The Nashville Predators must have a secret lab somewhere where they breed young defence prospects. Just when you think you've got a handle on the names of all of them, another one takes a big development leap.

This year, that defenceman is Roman Josi, a Swiss-bred rearguard that the Predators took in the second round (38th overall) in 2008.

In his third season in Switzerland's top pro league, Josi put up excellent numbers as he tallied nine goals and 12 assists in just 26 games. He also had a stint with the Swiss national team at the world juniors and – in an impressive feat for a teen-aged defenceman – is tied for the scoring lead among blueliners at the world championship.

Josi has a goal and two assists through three games and scored the game-winner against Latvia last Saturday. Such a precocious display of offensive ability by a defenceman is rare at the world championships. Despite Switzerland's recent wave of blueline talent that began with Mark Streit, the Swiss have never had a phenom on the blueline like Josi. Luca Sbisa earned accolades for his cool demeanour when he made the Philadelphia Flyers at age 18 and Yannick Weber has wowed scouts with the heavy shot he used to notch 20 goals with the Kitchener Rangers, but Josi could be the best of them because he combines their skills. As a fantasy GM, you don't worry too much about defence, but with a guy like Weber, his size and inability to handle bigger forwards could keep him out of the lineup or worse, out of the NHL. With Josi, there are no such concerns, and he has offensive upside is equal to that of Sbisa, perhaps with more likelihood that he'll hit it.

The Predators are excited about his potential because of his puck-moving skills and his penchant for well-time forays into the attack. Josi reads the game very well and makes smart, simple plays. He's responsible defensively and is a well-rounded blueliner who plays well all over the ice. He has good anticipation that allows him to use his stick to shut down passing lanes.

The six-foot-one, 198-pound Josi is a former captain of his country's under-18 team at the world championship and is very strong on his skates and just needs to develop the strength to handle bigger forwards.

Josi would be on a faster path to the NHL with just about any other NHL team. However, with Blueliner Inc., a.k.a. the Nashville Predators, his arrival time will depend on his ability to outplay rivals and the contract status of other defencemen. Dan Hamhuis, for one, could very well price himself out of town this summer and make way for Alexander Sulzer. The Predators brought

Cody Franson into the mix this past season and already have Ryan Suter and Shea Weber in the top two slots. The Predators like to take their time with prospects, so expect Josi to spend a year in the AHL to adjust to the North American game before he arrives in Nashville in 2011.

Upside: No. 2 defender, 15-35-50