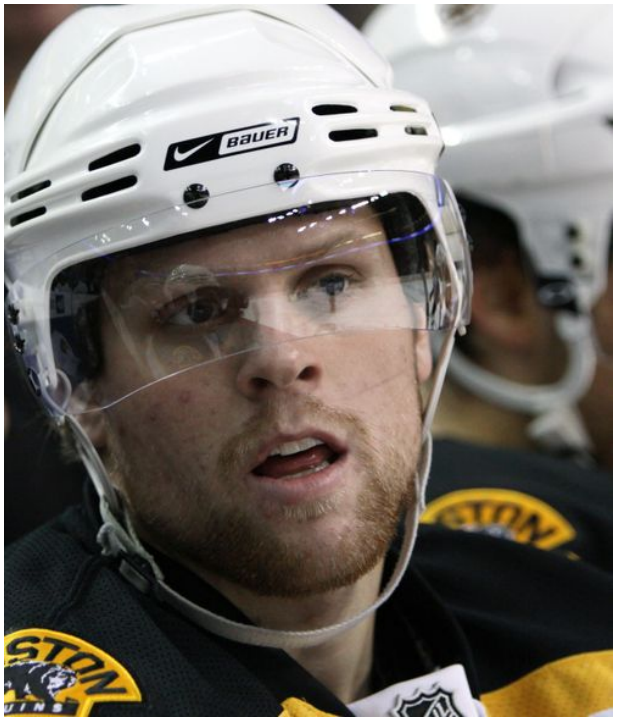

With the draft coming up, most people tend to focus on who is being drafted and have considerably less knowledge about who is doing the drafting. Many of the organizations have changed over the last few years, however, I plan to single out the decision makers on each team and see how they've done recently. I'm going to focus on the most recent drafts (2005-2008) only. The teams will be listed in alphabetical order and ranked from A+ to F. The Top 15 teams are graded between an A+ to a C+, while the bottom 15 receive a C to an F. The teams are presented in alphabetical order with four 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 each of those people have done in recent drafts.

Anaheim Ducks (D)

Draft day decision makers: Because former General Manager (GM) Brian Burke is now with the Toronto Maple Leafs, Ducks personnel will be more difficult to evaluate. Luckily, the Ducks hired from within, promoting the former Senior Vice President (SVP) of Hockey Operations Bob Murray. Not only does Murray have a strong scouting background, he has been with the club over the last four years and had a strong relationship with Burke. David McNab, current SVP of Operations, is another scouting veteran with a strong background in the NCAA.

The Director of Amateur Scouting is Martin Madden and the Assistant Director of Amateur Scouting is Alain Chainey. Madden, formerly an amateur scout for the Carolina Hurricanes scored a major promotion moving to Anaheim after the 2008 draft. It's unsure how much input Chainey, Ducks Amateur Scouting Director since 1996, will have in the upcoming draft, however, Chainey's track record isn't stellar. Carolina's picks in each year will be given a cursory examination given Madden's background with the team and his apparent success. There has been considerable turnover among Anaheim's amateur scouts over the last five seasons.

2005 - Anaheim picked Bobby Ryan with the second overall pick which looks pretty good given how difficult it is to find with someone of his skill set. Ryan is largely a Burke pick, however, as Burke was impressed with Ryan's interview and grabbed him over other top prospects largely on the strength of his character. Anaheim took Brendan Mikkelson with the 31st pick which appears to be a mistake given the talent taken right after him. Anaheim picked up Brian Salcido, a promising defenseman in the fifth round.

Carolina had did not have a good 2005 draft and eventually had to trade Jack Johnson, the third pick overall because of a dispute over where he would play.

2006 - Mark Mitera, a solid defensive prospect was taken with the 19th pick in the first round. Matt Beleskey was a good fourth round pickup, however the rest of the draft was uneventful for the Ducks.

Without a true first or second rounder, Carolina stole Jamie McBain, a prodigiously offensive defenseman from Wisconsin (NCAA) with the 63rd pick.

2007 - Anaheim grabbed Eric Tangradi, a potential power forward, with the 42nd pick. Logan MacMillan, a two-way forward prospect was taken with the 19th pick in the first round. MacMillan has been a relative disappointment.

In a weak first round, Carolina's decision to draft elite checking prospect Brandon Sutter will pay off. If not for a crushing Doug Weight check and subsequent concussion, Sutter would be an NHL regular today. Regardless, Sutter will be a good NHL pro. Third round pick Drayson Bowman was the real steal however, as Carolina fared as well as any team in the top end of the 2007 draft.

2008 - Anaheim picked solid defensive prospect Jake Gardiner with the 17th pick overall but the rest of the draft is a waiting game.

Carolina picked up Zach Boychuk with the 14th pick. Boychuk was so good in training camp he played a couple of games with the Hurricanes. Second round pick, Zac Dalpe led Ohio State in goals as a freshman.

Summary: With the loss of Burke and the hiring of both a new GM and Director of Amateur Scouting, there are too many changes in the Ducks front office to be confident about their drafting ability this season. Their drafting record in the last four seasons doesn't do anything to inspire confidence. Anaheim might surprise if Madden, an excellent scout, can adapt to his new job and gel with existing scouting personnel.

Atlanta Thrashers (C)

Draft day decision makers: The GM is Don Waddell, the Director of Amateur Scouting is Dan Marr and the Head Scout is Marcel Comeau. All three have been with the club for 11, 11 and nine years respectively. All three were there for the most recent drafts and the team's six amateur scouts are a relatively experienced group.

2005 - There were a number of good players available in the 2005 first round but Atlanta selected Alex Bourret. Consider the first round a bust. The Thrashers had two busts and one solid second round pick in a good, deep, second round. With their 41st pick they grabbed solid goalie prospect Ondrej Pavelic. Andrei Zubarev was a nice pickup in the sixth round as he appears to be headed to the NHL and has some upside as a top five defenseman. Overall, a pretty poor draft for Atlanta.

2006 - A decent draft for Atlanta as they picked up Bryan Little with the 12th pick overall and solid forward prospect Riley Holzapfel with the 43rd pick.

2007 - Atlanta traded away its top two picks but grabbed decent forward prospect Spencer Machacek in the third round. It was an average draft so it's hard to blame them for trading away their first two picks in this one.

2008 - Atlanta had the third pick overall and picked Zach Bogosian who played well prior to a season ending injury. Daulton Leveille was taken 29th overall and had a hard time adjusting to college hockey after a dominant season in Junior "B."

Summary: The Thrashers' decision makers, scouting department and their organization in general has been pretty stable. The stability seems to have paid off somewhat as their drafting has improved over time. Atlanta deserves an average grade even though their prospects are among the NHL's best. Their poor finishes have given them relatively high picks. Atlanta has a

very thin management team that oversees the amateur draft.

Boston Bruins (B+)

Draft day decision makers: Boston's current GM is Peter Chiarelli, previously the Asst. GM of the Senators. Chiarelli was Boston's GM for the 2007 and 2008 drafts only and had little input into Ottawa's amateur drafting. Fortunately, Boston's management team is experienced and deep, especially pertaining to the amateur draft.

Asst. GM Jim Benning joined the Bruins in July 2006 as Director of Player Personnel before being promoted to his current postion. Benning did a solid job for the Buffalo Sabres as their Director of Amateur Scouting for eight seasons prior to moving to Boston. Wayne Smith, in his third year with the Bruins, is the new head of amateur scouting. He works with Director of Player Personnel Scott Bradley overseeing the team's amateur scouts. Bradley, was the club's Director of Amateur Scouting for 11 seasons before moving to his current position to start the season. Most of the Bruins six amateur scouts have three years of experience or less.

2005 - With the 22nd pick Boston grabbed Matt Lashoff, currently a solid NHL prospect. Brock Bradford was a good 7th round pick although his future is still uncertain. It wasn't a great draft for the Bruins unless Lashoff surprises and develops into a consistent top-four defenseman.

2006 - An excellent draft. The Bruins had the fifth pick and grabbed Phil Kessel who appears to have 50-goal potential. Sure the Bruins had a high pick, but there were other good players available and Kessel's stock had plummeted before the draft. The Bruins picked the right guy. They followed that up with a second round miss but by grabbing Milan Lucic with the 50th pick, they more than made up for it. Lucic was an excellent selection considering the largely mediocre players drafted near him. With a high third round pick the Bruins grabbed Brad Marchand, who has an excellent chance to be a solid third-line player and team leader.

2007 - In a fairly weak first round, the Bruins grabbed fairly weak first rounder Zach Hamill with the eighth pick. With the 35th pick the Bruins grabbed Tommy Cross who has had injury problems at Boston College.

2008 - The Bruins grabbed Joe Colborne with their first pick, 18th overall. Colborne, a big forward, is expected to take a long time to develop, however, he had a solid first season playing for Denver in the NCAA. Maxime Sauve, a skilled forward from the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL), had a good season on a poor team in Val d'Or. So far so good for the Bruins.

Summary: Boston had one of the best 2004 drafts of any NHL team. Although I'm not looking at the '04 draft, if you combine it with their success in 2006, it proves 2006 was no accident. This group knows what they are doing and deserve a solid grade.

Buffalo Sabres (A)

Draft day decision makers: Longtime GM Darcy Regier and Director of Amateur Scouting Kevin Devine, are the chief decision makers. In his 11 years with the Sabres, Devine has spent the last three in his current postion. Except for the two European scouts, the Sabres have a relatively new group of seven amateur scouts largely because of a change in philosophy four years ago. Aside from losing Benning, the Sabres increased their use of video in their player assessments. Although the management team appears thin, both Regier and Devine are experienced and the Sabres have been consistently successful at the draft table.

2005 - Marek Zagrapan hasn't turned into the slick top-six center the Sabres had in mind when they drafted him with the 13th pick overall. He improved slowly every year and would likely have seen some time in the NHL, however, he grew impatient and will now ply his trade with Severstal Cherepovets of the Russian Kontinental Hockey League (KHL). Zagrapan can get out of his contract after one year if he tires of life in north western Russia. Aside from Zagrapan, the Sabres scored on almost every single
pick they made in 2005. Second rounder Philipe Gogulla, third rounder Marc-Andre Gragnani, fourth rounder Chris Butler, fifth rounder Nathan Gerbe and sixth rounder Vyacheslav Buravchikov (if he signs) have either spent time or will spend time in the NHL. Interestingly, Buffalo traded for Washington's 6th round pick Tim Kennedy two weeks after the draft. Kennedy, a Buffalo native and de facto Buffalo pick will also spend time with the big club, perhaps as soon as next season.

2006 - Defenseman Dennis Persson has been a bust with the 24th pick in the first round but second rounders Jhonas Enroth and Mike Weber will both likely play with the Sabres this season.

2007 - Second round pick T.J. Brennan and fifth rounder Bradley Eidsness are both excellent prospects although it's too early to tell if either will make the NHL. Paul Byron, the 179th pick overall was recently signed to an entry level contract with the Sabres after making significant progress since he was drafted.

2008 - Two Sabre first round picks Tyler Myers and Tyler Ennis played for Canada's gold medal WJC team earlier this year. Second rounder, Luke Adam progressed nicely playing for Montreal in the QMJHL this season.

Summary: As a team that frequently loses its top free agents, the Sabres have had to draft well to remain competitive. Despite a fairly big shakeup in the scouting department four years ago, the Sabres remain one of the elite clubs at the draft table. Considering their top draft position in the last four years has been 12th overall, the club has done a masterful job of stocking up prospects. Even when the Sabres don't hit a home run with their first pick (Zagrapan and Persson), they manage to make up for it in the later rounds.