

2011 NHL Entry Draft: October Top 30

Written by Matt Bugg

Saturday, 02 October 2010 19:38 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 October 2010 13:26



(Former Herning Blue Fox and current Oshawa General Nicklas Jensen)

The hockey season is well under way in all those leagues not called the NHL. Who's winning the battle for top spot, and who has emerged to stake their claim in the first round? Find out in the first official Bugg Bytes ranking of the season featuring the top 35 players in the 2011 class.

1. D Adam Larsson (Skellefteå/Elitserien)
2010-11 to Date: 5 GP, 0-2-2, -1, 2 PIM

While the race has begun to get awfully crowded up top, phenom rearguard Adam Larsson

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continues to be his steady, reliable self- and consistency is ultimately what matters the most at the end of the day. While Larsson's offensive output doesn't look like much, he's currently tied for first on Skellefteå and is receiving the lion's share of the squad's ice-time. It's hard not to like an 18-year-old who can play on the top pairing in a men's league, and unless he finds himself unable to score or stop chances at some point, he'll be in this spot for at least a few months.

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

2010-11 to Date: 8 GP, 7-5-12, +12, 4 PIM

Similarly, an 18-year-old forward who tied for first in league scoring last year and who is on pace for 90+ again even with a lengthy absence for the World Juniors is a tough player not to like. And how about that plus/minus? Oh, and a 66% success rate in the face-off circle? As complete a player as Adam Larsson is on defense, 6'4 Sean Couturier will continue to jockey him as 2011's most overwhelming package of skills in a forward. Once a moody, undisciplined player and a sub-par skater, Couturier has in short order rectified almost every weakness and turned them into strengths in the process. It's scary to think how much better he could get, especially when his 191 lbs is somewhere around 225-230.

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

2010-11 to Date: 4 GP, 3-3-6, +2, 6 PIM

The more one examines the 2011 class, the more and more it looks like the 2009 affair. In any other year, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins would be a top pick. A speedy, explosive center who owns a knack for scoring goals from nearly anywhere thanks to a lethal combination of accuracy and release, Hopkins compares closely with one Matt Duchene. But- and ready for this?- he might be even better. Comparable in terms of speed and goal-scoring ability, Hopkins' refined two-way game and his desire to win the puck in every situation mirrors Duchene's passion for the game. But what sets them apart is playmaking ability; a creative and simply sub-lime passer when he senses the opportunity, Hopkins can slow the game down in addition to speeding it up. And those hands; Alex Kovalev's practice video is a YouTube sensation, but Rebels season ticker holders are well-aware that Hopkins also owns a similar kind of feel for the puck.

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4. LW Matt Puempel (Peterborough/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 4 GP, 4-4-8, -4, 6 PIM

Just one of many non-shockers if you're a regular reader of DobberHockey, 2009-10 OHL ROTY Matt Puempel is continuing his abject domination of the league with a strong opening salvo. If the comparisons to Tyler Seguin sounded a little crazy before, try this on for size: in the first four games of last season, Seguin piled up ten points in his first four games, finishing with 106.

Will Puempel break the century mark? Possibly. But like Seguin, he'll have done it with almost no supporting cast. Winless in their first four games of the season, the Peterborough Petes look to give the Plymouth Whalers of 2009-10- heck, even the Whalers of this year- a run for their money as a truly shallow offense. The Petes have scored thirteen goals this season, and Puempel has factored in on 62% of them.

5. C/RW Brandon Saad (Saginaw/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 4 GP, 3-2-5, 4 PIM

It took just a couple games to get his feet under him, but 6'2, 211 lbs power winger Brandon Saad is starting to find his place in the OHL. An American import who gave up a spot on the NTDP in lieu of major junior, one can forgive Saad for struggling. While the U18 program prepares players for the college hockey schedule- facing off against D1 schools in the process- major junior is a step up from the USHL, whose clubs the NTDP plays most regularly. However, that adjustment period looks to be over. Three of his five points have come in his last two contests, with Saad being the best Spirit on the ice in both games.

6. RW Gabriel Landeskog (Kitchener/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 3 GP, 5-2-7, 12 PIM

In addition to the debate raging in the top three slots, there's likely another storyline we're bound to hear more about this season: rugged Euro center versus rugged Euro winger. Gabriel Landeskog recorded a hat-trick in his first-ever OHL regular season game, then added two more Friday night. For now, that gives the Swedish forward the lead. A similar player to Nino Niederreiter in how he maxes every bit of torque out of his body, skillset and limited skating ability, we personally don't find Landeskog quite as skilled or as natural a scorer, doing his best work instead around the front of the net. However, there's not doubting the results.

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Kitchener has been involved in some barn-burners, so watching Landeskog and his 2011 teammates- more on them below- is a must for any poolie considering him as a pick.

7. C Victor Rask (Leksand/Allsvenskan)

2010-11 to Date: 5 GP, 1-1-2, 0 PIM

Anchoring the second line on a team in the second-best men's league in Sweden, Victor Rask appears ready to be impact player at that level. It's a good thing, too, because he's simply too good for the J20 ranks. The 6'2" center proved that back on the 26th; sent down briefly to Leksand's junior club during a four-day break between games, Rask compiled three assists in a 7-1 win. While his shot is still a problem, the two-way pivot is as refined a playmaker as you'll find among U20 players and will simply make whatever team he plays for in his career better-better on the PK, at even strength, everywhere. Just please learn to shoot, kid!

8. D Ryan Murphy (Kitchener/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 3 GP, 3-6-9

How can a team lose a 50+ goal-scorer and yet look even better the next year? Well, it's easier when you have players like Ryan Murphy on your club. While many pre-season prognostications had the Rangers at least suffering a little bit with the news that Jeff Skinner would crack the Canes full-time, they simply look deadlier than at any point during the halted run to the Mem Cup last season. Murphy has led the way thus far, both on the ice and on the scoreboard, and currently holds the top spot in the OHL scoring race.

A majestic skater who works as hard as a player with half his talent level, if Murphy were to continue his torrid pace, he'd be in a truly special club. Tragic figure Bryan Fogarty was the last rearguard to lead the OHL in scoring, compiling 155 points in just 60 games from the blueline. Murphy likely won't touch that mark- and probably won't even come close to having as many point as Fogarty had assists that season (108)- but if he's at all in the conversation for the Eddie Powers, it will be tough to hold the 5'10", 165 lbs rearguard out of the top five.

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9. LW Tomas Jurco (Saint John/QMJHL)

2010-11 to Date: 4 GP, 5-1-6

Tomas Jurco is taking the hockey world by storm. QMJHL awards, many features in print and online, and even a segment on TSN have been devoted to the crafty winger. But we're proud to say we were among the first to report on Jurco, at the end of last month. Jurco's tremendous technical skill and creativity remind one of Ales Hemsky, and a team in need of a game-breaking winger will target him high.

10. D David Musil (Vancouver/WHL)

2010-11 to Date: 5 GP, 1-1-2, +2, 12 PIM

David Musil was a fan favorite for the 2011 top five even before the season began. If an excellent rookie season from the 6'3, 200 lbs defender wasn't enough, Musil began the pre-season like a house on fire, netting eight points in four games. At that point, my warning back in September that he might struggle offensively and that the Giants would suffer somewhat from the many veteran departures looked crazy. But the season's begun, and the warning's held true: while still a defensive virtuoso and a handful physically, it's been partner Neil Manning that's produced the lion's share of the team's offense from the blueline with six points.

Does this mean Musil is a player not worth a top ten pick? No. And it doesn't mean he's a failure. Giants GM Scott Bonner is reportedly desperately trying to acquire a 20-year-old rearguard to join in order to take some pressure off Musil, who is showing his age and experience. Once that happens, there's a definite possibility he returns to 40-point territory. However, as a defensive defenseman at heart, if you're looking for safe offensive upside, Murphy is the better bet.

11. RW Seth Ambroz (Omaha/USHL)

2010-11 to Date: 1 GP, 0-0-0, 0 PIM

Opting to stay back in the USHL one more year despite a guaranteed spot at the University of Minnesota, 6'3 200 lbs power forward Seth Ambroz has actually turned up the pressure in

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terms of his expectations regarding 2010-11 season. After all, had the Ryan Kesler clone struggled in a Gophers uniform, a simple explanation was at hand: playing against men 20-23, Ambroz may as well have been debuting in the AHL as a 17-year-old.

However, it appears former collegiate forward Tyler Pitlick's story has served a warning to those looking to accelerate their studies. A stand-out in Edmonton's rookie and pro camps, Pitlick notched just 19 points in limited ice-time with UMM last year, arguably costing him a first round spot- and first round money. Still, with St. Louis first round draft choice Jaden Schwartz dominating the USHL last year, there are no excuses. Ambroz will need to finish amongst the league's scoring leaders in order to remain a fixture in top-ten talk.

12. D Duncan Siemens (Saskatoon/WHL)

2010-11 to Date: 3 GP, 0-2-2, -4, 0 PIM

It's been an eventful week for Duncan Siemens. Named an alternate captain to start the year, Siemens- who started the year with 2 points in 2 wins- voluntarily gave it up when veteran rearguard Stefan Elliott returned from training camp with the Colorado Avalanche on Thursday. However, on Friday, the Blades discovered just far they are from being a top team in the league.

Down 1-0 before the game was five minutes old, the defending WHL champion Brandon Wheat Kings eventually torched Saskatoon for seven total goals, with Siemens finishing a -2.

Still, while he's no longer wearing an A, Elliott's return will unarguably help Siemens' stock. A rugged stay-at-home defender, being able to focus on what he does best- namely, hitting and hurting people- will prove better for his development than being asked to handle top-unit PP, PK and ES duties right away.

13. RW Ryan Strome (Niagara/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 4 GP, 3-6-9, +2, 4 PIM

Our pick as a surprise riser throughout the year, 6'1 Ryan Strome has quickly made a name for himself through the OHL's opening ten days as a timely scorer capable of playing in every situation. While Strome showed flashes as a rookie in 2009-10 with 27 points and 61 PIM in 61 games, having a full off-season to adjust to both the league and his IceDogs linemates- who he joined late last year via trade- has done wonders for his game. After scoring a beauty of a hat-trick in pre-season play, Strome has carried that momentum into the regular season.

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Despite being a tall, lanky forward with above-average skating ability- especially in terms of power- and despite excellent puck control in tight, Strome has a gift for jumping into the play at the right moment and letting go either an accurate, quick snapshot, or a booming slapper that's quickly become his trademark. While a better goal-scorer and less of a pure playmaker than his numbers might suggest, Strome's ability to spot seams spills over into his passing game, allowing him to get the puck to a teammate nobody sees.

When combined with his penchant for physical play, at this point, a strong comparable for Strome is Dustin Brown.

14. C Alexander Khokhlachev (Windsor/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 5 GP, 3-3-6

Like the team across the river from them, the Windsor Spitfires are a team that's gotten used to pre-season predictions of failure. Simply put, when you're as good as the Spits have been over the last little while, folks will look for any excuse to knock you down a peg. But even the most ardent Spits fan had to be worried about losing Taylor Hall and Cam Fowler, among many others. However, GM Warren Rychel continues to find top-line talent seemingly out of thin air. Alexander Khokhlachev was the 23rd pick in the CHL Import Draft, a shrewd bit of manipulation that the likes of Windsor and London have become known for in the OHL Priority Selection.

Khokhlachev has required little time in adapting to the North American game, but, then, being a speedy, highly-skilled forward with Alex Semin-esque hands will translate in any league. Paired with fellow import Tom Kuhnhackl and soon to be joined by Ryan Ellis, Khokhlachev is surrounded by the right types of players to continue potting plenty of points.

15. RW Nicklas D. Jensen (Oshawa/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 3 GP, 2-2-4, +4, 4 PIM

One of several players benefitting from the increased ice-time following a series of suspensions in Oshawa, 6'3 Danish winger Nicklas Jensen has quietly started off his first season on North American ice after spending much of his time in leagues even Hakan Andersson rarely watches. Listing his accomplishments reads like something out of the 1980s version of the Euro leagues; 15 points in five games at the D1 U18s, 43 points in 28 games playing Danish J20 at the age of 16.

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However, Jensen is here now, and his play hasn't suffered a bit. Extremely strong and agile on his skates, Jensen's stops and starts are incredibly fluid for a player his size. A dazzlingly creative forward, Jensen is constantly trying something different to get the puck on net, either by taking it there himself or out-skating opponents into openings. Jensen is an extremely intriguing package of ability and may crack the top twelve by season's end.

16. RW Vladislav Namestnikov (London/OHL)

2010-11 To Date: 3 GP, 1-3-4, +1, 4 PIM

Prepare to see these two very long and hard to spell Russian names flip-flop all year. Although off to a slightly slower start, Vladislav Namestnikov has not had the luxury of top-line minutes and time, competing with fellow RW Jared Knight. However, the NHL draft pick will always win, especially one who is the defacto heart and soul of the team. Still, there's no question Namestnikov is starting to find his comfort zone. An explosive north-south scorer who previously had built up a reputation for being a fine finisher, the passionate forward is starting to learn how and when to slow the game down, resulting in three helpers in his first two OHL games.

17. C Jonathan Huberdeau (Saint John/QMHL)

2010-11 to Date: 7 GP, 6-5-11, 11 PIM

If having to deal with one NHL-caliber stickhandler wasn't challenging enough for opponents playing the Saint John Sea Dogs, how about two? While Jonathan Huberdeau must improve on his skating technique and explosiveness if he wishes to become more than a complimentary threat at the pro level, there's no denying the pivot's extraordinary one-on-one ability. Although he often tends to telegraph his intentions- it's often the only route or move possible to get out of a situation- Huberdeau is so skilled that he simply gets around any obstacle every shift. A scorer who puts most of his goals in from around the net with fancy dekes, it's instead his ghost-like passes that will likely prove his calling card in the near future. With added speed and muscle- Huberdeau weighs in at just 155 lbs despite being over 6'0 tall- he could be a special player.

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18. D Nathan Beaulieu (Saint John/QMJHL)

2010-11 to Date: 7 GP, 0-1-1, 2 PIM

Despite their continued offensive outbursts against hapless clubs and 5-1-1 record, not every member of the Sea Dogs is enjoying a strong start to the season- especially those born before 1993. Veteran Michael Kirkpatrick, who finished with 83 points last year, is fourth in team scoring while Stanislav Galiev has appeared in just three games, recording one point. However, more troubling to the team's championship hopes is the adversity facing Nathan Beaulieu. No fewer than four rearguards have more points than the slick-skating two-way defenseman, and his -3 is tied for worst on the club.

Part of the problem may be familiarity. Gone is sometimes-partner Yann Sauve, an AHLer now with the Manitoba Moose. Simon Despres is also absent, at least for the moment, and the Saint John blueline is being led by a host of players born in 1992 and 1993 that played much of the time on the team's third pairing- if at all- last season.

There's still plenty of time for Beaulieu to turn it around, and that should hopefully begin with the return of Despres from Pittsburgh's training camp. But, ultimately, Beaulieu must show he can succeed without the first rounder at his side.

19. LW Lucas Lessio (Oshawa/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 3 GP, 3-1-4, +3, 6 PIM

Physical two-way winger Lucas Lessio is the second Gen on this list, and Oshawa be competing with Saint John all year for the prestigious title of most players taken in the first round from one CHL squad. A Tier II star last year for St. Michael's where he netted 30 goals and 72 points in 41 games- nearly identical numbers to Andrew Cogliano at same age on the same team- Lessio could have been in the O last season, but heavy courtship from the NCAA had him on the fence.

The decision's been made, of course, and Oshawa has yet another bright young talent to build around. While some may know him for a between-the-legs goal seen on YouTube, it's Lessio's high compete level and willingness to take his skill to the tough areas that makes him a promising talent. An NHL-ready player in how he can go into the corners and come out with the puck, Lessio is also a fine technical skater who can transition and get to full flight at a moment's notice.

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20. C Boone Jenner (Oshawa/OHL)

2010-11 to Date: 2 GP, 0-2-2, 5 PIM

One of several Generals serving two-game suspensions for their role in a massive brawl during a recent Peterborough/Oshawa contest- the OHL's version of Montreal/Boston or Edmonton/Calgary- Booner Jenner has not had a lot of ice-time to showcase his wares thus far. A mercurial player capable of dominating a game one night and being absent the next thanks to his poor skating ability and wavering effort level, if there's a player capable of matching John McFarland's fall from grace, it's Jenner and his combination of game-breaking skill and frustrating consistency.

21. RW Shane McColgan (Kelowna/WHL)

2010-11 to Date: 0 GP, 0-0-0, 0 PIM

In the annals of hockey injury history, there are some doozies. Like, oh, all of Sami Salo's ailments over the years. But Shane McColgan's malady is among the oddest. Stricken with a tonsil infection that's kept him out of game action the entire pre-season and regular season to date, McColgan finally went under the knife at the end of September and is getting closer and closer to game action by the day.

22. LW/C Jeremy Boyce (Timrå/Elitserien)

2010-11 to Date: 5 GP, 1-1-2, 2 PIM

With Magnus Svensson-Paajarvi assured a place in the NHL this year after a solid pre-season and Anton Lander ready to join him in 2011-12, any team would worry about how to replace such contributions. Well, any team but the hockey machine that is the the Timrå Red Eagles. The club's latest star is one Jeremy Boyce, a hard-charging power forward who is enjoying a meteoric rise to stardom. Held to just one assist in four games of J20 action last year, Boyce- a 6'0, 170 lbs forward- has eight points in just three J20 games, spending the rest of the time with the Timrå parent club, where he collected both his first goal and assist.

A physical forward with a penchant for driving the net, Boyce is an excellent skater who can settle an errant pass or shot down and explode onto the attack before defensemen can blink. In addition to good situational awareness and a soft touch with the puck, Boyce owns a

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tremendous amount of passion. Although he started to play with a little less composure as his Elitserien audition wound down, he is the type of player that can lead a team with his sheer effort level and hustle.

23. RW Ty Rattie (Portland/WHL)

2010-11 to Date: 3 GP, 3-2-5, 2 PIM

While it would take a miracle to match the watershed 2010 Draft that saw eight different Portland Winterhawks find NHL homes, Ty Rattie is well on his way to assuring the Hawks see at least one of their players go in the first round of the 2011 affair. A minor hockey phenom who broke the Alberta provincial Bantam scoring record, Rattie is a highly-skilled forward who thrives in trying the impossible every shift. An explosive skater who can handle the puck at top speed as well as he does at a slow burn, Rattie's greatest weapon isn't his skating ability or his soft hands or his quick, blink-and-you'll-miss-it release- it's his confidence and will to make moves even if the end result might be a face-plant into the boards. Rattie is a useful player on the PK for his scoring ability, and has quickly rounded into a two-way player that can be relied on not to make mistakes in the offensive zone.

24. D Jesse Forsberg (Prince George/WHL)

2010-11 to Date: 3 GP, 1-0-1, 2 PIM

Imagine a smooth-skating defenseman who can quarterback the powerplay, lead the rush, lay big hits and be relied upon to only not mistakes under pressure, but thrive under it. That's the kind of player 6'1, 195 lbs rearguard Jesse Forsberg has shown flashes of since debuting in the WHL for a handful of games at the age of 15. While the definition of raw at this point- one night he can be a world-beater in every zone, the next quietly reliable- if Forsberg can find a happy medium, he might end up being the best Canadian defenseman from this Draft.

25. RW Tobias Rieder (Kitchener/OHL)

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Tied with Gabriel Landeskog for second in scoring on the Kitchener Rangers with seven points, one would think there isn't a major difference between the two. Well, there is- and how much it matters is up to you. 5'10 and 165 lbs soaking wet in comparison to Landeskog's mature 6'3 frame, Rieder is a speedy, slick winger who boasts soft hands and an NHL-caliber slapshot that has terrorized goalies both here and abroad. While probably a little small to remain in the conversation for the top 30- better, smaller players continually fall into the 30-90 range- Rieder may finally buck both that bias and the one against German players that has continually seen them taken around the fringes of the Draft.

26. C Michael St. Croix (Edmonton/WHL)
27. LW Matt Nieto (USNTDP)
28. D Oscar Klefberg (Skåre BK/Swe Div-1)
29. D Adam Clendening (USNTDP)
30. C Mark McNeill (Prince Albert/WHL)
31. G Tyson Teichmann (Belleville/OHL)
32. C Brett Ritchie (Sarnia/OHL)
33. D Joe Morrow (Portland/WHL)
34. LW Ryan Tesink (Saint John/QMJHL)
35. D Xavier Ouellet (Montreal/QMJHL)