Once Team Canada's only match, Russia has underwhelmed in recent years. But can a younger, smarter, and more skilled entry than previous years bring Russia back to the recent glory days of Ovechkin/Malkin? How will the team respond to the unthinkable tragedy that left them without Alexei Cherepanov?

Forwards **Nikita Filatov, C/LW**6'0, 172 lbs 5/25/1990One of the most-hyped by DobberHocket last summer, Nikita Filatov looked like he was going to make seamless transition to the NHL at the beginning of 2008-09. However, the 18 year-old was cut from the Jackets despite scoring a goal in his first game. Third in scoring for Syracruse, Filatov has been inconsistent in his effort away from the puck. But that doesn't matter at the WJC. It would be nothing short of a disappointment if Filatov wasn't top-five in tourney scoring and the All-Star team choice at LW. **Evgeny Grachev, C** 6'3, 203 lbs 2/21/1990 How silly are NHL teams for ignoring Russian players? Exhibit A is Evgeny Grachev. Taken gladly by the New York Rangers in the third round, the sublimely talented 6'3 center has taken the Ontario Hockey League by storm. In just 30 games, Grachev has more goals (19) and points (35) than anyone on the Brampton Battalion not named Cody Hodgson. In fact, Grachev is just a goal behind Hodgson (GP difference be damned). Grachev is the one-shot scorer and high-end talent Alexei Cherepanov was showing flashes of being; however, unlike the always-hustling 'Cherry', Grachev has taken nights off- only to follow it up with a hat trick or five points.

Dmitry Kugryshev, RW
5'11, 193 lbs 1/18/1990
Another favorite in the summer draft guide, right wing Dmitry Kugryshev has been nothing short of dominant in his first year on North American soil. In just 31 games, the never-quit winger has 39 points for the Quebec Remparts. Sure to produce for Russia, look for Kugryshev to post near a PPG.

Evgeni Dadonov, RW
5'10, 178 lbs 3/12/1989
Completing the trifecta of favored Russians, in the 2007 Prospect Report and Draft Guide,

Evgeny Dadonov was singled out as a potential 40-goal scorer. Anyone just looking at his stats would think that crazy; after all, the 5'11 winger has just seven points in 28 games after scoring 20 in 43 last year. But Dadonov recently showed flashes of the player we saw and the player he was last year in the KHL with a dominant performance at the Canada/Russia ADT Challenge. Although he did not pick up a lot of points, Dadonov was the most dangerous player on the ice for the Russians, controlling the puck for long stretches. Look out for a big WJC showing.

Kirill Petrov, RW

6'3, 198 lbs 4/13/1990

A 6'3 forward with skill approaching that of Filatov's. The perfect player, right? Well, we were worried last fall that Kirill Petrov's one-dimensional game and one-trick pony tricks would not translate to the next level. Petrov changed that viewpoint with consistently improving performances all season, including full-time action in the KHL. Unfortunately, 2008-09 has been a step back. Knocked out in late September with an injury, Petrov is just coming back to the ice, and the WJC may be too much too soon. If he is underwhelming, don't blame his laziness or attitude- initially speculated to miss the World Juniors, it's a testament to Petrov's character that he has returned to help his country.

Sergei Korostin, RW

5'11, 180 lbs 7/5/1989

Pre-draft, one of the biggest knocks on 2007 pick Sergei Korostin was his willingness to come over. Those worries were dealt a swift and very surprising blow when the high-end scorer 'defected' to North America late last season to join the North American Hockey League's Texas Tornado. Not a league where many top prospects play, the Dallas Stars wanted him close to home base, and they had to be impressed. In his first eight games, Korostin tallied ten points, finishing with eighteen in nineteen. In the off-season, the London Knights selected Korostin in the CHL Import Draft, but he wasn't there for long. After a disappointing start, Korostin was dealt to the Peterborough Petes. Since then, Korostin has found new life, netting 13 points in 16 games. And while a finisher, the right wing has proven equally adept as a playmaker, threading gorgeous passes to linemates after drawing defenders to him.

Pavel Chernov, C

5'10, 187 lbs 1/30/1990

Undrafted, undersized, underplayed. So what does '90-born Pavel Chernov have going for him? Leadership and clutchosity. First seen internationally at the World U18s last season, Chernov played a key role, netting five points in seven games. At a U20 turnup this fall, he netted the winning shootout goal. And at the ATD Canada/Russia Challenge, he and the aforementioned Dadonov were the team's only consistent threats. Chernov will look to continue proving his worthiness at the draft table. Despite being only 5'11 and not a masterful skill player, Chernov plays a pro-quality game and gains the zone with ease.

Defense

Vyacheslav Voinov, D

6'0, 185 lbs 1/15/1990

From four points in 26 RSL games to 12 in 24 AHL games, highly skilled offensive-defenseman Vyacheslav Voinov has developed beyond anyone's expectations. While fellow '08 pick Drew Doughty has been LA's best defenseman, his Russian counterpoint has been Manchester's top threat from the blueline. The team's leader from the blueline in goals, assists and points, Voinov also leads the entire team in +/- (+4). Voinov is a big piece of Team Russia, and he will need to play great for the national team to have as much success as possible.

Projected Finish

While Russia has a lot of high-end weapons up front and plenty of international experience,they have struggled to retain their former WJC glory with the departure of Alex Ovechkin and Evgeni Malkin. The loss of Alexei Cherepanov, while tragic, also leaves Russia without its top talent post-1986 class.

While they have the talent to medal, Russia may once again disappoint. Already, many fans are calling for Sergei Nemchinov's job after some personal favorites made the team over NHL picks (see no Maxim Mayorov). Fifth place would be a crushing blow to the junior program, but may be what it takes to wake the complacement nation up. It's inexcusable that young talents like Maxim Kitsyn and Kirill Kabanov are being discluded from participation in not only the WJC, but lesser events. These players need international experience against older and better competition if they're to carry the flag for Russia in future tournaments.