

Under 18 Action (Rated PG)

Written by Matt Bugg

Monday, 23 April 2007 12:41 - Last Updated Monday, 24 September 2007 09:28



Your wife doesn't know. And hey, she doesn't need to. There's nothing wrong with it. You just like to watch. And screw society for judging you.

It's time to enjoy some premium under 18 action - of the international variety.

That's right, it's that time of year: the World U18 Hockey Championship finished up Sunday with the medal games. USA vs. Russia for the Gold. Sweden vs. Canada for Bronze. Here are some notes from throughout this year's edition of this most pivotal tournament, which showcased the

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2007 and 2008 draft classes.

Team Canada

Sweet 16s:

-While the entire tournament has been a showcase for top '08 defenseman Drew Doughty, Canada's 5-2 preliminary round win over Russia on Tuesday was his coming-out party. On view in front of the whole nation thanks to TSN, the 6'0 rearguard failed to disappoint. Every nice pass out of the zone, every nice hit, every great defensive play- if it wasn't Doughty's handiwork, it didn't happen. Throwing hits while never taking himself out of position, Russian sprite Nikita Filatov barely avoided replacing Rostislav Olesz on the highlight reels as he avoided a would-be Phaneuf-esque bomb by Doughty.

-The '2008 Line', named so for having a trio of underaged forwards in Steve Stamkos, Jamie Arniel and Zach Boychuk, dominated for much of the tournament. Stamkos' powerful, accurate slapper proved to be the best among his peers, and the driving force behind several opportunities. Crash-happy Arniel is a much more talented version of his uncle, former journeyman Scott Arniel, owning a superb wrister, great wheels and the same sense for garbage goals. Finally, Boychuk's superb hands and playmaking ability were on display, the keys behind a 91-point campaign in the WHL.

From Q to A+:

-Angelo Esposito is going in the top 12. The U18s were just what he needed. Struggling offensively all tournament, 'Espo' made up for it by playing superb defense, often the first forward back thanks to his excellent speed. He put the Russians away in the aforementioned prelim match with his first of the tournament. Cool as a cucumber, the crafty centre walked the puck out front off the faceoff and put it home for the score.

-Yves Bastien was going to be one of my steal picks, but he has simply played too well on the international stage to go under the radar. Extremely hot down the stretch in the Q, Bastien's problem has always been playing too calm a game. Instead of using his blazing speed and hands, he defaults to his smart defensive positioning game. He's an excellent backchecker, but he could be a league-leader if he just played one way. If he finds a balance, he's going to be a ridiculous pro.

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Putting the 'See' in BCHL:

-Kyle Turris has been pretty good. The lanky centre demonstrated his creativity when he got boxed out by a defenseman in the slot, spun, waited, waited, and had a nice chance on his backhand. The play never dies on his stick, because he always finds a way to get it to someone. Showed off his massive shot when he wired it from just past centre ice. Hit the net so hard and so fast you'd think he shot it from the faceoff dot. Strong start to games, only to tally off towards the end. This is where weighing only 165 lbs is a problem.

Team Russia

Sweet 16s:

-Slava Voinov was the best defenseman on the ice for Team Russia during powerplays, wiring pucks without fear and with a great deal of skill. His deadly-accurate shot was a revelation, and overall stellar play put the 2008-eligible rearguard into the upper echelon of his draft class.

-Kirill Petrov, a '90 born, was the Russian attack. Standing 6'3, the lanky, super-skilled winger was constantly given the puck because his teammates knew he could dominate with it. Too bad the defense knew exactly what was going to happen when someone other than Petrov came into the zone with the biscuit. This time next year, Petrov will be challenging for a top-ten spot and could break some records at the U18s.

-Speaking of Filatov, when he wasn't praying to the gods for dodging Doughty, he was showing the reason for the defensive attention. Pretty good for an incohesive Russian squad, the 6'0, 159 lbs winger demonstrated the trademark speed, agility and good hands associated with his countrymen. Having many excellent chances for his side, Filatov currently leads Team Russia with 4-4-8 in just five games. He'll be a high pick next year.

"Passing" Missing from Russian Dictionary:

-Sergei Korostin didn't have the best tournament, and some felt he needed to. That's simply not the case. A goal-scorer's goal-scorer, his goal against Canada represented his tournament: a game full of solid but unnoticed play in which he was finally rewarded for being in the right place all the time with a pass on his stick... after the game was a blowout. Scouting services have called him lazy and uninterested, but that's because he knows exactly where to be every shift. Korostin will fall, but has all the tools to be a capable NHLer.

-Alexei Cherepanov was another forward consistently in great scoring position but rarely set up by his teammates. Playing soft with the puck once it was on his stick cost the probable top-five pick a few goals, but he's still tied for first in goals on the squad. His strength was on full display, specifically during one play against rock-solid. WHL defenseman John Negrin. Forced into the corner on a 2-on-2, Cherepanov seemingly lost the battle and the play looked dead- until he bounced the puck off the rear boards and put it squarely back into scoring position.

Removing the Gonchar in Goncharov:

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Maxim Goncharov was the smooth to Slava Voinov's sparkle. A reliable defender throughout the tournament, the 2007-eligible defenseman was a big reason why the Russians were able to play their wide-open style. His 0 points aren't an accurate reflection of his offensive ability, however. Most games, it was simply a matter of being snakebitten. It's hard to imagine a goose egg raising anyone's stock, but Goncharov has proven himself against his peers as an even-strength capable defender.

Next Week: A look at Team Finland and Team USA.