

Scouting Jussi Rynnas

Written by Justin Goldman

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Don't look now, but the goalie factory known as Finland has just churned out another quality fantasy prospect. Meet **Jussi Rynnas**, the second European goalie to attract attention from a number of NHL teams and ultimately choose to start their pro hockey career with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Rynnas, who turns 23 on Saturday and is a monster in his own right, just completed a breakout rookie season in the SM-Liiga with Assat Pori. In 31 games for one of the league's weakest teams, he posted a brilliant 2.50 goals-against average and a league-high .929 save percentage.

Listed at 6-foot-4 (6'5" in some places), Rynnas' basic stance has the solid foundation of a cement truck with nitrous boosters. He has an extremely wide stance that allows him appear even bigger in the net, but NHL-level quickness. In fact, if you compared his stance to all current NHL goalies, his would be the widest. Rynnas still has the mobility of a raw-skilled Finn, but similar to Antti Niemi, if given the opportunity, he could easily win games at the NHL level.

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Moving forward, fantasy managers should consider Rynnas as a legitimate long-term keeper with great talent and a clear path of opportunities set before him. This is thanks in large part to Brian Burke's ability to harvest hidden gems and turn them into stars. I expect that Rynnas won't just challenge James Reimer for ice time with the Marlies next season, but will end up playing more games. Combined with his skill, Rynnas is a hard-working individual with a fierce, competitive edge to his game. Most over-sized goalies are considered a bit passive, but Rynnas is active and agile.

It was back in January that I started hearing rumors about NHL teams interested in his services. Because I was slightly familiar with his history in the junior ranks, I knew the rumors had some backing to them. Starting with the 2005-06 season, Rynnas played 30, 23 and then 39 games with Assat's Junior-A team. His skill level and confidence slowly increased over those three seasons, which ultimately put him on the short list for at least 10-12 NHL scouts. Rynnas finally notched a spot on our [Top-100 Rankings](#) back in February, and has been rising ever since. By the time next season begins, he could be nestled very nicely in the Top-50.

[School of Block](#) is all about making quality fantasy goalie decisions. For fantasy managers, the more you are able to understand the goaltending position, the better your results will be against your competitors. Here at DobberHockey and The Goalie Guild, we bring you a 360-degree, three-dimensional profile of goaltenders and prospects. So enjoy our scouting report, which is made possible by this game video posted by [Dave Marlin](#) [Goaltending Academy](#)

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{youtube}YVK28Pfrugk{/youtube}

0:00 to 2:00 – The most noticeable aspect of Rynnas' style is the extremely wide stance and powerful hips and core muscles. This allows him to have an intimidating presence that will force even the most talented shooters to think twice when aiming. Right away, I notice Rynnas uses the "pop-up" technique more effectively than most Finnish prospects, as he still has good body control and balance. In one sequence, he exerts a lot of energy to track the puck by popping in and out of his butterfly three times (:20-:24), which acted as a great display of his strong core.

Another noticeable trait is his crouching ability. Before Rynnas senses a shot coming his way, he visibly crouches by bending his knees a little more and flaring out his feet in order to fully prepare to make the save. Because he's still quite tall, flaring out his stance is a pure advantage. It also reveals he strong focus and tracks plays with precision. Throughout the video, Rynnas reads shots cleanly and clearly knows when to make blocking or reaction saves. He has very active hands and challenges well in all stick and glove areas, so he has tremendous quickness for his size.

2:30 to 4:00 – By now I'm impressed with Rynnas' strong glove hand positioning. His glove is held higher than what is normally seen in North America, but it's not held out in front of him, which is a current trend with many young goalies. Rather, his glove is kept more parallel, tight to his body and held in a more natural, traditional and ready position. In my opinion, this is a great sign that will lead to many other scouts commenting on his strong glove hand.

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I notice that when he stands more upright to see over and around bodies, his glove follows his body and comes too high. But when he's crouching and looking through bodies, that glove is at a perfect height. Many prospects are using the relatively effective, but totally unnatural "palm-out" style, which can cause terrible rebounds and force goalies to think more than they should when making glove saves. It's the most natural save reaction of all, so glove placement should always be at the goalie's most natural or comfortable angle.

His blocker-side elbow is a little more flared out than usual, but over time it will either collapse into his side, or it will stay there and become one of his signature traits. Most goalie coaches teach a tight butterfly in order to seal holes between arms and sides, so it will be interesting to see if it changes over time. Regardless, I love the way he uses active hands to challenge and meet shots. His glove appears tight to the body, but he keeps the wrist and arm loose enough to react cleanly. In most videos of Rynnas, you will see him makes many sharp, clean glove saves.

4:30 to 7:00 – Now I begin to notice a few areas of improvement for his game. Like many raw-talented and big goalies, Rynnas needs to straighten his back. The crouch is excellent, because his knees are bent more, but being hunched over takes away from balance and efficient movement. This is a gradual aspect of development that will take time, but the higher he can sit in the butterfly, the more his shoulders will take away space from the top corners.

Also, when pucks are below his goal line, it is clear that Rynnas isn't very comfortable in this area. He seems unsure of when to turn his head and push to the opposite post. If there's one area on the ice that a goalie moves in a very regimen way, it's behind their goal line stretching all the way across the ice. Because Rynnas has such a wide frame and stance, he takes a lot longer to turn back and forth. He will probably be prone to losing pucks behind the net from time

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to time, so this is another area he will need to work on.

Rynnäs did not display an affinity to handling the puck, which comes at no surprise. It almost looks like he could benefit from a longer paddle. But every goalie is different and that length might be where he feels most comfortable.

7:30 to END – At this point, I've noticed many different aspects of his footwork need refining and improving. He has "happy" or "loud" feet on many instances in the final five minutes. He shuffles well, but a goalie with his size has to play to his strength, so less is more for Rynnäs. By taking advantage of his strong core to make more powerful pushes from his post to the top of his crease, he will cover more distance and takes up even more space in the net.

Rynnäs' left elbow is flared out too far. In a position where everything is as tight as possible, the inside blocker area is an area of potential weakness. There were also a few instances where Rynnäs was unsure of which save technique to use on plays in tight. He was awkward at times, and didn't have the greatest balance on situations where players attacked him from the posts or directly around the net.

Closing Notes

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Overall, I can't help but admire the combination of intimidating size and speed. Because of this, he demands a ton of space in and around his crease. He's such a solid force that players were actually making an effort to not get in his face or create contact on drives to the net. It helps that his blue crease isn't truncated like in North America, but the advantages to a full semi-circle, as we explained during the Olympics, are amorphous at best.

Although this is only one 10-minute sample of Rynnas' game, I feel it's a great representation of his current abilities. Rynnas is a legitimate keeper for any fantasy league manager to own. Combined with the uncertainty surrounding J-S Giguere's future and Gustavsson's ability to handle a heavy workload (and Jussi continually improving on a monthly basis), Rynnas is primed to get some NHL minutes in one to two more seasons. Two years and anywhere from 50-75 games played in the AHL should prove an adequate amount of time for him to adjust to playing in North America. And that's not even discussing the boost Rynnas' game will get from working with the goaltending wizard Francois Allaire.

As I love to do with all rising prospects, I like to compare him to other pro goalies. I see a number of traits in him that remind me of other Finnish goalies. For one, there's Niklas Backstrom. They share the wider-than-average stances and the ability to cover a lot of the net without even really trying. I see traits of Harri Sateri in his game as well, including the husky appearance, the active hands and slow-but-steady development. I even see a few traits of Tuukka Rask in his game, including the flair for the dramatic, the flashy hands and the lightning quick, energetic feet.

Remember that Rynnas is his own style and he's still a young, raw goalie with a lot to prove. He's prone to the same issues that any other young European goalie will face, including angles, positioning and the ability to play through traffic, not to mention long-term issues like handling a

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heavy workload and transitioning to a smaller ice surface. So while there's no guaranteeing Rynnäs will end up as one of the best long-term keepers over the next few years, the video clearly shows that Rynnäs has the skill set, and now the opportunity, to become a true leader for Toronto.