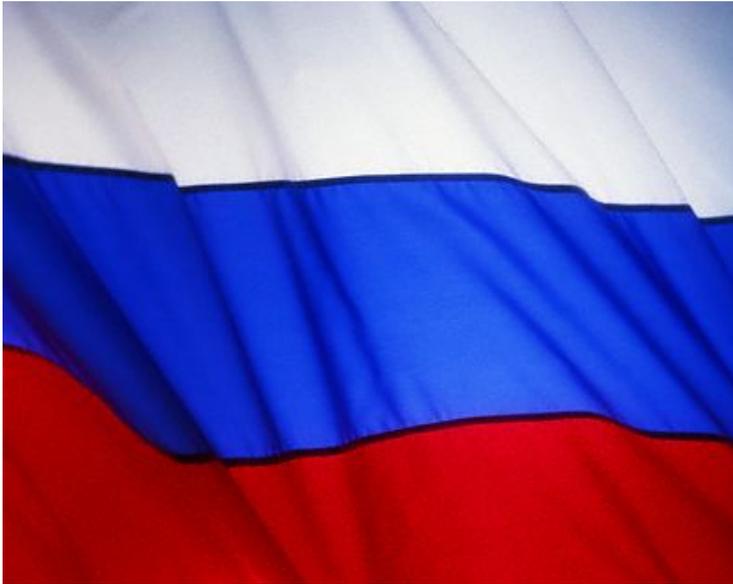


2010 NHL Draft: Underrated players from Russia

Written by Alessandro Seren Rosso

Wednesday, 16 June 2010 09:42 - Last Updated Wednesday, 16 June 2010 20:51



Just in the last few days, the St. Louis Blues got a “one in, one out” deal with Russian prospects. Evgeny Skachkov, whose agent announced that he signed an ELC with the Blues, signed instead a three-year deal with KHL reigning champions Ak Bars Kazan, while blueliner Nikita Nikitin signed with them for real, as reported on their official site.

But now it's the NHL draft time and thus most of the attention is focused on prospects. Some time ago I wrote about [Maxim Kitsyn](#), now I'm going to write about some underrated prospects. There are three players whose stock is rather low in North America, mostly because of the lack of visibility for scouts, but this doesn't mean that they aren't good players or have less potential than other, but more known, players.

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The best kept secret for this year's selections is probably defenseman Alexei Marchenko. The blueliner is a product of the famous CSKA hockey school and he was the supposed to be number one defenseman for the U18 WJC in Belarus, but a mysterious injury kept him out of the lineup. Marchenko is a reliable defenseman who can play very well at both ends of the ice. He's technically gifted – like most of the known Russian players – and can either bring up the puck or search for the breakout pass. He tries to play aggressively, but he rarely exaggerates and has a good ability in avoiding penalty minutes. Marchenko has all the tools to become an NHL player. Technique, defensive play, vision, intelligence – he's got talent, that's for sure. His problem is the lack of a good shot and in fact he scores less than what a player of his caliber should.

“Since the start of the season everyone was waiting from Marchenko to become a star, and he did it” – Russian reporter Ilya Elchaninov explained. “He has had good stats (11 goals and 34 points in 43 MHL games, note), he gets most of his points on the power play, but he's a reliable defenseman. He has the best ceiling among Russian defensemen, if not the best one overall. He can become the new Andrei Markov. I do believe in him. He's got good size for his age and he can still grow. I think that sooner or later he will be one of the top defensemen in the world.”

Another good player who didn't play at the U18s is Nikita Gusev. A fast skater, Gusev is a great dangler and a very good player one-on-one. He's one of the many Russian players whose style might be compared to Pavel Bure's as his top feature is getting the puck after a good breakout pass, then catapult toward the goalie and score him after a fancy fake. That being said, he's a small player and might be hurt by physical play, hence NHL teams might be not too eager to use a pick on him yet even if a call in the later rounds might not be a big surprise for the ones who follow Russian hockey. His natural goalscoring abilities are surely valuable.

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The U18s didn't see another interesting player, Alexander Gogolev. The 18-year-old winger is a very fast player with good playmaking skills, and when the U18 team head coach Mikhail Vasiliev didn't call him for the tournament, many were surprised. He is a very good bag of tricks and this technically sound player might interest more than one NHL team, even if he is absolutely not ready to play against men.

You can add to these players all the other available ones for the 2010 NHL Entry Draft - Kabanov, Burmistrov, Tarasenko and so on. The Russian class for this year's selections does look good, doesn't it?