The Americans are heavy underdogs at the World Juniors this year, while the Russians boast their usual offensive arsenal. Who are the key players to watch for? Anyone you should try and nab in your fantasy pool? Read on to find out.

Key Americans to watch:

D Cam Fowler *(2010 draft eligible)*. Fowler is a key cog for the Windsor Spitfires. His 40 points place him 4th on the team in scoring, and he is a likely top-five pick for the upcoming 2010 NHL Entry Draft.

D John Carlson *(Washington Capitals 2008 1st round pick)*. Like Alex Pietrangelo on Canada, Carlson's limited NHL experience should help him leaps and bounds at the tournament this year. His fantasy upside is huge, especially considering he is likely to see heavy power play minutes with the Capitals for a long, long time. If you don't own him, chances are you won't be able to after this tournament.

D Jake Gardiner *(Anaheim Ducks 2008 1st round pick).* Gardiner has gotten off to a rotten start with the University of Wisconsin this season, registering only three points through 18 games. Hopefully this tournament is the kick in the pants he needs to get back on track. Like Fowler and Carlson, his game is all about moving the puck.

F Chris Kreider *(New York Rangers 2009 1st round pick).* The top two lines for the Americans will have a New York presence. Kreider, Ryan Bourque, and Derek Stephan are all recent Ranger draft picks, and all three should figure in on one of the scoring units for the US. Kreider can absolutely fly, and is a very smart player at both ends of the ice.

F Derek Stephan *(New York Rangers 2008 2nd round pick).* Unlike many of USA's other offensive players, Stephan is not struggling this season. He has racked up 17 assists and 22 points so far at the University of Wisconsin, and is expected to center the second line for the Americans.

F Danny Kristo (Montreal Canadians 2008 2nd round pick). Kristo's speed and tenacity have earned himself comparisons to current Ranger Ryan Callahan, but many believe he possesses more offensive upside than Callahan. He has a lethal snap shot, and plays with an edge on a consistent basis.

F Ryan Bourque *(New York Rangers 2009 3rd round pick).* Brother of Chris and son of Ray, Bourque is a speedy winger with some offensive upside. He is undersized but plays big. He is more talented than big brother Chris, and has more offensive upside to boot. Something about him screams Brian Gionta to me – perhaps it is the willingness to compete and battle every game.

F Jordan Schroeder *(Vancouver Canucks 2009 1st round pick).* Schroeder is well behind his scoring pace of last season, with only 12 points in Minnesota's first 18 games. The Golden Gophers have struggled all season to score goals, as they – and Schroeder – really miss Ryan Stoa's big body presence (shout out to Pierre McGuire). This World Juniors will be Schroeder's third, and expect him to be the go-to-guy for the Americans. Schroeder needs only seven points to break Jeremy Roenick's record as the all-time scoring leader for the Americans at this tournament. He is expected to play with Ryan Bourque and Kyle Palmieri.

The Americans are fast and gritty, but not as skilled as other countries. The defense possesses a wealth of mobile puck movers. They will compete for a medal if they can play a simple game and avoid trading chances with the more skilled teams.

Key Russians to watch:

F Nikita Filatov *(Columbus Blue Jackets 2008 1st round pick)*. Like Schroeder, this will be Filatov's third WJHC. He has dominated since returning to Russia from Columbus. Don't be surprised if the Jackets deal him either at the deadline or this summer – he may have burned too many bridges to return.

F Alexander Burmistov *(2010 draft eligible).* Burmistov will center the top Russian offensive unit, and is enjoying a terrific season to date with the Barrie Colts of the OHL.

F Vladimir Tarasenko *(2010 draft eligible).* Like Burmistov, Tarasenko's age won't get in the way of his role with the Russians, as he is expected to join Filatov and Burmistov on the first line. He is an amazing skater, and has an amazing work ethic to go along with it. His coming out party was at the U-18 tournament last year, where he led the Russians in scoring and was named to the tournament All-Star team. He has 10 goals so far in 28 KHL games, a very impressive total for a 17 year old (Alex Ovechkin scored 13 goals in 53 games as a 17 year old).

F Kirill Petrov *(New York Islanders 2008 3rd round pick*). At 6'3" and over 200 pounds, Petrov is the power forward for the Russians. He has NHL upside and the Islanders have been trying to get him over to North America this season, and it sounds like they are close to succeeding. His value will skyrocket once he arrives in North America.

F Dmitry Kugryshev *(Washington Capitals 2008 2nd round pick).* After an impressive 74 point campaign with the Quebec Remparts last season,. Kugryshev has not skipped a beat, scoring 15 goals and adding 32 assists in 35 games for Quebec so far in 2009-10. He has huge offensive potential, and his value is that much higher because he figures in to the long-term plans of the Capitals, who are positioned to be an offensively stacked club for a long, long time.

Like always, the Russians boast a wealth of offensive talent up front. Unfortunately, they also boast their usual mediocre defense. Their goaltending will have to come up big if they expect to compete with the Canadians and the Swedes for the gold medal.