

## The Vantaa Vulture is Lurking

Written by Justin Goldman

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I'm the first to admit that there's no real argument to make against the lack of prized goalies available in this year's NHL Entry Draft. But since it is my sworn duty to help you uncover some of the lesser-known goalies that are draft-eligible and thus capable of transforming into fantasy gold in three or four years, I'll at least die trying.

So forget the fact that most scouting services lack a goalie in the "Top 30" rankings because there are still a number of quality goalies out there that have what it takes to be chosen in the first two rounds. And we have the goalie factories known as Finland and Sweden to thank for this. The European influence, albeit not as strong as past seasons, is once again primed to make a mark on pro hockey in North America for 2009-2010.

We also have to consider the significant notion that most quality NHL goalies are actually drafted in later rounds and in some cases, not even drafted at all. During my research, I uncovered what has to be the best breakdown of goalies taken in the Entry Draft and their subsequent careers. This is a must-read for just about every single fantasy fan out there because it preaches the important lesson of patience for GM's at the Draft. [Read the two-part series right here](#)

So once the North American goalies like Matt Hackett and Olivier Roy are chosen, where does

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it go from there? Well, when you consider how much attention Jonas Gustavsson has received over the last month, it's no wonder this week's School of Block session is dedicated to his arch nemesis and combatant from Finland, Mikko Koskinen.

You'll understand my nickname "The Vantaa Vulture" as soon as you see an action shot or video of him. It seriously looks as if he possesses the wing span of a behemoth vulture with a hyperactive pituitary gland. Koskinen lurks over his opponents at 6-foot-7 and covers the net with quick, telescoping legs and arms that reach from here to Istanbul.

Packaged nicely with his size is a set of solid fundamentals and great positioning that any goalie of his stature would love to have. But the downside is his weight, which I've found to be listed anywhere between 181 – 187 pounds (too many sources to list). So filling out that frame is the next major step to take when it comes time to cross the ocean. Otherwise he will have to deal with a lot more of this:

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=png141I6Y18>]

But before you go labeling him for the second or third round, however, let's all remember the story of Ben Bishop. An absolute monstrous goalie with an excellent three-year collegiate career at Maine, Bishop was drafted much sooner than most expected when he went 85th (3rd round) in the 2005 Entry Draft. This came after one season with the Texas Tornado of the NAHL (a team I actually tried out for in 1999). But after a year of AHL experience in which he played fewer than 40 games, the 6-foot-5, 205-pound Denver native has seen just six games in the NHL.

Bishop's path proves that drafting goalies is a real crapshoot because they are drafted at a very young age and their development charts are murky at best. Some develop quicker than others and some take forever – and many never turn into much of anything at all. Bishop's story also proves that drafting a goalie with the tantalizing one-two punch of "great size" and "quickness" doesn't always translate to a starting NHL goalie. Is Bishop capable of turning into an elite starter, of course...but he sure has a lot to prove over the next few years.

Now there's another promising Finnish prospect available for the Entry Draft named Joni Ortio, who was most recently a member of Finland's U-18 World Championship team. Ortio reminds me of Vesa Toskala thanks to his average-sized 6-foot-0, 174-pound frame and quick hands. He's been a part of the Finnish national team for several years and played for TPS in the U-20 SM-Liiga last season, posting a solid 2.63 goals against average and a .918 save percentage in 26 games. There's no reason why this kid shouldn't be drafted because he has the goods to develop into a true elite NHL goalie.

Then you have the top-ranked European goalie heading into the draft, Sweden's Robin Lehner. Only 17 years old, Lehner was set to see his stock rise after he was named Sweden's starter in the U-18 World Championships. And just like the sun continues to rise and fall, his frame of 6-foot-4 and 220 pounds is considered massive for Swedish goaltenders, especially for his age. So where will he end up being drafted? I'm guessing early in the third round.

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What makes Lehner such an interesting study, however, are his roots. His father Michael coached Henrik Lundqvist for nearly ten years and actually used his son as a guinea pig of sorts. Robin openly talks of the times when his father, complete with a puck shooting machine, used him to test out different styles, positioning and movements in many types of game situations. His father, who never actually played the position himself, would take bits and pieces of wisdom from those practices and then use them to his advantage while working with Lundqvist.

Those practices with his father played a vital role in Lehner quickly turning from a 10-year old player new to the position to a 17-year old Swedish superstar. And therefore it stands to reason that Lehner will not only continue to improve at an outstanding rate, but he could possibly have similar traits to Lundqvist. And which GM wouldn't want a goalie that could look and play like Lundqvist? Feel free to [read more about Lehner and his background here](#) .

"He's the son of Lundqvist's coach in Sweden," all the scouts will say. "He's huge and he's only 17 years old!"

Again, don't get overly excited. It's well documented that Lehner prefers to play one more year in Sweden before setting sail to North America. But depending on when he's actually drafted, he could potentially play in the CHL next season. Right now Lehner is projected to be the first European goalie taken in the Entry Draft, but considering how he performed in the U-18 World Championships, combined with his desire to remain in Sweden one more season, I think that award will end up going to the Vantaa Vulture.

But I'll be completely honest – I'm no wizard when it comes to the NHL Entry Draft, prospect rankings, etc. But what I do know is that Finland produces some of the best goalies in the game right now. Hell, everyone knows that, especially the wonderful group of fantasy freaks known as Dobber Nation. And you know what else everyone knows?

That GM's would love to harvest, tout and ride a highly-talented Finnish or Swedish netminder and that every GM also wants a goalie that takes up a lot of net upon first glance and moves well laterally. Those are the buzz words that GM's look for when drafting a goaltender in late-June. So if I'm an NHL scout, I'm chirping in the ears of the GM and everyone I can about the Vantaa Vulture, Finland's silent answer to Sweden's Gustavsson.

Beyond Koskinen, Lenher and Ortio, there are a number of other solid future goalie stars coming down the pipelines in Europe. The list includes Jurai Holly, Switzerland's Lukas Flueler, Sweden's Anders Nilsson and the Czech Republic's Marek Mazanec.

**YEEHAW, COREY CRAWFORD**

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What a wild weekend for Corey Crawford. It was the first time I saw him play live in a crazy situation like that, so I did some scouting of my own during the second period of Game 4 yesterday afternoon.

\*Crawford moves quickly for a big goaltender and uses his size very well and incorporates a wide-butterfly stance.

\* He had "happy feet" and never really looked "set" for any of the shots against him. This is totally expected when thrown into a situation like his, but at the same time it was very noticeable...and not very effective.

\* Crawford still has some positional work ahead of him. I noticed a number of times that his recovery was not very refined and he is not very proficient with the butterfly slide like many other goalies in the AHL. Instead he relies on positioning and size to get of sticky situations.

\* He displayed a lot of poise throughout the period and did not get rattled easily and stayed mentally sharp.

\* His stance looks a little awkward in net and he doesn't have the flexibility or agility of an elite goaltender.

\* Final Grade: A very solid backup NHLer that will get by relying on size and positioning more than quickness and flexibility. He has the potential to be a #1 netminder but only after three to four years of solid development.

*Be sure to check out The Goalie Guild's updated [BEAST TRACKER throughout the playoffs by clicking the link](#)*

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