

## Rookie Renaissance

Written by Russ Miller

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*Russ Miller takes a look at the impact rookies of the Eastern Conference*

Here we are at the halfway point of the season already. It has been a long time since I remember as many first year players having this type of impact for their respective teams as there have been this season. The Eastern Edge looks at some first year players from the Eastern Conference that are having an impact in their inaugural campaigns.

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[Cory Conacher](#) , Tampa Bay

In the AHL last year, Conacher was the leading goal scorer and took home both the Rookie of the Year and MVP honours by recording 39 goals and 80 points in 75 games. He also sat for 114 penalty minutes, which means that even though he isn't the biggest player on the ice, there is a lot of fight in this dog.

Currently the leading NHL rookie point-getter, Conacher has made an impact in a top six role for the Lightning with 18 points in 22 games. He's even receiving second unit power play time. In his last three games, he has taken over 80 percent of his even-strength shifts with Steve Stamkos. When you watch him play, you realize that he's a gamer and is here to stay.

[Jonathan Huberdeau](#) , Florida

The third overall pick in the 2011 NHL Entry Draft, Huberdeau lit up the QMJHL in 2011-12 with 72 points in only 37 games, nearly a two points per game pace. He was named the Memorial Cup MVP in 2010-11 and in his three QMJHL playoffs, he came up large with 69 points in 55 combined games. In two World Junior Hockey Championships, he recorded 18 points in 12 games.

In his rookie season to date, Huberdeau is receiving 16:45 minutes per game, but over the last five contests, he has averaged 20 minutes a match. He plays top power play time and has four multi-point efforts on the season. His 15 points leave him in a three-way tie atop the Panthers in scoring and his ten goals lead the team and all NHL rookies.

[Brendan Gallagher](#) , Montreal

The 20-year-old has a lot in common with the Bruins talented agitator [Brad Marchand](#) . They are equally small, but fearless shift disturbers taken in the middle rounds of their respective draft years who put up both points and penalty minutes. In their last two major junior seasons, Marchand had 153 points in 116 games (1.32 points-per game) and 184 penalty minutes. Gallagher recorded 168 points in 120 games (1.40 points-per game) and sat for 187 minutes.

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Gallagher has 13 points in 18 games, good for third in rookie scoring and was a healthy plus-12 (9th best in the NHL) to start his NHL career. He appears to have adjusted to the pace of professional hockey quite well and was taking shifts with [Max Pacioretty](#) and [David Desharnais](#). His game translates well for fantasy hockey, especially in leagues that value penalty minutes, but with his style of play and lack of size, there will always be the risk of injury.

[Alex Killorn](#), Tampa Bay

The 23-year-old played four years of college hockey for Harvard, with his best season being 46 points in 34 games in 2011-12. He finished off that season with Norfolk of the AHL, recording six points in ten games and then had 12 points in 17 playoff matches. Before being called up to the bigs, Killorn logged 38 points (and 166 shots on goal) in 44 AHL games this season. His 0.86 points-per-game were better than [Cory Conacher](#)'s 0.78 in the AHL during the lockout.

Since being recalled, Killorn has six points in 12 games with Tampa. In last Saturday's game against Boston, he played over 19 minutes, including 6:37 on the power play. He was even playing with Stamkos and St. Louis in the third period and was out there at critical times when the game was on the line, not nailed to the end of the bench like most rookies. He also played 2:07 on the penalty kill, which tells you the coach trusts him with defensive assignments. Combine all that with his skating ability and you've got a great young player in the making.

[Drew Shore](#), Florida

The 6-3, 200 pound Shore was Florida's second pick, 44th overall in the 2009 NHL Entry Draft. In his final season of college hockey, he registered 53 points in 42 games. During the lockout, the 22-year-old had 30 points in 41 AHL games.

In his rookie NHL campaign to date, Shore is averaging close to 16 minutes of ice time per game, but over the last five games, he has received 19:30 per match. He has three points in his last five games and over his most recent three game stretch, he has been playing primarily with [Jonathan Huberdeau](#)

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and

[Peter Mueller](#)

. Shore's plus-1 leads the Panthers and overall, he has ten points (and 59 shots on goal) in 20 NHL games this year.

[Dougie Hamilton](#) , Boston

Hamilton was taken with the ninth overall selection in the 2011 NHL Entry Draft. In his final year of junior hockey, he scored 72 points in 50 games and was plus-37. He also was named Canadian Major Junior Defenseman of the Year in 2011-12.

In what is turning out to be a fine rookie campaign, Hamilton has 11 points in 19 games, outscoring both [Zdeno Chara](#) and [Dennis Seidenberg](#) . Hamilton is receiving the fifth most average time on ice amongst Bruins defensemen (17:22) and plays 2:19 with the man advantage, but only has three power play points. He has played 63 percent of his even-strength shifts with Seidenberg and only 22 percent with Chara. He has three points in his last three contests. This guy has stud written all over him.

[Alex Galchenyuk](#) , Montreal

Galchenyuk was taken third overall in the 2012 draft, the Habs highest draft pick since 1980. He tore his ACL two games into his draft year, but had scouts drooling with his performance in the previous season by recording 31 goals and 83 points in 68 OHL games. In last year's World Junior Championship, Galchenyuk registered eight points in seven games for the gold medal winning Team USA.

After his first 22 NHL games, the 19-year-old rookie has 12 points. He also sports a respectable plus-6 which attests to his attention to the both ends of the rink. He has a very good shot and is starting to unleash it more often. During a six game stretch in mid-February, Galchenyuk scored five points, but he followed that up with a four game pointless streak. On the season, he is receiving an average of 12:19, but over a three game span went from a season high 16:00 minutes to a season low 9:40. Such is the life of a teenager in the NHL.

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[Jakob Silfverberg](#) , Ottawa

The slick Swede came to Ottawa with much anticipation. Last year, he was second in scoring in Sweden's top circuit with 54 points in 49 games, where he nabbed regular season and playoff MVP honours. During the lockout, he played for the baby Sens and he still leads the team with 29 points in 34 games, although with the number of injuries to the Sens this year, is there anyone left on the farm?

Silfverberg receives top six (16:01) minutes in ice time, including mop up duty (1:26) on the power play. He has six points, 60 shots on goal and is a respectable plus-4 in 23 games so far in his inaugural NHL season. The numbers aren't there yet, but when you watch him play, you can see the talent; he is a player.

[Marcus Foligno](#) , Buffalo

Foligno couldn't sustain the momentum he had at the end of last season with [Tyler Ennis](#) and [Drew Stafford](#). Foligno had 13 points in 14 NHL games last year. That year, he finished with 39 points in 60 AHL contests. In his final year of junior hockey, he had 59 points in 47 games. During the lockout this year, Foligno recorded 27 points in 33 games and he currently has eight points in 22 NHL games. Unfortunately, with the recent coaching change in Buffalo, all bets are off.

Patrick Wiercioch, Ottawa

Someone had to benefit from [Erik Karlsson](#)'s untimely demise this season. It appears that Weircioch might be that guy. He has stepped it up offensively from the back end with seven points in 19 games and is averaging 15:40 minutes of ice time per game. Weircioch is receiving 2:02 on the power play and has five of his seven points with the man advantage. He doesn't have a track record of racking up big points in the AHL; last season, he scored 20 points in 57 games and this year, he has a decent 19 points in 32 games. In his best college hockey season, he did have 35 points in 36 games. It wouldn't be completely crazy to suggest that he might sustain his current 30 point pace (pro-rated to 82 games) with the Sens in this shortened campaign.

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[Eric Gryba](#) , Ottawa

While Weircioch has had more of an impact on the scoreboard, Gryba has recorded the third most average time on ice amongst rookies with 21:32 per game, behind only [Justin Schultz](#) and

[Jonas Brodin](#)

. He receives no appreciable power play time though and that seriously limits his fantasy upside. Last year, Gryba scored 20 points in 73 AHL games and prior to getting the call to Ottawa, he had 11 points in 38 AHL games this season. He has two points, 25 hits and 19 blocked shots in nine games with the Sens so far this year. Gryba is having real world impact, but will not be a fantasy hockey factor outside of hits and blocked shots.

[Andrei Loktionov](#) , New Jersey

Since being dealt from the Kings to the Devils, Loktionov has scored five points in seven games. Granted, he has had the luxury of playing beside fellow Russian [Ilya Kovalchuk](#) for most of those games, which is going to help your adjustment period. When Loktionov was 18-years-old, he recorded 66 points in 51 OHL games. The very next season, he registered 31 points in 34 AHL games. He is a risk to flee to Russia to make some serious cash, but if the Devils can make him a regular, then he will be able to make the big bucks in the best league in the world.

[Mika Zibanejad](#) , Ottawa

The Sens top pick (sixth overall) from last year's NHL Entry Draft, has never recorded more than a point-per-game pace in any professional or junior season. There is no denying his talent, but it's never comfortable to pick a guy where the numbers don't add up. He has averaged 12:49 minutes per game including 1:56 with Ottawa and has seven points in 17 games. He also has 11 points in 23 AHL games. Last year, he scored 13 points in 26 Swedish Elite League games and had five points in six World Junior Hockey Championship games for the gold medal winning Swedish squad.

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[Leo Komarov](#) , Toronto

Komarov throws his body around with reckless abandon. Don't count on this Finn who was born in Estonia, but came to the NHL from Russia with no love for anything but hits. Last year in the KHL, Komarov scored 24 points in 46 games for Dynamo Moscow. Komarov has only five points, but sits third in the NHL with 92 hits after 23 games. Now that's making an impact.

Honourable mentions to [Paul Postma](#) , [Tye McGinn](#) , [Casey Cizikas](#) and [Simon Despres](#) .

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