to league. He's a pure sniper, plain and simple — Tolvanen is an elite goal scorer with a blistering shot. The knocks on him have varied from skating to defensive play, but Tolvanen when engaged can be an effective player both on and off the puck. He dominated the KHL the year after he was drafted and scored 36 goals in 121 games since joining Milwaukee. Last season was Tolvanen's first taste of the NHL, scoring a goal in four games. He played for Jokerit in his native Finland during the offseason (5 goals and 13 points in 25 games) and is once again back with the Predators with a goal in four additional matches.

**Frederic Allard (D, 6'1, 189 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {78<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Much like most of Nashville's defense prospects, Allard has been stuck behind a significant logjam and has therefore been forced to spend three full seasons with Milwaukee, where he's averaged close to 25 points per campaign. He had a stellar career with the QMJHL's Chicoutimi Saguenéens, finishing as one of the league's top scoring defensemen in each of his last two seasons. It's doubtful Allard will play in North America in 2020-21, however, as he currently is on loan to Austria's EC VSV, where Allard has recorded four goals and nine assists in 25 games.

**Phil Tomasino (C/W, 6'0, 183 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {24<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** The speedy Tomasino was one of Team Canada's better forwards at the recent under-20 world junior hockey championship and is the most promising forward in Nashville's farm system. He was drafted 24th overall in the 2019 draft after an excellent season with the OHL's Niagara Ice Dogs. He was traded to Oshawa midway through the season and still finished with a combined 40 goals and 100 points prior to the shutdown. Tomasino, who can play center or wing, was one of Nashville's top players at their 2019 prospect tournament and is off to a fast start with Chicago, scoring two goals and adding three assists in only four games.

# Binghamton Devils (New Jersey Devils)

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**Jesper Boqvist (LW, 6'0, 180 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {36<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Boqvist spent more time in New Jersey this past season (35 games) than in Binghamton (19 games). He was inconsistent, as one would expect a 21-year-old first year North American professional to be. Boqvist's offensive ceiling is among the highest in the system and I expect a significant step forward this coming season. Again, he was one of Sweden's top teenage players from two seasons ago and plays with a lot of pace and won't shy away from physical encounters. Boqvist once had a reputation for being a perimeter player but he has since carried his developing inside play over from Sweden to both the AHL and NHL.

**Janne Kuokkanen (LW, 6'1, 190 pounds, acquired: Trade with CAR):** Seemingly locked out of a role in a deep Carolina team, Kuokkanen was shipped to New Jersey in the deal that sent Sami Vatanen to the Hurricanes. Kuokkanen is a winger by trade but can play center if necessary. Drafted 43<sup>rd</sup> overall by the Canes in 2016, Kuokkanen proved to be one of the AHL's better young forwards in each of his three full seasons with Charlotte (120 points in 160 games). Kuokkanen went back to his native Finland during the stoppage but returned for an impressive showing at the Devils' training camp. He's now an NHL regular with upstart New Jersey, where he's appeared in all nine games and notched a goal and two assists through Tuesday.

**Mikhail Maltsev (LW, 6'3, 221 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {102<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2016):** If you want an idea of Maltsev's hands, go to YouTube and check out the goal he scored against the Rangers in the preseason last year. Then keep in mind he's 6'3 and well over 220 pounds. There are some consistency issues to work through here but Maltsev is just 22 years old, which is why he had such a tough time cracking a veteran-laden SKA roster in the KHL. His first season with Binghamton was successful, as he finished ninth in team scoring with 11 goal and 21 points in 49 games. Maltsev is both physical and a strong penalty killer, and he should be one of New Jersey's more frequent travelers between Binghamton and Newark.

**Nick Merkley (RW, 5'11, 192 pounds, acquired: Trade with ARI):** A first-round pick of the Coyotes in 2015, Merkley had worn out his welcome in Arizona and essentially was the third piece sent back to the Devils in the Taylor Hall deal. Merkley has had all sorts of problems staying healthy but he's young (23), cheap, and has always put up numbers at the AHL level. Last season, the diminutive scoring winger combined for 35 points in 53 games between Tucson and Binghamton and later appeared in four games with the Devils (1 goal, 1 assist). Merkley spent about 20 games with Assat in Finland this offseason before heading back to North America to make the Devils out of training camp and appear in several games.

**Fabian Zetterlund (C, 5'11, 218 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {63<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2017):** Zetterlund came to the Devils with the reputation of a shoot-first winger but he's developed into a more well-rounded prospect. His first AHL campaign (eight goals, 19 points in 46 games) was promising considering he played the entire season at age 20. Zetterlund returned to Sweden following the pause and posted four goals and 10 points in 21 games for AIK in the Allsvenskan. The slew of graduations from Binghamton should open the door for Zetterlund to have a bigger role this year and possibly see his first taste of NHL action.

**Nolan Foote (LW, 6'4, 201 pounds, acquired: Trade with Tampa Bay):** A power winger with a deadly shot, Foote was Tampa's first-round pick in 2019 before he was shipped to New Jersey last February. He's finally old enough to play in the AHL after four successful seasons with the WHL's Kelowna Rockets, but he increased his reputation by helping Canada win gold at the 2020 under-20 world junior hockey championship. His father Adam was a Stanley Cup-winning defenseman with Colorado and is he also is the younger brother of Tampa defenseman Cal Foote. Nolan dealt with a nagging lower-body injury last season but is now healthy and talented enough to be one of Binghamton's possession drivers.

# Bridgeport Sound Tigers (NY Islanders)

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**Kieffer Bellows (LW, 6'1, 195 pounds, acquired: 1st Rd. {16th overall} 2016):** Bellows led the team with 22 goals in 52 games. He started very slowly, with just one goal in his first 19 games, before a streak in which he tallied at least once in 10 of the next 13 games. Bellows is a pure sniper who figures to need a creative center to get him the puck for him to maximize his potential. On paper, he looks like a great fit alongside Mathew Barzal. Bellows, however, isn't the type of player to create his own offense. He had a strong training camp and made the Islanders' 2020-21 team, albeit on the extended "taxi" squad.

**Simon Holmstrom (RW, 6'1, 183 pounds, acquired: 1st Rd {23rd overall} 2019):** Holmstrom was a surprise selection at No. 23 overall in 2019 and the Islanders immediately stuck him in Bridgeport. The numbers (eight goals, 15 points in 46 games) were underwhelming but Holmstrom was one of the youngest players in the league. He had also played very little hockey in his draft year due to injury. Holmstrom, who played for Sweden at the 2021 under-20 world junior hockey championship, is a long-term upside play.

**Otto Koivula (LW/C, 6'4, 225 pounds, acquired: 4th Rd {120th overall} 2016):** Koivula has spent much of his career on left wing, but the Islanders recently decided to give him a look at center. It appears to be an odd fit, given the biggest hole in Koivula's game is a distinct lack of foot speed. He's a massive kid but projects as more of an offensive threat than role player. He played 12 NHL games in 2019-20 and failed to record a point.

**Jakub Skarek (G, 6'4, 203 pounds, acquired: 3rd Rd {72nd overall} 2018):** Skarek split his first North American season between Bridgeport and Worcester of the ECHL. His numbers with the Sound Tigers (3.27 GAA, .888 save percentage in 16 games) were ugly but he's better than those statistics would suggest. Skarek remains a legitimate prospect despite the rough season and earned a spot on the taxi squad.

**Oliver Wahlstrom (RW, 6'2, 209 pounds, acquired: 1st Rd {11th overall} 2018):** Wahlstrom's first AHL season was up and down. He managed 10 goals in 45 games, a reasonable number for a kid who played the entire season at age 19. Wahlstrom's ceiling is that of a perennial 30-goal scorer at the NHL level but he needs to work on his consistency. Like Bellows, Wahlstrom made the team's taxi squad out of training camp and has already appeared in NHL action.

**Bode Wilde (D, 6'4, 200 pounds, acquired: 2nd Rd {41st overall} 2018):** Wilde's 'season got off to a late start due to a high-ankle sprain. He returned in mid-November and played 20 games for Bridgeport (zero goals, two assists) before being reassigned to OHL Saginaw. Wilde is an offensive defenseman, but he's not Quinn Hughes or Cale Makar and his decision making with the puck has always been iffy. He has NHL-caliber traits, but I would place the odds of him becoming a productive pro at far less than 50/50 right now.

**A.J. Greer (LW, 6'3, 203 pounds, acquired: Trade with Colorado):** A former second-round pick of Colorado in the 2015 NHL draft, Greer is a punishing power forward with size who produced consecutive productive AHL seasons with the Colorado Eagles before he was traded to the Islanders for Kyle Burroughs on Oct. 11. Although the Islanders have depth for days on the flanks at both the NHL and AHL levels, Greer is getting a fresh start with an organization that desires physical play from its forwards. With both Kieffer Bellows and Oliver Wahlstrom both up with the Islanders, it's reasonable to believe that Greer will be a key cog in Bridgeport's attack.

# Hartford Wolf Pack (NY Rangers)

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**Tim Gettinger (LW, 6'6, 218 pounds, acquired: 5<sup>th</sup> Rd {141<sup>st</sup> overall} 2016):** Gettinger is a massive man, but he's more of a scorer than a grinder and his game appears ill-suited to fill a bottom-six role at the NHL level. He doesn't skate all that well and has the look of an up-and-down guy.

**Libor Hajek (D, 6'2, 203 pounds, acquired: Trade with TB):** Hajek was the "main" piece of the trade that sent Ryan McDonagh and J.T. Miller to the Lightning. Hajek is built like a tank but his decision-making with the puck has been questionable at times and he was never projected to generate much offense as a pro. I'm hesitant to give up on him but he's clearly been passed by the likes of Ryan Lindgren and K'Andre Miller on the LHD depth chart. Plus, prospects like Zac Jones and Matthew Robertson are on the way. Although Hajek would appear to be a possible candidate for Seattle in the upcoming expansion draft, the Rangers' current struggles on defense and pending trade of Tony DeAngelo could open the door for Hajek to give his stock a boost.

**Adam Huska (G, 6'4, 218 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {184<sup>th</sup> overall} 2015):** Huska is a legitimate prospect and that alone is a great return for any seventh-rounder. He just finished his first pro season with Hartford, posting a 3.03 GAA and .894 save percentage in 28 games. Huska's greatest attribute is his size. Truth be told, there's an outside chance he could develop into an NHL backup but Huska figures to split AHL time with the recently-signed Tyler Wall. One thing to consider is New York's current goalie struggles, which could hasten an NHL promotion.

**Vitali Kravtsov (RW, 6'3, 189 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {9<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Kravtsov didn't have a very good first AHL season (15 points in 39 games) but he played considerably better after a brief return to the KHL. With fellow winger Kaapo Kakko having graduated, Kravtsov is by far the most talented prospect in the NYR system. Players with Kravtsov's offensive skill set are extremely hard to find and the Rangers need to be patient with him, but the good news is that he's having another quality season in Russia. The only hurdle for the Rangers regarding Kravtsov is that he is yet again playing in the KHL and won't be available until much later in the season.

**Darren Raddysh (D, 6'1, 200 pounds, acquired: Trade with CHI):** Raddysh has completely remade his game since his time as a point-producing rearguard who ate minutes with the OHL's Erie Otters alongside notable forwards Connor McDavid, Dylan Strome and Alex DeBrincat. Raddysh is more of a shutdown, penalty-killing type at this stage of his development, and although he turns 25 in February, he's been serviceable for the organization as a minor league. Raddysh may never become an NHL regular but given the chance, he may fare well as a sixth or seventh defenseman. He is a character player who deserved his qualifying offer from the Rangers.

**Yegor Rykov (D, 6'2, 210 pounds, acquired: Trade with NJ):** The Rangers worked hard to get Rykov to leave the KHL and it all fell apart from the get-go — he suffered an ankle injury in the Traverse City prospects tournament and inconsistency made him a healthy scratch later in the season. His contract contains a European out clause, and he's once again playing in Russia with CSKA (nine assists in 43 games). Rykov turns 24 in April and it's doubtful we ever see him in North America again.

**Igor Shestyorkin (G, 6'2, 182 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {118<sup>th</sup> overall} 2014):** Although he's never going to play another game in the AHL unless it's on a rehab assignment, Shestyorkin's AHL performance last year played a significant role in his becoming the heir apparent in net to future Hockey Hall-of-Famer Henrik Lundqvist. He played 25 games with the Wolf Pack last season (his first in North America), posting a stellar 1.90 GAA and .934 save percentage. The Rangers had no room for him to play but they essentially mothballed Lundqvist last January and gave Shestyorkin the No. 1 job. He was brilliant (2.52 GAA, .932 save percentage in 12 NHL games) and should be New York's primary starter for years to come. Shestyorkin is uber-athletic and projects as a perennial Vezina Trophy candidate.

**Braden Schneider (RHD, 6'2, 202 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {19<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** A heat-seeking missile who patrols the back end with quickness and lethality, Schneider was drafted 19th overall by the Rangers in 2020, and they had to trade up to grab him. He had several impressive showings at the 2021 world juniors, and even his one-game suspension for a massive open-ice hit in the preliminary round pays tribute to Schneider's coveted intimidation factor. He turned 19 in September and already completed three full WHL seasons with the Brandon Wheat Kings. Schneider appeared in two games (1 assist) or the Wolf Pack before returning to the WHL.



# Belleville Senators (Ottawa Senators)

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**Vitaly Abramov (RW, 5'10, 180 pounds, acquired: Trade with CBJ):** Abramov is a former QMJHL scoring champion and MVP who finally found his footing in his second pro season. Drafted 65th overall by Columbus in 2016 but later traded to Ottawa in the Matt Duchene deal, Abramov finished with 18 goals and 41 points in 51 games for Belleville a season ago, in addition to scoring a goal in his two NHL games with Ottawa. Abramov is on the smallish side but he is a talented offensive player who probably deserves a full-time look at the NHL level, albeit on a rebuilding team like the Sens. He was injured playing in Europe during the offseason and is now a non-roster player during his rehabilitation.

**Drake Batherson (RW, 6'3, 197 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {121<sup>st</sup> overall} 2017):** Batherson has been an AHL All-Star each of his first two pro seasons and on occasion has distinguished himself in the NHL. He was one of the AHL's best players in 2019-20, posting 54 points in 44 games. He also tallied 10 points in 23 games with Ottawa. A well-rounded forward who possess a nice mix of both skill and grit, Batherson has quickly developed into one of Ottawa's most coveted assets. He made Ottawa's squad out of training camp and has appeared in all 10 games through Tuesday, notching a goal and four assists while averaging nearly 17 minutes a games.

**Erik Brannstrom (D, 5'9, 181 pounds, acquired: Trade with LV):** The key piece of the trade that sent Mark Stone to Vegas, opinions on Brannstrom tend to be all over the map. I fall somewhere in the middle. Selected 15th overall by the Golden Knights in 2017, Brannstrom lacks size and while talented, the dynamism he's shown at the junior and AHL levels has been missing during his 33 NHL games. He was expected to play in a bottom-pairing role this season but was forced into a month-long quarantine after returning from his offseason stint with Lagnau in Switzerland (eight points in 10 games). He's set to go as of today, and it's just a matter of time until the struggling Senators put him into the lineup, especially since Belleville's season is delayed further because of COVID.

**Logan Brown, (C, 6'6, 228 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {11<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Ottawa's handling of Brown has been nothing short of baffling for a variety of reasons. The Sens seem to have no real interest in giving him a significant role on a team riddled with scoring problems, yet Brown has down nothing but produce since he was drafted nearly five years ago. He's put up points with Belleville in each of his two combined season (70 points in 81 games) and showed flashes of promise last season during his 23 games with the big club (1 goal, 7 assists). Brown has consistency issues to work through like most young players and injuries have been frequent, but most rebuilding teams tend to provide plenty of opportunities for a 6'6 former first-rounder with an above-average offense skill set. Through Tuesday, Brown has yet to appear in a single game this season, based mostly on the veteran acquisitions the Sens made this past offseason.

**Jonathan Davidsson (RW, 5'11, 185 pounds, acquired: Trade with CBJ):** A former sixth-rounder of Columbus in 2016 who was part of the Matt Duchene deal, Davidsson makes for solid organizational depth. He might be nothing more than an up-and-down guy but players like that have value in today's salary cap era. His first season in North America was rather uneventful from a production standpoint — Davidsson struggled to adapt to the AHL's speed and physicality and barely played during a six-game stint with the Sens in the fall of 2019. To be fair, Ottawa is loaded at every position from a prospect standpoint and it appears as he's already been identified as a potential checker rather than the top-six scoring winger he was in Sweden. He went back to his homeland during the shutdown to play for Vasterviks in the second-tier Allsvenskan, where he notched a goal and three assists in 10 games before returning for to North America for camp.

**Alex Formenton (LW, 6'3, 190 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {47<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Formenton 'was far more effective offensively in his first full AHL campaign than I would have predicted. He was named to the All-Rookie Team after posting 27 goals and 53 points in 61 games. He's a true burner and has a high floor because of his wheels but I may have underrated his overall scoring touch. Formenton also plays a tough, physical brand of hockey that was expected to endear him to Ottawa's coaching staff during training camp, but he surprisingly was left off roster and is now awaiting Belleville's season to start. Surprisingly, Formenton has not played in an NHL game since Nov. 1 of 2018.

# Belleville Senators (Ottawa Senators)

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**Filip Gustavsson (G, 6'2, 182 pounds, acquired: Trade with PIT):** Once viewed as one of the better goaltending prospects in the league, Gustavsson's stock has bottomed out. He's played 62 AHL games over parts of the past three seasons, posting a 3.28 GAA and .891 save percentage. I'm hesitant to completely give up on him but Gustavsson is clearly trending in the wrong direction. He's expected to share Belleville's netminding duties with 2018 sixth-round pick Kevin Mandolese now that Joel Daccord is on Ottawa's taxi squad. Gustavsson spent the offseason in Sweden, where he posted an 11-7-0 mark and was sixth in the league with a .919 save percentage for Sodertalje in the Allsvenskan.

**Josh Norris (C, 6'2, 190 pounds, acquired: Trade with SJ):** Norris came over from San Jose in the Erik Karlsson deal and showed more in his one year in the Ottawa organization than at any point in his brief time as a Sharks property. Norris' unexpected offensive explosion in his first AHL campaign resulted in him league all AHL rookies in both goals (31) and points (61). A product of the U.S. NTDP and the Michigan Wolverines, Norris already is an NHL regular for the Sens, recording six points in his first 10 games and averaging 16:01 a game.

# Lehigh Valley Phantoms (Philadelphia Flyers)

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**Nicolas Aube-Kubel (RW, 5'11, 204 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {48<sup>th</sup> overall} 2014):** Aube-Kubel appears to have established himself as an NHL regular after four years in the Philadelphia system. He brings plenty of grit and an underrated amount of skill which should help him remain a productive bottom-six option for the Flyers for years to come. Thus far, he's posted a goal and two assists in 10 games for Philadelphia after he registered eight points in 26 games for Lehigh Valley last season.

**Morgan Frost (C, 6'0, 180 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {27<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Frost turned pro in 2019-20, playing in 20 games for Philadelphia (seven points) and 41 games for Lehigh Valley (29 points) after being one of the top junior scorers in Canada. It was an extremely productive year for a kid who played the entire 2019-20 hockey season as a 20-year-old. Frost is one of the most gifted offensive prospects in the entire league. With Sean Couturier and Kevin Hayes already on board, the Flyers have the luxury of breaking Frost in as a depth-line center role while giving him considerable power-play time. He made the club out of camp and appeared in two games (zero points) but is out indefinitely with a dislocated shoulder

**Isaac Ratcliffe (LW, 6'5, 203 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {35<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** This linebacker on skates potted 50 goals in 65 games in his final OHL season but scored just six times in 53 contests as an AHL rookie. Although struggles are common in the transition period from major junior to an adult-age league, Ratcliffe's inability to score with consistency certainly put his junior numbers in perspective. Ratcliffe's size alone make him a highly intriguing prospect but his stock is down considerably from this point a year ago. He made the Flyers' taxi squad out of camp but missed a month with a fractured rib. The good news is that Ratcliffe already is skating again and should be considered a top-liner for Lehigh Valley once he's healthy.

**German Rubtsov (C, 6'0, 190 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {22<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2016):** Making his AHL debut in 2018-19, Rubtsov posted four goals and 10 points in his first 14 games with Lehigh Valley before he was injured and missed the rest of the year. He spent the entirety of the 2019-20 campaign in the AHL as well, posting just two goals and 13 points in 43 games. I have a difficult time seeing him as anything more than a fourth-liner or extra guy at this point. He was loaned to Sochi in the KHL (11 points in 43 games) where he's one of the younger players on a terrible squad, so like many other Russian prospects may stay there until his team is eliminated from the playoffs.

**Matthew Strome (LW, 6'4, 210 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {106<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Whenever I see Strome, he reminds me of former Arizona (then Phoenix) first-rounder Henrik Samuelsson. They're both players with excellent size and at least an average offensive skill set, but both are well below-average skaters, and that figures to keep Strome from becoming an NHL player. He split this past year – his first as a pro – between the AHL and ECHL and I expect that to continue moving forward. Strome did not make the Flyers out of camp but he remains with the organization and is awaiting his AHL season to start.

**Mikhail Vorobyov (C, 6'2, 206 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {104<sup>th</sup> overall} 2015):** Vorobyov has always played well for Lehigh Valley the past few years but disappointed in the rare instances in which he was given time with the Flyers. He has just two goals and five points in 35 career NHL games, and elected to head back to the KHL this summer, where he was playing with UFA before blowing out his ACL in late December.

**Egor Zamula (LHD, 6'3, 177 pounds, acquired: Undrafted Free Agent):** There are a bunch of Flyers' prospects to lock onto for this upcoming AHL season, but Zamula is near the top of a competitive list of NHL-ready neophytes. A big bomber with size who starred for the WHL's Calgary Hitmen, Zamula was an undrafted free-agent signee who can move well, distribute the puck cleanly, and lock things down in his own end. He turns 21 on March 30.

# WB/Scranton Penguins (Pittsburgh Penguins)

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**Jordy Bellerive (C, 5'11, 194 pounds, acquired: signed as free agent):** Bellerive was a big-time scorer with the WHL's Lethbridge Hurricanes but is simply one of the better AHL prospects in arguably the league's thinnest farm systems. His first full season as a pro delivered moments of promise but his production (12 goals and 22 points in 53 games) was more than acceptable on a team that struggled to score. Bellerive likely gets the long-term development treatment that most Pens' forward prospects get before they get to the Steel City, but once must consider that he was added to the organization under Jim Rutherford, who left his post last week.

**Pierre-Olivier Joseph (D, 6'2, 161 pounds, acquired: Trade with Arizona):** One of the few remaining blue-chip prospects in Pittsburgh's shallow pool made quite the impression in training camp to not only make the Penguins but also play a regular shift. Joseph, who was Arizona's first-round pick in 2017 and later traded to the Pens in the Phil Kessel deal, already has four assists in six games for the Pens and posted back-to-back games with at least 25 minutes of ice time.

**Jonathan Gruden (W/C, 6'0, 170 pounds, acquired: Trade with Ottawa):** Acquired from Ottawa in the Matt Murray trade, Gruden was a creative top-six center with the U.S. National Team Development Program who Ottawa selected in the fourth round of the 2018 draft. He spent a season in college with Miami University before moving to the OHL for the 2019-20 season and finished with 30 goals and 66 points in 59 games for a deep London Knights roster. He used to be considered as a pass-first type but playing in the run-and-gun OHL showcased Gruden's shot and ability to finish around the net.

**Felix Robert (W/C, 5'9, 180 pounds, acquired: Undrafted Free Agent):** One of the top QMJHL scorers a season ago (36 goals, 56 assists), Robert is one of the few skilled players within Pittsburgh's system who is under 25 years of age. He's also a noted power-play specialist – Robert's 39 power-play points for Sherbrooke ranked second in the QMJHL only to top 2020 draft pick Alexis Lafreniere. The numbers say Robert is a flashy offensive player but he also contributes beyond point production as his 61.8 faceoff success rate was the highest among all QMJHL centers who took 850 draws or more. The Penguins obviously did their homework on Robert since he centered Sherbrooke's top line with Pittsburgh 2019 first-rounder Samuel Poulin on his flank. Robert may not be the biggest or fastest center but he has exceptional balance and a soft set of hands.

# Utica Comets (St. Louis Blues)

\*St. Louis's affiliate in San Antonio opted out of the 2020-21 season. Their prospects will play in Utica.

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**Ville Husso (G, 6'2, 205 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {94<sup>th</sup> overall} 2014):** This will be Husso's fifth season in North America and he finally secured a job in the NHL as Jordan Binnington's backup. There certainly have been plenty of ups and downs along the way, but Husso's numbers in the AHL last season — 2.56 goals against average, .909 save percentage, and four shutouts — proved to be enough for the Blues to trade Jake Allen to Montreal in the offseason. The decision hasn't bore the desired results, however, as Husso has posted a 1-2-0 mark and paltry .870 save percentage in his first four NHL appearances.

**Klim Kostin (RW, 6'3, 212 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {31<sup>st</sup> overall} 2017):** Kostin 'was a highly-regarded draft prospect coming out of Russia in 2017 but opted for the less-conventional route by skipping the KHL to serve as an understudy in the AHL. He improved in each of his last two seasons with San Antonio, and last season was one of their top players, scoring 13 goals and adding 17 assists in 48 games. That was enough for the Blues to give him a four-game look, and the bruising power winger even scored his first NHL goal. Kostin finally got his chance to play in the KHL following the shutdown, however, and it looks like he'll remain there until his season is complete. Through Thursday, Kostin has 17 points (6 goals, 11 assists) in 38 games for Omsk but has been red hot of late.

**Tyler Tucker (LHD, 6'1, 205 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {200<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Tucker is a physical two-way defenseman who can deliver massive hits and hammer the puck with authority. He was drafted in the seventh round in 2018 but since that time had established himself as one of the OHL's most feared blueliners. He was a team leader for the Barrie Colts and last season was traded to Flint, where he finished the season with 17 goals and 56 points. It might take him a season or two to find his offense as a rookie AHL'er, but Tucker isn't the type to get intimidated or humbled by his surroundings. Look for him to make statement hits early into his rookie season.

# San Jose Barracuda (San Jose Sharks)

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**Joachim Blichfeld (RW, 6'2, 180 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {210<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Blichfeld has won a WHL MVP award and an AHL All-Star (16 goals, 32 points in 44 games) since being the 210<sup>th</sup> overall pick in 2016. I'm not convinced it's going to translate to NHL production, but he's already outperformed even the most optimistic expectations and even earned a three-game promotion with the Sharks. Blichfeld is only 22 and owns one of the nastiest shot-release combinations you'll find, but he needs to improve his play off the puck.

**Ivan Chekhovich (LW, 5'10, 180 pounds, acquired: 7<sup>th</sup> Rd {212<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** The Sharks have had a thin prospect pool for many years that forced them to rely on late round picks like Chekhovich to develop into potential NHL players. Although the Russian played well in brief periods with the Barracuda, his first full AHL season was rather nondescript (4 goals, 12 points in 42 games). He has since rebounded to post 14 goals and 31 points in 38 games while on loan to Nizhny Novgorod in the KHL where he's likely to remain for the rest of the season. I'm interested to see if Chekhovich can carry that production over to the AHL's smaller ice surfaces.

**Sasha Chmelevski (C, 6'0, 185 pounds, acquired: 6<sup>th</sup> Rd {185<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** I thought there was a pretty decent chance Chmelevski would have played NHL games last season, but it didn't end up happening. He acquitted himself extremely well in his first AHL campaign, posting 27 points in 42 games. Chmelevski is an ideal middle-six center with the ability to slide up in the lineup should injuries strike. I remain a believer and think he's an NHL regular, and it appears as if the Sharks wanted to give him a longer look by adding him to the taxi squad after training camp. Chmelevski played in his first NHL game in a win over the Ducks on Feb. 5 and picked up an assist in 6:11 of ice time.

**Max Letunov (C, 6'4, 180 pounds, acquired: Trade with St. Louis):** I've been higher on Letunov than most anyone since his days in the Blues system and he's starting to put it all together. He was the Barracuda's leading scorer a season ago (40 points in 50 games) and tallied his first NHL goal in a brief four-game trial with the Sharks. Many feel the organization would be wise to commit to a full rebuild and give guys like Letunov regular playing time, but they aren't going that route this season.

**Ryan Merkley (RHD, 5'11, 175 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {21<sup>st</sup> overall} 2018):** One of the most gifted puck movers we've seen coming out of the Ontario Hockey League, Merkley seems to have shed his label as a problem child by delivering a strong season with the London Knights and head coach Dale Hunter. His 61 assists led all defenseman and he placed second in scoring with 76 points, but it was Merkley's improvement in his own end that has some of his harshest critics upgrade their opinions on his potential. This will be Merkley's first full AHL season after appearing in six games (zero points) in 2019-20.

**Ozzy Wiesblatt (RW, 5'10, 185 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {31<sup>st</sup> overall} 2020):** A prolific scoring winger with top-end speed who is one of the more dangerous prospects off the rush, Wiesblatt was selected 31<sup>st</sup> overall by the Sharks after a 70-point season with the WHL's Prince Albert Raiders. He won't be handed a top-six role immediately but his hard work and ability to create his own scoring chances should make his case stronger on a game-to-game basis.

# Syracuse Crunch (Tampa Bay Lightning)

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**Alex Barre-Boulet (C, 5'9, 172 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** The Lightning are arguably the top organization in the NHL for a multitude of reasons, and one of them is their ability to identify and acquire players who slipped through the cracks. Barre-Boulet – who was originally undrafted (somehow) – is a perfectly example of that. A former QMJHL scoring star, ABB has posted 61 goals and 124 points over the course of his first two AHL seasons. I am entirely confident he could fill a top-nine role for Tampa Bay right now and he may very well get the chance given how close to the salary cap the Lightning project to be in 2020-21.

**Cal Foote (D, 6'4, 220 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {14<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Foote may not project to be a Norris-caliber rearguard, but he won't have to be with the Lightning when you consider the depth they have at the position. He has size, smarts, and offensive abilities that tend to be a bit underrated. Now that he's made the team and is solidifying his role as a rookie depth defender, I expect Lightning head coach Jon Cooper to deploy Foote properly so that he can develop into an NHL asset for the contending club in short order.

**Boris Katchouk (LW, 6'2, 204 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {44<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Katchouk is a big-bodied winger with a nice set of hands. As is, he's probably nothing more than roster depth for a loaded Tampa Bay team but I'd be interested in seeing if there was a bit more meat on the bone had he come up with another organization. Katchouk scored 14 goals in 60 games for Syracuse this past season and I think he could hit double digits at the NHL level in the right circumstance. I'm not sure he'll get the chance.

**Taylor Raddysh (RW, 6'3, 205 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {58<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** I had high, high hopes for Raddysh following his brilliant OHL career, but a lack of foot speed has exposed some of his weaknesses. He's still a solid player who has an outside shot at developing into an NHL regular, but I expected more. Raddysh had 35 points in 62 games this past season, his second with Syracuse.

**Alexander Volkov (LW, 6'1, 185 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {48<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Volkov, Raddysh and Katchouk were all former second round picks and it has reached the point in which Volkov is probably the best bet of the group moving forward. Volkov isn't Anthony Cirelli or even Mitchell Stephens but I think he possesses the all-around skill set to play up and down a lineup while not hurting his club defensively. Guys like this are invaluable to a team up against the cap.

**Ross Colton (C, 6'0, 202 pounds, acquired: 4<sup>th</sup> Rd {118<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Colton through most of last season had the plum job of being flanked by the aforementioned Katchouk and Raddysh, but he is a critical possession diver who can execute precision cycles and give-and-goes, and his ability to slip away from coverage undetected allows him to bring his excellent shot to bear. An NCAA standout with the Vermont Catamounts who was selected in Round 4 in the 2016 draft, Colton already has two full AHL seasons under his belt, and his play at the AHL level is another example of him distinguishing himself among his peers.

# Utica Comets (Vancouver Canucks)

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**Michael DiPietro (G, 6'0, 200 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {64<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** DiPietro started one game for Vancouver this season as a 19-year-old under emergency conditions. He was torched by the Sharks in that contest but that doesn't impact what was otherwise an excellent season for the former Windsor (OHL) star. DiPietro played 36 games for Utica, posting a 2.79 GAA and .908 save percentage. He doesn't have the size of most of today's goaltenders but he's the ultimate competitor and has a very bright future.

**Jonah Gadjovich (LW, 6'2, 209 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {55<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Gadjovich's second season with Utica (17 points in 38 games) was far better than his first (10 points in 43 games) but that's a low bar to clear. Gadjovich has long been viewed as a physically-mature prospect who can play physical and impact shifts with reliable board work. His ceiling is limited due to below-average mobility and quickness, but I expected much more of an immediate impact given his size. A bottom-six role would be a best-case scenario at this point but he should be a focal point on Utica's power play.

**Olli Juolevi (D, 6'3, 198 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {5<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** The fifth-overall pick in the 2016 draft, Juolevi finally made his NHL debut in the playoffs this season and parlayed that into an longer look to start the 2020-21 campaign. He's dealt with multiple injury issues in the past but is finally healthy, and he did enough in camp to win a job over several quality peers. I seriously doubt he will ever provide the value of a top-five selection, and he's already at the point where the best you may ever get is a mobile second-pairing defender. Vancouver's acquisition of Nate Schmidt impacted Juolevi to the point where he can't go higher than being a No. 5 or No. 6, and first career goal notwithstanding, Juolevi's overall play has been beyond adventurous.

**Kole Lind (RW, 6'1, 186 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {33<sup>rd</sup> overall} 2017):** People were quick to write Lind off following his dreadful (17 points in 51 games) first pro season, but he rebounded in a major way (14 goals, 44 points in 61 games) this past year. Lind has decent enough size and will go to the difficult areas of the ice to make a play. He'll start this coming season in the minors after not making the taxi squad but he's a dark horse to play a significant amount of NHL games in 2020-21.

**Brogan Rafferty (D, 6'2, 195 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** Had this past season been completed as scheduled, Rafferty would have been a legitimate contender for the Eddie Shore Award as AHL Defenseman of the Year. His 45 points in 57 games placed him third among all AHL rearguards in scoring. Rafferty is 25 years old and played three years of college hockey at Quinnipiac, so he has nothing left to learn in the minors. Vancouver should shop him if they don't plan on giving him a full-time role in 2020-21, but the rough shape their defense is in likely means Rafferty will move up from the taxi squad at some point. Right-handed offensive defensemen on entry-level deals are difficult to find. Rafferty would undoubtedly have a reasonable amount of trade value.

**Jett Woo (RHD 6'0, 203 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {37<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** A physical defenseman with all the traits of a reliable shut-down option to match up against top lines, Woo is coming off a solid WHL career and is trending upwards the way a high second-round pick (2018) should be expected to. He's both mobile and smart, and Woo on occasion will deliver a punishing hit without giving away much in positioning. One shouldn't be surprised if his transition to the AHL is seamless, and Vancouver's ongoing shoddy play in their own end could translate to a quicker promotion to the big club.



# Henderson Silver Knights (Vegas Golden Knights)

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**Lucas Elvenes (RW, 6'1, 173 pounds, acquired: 5<sup>th</sup> Rd {127<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Elvenes was one of the biggest risers in the prospect world last season after posting 48 points in 59 games in his first AHL campaign. It was a significant, unexpected rise in production from a kid who was a former fifth rounder and never scored much as a pro in his native Sweden. The breakout appears sustainable in my eyes, but I'd like to see another strong season before I say I'm fully committed. Elvenes is picking up right where he left off as he registered two assists in his first two games for Henderson this season.

**Nic Hague (D, 6'6, 215 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {34<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Hague began the season in the AHL, but he was essentially a regular for the Golden Knights in the later part of the season. In fact, Hague played just 21 AHL games in 2019-20 compared to 31 NHL contests. Hague was one of the OHL's most productive two-way types during his initial prospect years and his ability to create offense has translated into both the AHL and now the NHL, where Hague is yet again a Vegas regular and notched four points (1 goal, 3 assists) in only six games through Feb. 8.

**Jake Leschyshyn (C, 5'11, 191 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {62<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2017):** The son of former longtime NHL'er Curtis Leschyshyn, Jake is a smart player with limited physical gifts. He might carve out a career as a fourth-liner or an up-and-down guy, but last season he managed just four goals and eight points in 61 AHL games after five seasons in the WHL. Leschyshyn is off to a better start in 2020-21, notching a goal and an assist in his first two games.

**Jonas Rondbjerg (RW, 6-foot, 176 pounds, acquired: 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd {65<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Rondbjerg was injured in Chicago's first game of last season and never played again until last week's opener nearly a year and a half later. He was an accomplished player for Vaxjo in the SHL and opened some eyes while playing for his native Denmark at all four of the under-20 world junior tournaments he was eligible for between 2016 and 2019. I always thought Rondbjerg was a bit of an underrated prospect, and he is off to a good start in 2020-21 with a goal in his first two games for Henderson.

**Jimmy Schuldt (D, 6'1, 185 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** Schuldt signed with Vegas as an undrafted free agent following four standout seasons at St. Cloud State. He was a finalist for the Hobey Baker Award as college hockey's top player in each of his final two years with the Huskies. He also was productive (21 points in 52 games) in his first season with Chicago and even registered an assist in his lone NHL appearance that same season. Schuldt might become an NHL regular but at age 25, it would behoove Vegas to find out sooner rather than later. His \$700,00 cap hit is also attractive for a team that is constantly working near the upper limit of the salary cap. Schuldt hit the scorebooks with a goal and an assist in his first two games with Henderson.

**Dylan Coghlan (D, 6'2, 190 pounds, acquired: undrafted free agent):** An undrafted free agent who starred with the WHL's Tri-City Americans, Coghlan played each of the last two seasons with the Wolves and in that span scored more goals than any defensemen on his team. His AHL point production dropped from 40 in 66 games in 2018-19 to 24 in 60 last season, but that didn't stop Vegas from, giving him a long look in training camp this year and giving him three games of NHL action to build on. Coghlan is a very good skater and certainly leans more towards the offensive side of the ice, but his improved play off the puck has helped him earn some minutes for one of the top teams in the league.

**Peyton Krebs (C, 6'0, 187 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {17<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** Krebs is a tough-as-nails center who continues to prove any doubters wrong by mixing sharp decision making with skill and a strong work ethic. He was a top-line center for the WHL's Winnipeg Ice and was critical in Canada's dominant performance at the last under-20 world junior championship. Krebs already is putting up points in Henderson, as he's picked up a goal and four assists in his first five games. He can be a massive pest and pressure the puck relentlessly, but Krebs' should not be confused for a grinder — he likely would have been a top-10 pick in the 2019 draft had he not hurt his knee.

**Jack Dugan (LW, 6'2, 209 pounds, acquired: 5<sup>th</sup> Rd {142<sup>nd</sup> overall} 2017):** It's always a good sign when your fifth-round pick become the NCAA's leading scorer in just his sophomore campaign. And that's exactly what Dugan (10 goals, 42 assists in 34 games) accomplished for Providence College in 2019-20. Vegas wasted little time signing him to a professional contract once the college season was cancelled, and Dugan has already made an impact with Henderson, dishing out two assists in his first two matches. He has ridiculous hands and stickhandling ability, but he's more of a pass-first playmaker than a finisher.

# Hershey Bears (Washington Capitals)

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**Alexander Alexeyev (D, 6'4, 196 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {31<sup>st</sup> overall} 2018):** Although their farm system is slowly recovering from years of trades and misfires at the draft, Alexeyev is one of the legitimate blue-chip prospects in the Washington system. The Caps have been one of the better NHL teams for years and their depth has taken a hit as a result. Alexeyev posted impressive totals as a rookie AHL defenseman (21 points in 58 games) and logged heavy minutes for Hershey. He's clearly a potential NHL regular, although for now he's probably going to stay in a depth role as opposed to a top-four option. Alexeyev is having a fine season with the KHL's Ufa Salavat Yulayev but he could return in time to play games for Washington in 2020-21.

**Axel Jonsson-Fjallby (RW, 6'2, 192 pounds, acquired: 5<sup>th</sup> Rd {147<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** "AJF" is an NHL prospect primarily because of how well he skates but I'm skeptical that alone will make him a productive player at higher levels. His creativity with the puck limits his potential as point producer and would likely have to fill a Carl Hagelin-type role if he is to succeed. Jonsson-Fjallby posted respectable totals in his first full AHL season — 12 goals and 23 points in 61 games — and he's currently on loan to Vasterviks in Sweden's second-tier Allsvenskan. He has a bit of a cult following within the fan base but Washington has been beefing up the forward ranks of its prospect pool in each of the last two drafts.

**Vitek Vanecek (G, 6'1, 187 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {39<sup>th</sup> overall} 2014):** Vanecek has been in the Washington system for five seasons but finally caught a break when free-agent signee Henrik Lundqvist had to undergo open-heart surgery. Therefore, Vanecek's strong AHL resume (40-26-4 the last two seasons for Hershey) made him an easy choice to backup starter Ilya Samsonov, but Vanecek is now the Caps' No. 1 with a stellar 5-0-2 mark through Sunday. Both he and the Capitals' staff have been patient since he was drafted nearly seven years ago and the results are benefitting the organization.

**Brett Leason (RW, 6'5, 225 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {56<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** Drafted 56th overall as a double overager by Washington in 2019, the 1999-born Leason had an inconsistent rookie AHL season production-wise (14 points in 50 games) but was used in critical situations and did a good job on the penalty kill. The Capitals are impressed with his makeup and maturity, and it would be smart to bet on a studious hard worker like Leason taking a significant step forward in his development. At 6'5 and 225 pounds, Leason has shown to be both agile and elusive despite owning such a large frame.

**Connor McMichael (C/W, 6'0, 183 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {25<sup>th</sup> overall} 2019):** McMichael should be considered a trend setter because in 2019 he was the first forward the Capitals drafted in Round 1 in five years. Whether the strategy behind the selection was driven either by an aging parent club roster or the fact that McMichael simply was the best player available at 25<sup>th</sup> overall is at this point irrelevant — he's clearly the top prospect in the system and has done nothing but pile up points since joining the organization. Last season, McMichael was third in the OHL in both goals (47) and points (102), and his eight points in seven games for Canada at the 2021 under-20 world junior hockey championship tied him for seventh. He's a dual threat with an excellent wrist shot but also competes hard and is versatile enough to play center or wing.

# Manitoba Moose (Winnipeg Jets)

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**Mikhail Berdin (G, 6'2, 184 pounds, acquired: 6<sup>th</sup> Rd {157<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** Berdin has played 65 AHL games over the course of the past two years, posting a 2.70 GAA and .916 save percentage. He could see some backup duty for the Jets at some point but he's most likely the primary starter for their AHL affiliate. Berdin made the Jets' taxi squad after former Manitoba starter Eric Comrie was claimed in waivers by New Jersey.

**Leon Gawanke (D, 6'1, 198 pounds, acquired: 5<sup>th</sup> Rd {136<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** Gawanke is a German puck rusher who has put up a fair number of points from the back end regardless of the league he played in. Last season, Gawanke was one of the AHL's top-scoring 21-and-under defensemen thanks to a 4-goal, 22-assist effort over 48 games. He went back to The Fatherland during the offseason to play for the famed Eisbaren Berlin program, recording two assists in six games before he returned to North America for camp. He should be their primary power-play quarterback this season.

**David Gustafsson (C, 6'2, 196 pounds, acquired: 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd {60<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Gustafsson had a nice year a season ago. He got into 22 games with Winnipeg (1 goal) in addition to 13 games with Manitoba (2 goals, 5 assists). Additionally, Gustafsson served as an assistant captain for Sweden at the World Juniors. He's a smart, physically mature player who tends to keep things simple offensively but excels in a defensive role, to include the penalty kill. I like his chances of developing into a bottom-six regular, and he's already appeared in four games for the Jets in 2020-21.

**Logan Stanley (D, 6'7, 242 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {18<sup>th</sup> overall} 2016):** The Stanley pick – while well intentioned – once appeared to be doomed from the very start. There are very few players Stanley's size who develop into productive NHL players and his value comes in the defensive zone. Luckily for him, the Jets last season were one of the league's worst at suppressing high-danger chances, which is why it makes sense that Stanley not only made the team out of training camp but has appeared in 12 of their 13 games. He doesn't see much ice time (11:55 through Thursday) and has yet to register a point, but the young man deserves credit for turning a decent AHL career into an everyday NHL job.

**Kristian Vesalainen (LW, 6'4, 218 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {24<sup>th</sup> overall} 2017):** I've been a Vesalainen supporter for quite a while. While I wouldn't say he had a standout 2019-20 AHL campaign (12 goals, 30 points in 60 games), I thought he made some positive strides. Vesalainen is plenty big and plenty skilled and those type of players are difficult to find. He should have trade value if the Jets decide they have seen enough. Through Thursday, Vesalainen has appeared in 10 NHL games over the last two seasons with one assist to his credit.

**Declan Chisholm (LHD, 6'1, 190 pounds, acquired: 5<sup>th</sup> Rd {150<sup>th</sup> overall} 2018):** Chisholm is a mobile playmaker from the blue line with good size and impressive playmaking skills, Chisholm's fourth full season in the OHL was his best, as he led all Peterborough Petes defensemen in scoring with 13 goals and 56 assists in 59 games. He owns a cannon of a shot but his ability to deliver passes right into his forwards' wheelhouse makes him an even bigger threat during the power play. Chisholm, who was taken by the Jets in the fifth round of the 2018 draft, signed his entry-level deal after last season and was sent to the AHL affiliate after training camp.

**Cole Perfetti (W/C, 5'10, 185 pounds, acquired: 1<sup>st</sup> Rd {10<sup>th</sup> overall} 2020):** Perfetti is one of several high-profile prospects from the 2020 draft who get to play in the AHL because their respective junior leagues were shut down, but he clearly was done with the OHL anyway. He ranked second in the league in both points (111) and assists (74), which isn't bad considering he came into the season known more for his goal scoring. Perfetti is an exceptional stickhandler and shooter, so it's natural that he's been used at both the center and wing positions. The Jets haven't drafted this high-profile of a forward prospect since the now-traded Patrik Laine in 2016, and it wouldn't be surprising if the Jets considered Perfetti's elite goal-scoring ability enough to consider Laine expendable.