

The World Juniors □ Sweden and Finland.

Written by Jeff Angus

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Every December, the best young hockey players in the world gather to take part in one of the most prestigious and exciting hockey tournaments in the world (and my personal favourite) – the World Junior Hockey Championships. Legends are born, just ask “Double Dion” Phaneuf. Unheralded players steal the spotlight, like Swiss goaltender Reto Berra did a few years’ back. Looking back, there have been a lot big names as well as a lot of big busts. For the next few weeks leading up to the tournament, I will report on what has happened to many of the young players who have starred at this tournament over the years. This weeks’ article covers Sweden and Finland.

Studs

Peter Forsberg and Markus Naslund - 1993

Forsberg and Naslund both set numerous tournament records in 1993. Forsberg had an astounding 24 helpers to go along with Naslund’s 13 goals. The Swedes laid a thumping on Japan 20-1 and a lot of the dynamic duo’s points came from that game. Both Forsberg and Naslund developed into NHL superstars. Forsberg won multiple cups with Colorado and established himself as one of the most dominant forwards of the 1990’s, while Naslund had several productive seasons in Vancouver, including a 104 point season in 2002-2003. In this case, World Junior domination was an accurate measure for NHL success with these two

talented Swedes.

Olli Jokinen - 1998

Jokinen had nine and was named the tournament's top forward in 1998. He led the Fins to a Gold Medal with a 2-1 defeat over the Russians. Jokinen also helped Finland destroy Kazakhstan 14-1 in a quarterfinal match up. Jokinen has become a very good NHL player, but has yet to see any playoff action, but has amassed nearly 750 regular season games with Florida and Phoenix.

Valtteri Filppula - 2004

Finland took home the Bronze in 2004 for the third straight year. The tournament was essentially a two-horse race with Canada and the United States. Filppula and Sami Lepisto (the top defenseman) led Finland in scoring, and Filppula has developed into another one of Detroit's European gems. He looks to be on his way to emerging as a very good two-way center.

Victor Hedman - 2008

It may be premature to put Hedman in considering he has not even been drafted yet, but he is that good. Hedman will be the first overall pick in the draft unless he gets hurt or John Tavares starts scoring three goals per game down the stretch.

Dud

Eero Somervuori - 1998

Somervuori skated on a line with Jokinen and matched his nine-point output. He was a seventh round draft pick of Tampa Bay in 1997 and the team had high hopes for him after some solid seasons in Finland. The closest he got to the NHL was in 2003-2004 when he played for Hamilton of the AHL, scoring 19 goals in 79 games. He is currently playing in the Swedish Elite League for Farjestads.

Ari Ahonen - 2001

Ahonen was once thought of as the successor to Marty Brodeur in New Jersey. He led Finland to a Silver Medal in 2001, as they were narrowly defeated in the Gold Medal game by the Czech Republic. Ahonen went on to play five full seasons for Albany of the AHL, waiting to get his chance to take over for Brodeur. Unfortunately for him, Brodeur only got better with age. Ahonen's goals-against-average hovered around 3.00 during his time in the AHL, but he was on some pretty crummy teams. His only claim to fame is being the only goaltender in Finnish history to play for all three of the teams in the Helsinki area: HIFK, Jokerit, and Blues. (Thanks, Wikipedia!)

Jani Rita - 2001

Rita led the tournament in scoring with eight goals, and along with Ahonen helped Finland win a Silver Medal. Rita was drafted 13th overall by Edmonton in 1999, but he never was able to develop into the speedy, scoring winger that everyone assumed he would. The Oilers eventually dealt him to Pittsburgh for Dick Tarnstrom. Rita now plays for Jokerit after signing a three-year deal in 2007. He ended his NHL career with nine goals and 14 points in 66 games.

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Lauri Tukonen - 2006

Tukonen was highly touted and the Los Angeles Kings took him 11th overall in 2004. Along with fellow Finns Lauri Korpikoski and Petteri Nokelainen, he was supposed to be a part of the next wave of Finnish talent to hit the NHL. Tukonen scored seven goals and was named to the tournament all-star team in 2006. The Kings gave up on him and dealt him to Dallas in 2008. He was recently traded to Tampa Bay from Dallas. The fact that he has already been on three NHL clubs and hasn't cracked a roster yet speaks to his development. Tukonen has returned home to play in Finland, probably for good.