PART 1

PART 2

With the draft coming up, most people tend to focus on who is being drafted and have considerably less knowledge about who is doing the drafting. I plan to single out the decision makers on each team and see how they've done recently. I'm going to focus on the most recent drafts (2005-2008) only. The teams are presented in alphabetical order with five articles each to be published prior to the draft. Please note: This is not an assessment of each team's current prospects but an examination of the people currently doing the drafting and how well those people have done in recent drafts.

Florida Panthers (F)

Draft day decision makers: What a mess. GM Mike Keenan ran the Panthers from May 2004 until Jacques Martin took over in September 2006. The fact that Martin left the GM post recently to become a coach, shows just how low the Panthers are in the NHL pecking order. That turnover has hurt the club and will continue to hurt it until someone of substance steps up and makes a serious commitment to hockey in South Florida. Director of Amateur Scouting Scott Luce and Asst. GM Randy Sexton will be the chief draft day decision makers in 2009. Sexton has only been with the club since 2007, while Luce has been a scouting director with the club for the past four drafts.

All three European scouts have been with Florida for some time, although no other current amateur scout was with the club at the 2005 draft. The Panthers had only two full-time, North American based amateur scouts at the 2005 draft.

2005 - With limited scouting resources, it comes as no surprise that the Panthers made a huge mistake in 2005. Florida took Kenndal McArdle with the 20th pick, ahead of Tuuka Rask, Matt Lashoff, Nicklas Bergfors, T.J. Oshie and Andrew Cogliano who were the next five players taken. Any one of the five would have been much better than McArdle. The Panters were no better with their next pick. At 32nd overall, Florida grabbed current ECHL goalie Tyler Plante. The next three second round picks were James Neal, Ryan Stoa and Marc-Edouard Vlasic. This is one of the worst drafting performances of any team from 2005-2008.

2006 - The Panthers drafted Michael Frolik with the 10th pick. Frolik is looking better and better all the time. The Panthers took nothing of consequence from the rest of the draft, although they didn't have a second round pick.

2007 - In the first round Florida drafted defensive defenseman Keaton Ellerby who could play on the roster as early as this season. Ellerby, taken 10th overall, hasn't turned into the dominant

defensive blue line force as forecast; however, Ellerby was one of many 2007 first-round disappointments. Florida took diminutive winger and current prospect Michal Repik with the 40th pick.

2008 - Despite eschewing a first-round pick in the deepest draft since 2003, the Panthers stole goalie Jacob Markstrom with the first pick of the second round. The Panthers scored again with the 46th pick taking excellent blue line prospect Colby Robak. Florida's third and fourth round picks, defenseman Adam Comrie and power forward A.J. Jenks, both had decent seasons and are solid prospects.

Summary: The Panthers have no GM for the draft, a terrible draft record and a huge turnover among their domestic amateur scouts. The 2008 draft looks promising but not enough to give this group a passing grade after three relatively weak drafts.

Los Angeles Kings (B+)

Draft day decision makers: President and GM Dean Lombardi has been with the club since April 2006. Lombardi established himself with San Jose, working there for 20 seasons, seven as GM. Lombardi decided to buck convention and go with co-amateur scouting directors prior to the 2007 draft. Lombardi promoted Mark Yannetti from pro scout to co-director of amateur scouting along with Michael Futa who came to the Kings from the Owen Sound Attack.

Including senior scout Brent McEwen, four of the Kings eight amateur scouts have been with the team since the 2005 draft.

2005 - Although only half of the Kings current amateur scouts were with LA for this draft, the organization deserves some credit for taking Anze Kopitar with the 11th pick. Seven teams picked weaker players before Kopitar went to the Kings. The Slovenian wasn't the obvious pick he is now. The Kings also grabbed decent goalie propect Jonathan Quick with the 72nd pick.

2006 - Elite goaltending prospect Jonathan Bernier was the first player taken in the Dean Lomardi era with the 11th pick overall. While the Bernier pick was solid, Trevor Lewis with the 17th pick wasn't quite up to par, although Lewis should play in the NHL someday after an excellent "comeback" season.

2007 - Lombardi stunned almost everyone in 2007 when he grabbed unheralded defenseman Thomas Hickey with the fourth pick overall. Two years later, Hickey looks like a good pick at No. 4. With the eighth, ninth and 10th picks, Boston, San Jose and Florida respectively, showed the lack of depth in the 2007 first round grabbing relatively weak players who they would gladly give up for Hickey today. You could even make an argument that Hickey is the best defenseman in the draft. Considering the Kings were in the market for a blue liner, their scouting department looks creative, bold and most importantly, accurate. The Kings shone again in the second round when they drafted Oscar Moller with the 52nd pick. In training camp Moller made the Kings as a 19 year-old and looks to be an interesting mix of grit and second-line skill. LA went

three-for-three with their early picks as they drafted power forward Wayne Simmonds with the last pick in the second round.

2008 - Although they owned the second pick overall, the Kings didn't blow it, drafting future blue line all-star Drew Doughty. The Kings nabbed another defenseman with the 13th pick, picking up big Colten Teubert. It's too early to tell how Teubert compares with those drafted around him, although he had a productive season in the WHL. Lombardi drafted yet another D-man with the second pick in the second round, taking Vyacheslav Voinov, a gritty but smooth-skating Russian. The Kings stole Andrei Loktionov with the 123rd pick, proving they can draft in the later rounds as well.

Summary: The Kings are as good as any team in the early rounds, although their lack of consistent late round pick ups keeps them from the top of the class. Their last two drafts have been very impressive and bode well for the organization.

Minnesota Wild (D-)

Draft day decision makers: Former Pittsburgh Asst. GM Chuck Fletcher took over the club earlier this summer. The rest of the Wild's amateur scouting department has hardly changed over the past four seasons. Guy Lapointe has been the club's co-ordinator of amateur scouting since the club's inception. Eight of Minnesota's 11 amateur scouts have been in place for at least the last four drafts.

2005 - Given the talent available, taking Benoit Pouliot with the fourth pick was a mistake. The rest of the draft was almost as bad, although 122nd pick Morten Madsen holds some offensive promise.

2006 - The Wild took James Sheppard with the 9th pick overall. Sheppard was a decent pick given his combination of offensive talent and leadership ability. Diminutive Cal Clutterbuck, a decent third round pick, will be a hard working bottom-six forward for years to come.

2007 - Colton Gillies, a 6'4, 205-pound power forward, possesses great speed for his size and would be an elite power forward if he had hand-eye co-ordination. As it stands, Gillies has upside as a third line checker. Considering he was taken 16th overall, Gillies had better turn into an elite checker to make this pick worthwhile. Fourth rounder Justin Falk and fifth rounder Cody Almond both hold promise but are still considered propects and are both at least three years away.

2008 - Smooth skating defensive defenseman, Tyler Cuma was taken 23rd overall. Cuma is a touch small but holds great promise as an elite stopper. The Wild grabbed offensive blue liner Marco Scandella 55th overall. Scandella doesn't have elite offensive upside but he can put up some points from the back end.

Summary: For a team with the fourth, ninth, 16th and 23rd overall picks in the last four drafts, the Wild have relatively little to show for it. Sheppard and Cuma were both decent picks but Pouliot and Gillies are questionable at best. The Wild have drafted some decent prospects in the mid rounds but nowhere near enough to compensate for their mediocre performance in the early rounds. Considering how poorly the Wild have done at the draft table, there has been precious little turnover among their amateur scouts.

Montreal Canadiens (A+)

Draft day decision makers: Executive Vice-president and GM Bob Gainey assumed his current duties on July 1st 2003. Gainey hired director of player recruitment and development, Trevor Timmins soon after he took the GM post. Timmins is primarily responsible for overseeing and directing the Canadiens' amateur scouting system which includes 12 amateur scouts.

2005 - In one of the biggest surprises in recent drafts, the Canadiens took Carey Price with the fifth overall pick. It turned out to be a great move and Montreal followed it up with more draft magic. The Habs grabbed Guillaume Latendresse with the 45th pick, Matt D'Agostini with the 190th pick and Sergei Kostitsyn with the 200th pick. Montreal is the only team that have four regulars from the 2005 draft and if Price develops some consistency, he could become a superstar.

2006 - With the 20th pick, Montreal drafted David Fischer who has developed slowly but consistently with Minnesota in the NCAA. Montreal then stole Ben Maxwell with the 49th overall pick. Maxwell, third in AHL rookie scoring, has potential as a first-line center.

2007 - Montreal took defenseman Ryan McDonagh with the 12th overall pick. McDonagh has developed smoothly and is considered a blue chip defensive prospect. With the 22nd pick Montreal scored again, grabbing Max Pacioretty, already an NHL'er and potentially an elite power forward with a special mix of size and strength. Future NHL defenseman P.K. Subban was Montreal's next steal. Taken 43rd, Subban not only has star potential, he is captain material. Slick offensive blue liner and blue chip prospect, Yannick Weber was another steal at 73rd overall.

2008 - The Habs had no first round pick in 2008 and they had a very late pick in the second round. Montreal picked up Danny Kristo, a slight but offensively talented, college-bound forward with their second rounder. Late in the third round, the Canadiens drafted Steve Quailer a big two-way forward who excelled for Northeastern as a freshman. In the fifth round Montreal grabbed their best prospect of the draft - Maxim Trunev. Although a little small, Trunev has all the offensive tools to excel in the NHL.

Summary: The only thing separating Montreal's scouting department from Detroit's is Montreal's inability to consistenly draft late-round talent. Montreal frequently drafts mid-round gems and have drafted very well in the first two rounds.

Nashville Predators (C)

Draft day decision makers: In Nashville, it's all about President of Hockey Operations and GM David Poile. Poile, the only GM in franchise history, will work closely with Asst. GM. Paul Fenton and chief amateur scout Jeff Kealty on draft day. Kealty has been with the club since the 2001-02 season and was appointed to his current post after the 2007 draft. Fenton is in his third season as Asst. GM. Five of the Predators' eight amateur scouts have been with the club for the last four drafts.

2005 - Nashville's first round pick has already played 54 NHL games for Philadelphia. Ryan Parent, taken 18th overall, could be an elite defensive defenseman one day. Nashville snagged 6'5, 225-pound Cody Franson with the 79th pick. Franson had a poor camp but managed a 50-point season in the AHL. It's just a matter of time for Franson. Cal O'Reilly, drafted 150th overall, has developed consistently and should eventually get a chance to crack Nashville's top six. Patric Hornqvist was the last player taken in the 2005 draft. He was taken 230th overall but should be a decent pro. He's played 28 games for Nashville already and has some upside as a second-line sniper.

2006 - With no first or third round picks, Nashville's scouts were unable to unearth any players of note in this draft. A wasted year.

2007 - Still very thin, defenseman Jonathan Blum oozes hockey sense. Blum is a blue chipper who needs at least two years before he sees regular NHL ice time. Once highly rated, Goalie Jeremy Smith seems to consistently crack under pressure. Despite that, Smith has a chance to make the NHL as a backup. Center Nick Spaling, a big producer in junior, hasn't been able to produce in the pros. Spaling will use his speed and work ethic to play in the NHL, albeit in the bottom six.

2008 - At No. 8, Nashville drafted budding power forward Colin Wilson. Wilson was a good pick but not a great one considering Mikkel Boedker was drafted right afterwards and Cody Hodgson was taken two picks after Boedker. With the 18th pick, Nashville took Chet Pickard, a blue chip goaltending prospect. Pickard had 11 less wins than in his draft year and played poorly in the playoffs this season.

Summary: Nashville had a great 2005, a horrible 2006, a decent 2007 and a decent 2008. It all adds up to a good grade but not a great one.

New Jersey Devils (C+)

Draft day decision makers: President, CEO and GM of the Devils, Lou Lamoriello is a hands on leader and a proven winner. He relies heavily on David Conte, Executive VP of Hockey Operations and Director of Scouting, however Lamoriello is not afraid to step in and take over. Conte and assitant scouting director, Claude Carrier will make most of the draft day decisions

unless Lamoriello feels strongly about a player. New Jersey have 14 full and part-time amateur scouts, by far the most in the NHL.

2005 - With the 23rd pick, New Jersey took Nicklas Bergfors, a solid two-way forward. Bergfors has been a mild disappointment because of his slow development. T.J. Oshie and Andrew Cogliano were drafted right after Bergfors who has upside as a two-way second-line winger. With the 38th pick, New Jersey grabbed Jeff Frazee, a blue chip goalie prospect who improved considerably last season.

2006 - The Devils grabbed gritty defenseman Matt Corrente with the last pick in the first round. The Devils also picked up Alexander Vasyunov with the 58th pick. Vasyunov is a long shot to play on the first line although he has serious top-six potential. With their third round pick, New Jersey grabbed elite checker, Vladimir Zharkov.

2007 - Despite not having a first round pick, New Jersey nabbed two Lou Lamoriello-type players in the draft. Mike Hoeffel and Matt Halischuk are good on their skates, play both ways and consistently work hard.

2008 - Mattias Tedenby is small but extremely fast. If Tedenby can handle the rough stuff and stay healthy, he could become a star. If that happens, the Devils will have stolen a good one with the 24th pick. Patrice Cormier, a mature player who re-invented his game, was the Devils 2nd pick. Cormier went from high- flying junior to grind-it-out pro and appears to have carved out a career for himself.

Summary: The Devils almost always draft at the bottom of each round. Because of that they frequently pick character players that fit their culture rather than risk a pick on a boom-or-bust type. Their conservative philosophy doesn't lend itself to drafting well after the third round and nor does it help them draft star players.

Team ratings so far:

A+ Detroit Red Wings
A+ Montreal Canadiens
A Buffalo Sabres
A- Colorado Avalanche
A- Dallas Stars
B+ Los Angeles Kings
B+ Boston Bruins
B Edmonton Oilers
C+ Chicago Blackhawks
C+ New Jersey Devils
C Nashville Predators

C Calgary Flames
C Columbus Blue Jackets
C Atlanta Thrashers
D+ Carolina Hurricanes
D Anaheim Ducks
D- Minnesota Wild
F Florida Panthers