The 2010 Draft isn't even in the books yet, but it's time to look ahead to 2011... and further. In short: if you're ruing missing out on Taylor Hall or Tyler Seguin this year, don't sweat it; next year's edition is shaping up to be the one of the best all-time when it comes to the top five. And 2012 looks pretty good, too.

2011

1. D Adam Larsson (Skellefteå, Elitserien)

Chasing the Elitserien's record for points by a U20 player throughout most of the year, it would come as a shock to anyone not familiar with Swedish mega-talent AdamLarsson to learn he's not the puck-rushing demon you'd expect. While a respectable skater for his 6'3, 209 lbs frame, Larsson is simply the safest player you'll ever see play the game at his age. Don't take that to mean he takes the easy way out; rather than merely work to get the puck out of his end safely,Larsson will constantly make the right play- be it a break-out pass or quick sortie out of his zone- in order to get the puck safely to a teammate. If he can't, the 16-year-old is content to use his big frame and deceptive agility to protect the puck while waiting for re-enforcements.

Compared to Ray Bourque by a noted Swedish commentator, Larsson proved earlier this year that he's capable of playing his game on smaller ice. He was a dominant factor in Tre Kronor exhibition games against Canadian universities, drawing praise from the commentators to the players themselves. Defensively flawless, he was also leaned on to provide offense during thepowerplay and proved he could move the puck effectively. Larsson is perhaps the best pro prospect to emerge on defense in twenty years- with him, there's no talk of potential, of improving this or that area. He's simply ready for the NHL, and may have been last year.

Upside- Superstar defenseman, 10-45-55

2. LW/C Sean Couturier (Drummondville, QMJHL)

You could call 2011 the Battle of the Big Men. Like the now-infamous 2008 Draft, next year's edition will feature a heated battle between a future stud rearguard and a forward capable of winning the Richard. At 6'4, 193 lbs, Sean Couturier gives up nothing physically toLarsson , and boasts his own impressive array of skills. Initially a poor skater who struggled with playing a two-way game, Couturier posted just 31 points as a rookie withDrummondville in 2008-09. However, the hulking center worked extremely hard and maturity did the rest; while not a burner, by the end of this past season, he was among the fastest players on the ice at top speedenroute to a 41-goal, 55-assist season.

A lethal player in the slot or off the rush because of his size and speed, Couturier's calling card is nevertheless his butter-soft hands. He is capable of dictating the play both with his vision and frame, and as such the comparisons to VincentLecavalier have begun in earnest; while Lecavalier out-pointed him at the same age, Couturier nevertheless shared the league scoring title with 96 points- an unheard-of feat for a player still a year away from drafteligbility- and finished with just one fewer goal.

The NHL team that finishes last will have to make a very difficult decision; if it's Edmonton, it will come down to choosing between a center and something else for a second straight year. If it's Toronto, PeterChiarelli will be forced to wonder just how big a gift basket to send Brian Burke.

Upside- Superstar center, 35-45-80

3. C Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (Red Deer, WHL)

Okay, maybe 2010 will be more like 2009. In a year that saw both a Swedish defenseman and a Canadian phenom center battle for top-spot, it was a speedy center with an excellent two-way game that eventually trumped both in their shared rookie NHL year.

A mere 6'0 and 160 lbs, like Matt Duchene, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins has experienced little fanfare in the East despite his many gifts. The first pick in the 2008 WHL Bantam Draft, Hopkins likely would have stayed in the Dub as a 15-year-old had he been eligible; in five try-out games, the maximum allowed, Hopkins tallied six points for the befuddled Rebels.

As it was, Hopkins was worth the wait; a fixture on the first line out of camp, it was Hopkins' dominance that played a part in Landon Ferraro's struggles. Both a better skater and a more complete forward, Hopkins tallied 24 goals and 65 points in just 67 games to finish second in team scoring. For comparison's sake, as a rookie in 2007-08,Duchene tallied 30 goals and 20 assists in 64 games.

A devastating skater both out of the blocks and at top-speed, Hopkins stands out because of his agility and puck-handling ability in full flight; able to turn on a dime and execute a flawlessdeke in the process, Hopkins can create a man-advantage out of what was formerly a one-on-one situation. He is a special player that would probably be a top pick in any other year.

Upside- Star forward, 30-30-60+

4. LW Matt Puempel (Peterborough, OHL)

If Tyler Seguin ends up the first pick in the 2010 Draft, Matt Puempel likely owes him dinner. That's because he'll have sparked a sea-change in the way NHL teams assess talent, eschewing pedigree and hype for pure ability and potential- a scenario that plays perfectly intoPuempel's hands.

Like Seguin- the ninth overall pick during the 2008 OHL Priority Selection- Puempel entered the league with little fan-fare and expectations after being selected outside of the Priority Selection's top five (sixth). Skip forward a year, andPuempel was named ROTY after a stellar season in which the 6'0, 190 lbs winger notched 33 goals- 12 more than Seguin at the same age- and 64 points in just 59 games.

Despite this break-out year, Puempel has a lot of work ahead to ensure he's among the first two or three names called next June. A self-professed fan of Jarome Iginla, Puempel had just 43 PIM and he'll need to double or perhaps even triple that number if he's to compete with two players that stand a half-foot taller. However, unlike Seguin, Puempel happens to play on a much deeper team; loaded with talent like Ryan Spooner and Austin Watson, the Petes could easily end up in the OHL Finals, meaning plenty of exposure for a star that's had precious little. A strong skater who can change gears effortlessly, Puempel is simply jaw-dropping when his confidence is at full-tilt. The proud owner of an NHL-caliber release, he's got enough playmaking ability to turn to that when the lanes close up.

Upside- Star forward- 35-30-65

5. RW Seth Ambroz (Omaha Lancers, USHL)

At 6'3, 205 lbs, winger Seth Ambroz can be excused if he didn't immediately catch on to the USHL as a 15-year-old. Competing in the league since 2008-09, although it was immediately obvious that the horse-like winger with strong legs and tremendous top-end speed would be an impact player, the adjustment from U17 play to Junior A was initially a challenge. Well, for a year, anyway. Held to just 31 points in 60 games last season and three points in eight October games to open this year,Ambroz was lights-out the rest of 2009-10. In addition to tallying 46 points in 48 games, Ambroz set a career-high with 118 PIM.

Headed to the University of Minnesota next season, Ambroz will be that rare player that plays in the NCAA as a 17-18 year-old. However, unlike the shift from Midget to the USHL, thia transition shouldn't be a problem; with two years playing against 20-year-olds under his belt, Ambroz should slot effortlessly into the college game.

Upside- First-line forward, 25-35-60, 100 PIM

6. **Brandon Saad (USNTDP U18)**

While Team USA has dominated the U18 level for the past two seasons, it's remarkable when one considers the team's core is primarily made up of late 1992 and 1993-born players. The best example is BrandonSaad. Not terribly aggressive despite his 6'2, 200 lbs frame, Saad could be excused for playing a skill-based game due to his soft hands- he is, after all, a dominant one-on-one force. However, unlike those kids who just victimize junior defenses with silly moves,Saad uses his rare mix of size and puck skill to slip into prime scoring areas undetected. A natural finisher, Saad also excels good at recognizing the open lane and getting off flat, accurate passes.

7. **D David Musil (Vancouver, WHL)**

At 6'3, 191 lbs, Vancouver Giants rearguard David Musil lives up to the name on his sweater- both the one on the front *and* the back. Father Frank, a European scout for the Edmonton Oilers, was himself a 6'3 215 lbs rearguard who played almost 800 GP in the NHL.

Musil Jr. first grabbed headlines in North America when the youngster debuted in the Czech second men's league as a 15-year-old, a record. Although he tallied just one assist in 14 games, David followed that up by jumping to theWHL for 2009-10, posting 32 points and a ridiculous +33 rating for the Giants.

Simply a natural at his position, Musil is an awkward albeit mobile skater who effortlessly erases players two to four years his senior. At times uncoordinated when it came to jump-starting the

attack,Musil struggled to find a mix between playing both sides of the puck in the WHL playoffs, but that's to be expected from such a young player.

Although he recorded just 67 PIM, expect Musil to break the century mark next season as he begins to experience greater confidence both offensively and physically. A summer of training should also him iron out theinefficiences in his skating.

8. LW/C Alexander Khokhlachev (MHC Spartak MHL)

Six days too old for the 2012 Draft, Alexander Khokhlachev enjoyed a monster season with Spartak of the Russian junior league in 2009-10- and was even better during the World U17s. A tricky albeit under-weight forward at 5'11 and 175 lbs, the shifty forward tallied five goals and thirteen points to lead Team Russia in points at the prestigious tournament. Comparable to AlexSemin in the way he can dissect defenses with tremendous one-on-one ability, speed and creativity, Khokhlachev answered criticism about his selfishness not only with his U17 performance but in MHL play by picking up 25 assists- sixth-most in the league.

9. C Vladislav Namestnikov (Khimik Voskresensk, Rus-2)

One of the most natural scorers to emerge from Russia in some time, 6'0, 163 lbs forward Vladislav Namestnikov experienced a star-making U18s this past season. No stranger to bagging goals at the international level- the sniper potted eight in five games at the 2009 U17s-Namestnikov at times looked like Ilya Kovalchuk in the way he utilized his speed and quick hands to back off defenses enroute to seven points in seven games. Namestnikov's five goals tied Evgeny Kuznetsov for the team lead, an indication of how talented a finisher he is.

At home with Khimik, Namestiknov's 11 goals were the most among any U20 player in Russia's second-tier men's league- and just happened to be the same number Kovalchuk tallied in the same league. Unlike the stereotypical Russian forward- a stereotype that is admittedly dying off- Namestnikov is a strong and emotional competitor, although his defensive play could use some refinement.

10. C Victor Rask (Leksand, Swe-J20)

Scouts have constantly been on the look-out for the next Peter Forsberg. And although some have elements that remind watchers of 'Peter the Great'- whether it be Magnus Paajarvi's stellar puck control or Nicklas Backstrom's vision- none has brought the combination of size, creativity and hockey sense required to harken the complete game Forsberg once used to dominate the NHL.

Well, until now. A 6'2 center who potted 22 goals and 41 points to lead an otherwise tepid Leksand squad, Swede Victor Rask can simply beat you any way you want to play him. A deceptive skater who leverages bursts of speed to their maximum advantage, it's not

uncommon to see the big center hold the offensive zone himself as he combines his brute strength and soft hands to retain control of the puck.Rask is at home in the trenches, and prides himself on battling as hard away from biscuit as he does when it is on his stick. A giftedplaymaker who can make dead-accurate passes through traffic, Rask's lone weakness may be the lack of a truly elite shot. Still, it's a mishmash of talents and traits few teams can boast down the middle.

11. RW Shane McColgan (Kelowna WHL)

The WHL seems to produce two things in spades: big, gritty defenders and- seemingly paradoxically- small, gifted scorers. However, it's not such an enigma; after all, if a 5'10 forward can survive against the 6'3-6'5 beasts of theWHL, his odds of doing so against NHL competition are simply better.

Potentially set to join Zach Boychuk and Zach Hamill as sub-6'0 WHL forwards who have cracked the top fifteen, California native Shane McColgan finished third in points among rookie WHL forwards in 2009-10 with 44 assists and 69 points in 71 games.

Although an excellent skater, both in terms of agility and top-end speed, a player that stands just 5'10 and 170 lbs needs to possess both elite skill and skating attributes to be a regularNHLer. It's questionable whether McColgan has that; although not adverse to dishing hits and an extremely hard worker who plays to win not only every game but every shift, his puck control, shot and vision are several levels below a Patrick Kane or Tyler Ennis.

If McColgan does not develop such skills, he may face many of the struggles Zach Hamill has encountered in advancing up the hockey ladder. A muchballey-hooed 16-year-old who tallied 59 points in 53 games, Hamill has the intangibles and work ethic of a 6'2 player but not the savvy needed to get around those that tower over him. In 147AHL games, the 5'11, 190 lbs center has just 75 points and may max out at as a third line forward- definitely not the player the Bruins were expecting when they selected him eighth in 2008. His story is a warning not only for NHL teams seekingMcColgan, but also fantasy GMs.

2012

1. RW Martin Frk (Hc Karlovy Vary, Cze-U20)

Two years from his draft year, and Czech phenom Martin Frk has already figured out junior. While a CHL talent would be forced to go through the motions in their home league for another two seasons, Frk is the perfect example of a player who will benefit from the European style of prospect development.

Debuting in U18 hockey as a fourteen-year-old, Frk had just one assist in five games but followed that up with 93 over his next 74 games at that level. The 5'11, 190 lbs graduated to the U20 ranks full-time this past year, and promptly finished fifth in league scoring with 55 points in

just 39 games; hadFrk not missed so many games to play in both the U17s and U18s, there's a good chance he would have been first.

Frk also compiled 184 PIM; before anyone gets too excited, those totals came mostly as a result of Frk supplanting himself among 20-year-olds by way of fisticuffs. Initially a target of cheap shots, few have bothered to tangle with the double-underager since.

A sublime puckhandler whose hockey sense may eclipse any skater in the 2010, 2011 and 2012 drafts, Frk has drawn several comparisons to one Jaromir Jagr- mostly due to heritage. In truth, a better one may be the player one spot below Jagr on the all-time RW points list. Listed at 5'10, 195 lbs, Mark Recchi had three 100+ point seasons and two more over 90. He's also compiled close to 1000 PIM.

2. C Mikhail Grigorenko (CSKA MHL)

It's destined to be the featured battle of 2012- Grigorenko vs. Yakupov. Two-thirds of one of Russia's most feared junior troikas since the 90s and Bure/Fedorov/Mogilny, Grigorenko, a 6'2 center, has so far won the scoring battle. Grigorenko finished third in U17 tournament scoring with ten points in six games.

Grigorenko is as ideal a center as you could ask for. Already a respectable 6'2 and 183 lbs, while he doesn't overwhelm with his speed, the Russian phenom has the size and hands to control the puck for as long as it takes a lane to open up. A savvy puck distributor and reliable face-off man, asGrigorenko becomes more comfortable with the U18 game, he'll be able to return to his specialty- scoring rebound goals. In 122 minor hockey games, the big center tallied 232 goals between the ages of nine and thirteen.

3. LW Nail Yakupov (Reaktor MHL)

It should seem no competition; at 5'11, 168 lbs, it would seem as though the gap between Grigrenko and winger Neil Yakupov would be considerable. But consider this: along with his explosive speed, there may not be a better puck-handler in the world right now than the 16-year-old forward.

Unable to represent Russia at the U17s due to a hand injury, Yakupov nevertheless played in the MHL- something Grigorenko didn't do- and tallied four goals and six points in fourteen points.
Yakupov was also the youngest player at the recent Challenge Cup, and added 2-1-3. Amongst his own age group, Yakupov tallied an impressive 25 points in eleven games before the hand injury shut him down.

4. D Nick Ebert (Waterloo USHL)

One of two fifteen-year-olds playing in the USHL, defender Nick Ebert tallied eighteen points in 53 games for the Black Hawks enroute to a strong season for the New Jersey native. A refined rearguard who was seeing action in the last minute of close games from almost his first contest in the league, Ebert's calling card right now is a simple, refined defensive game. Built for battles in front of the net at 6'1, 185 lbs, Ebert excels at not only blocking shots, but directing pucks away from dangerous areas with his stick and body. Composed when facing pressure under fire, Ebert is a careful outlet passer who gets the puck up and out with minimal fuss.

A pick of St. Michael's in the OHL Draft, Ebert is likely headed the NCAA route.

5. RW Branden Troock (Seattle WHL)

The carrot-and-stick approach to call-ups can be the most effective motivational tool at a coach's disposal. Just ask Branden Troock. Initially called up December 28th, the 12th overall pick in the 2009 Bantam Draft registered just one assist and was a -2 in two games. The 6'1 power winger was promptly sent back down to Midget with that briefest- and mostdisappointing-of debuts.

Fast-forward to February 21st; with Seattle well out of the playoff hunt, Troock was once again re-called and given prime ice-time. The difference in his play was night and day. In five February games, Troock added 2-3-5 before finally running out of steam and going pointless in the season's last two contests.

A big, strong winger with excellent puck control and maneuverability, Troock's first WHL goal was a typical effort for the young forward: get in front, stay in front, and use deft hand-eye coordination to deflect shots. Troock is just as adept at intercepting passes or clearing attempts, and can create odd-man breaks thanks to his deceptive acceleration and long, powerful stride. Troock finished 18th in Alberta Midget AAA scoring with 37 points, but did so in just 27 games; had he played the whole season, he likely would have finished in the top five.

HM- C Connor Crisp (York Simcoe Express)

There were players who scored more during the presitigious OHL Cup showcase tournament, and players who were more valuable to their teams. But our favorite of the tournament was a little-hyped power center by the name of Connor Crisp. A 2nd round pick in the OHL Priority Selection by the Erie Otters, Crisp is in good hands; the Otters have produced two-ways centers such as Ryan O'Reilly (COL) and Greg McKegg ('10) and appear to have yet another apt pupil.

Eighth in tournament scoring with a 5-1-6 line in six games, Crisp helped York Simcoe to within a game of the OHL Cup finals. A sturdy 6'2 and 210 lbs, Crisp possesses an excellent top-end gear and a soft pair of mitts. But what sets him apart is his competitiveness; his balls-to-the-wall style and relentless pursuit of the puck is reminiscent of Alexander Ovechkin and makes him one of the most entertaining players in the 2012 class. If all goes well over the next two years, Crisp be selected higher in the NHL Draft than he was in the O.