

Ivan Hlinka Tournament Review

Written by Matt Bugg

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The Ivan Hlinka Memorial Tournament is one of the first tests a draft-eligible prospect will face as they attempt to prove themselves worthy of a pick. Oddly enough, the class's top two talents- Adam Larsson and Sean Couturier- were ineligible due to age, leaving the field wide-open for surprises. Beyond a Gold Medal game in which one goal made all the difference- literally- who stood out at the Hlinka?

Medal Round

Gold: Canada 1 - USA 0

Bugg's 1st star: C Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (1 G, GWG)

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Bugg's 2nd star: G Tyson Teichmann (22 shots, 22 saves)

Bugg's 3rd star: G Steven Michlalek (24 shots, 23 saves)

Bronze: Sweden 6 - Cze 1

Bugg's 1st star: LW Joachim Nermark (2 G, 1 A)

Bugg's 2nd star: LW Pontus Åberg (1 G, 1 A)

Bugg's 3rd star: G Marcus Due-Boje (1 GA)

Scoring Leaders (Unofficial)

1. LW Joachim Nermark (SWE)- 5 GP, 5-6-11

The revelation of the Hlinka, 6'0, 179 lbs pivot Joachim Nermark led the whole tournament- never mind a deep Swedish offense that dominated the leaderboard- in points. However, it's not a complete shock; a regular on every U18 edition of Tre Kronor last year, Nermark managed to be a reliable contributor with nineteen points in 25 U18 and U17 games.

Nermark stood out for three reasons: smooth, agile skating, his relentless pursuit of the puck in the so-called dirty areas, and an extremely soft, accurate passing touch. Although not all that big, his willingness to battle for position was on display almost every shift. Like late U18 standout Johan Larsson last season, He'll be an interesting player to watch as the games get bigger throughout the year.

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2. LW Pontus Åberg (SWE)- 5 GP, 5-1-7

A lethal finisher who tallied 22 goals in 22 J18 Elit games, 5'11, 181 lbs Pontus Åberg is a name to watch for the future. A late-born '93 and thus not eligible until the 2012 Draft, few underagers have made as big of an impact at the Hlinka as Åberg. A gangly forward who drives into the hard areas of the ice in order to score, Åberg's is above-average in almost every offensive category.

3. C Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (CAN)- 5 GP, 5-2-7

Enroute to Canada's 1-0 win over the United States in the tournament final, it was fitting that Ryan Nugent-Hopkins was the one and only scorer. Canada's top goal-getter and locked in a three-way tie for tournament leader with four tallies, Hopkins was lethal every shift thanks to his elite top-end speed and a willingness to shoot from everywhere. He's tracking well to retain our pre-season 2011 ranking (3rd), but he- and Puempel- will be in tough to pass either Sean Couturier or Adam Larsson.

4. RW Dmitrij Jaškin (CZE)- 5 GP, 3-4-7

It's not often a player selected first overall in one league's junior draft would jump ship for one in which he was drafted 58th, but that may be the case with Czech/Russian winger Dmitrij Jaškin. Selected by Sibir first in the KHL's draft, few out-of-country picks ever actually honor the pick- see Hall, Taylor and Seguin, Tyler.

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Although born in Russia to Russian parents, Dmitrij's father Aleksei moved to the Czech Republic in 1993 and never looked back, retiring just two years ago. There's a good chance Jaškin does the same thing. Selected by the Calgary Hitmen in the CHL Import Draft, the club's history of bringing Czech and Slovak players into the fold compounds the likelihood Jaškin plays at least one season in the WHL. A strong, balanced skater who owns a long reach and quick hands, the 6'1, 196 lbs winger is a natural fit for North American hockey in the way he fights for position and cycles the puck.

5. LW Matt Puempel (CAN)- 5 GP, 3-4-7

Last season, we told you to keep an eye out on Peterborough winger Matt Puempel, calling him the Seguin of the 2010 class in terms of rapid emergence. So far, he's tracking well with that comparison. In Piastany last year, Seguin led Tead Canada with ten points in four games; while Puempel posted less, he still managed to lead the red and white.

A lithe skater with outstanding puck control and a superb release, it's his dedication to the little things that has consistently allowed him to be Canada's top U18 player and a perfect partner for Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (see below).

6. D Oscar Klefbom (SWE)- 5 GP, 1-6-7

A 6'3 Swedish rearguard averaging over an assist a game? The first- and, well, only- name to jump to the fore would be Adam Larsson, but his late '92 birthdate made him ineligible for Hlinka. Instead, it was little-known Oscar Klefbom who stole the show on the Swedish blueline. A lethal player in the J18 ranks back home, Klefbom added a further ten points in twelve U17 international games in 2009-10, setting the stage for his breakout performance in the Czech

Republic.

A mobile skater who has no trouble transitioning and pivoting, Klefbom isn't a burner but may just be a better overall skater than Larsson. However, where the two differ is in how they create offense. Whereas Larsson is an active, engaged point player who routinely pinches up in order to let fly his seeing-eye wristshot, Klefbom prefers using smart lateral passes in addition to a low, powerful slapshot. Not in the top thirty conversation before, Klefbom's outstanding tournament could be the start of a campaign that makes him a mid-to-late first round pick.

7. RW Cason Hohmann (USA)- 5 GP, 3-3-6

Patrick Kane's Stanley Cup game-winner wasn't just a victory for the Hawks, but one for sub-6'0 skaters everywhere. That speed and skill quite literally trumped size and brawn will inevitably fuel a run on such players over the next few drafts.

The first benefactor of this development could be Cason Hohmann. The 5'7 150 lbs American winger had an outstanding USHL season for an underager in 2009-10, potting 36 points in 58 games. He appears determined to improve on that mark this season thanks his Team USA-leading performance in Piestany.

Aggressive both physically (he dropped the gloves last season) and on the attack, Hohmann is primarily known as a playmaker but that could be changing. Boasting tremendous technical skill and puckhandling ability, Hohmann surprised opponents at times last year by unleashing a quick, no-telegraph snapshot. A compact skater reminiscent of Sidney Crosby, there are few flaws in the Texas product's offensive game. Watch for him in 2010-11.

8. RW Joel Armia (FIN)- 4 GP, 2-4-6

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The success of Finnish power forward Teemu Hartikainen since being a late draft choice in 2007 has made the idea of, well, a Finnish power forward not so ridiculous. Joining him is Joel Armia. The 6'3, 183 lbs forward plays every bit as nasty as his frame allows- see 25 PIM in just three qualifying games last year. While slightly more restrained in Piastany, Armia simply used that extra ice-time to do the other thing his size is good for- to create offense.

A nation known for producing mite-sized offensive talents in recent years, Armia was the only Finn to finish among the Hlinka tournament's top-ten scorers.

9. RW Viktor Arvidsson (SWE)- 5 GP, 5-1-6

It's been at least a couple years since a diminutive Swedish forward has captured the attention of North American scouts; guilty of producing physical lightweights at the best of times, Arvidsson- all 5'8 and 165 lbs of him- will look to tempt at least one GM and the Hlinka was an excellent start. A speedy ball of energy who stickhandles with the best of them, the most fitting comparison at this point in time is New Jersey's Mattias Tedenby.

In 40 total J18 games at the Elit and Allsvenskan levels, Arvidsson scored an incredible 52 goals and 100 points, adding an assist in two games at the J20 SuperElit level. While that's wholly impressive, it's important to remember that J18 is about equivalent to Midget AAA/AA here and Tedenby spent his pre-draft year in J20, posting 20 points in 27 games.

10. C Victor Rask (SWE)- 5 GP, 0-6-6

Since our first mention of 6'2 pivot Victor Rask, there have been few prospects over the last couple of years who have captured the imagination of readers around the world. It was hoped that the Hlinka would merely be a continuation of that, but despite averaging over a point per

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game, it was instead Rask's wingers who stole the show.

However, it wasn't as if he was invisible. Take Sweden's game against Slovakia for example; tied 1-1, Rask won an own-zone draw and helped advance the puck up and out of the zone. In the other end, Rask then jumped on a juicy rebound created by winger Mika Zibanejad... only to miss the net and have it rebound off the backboards and onto the stick of left wing Pontus Aberg.

Later in that same contest, Rask was working the left wing and pounded a shot off the post; it too flew behind the net and bounced back out, where Joachim Nermark slipped it under the Slovak goalie for the 4-2 lead.

Despite being held goal-less, Rask was a stand-out in his consistency; he was constantly winning battles for pucks, winning draws, and making the kind of soft-touch plays we praised him for back in June. However, his one glaring weakness- shot accuracy- was also on full display. If he can fix that, he'll be a special player.

Goaltending Leaders (Unofficial)

1. Robin Gusse (CAN)- 1 GP, 1.00 GAA, 0.961 SV%

The Defensive Rookie of the Year in the Q, 4'9 166 lbs Robin Gusse potted thirteen wins and three shutouts for Chicoutimi in 2009-10 but saw action in just one game- against the last-place Slovaks- at the Hlinka Tournament.

2. Tyson Teichmann (CAN)- 4 GP, 1.50 GAA, 0.941 SV%

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Born, raised and playing major junior Belleville, Teichmann was strong in every outing for Team Canada. Listed at 150 lbs according to some sources, the 6'0 keeper nevertheless stood his ground and showed why the Bulls entrusted him with 31 games as a 16-year-old in 09-10.

3. Steven Michalek (USA)- 3 GP, 2.00 GAA, 0.895 Sv%

Michalek made up for an otherwise average tournament with a strong showing in the finale. Although he and Team USA lost, it's tough to win when your team scores no goals. The 6'2, 188 lbs Connecticut native was POTG against Finland earlier in the tournament.

4. Marcus Due-Boje (SWE)- 5 GP, 2.40 GAA, 0.869 Sv%

5'11, 172 lbs Marcus Due-Boje shone brightly in a three-game audition at the J20 level last year, posting a 1.67 GAA, and was named the top goaltender of the J18 playoffs with a similarly sparkling 1.76 GAA and 0.932 Sv%. But Due-Boje was merely average when it counted in Piastany, allowing five goals to the USA in the semis.

5. Luca Boltshauser (SUI)- 3 GP, 3.33 GAA, 0.890 Sv%

Although born July and thus one the younger players available in 2011, it'd be nothing short of a miracle for 5'8, 152 Luca Boltshauser to improve substantially from a physical standpoint. A quick, technically skilled goaltender, Boltshauser battles hard but he's likely too small to be a serious pro prospect.

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