

Calder Contenders for 2008 □ Part Two

Written by Jeff Angus

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While Steven Stamkos is the odds-on favorite to win the Calder, he will have to beat out a fantastic rookie crop to join Kane as back-to-back top pick winners. Here are some more of the other rookies...

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Shawn Matthias – Florida Panthers. Matthias was stolen from the Red Wings prospect vault at the trade deadline in 2007. He is a very skilled and tough winger/center who dominated the OHL. The Panthers will give him top line minutes starting next year – especially with Olli Jokinen now gone. Matthias' versatility will allow him to see more offensive minutes, both on the wing and at center. His game projects very well at the pro level, but the awful Panthers may drag down his chances of winning the Calder.

Bobby Ryan – Anaheim Ducks. The former second-overall pick from the Sidney Crosby draft has been brought along very slowly by the Ducks. He appears ready for the NHL after dominating the AHL playoffs last year with Portland (20 points in 16 games). The big winger is more of a playmaker and slots in on the second line with Brendan Morrison and either Teemu Selanne (if he comes back), or Ryan Carter. Ryan has a ton of offensive skill, but needs to continue to work on his skating. The Ducks are thin at forward so Ryan will see his fair share of opportunities.

Derick Brassard – Columbus Blue Jackets. The gifted center will be the best of the young Blue Jackets this season. Columbus acquired RJ Umberger in hopes that he sticks with Rick Nash, but in the long run Brassard is the guy for the top line. He put up 51 points in only 42 games last year with Syracuse of the AHL. His skating and playmaking ability will allow him to ride alongside Rick Nash for the long term. He has a very good chance at being the top line center in Columbus as early as this coming season.

Ted Purcell – Los Angeles Kings. Purcell is going to be on the second line in Los Angeles, along side Jarrett Stoll and Alex Frolov. He had a fantastic season in the AHL with 83 points for Manchester, winning the Rookie of the Year award along the way. He is being groomed for the first line right wing spot in Los Angeles down the road, as his upside is even higher than Dustin Brown's. He is a pass-first winger with a ton of talent, who is worth picking up as a dark horse, even for this season.

Brian Boyle – Los Angeles Kings. Boyle was very impressive in his brief time with the Kings last season, putting up four goals in only eight games. The Kings will start him off on the third line, but he is the long-term number two guy behind franchise forward Anze Kopitar. The Kings will shift him around and may want to play Stoll in a checking role, freeing up some more ice time for Boyle. He has a shot at a 20/20 season.

Karl Alzner – Washington Capitals. Alzner is the first defenseman to crack my list of Calder hopefuls. He plays a steady, mistake-free game and will be in the Capitals top-four on defense next season. He dominated at their rookie camp and is clearly NHL ready. He isn't flashy, but is a great skater and rarely makes mistakes. His defensive zone positioning and stick work is – and has been for a few years – NHL level and then some. His offensive upside is still a bit of an unknown, but the points will come being on Washington.

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