

Curtains in Camrose and Swede Surprises

Written by Matt Bugg

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The first-annual Wild Rose Rookie Tournament is officially over, and the grades are in. Who was the surprising champion of the tournament, and who failed to earn a win? Also, pre-season action is underway and Europe, and we look at a couple interesting names playing in Sweden's mysterious Division 1 league. Are there any Zetterbergs or Edlers on the horizon?

The Calgary Flames, Vancouver Canucks and Edmonton Oilers sent their best and brightest youngsters to the college town of Camrose, Alberta this past week for the first-ever Wild Rose Rookie Tournament. Each team played each other once, with the host Oilers also seeing action against two local college teams.

Final Standings

Calgary 2-0-0

Vancouver 1-1-0

Edmonton 0-2-0

Player Grades

Cody Hodgson, C (Vancouver) A+

No player did more to improve his shot at making his respective NHL team than Cody Hodgson. Vancouver's tenth overall pick in this past draft dominated the tourney with a 5-point performance in just two games. Hodgson impressed not only offensively, but played gritty, responsible hockey every shift. Though he's five inches shorter, the Canucks have found their new Trevor Linden.

Immediate Future: Not signing Mats Sundin may be the best thing the Canucks ever did. Hodgson now has an opportunity to shine as #2 C on a line with Pavol Demitra and speedster sophomore Mason Raymond. Look for 40 points if he cracks the roster.

Matt Keetley, G (Calgary)

Grade: A

Watching the games from the perspective of an Oilers fan, Edmonton and Calgary's tilt was just like a BOA. Why? Despite icing the more skilled team, the Baby Flames had a gritty squad and a standout goalie. The 20 year-old Keetley was Kipper-good in his two starts, making numerous sensational stops.

Immediate Future: AHL backup in 2007-08, Keetley stands a very good chance of making the Flames as the backup for Kiprusoff this year.

Cory Schneider, G (Vancouver)

Grade: A

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It seems as though Cory Schneider has been around forever, despite only making his pro debut this past season. The 22 year-old flashed the goods 'a plenty in Vancouver's net, stopping a penalty shot, a 5-on-3 and a breakaway in his lone start.

Immediate Future: Schneider will Manitoba's starter for 2007-08, but look for him to come up on occasion to give Roberto Luongo some much-needed rest. However, Schneider won't get a meaningful shot... ever... if Luongo remains in Vancouver past 2010- his FA year.

Jordan Eberle, C (Edmonton)

Grade: A-

If it weren't for the aforementioned Keetley, Eberle might be on the Oilers already. Eberle had three great scoring chances alone in his very first period in an Oilers uniform- including one while killing a penalty!- but finished the first game of the tournament with just a single goal. However, his best performance came during the Oilers/University of Alberta Golden Bears tilt, where his line was the best on the ice every shift. He added a goal in that one, too, to finish with a pair in three contests.

Immediate Future: Eberle will be one of the final cuts from camp as he soaks in the NHL pace. However, don't take that to mean he has more than 25% shot of making the team. The Regina Pats are waiting for their franchise player to return, and from Eberle's performance against rookies much older than himself, look for a 52+ goal season in what could be his final year of major junior.

Michael Grabner, RW (Vancouver)

Grade: A-

While he scored two 'lucky' goals in a blowout, 2006 14th overall selection Michael Grabner was the most dangerous player speed-wise for the Canucks. His ability to find the open seam and take off was gasp-worthy.

Immediate Future: Grabner may be a fantastic skater and a willing combatant in traffic, but he often muffed chances when alone. He needs to work on controlling the puck at high speed, but will be a Canuck by 2009-10.

Bryan Lerg, C (Edmonton)

Grade: B+

The Oilers have found an Anaheim-esque FA steal in 22 year-old Michigan alum Bryan Lerg. Signed to a two-year deal in April, Lerg kicked off his Oilers prospect career with a poor debut against Calgary. However, the speedy sniper added four points (2 G, 2A) in his next two games against Vancouver and of the U of A. He and linemates Eberle and Phillippe Cornet displayed some instant and dominant chemistry.

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Immediate Future: Lerg has no shot at the Oilers this season, and would be in tough next year as well. And unless Rob Schremp makes the team, Lerg will have to settle for second line duty in the A. But the seasoning can't hurt. Look for Lerg to score 30 in the A this year and seriously challenge for an NHL job next season. He has Shawn Horcoff upside.

Phillipe Cornet, LW (Edmonton)

Grade: B+

Fewer players got a rougher ride from myself as Cornet, Edmonton's fifth round selection in 2008. Although an admittedly dazzling puckhandler, I accused him of all manner of things, from lacking hockey sense to being selfish. So imagine my surprise when he actually made a top-shelf playmaker for linemates Eberle and Lerg. A standout against the Alberta All-College All Stars, Cornet's deft stickhandling and passing made him a threat cross-ice every play.

Immediate Future: Cornet was one of Rimouski's few scoring threats last season, and that won't change for 2008-09. However, a tremendous attitude and work ethic displayed throughout camp hint at a player capable of taking the reigns. Look for Cornet to form a deadly duo with 2009 eligible power forward Jordan Caron.

Devan Dubnyk, G (Edmonton)

Grade: B

While 22 year-old Devan Dubnyk played solid, unspectacular hockey, it was how different he looked from last year that earns him a B. At last year' camp, Dubnyk was a disaster, waddling around his crease and failing to stop the simplest low shots. However, after losing 25 pounds and improving his fotospeed, the DD Oilers fans were hoping for is finally starting to emerge. A mobile 6'5 goalie is a rare thing.

Immediate Future: Dubnyk will be fighting with long-time Oilers prospect Jeff Deslauriers for playing time in Springfield. However, he was so impressive that he may not have to worry about playing time as he could find himself Edmonton's backup.

T.J. Brodie, D (Calgary)

Grade: B

The Calgary flames are oft derided for their cement-footed D. However, it looks like they're starting to work on that. 2008 th round selection T.J. Brodie was one of the most intriguing prospects on display. A dazzling rusher, Brodie lead several rushes Coffey-style up ice. He's also mean; in his first game back with the OHL's Saginaw Spirit, the 6'1, 170 lbs rearguard got in a good old-fashioned fist fight.

Immediate Future: Brodie is a longer-term project with huge upside. A 30-point scorer last season, look for a PK Subban-esque rise to fame.

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Mikael Backlund, C (Calgary)

Grade: C+

Hockey's a funny game. The most unskilled players can become stars, and the most skilled players can be... invisible. 2007 first-rounder Mikael Backlund didn't even look like a World Junior first liner, let alone an NHL top-liner like some more... optimistic... Flames fans had him. The talented forward stood out on occasion; when 'on', Backlund drove the net with impunity, taking control of the offense. But all he managed was a goal and an assist in a 6-3 blowout.

Immediate Future: Backlund is headed back to Sweden. If he can't figure out his consistency issues, he'll never be back.

Swede Surprises

No league has confounded general managers and scouts more than Division 1. Comprised of over 30 teams in remote towns, Sweden's biggest and lowest level of pro hockey continues to churn out surprises despite an increased focus on its talents.

Heralded for being the birthplace of many Hakan Andersson finds, from his first (Tomas Holmstrom) to his most successful (Henrik Zetterberg), Division 1 has most recently produced Canucks star rookie Alex Edler.

Like the NHL, most Division 1 teams don't begin play until the first week of October. And like most NHL teams, junior talents are competing for spots on the big club. Are there any Edlers or Zetterbergs to be found? Well...

Jesper Dahlroth, D **Bodens HF (Div 1)**

Born: 7/29/1991

Ht/Wt: 5'9, 190 lbs

2007-08 Statline: 26 GP, 2-8-10, 37 PIM

Sweden has enjoyed a resurgence in obscure talents as of late after producing some of the biggest names of the 90s. The official re-arrival of this trend came at the 2008 Draft when the Ottawa Senators selected 5'10 offensive defenseman Erik Karlsson 15th overall.

Karlsson has been hyped- especially by us- as a future stud NHLer capable of 45 points. His ability to control the game against his age group culminated in a U18 World Championships Best Defenseman award. So don't take it lightly when we say Jesper Dahlroth has the potential to be just as good.

One of the youngest players in the 2009 draft class, Dahlroth is already close to being the player we hope Karlsson will be- filled out, defensively responsible and of course dangerous

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offensively. A top-four rearguard on a men's team as a 16 year-old, Dahlroth already has impressive muscle and a great competitive streak. But when you combine it with fine wheels and tremendous awareness, you have a top-flight prospect.

Sound too good to be true? Well, let's compare him to Edler. In his draft year, the Canucks stud posted nine points (3-6) in 24 games to go along with 20 PIM- an almost identical statline to Dahlroth.