All players face challenges making it in the NHL. For big players, they sometimes struggle to keep up with the pace of the game. It can take a while to grow into their frame and their skill can lie largely untapped until their early 20s. For small players who catch the eyes of scouts, skill is rarely a problem. They usually ooze it. It has been this way for a few decades now. Smaller players need to prove that they can handle the rigours of the pro game. Many have done it before, and more are doing it now, but there is still a bias against the smaller player. It does take a special breed of player to make it as a small guy and work ethic and courage are usually the key attributes.

Buffalo Sabres prospect Tyler Ennis is one such player. Ennis has been a fast climber since the New Year. This month, he's up to 17th on DobberHockey's List of top 215 prospects. The former first round pick (26th overall in 2008) climbs up from 40th in February and 57th in January.

Ennis's offensive output has been fairly consistent all season, but he had his best month in February with 17 points in 14 games. He's notched 22 goals and 42 assists in 66 games as a 20-year-old rookie in the AHL. Scouts give Ennis an excellent grade in skating, puckhandling

and hockey sense. His shot and scoring ability are very good. That adds up to a great combination of skills that will help him overcome his lack of size. He put up back-to-back 40-goal seasons in the rugged WHL and once scored all six of his team's goals in a 6-2 win.

For those of you who remember Cliff Ronning, Ennis is very much like him, although Ennis is more of a goal scorer than Ronning was. Ennis is a small waterbug centre with all the offensive tools. Ennis has great touch and soft hands and complements his mobility with a dangerous change of gear. One thing you should not count on Ennis for is penalty minutes. He won back-to-back Brad Hornung trophies as most sportsmanlike player in the WHL. He will not help you in the PIM categories – he had just 10 PIM this year in AHL

At five-five-nine, 164 pounds, Ennis is going to make some defencemen lick their chops when he comes streaking through the neutral zone. Defencemen like to clobber little guys, but catching guys like Ennis in the trolley tracks proves to be difficult because of their mobility and low centre of gravity. If Ronning, who played at five-foot-eight and 170 pounds, can succeed in the NHL of 20 years ago, Ennis can certainly succeed in today's NHL. Ronning amassed 869 points in 1,137 NHL games.

If Ennis can come close to that, he'll make his fantasy GMs and the Buffalo Sabres very happy.

Upside: 35-45-80