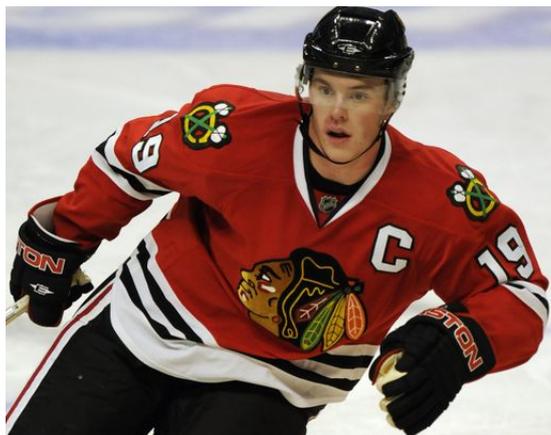


Battle of the Scouting Departments - Part 2 of 5

Written by Stuart McDonald

Saturday, 13 June 2009 11:13 - Last Updated Monday, 15 June 2009 13:13



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. We'll focus on the most recent drafts (2005-2008) only. 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.

Calgary Flames (C)

Draft day decision makers: The Flames have three draft-day decision makers, including GM Darryl Sutter, Director of Amateur Scouting Tod Button and Director of Amateur Scouting Mike Sands. All three were with the Flames for the last four drafts. There has been some turnover among the amateur scouts, but that's probably a good thing given that Calgary's last two drafts were much better than the two prior.

2005 - Calgary took big defensive defenseman Matt Pelech with the 26th pick overall. It wasn't a great pick but not a bust either. Pelech should be a solid if unspectacular top-six defenseman for the Flames. Calgary had no second round pick in the draft, which was a mistake because this draft had two good rounds. Calgary's two early third round picks were busts, but their fifth

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rounder saved their bacon. Goalie Kevin Lalande, since traded to Columbus, has excellent upside as a No. 1 NHL goalie. Brett Sutter is another late rounder who has some potential as an energy player.

2006 - The Flames took Leland Irving with the 26th pick. Irving has upside as a No. 1 NHL goalie so give the Flames some credit here. Again they had no second round pick and two third rounders. Calgary missed again with their third rounders and there was no late round steal to salvage this draft.

2007 - This was a weak draft, but don't tell that to the Flames. In a terrible first round for most teams, Calgary grabbed Mikael Backlund with the 24th pick. Yet again, there was no second round pick, however, John Negrin a good offensive defenseman was taken early in the third. Negrin shapes up as a puck moving blue liner. Calgary hit in the fourth, grabbing 6'6 Keith Aulie with the 116th pick. Aulie is huge and has top-four potential. Calgary grabbed Windsor character forward Mickey Renaud in the fifth round. Renaud had excellent NHL potential before passing away in February 2008.

2008 - The Flames grabbed Windsor's Greg Nemisz with the 25th overall pick. Nemisz should be a top six winger at some point. With their only second rounder since 2004, Calgary drafted Mitch Wahl, a hard working, character player with definite upside as a third line checking center. In the fourth round Calgary drafted T.J. Brodie who emerged this season as a solid offensive blue line prospect. He bumped up his point totals by 20 this season, a huge jump for a defenseman.

Summary: Surprise! Calgary don't have a second rounder in 2009. They don't have a third rounder either. They're a tough team to gauge because they haven't had a first rounder before the 24th pick and have only had one second round pick in the last four seasons. Their first picks have been solid and they have drafted reasonably well in the later rounds, however, you have to question Sutter's willingness to draft only five players in the top 60 and none in the top 20 in the last four drafts. That said, the scouts have done well with what they have. Calgary's drafting has improved considerably in the last two seasons.

Carolina Hurricanes (D+) □

Draft day decision makers: Anaheim's Director of Amateur Scouting Martin Madden, formerly a top amateur scout for the Hurricanes, scored a major promotion moving to Anaheim after the 2008 draft. This is a fairly significant change for the organization because they have a very small amateur scouting staff and Madden was a big part of it. Tony MacDonald, Carolina's current Director of Amateur Scouting, only has a year's worth of experience in the position although he has been with the organization for 11 years. GM Jim Rutherford has been with the club since 1994.

2005 - Carolina 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. Consider this year a complete bust.

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2006 - Without a first rounder, Carolina stole Jamie McBain, a prodigiously offensive defenseman from Wisconsin (NCAA) with the 63rd pick. There were no late round pick-ups of note.

2007 - In a pretty average 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. Chris Terry, taken with the 132nd pick (fifth round) has slowly developed into a blue chip prospect. Terry has excellent top-nine potential.

2008 - Carolina picked up Zach Boychuk with the 14th pick. Boychuk was so good in training camp that he played a couple of games with the Hurricanes. Boychuk has star potential. Second round pick, Zac Dalpe finished second in Ohio State goal scoring as a freshman and appears to have been a steal at 45th overall. Carolina fared well in the later rounds as well, grabbing solid defenseman prospect Michal Jordan and blue chip goalie prospect Mike Murphy with the 105th and 165th picks respectively.

Summary: Like Calgary, Carolina had two weak drafts followed by two good ones. Unlike the Flames, however, Carolina has had considerable turnover among the decision makers. Based on their success in the last two drafts, the Canes deserve a decent grade, but losing Madden to Anaheim makes the current group mediocre until they can prove otherwise.

Chicago Blackhawks (C+) □

Draft day decision makers: Chicago has a deep front office and a deep amateur scouting staff. GM Dale Tallon has been with the club since the 2005 draft, Asst. GM Rick Dudley, a former GM with Ottawa, Tampa Bay and Florida, has been with the Hawks since the 2007 draft. Director of Amateur Scouting Mark Kelley, an experienced scout, is in his first year in his current role and Michel Dumas, Chief Amateur Scout, has been a Hawks scout for 32 years (yes, 32) and Chief Scout for 17. The team has seven amateur scouts, three of whom have been with the club since the 2005 draft.

2005 - The Hawks made a mistake drafting Jack Skille with the seventh pick overall. Four out the next five selections were better picks, or would have been if not for the tragic death of Luc Bourdon. Skille isn't a bust, but he's far from the star power forward Chicago expected him to be. It's possible Skille just needs more time, however, he has to show more than he did in the AHL last season. The Hawks drafted blue chip defensive prospect Niklas Hjalmarsson with the 108th pick in the draft. Hjalmarsson could be an elite defensive defenseman one day.

2006 - Chicago grabbed Jonathan Toews with the third pick. The top-five players in the 2006 draft have all proven to be NHL stars, however, Toews' leadership stands out. The Hawks grabbed Igor Makarov early in the second round. Makarov is a blue chip offensive prospect.

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2007 - With the first pick, Chicago drafted Patrick Kane, not a slam dunk pick at the time because of his small frame. Given that Kane is already a legitimate star and that the other top picks have yet to establish themselves, it appears that Chicago got it right. With the 38th and 56th pick, the Blackhawks drafted Bill Sweatt and Akim Aliu, two solid, if unspectacular prospects.

2008 - Kyle Beach might be the power forward Chicago was hoping for when they drafted Jack Skille. Power forwards take a long time to develop but Beach had an excellent season and is definitely on track. Defenseman Shawn Lalonde, an offensively gifted defenseman, also had a good season and was a nice pick-up early in the third round.

Summary: There is no question Chicago has built an elite young team around players taken in the last four drafts. But be wary of giving them too much credit, because Kane and Toews aside, they haven't been spectacular. Other than Hjalmarsson, the Hawks haven't drafted anyone of NHL value in the mid to late rounds.

Colorado Avalanche (A-)

Draft day decision makers: For an organization that had Pierre Lacroix as its GM in 2005, Francios Giguere in 2006-2008 and will have a new GM in Greg Sherman, the organization is remarkably stable. Giguere left in April but the Avs just moved everyone up a notch internally. It's a good way to run an organization and Lacroix deserves a tonne of credit. There is more than enough draft day talent in the organization to handle the loss of Giguere.

Craig Billington, the new Vice President of Hockey Operations/Assistant General Manager, has been a part of the Avalanche front office for the past six years. Along with Rick Pracey, Director of Amateur Scouting and Alan Hepple, the Assistant Director of Amateur Scouting the Avs amateur scouting core is as good as anyone's in the NHL.

2005 - Colorado had no picks in the first round, but snagged Ryan Stoa with the 34th pick early in the second. The big center came back from relative obscurity to lead the University of Minnesota in scoring and plus minus last year. Stoa is a good example of how difficult it is to assess recently drafted prospects because he was considered a write-off a year ago. The club drafted a franchise player with their second rounder, grabbing Paul Stastny with the 44th pick. Sure they got a little lucky, but give them credit for drafting him when every other club didn't. Grabbing blue chip prospect T.J. Hensick with the 88th pick puts Colorado near the top of the pack for the 2005 draft. As an added bonus, the Avs picked up small defenseman Kyle Cumiskey with their seventh rounder. Cumiskey has played 53 games in three years with the Avalanche and may someday earn a regular roster spot.

2006 - Chris Stewart was a decent pick at 18th overall. Stewart started out well last season but faded late. Power forwards take time to develop and Stewart won't be any different. Considering

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his progress he deserves more time, but the pay-off will be worth it because of his rare skill set. The Avs picked Nigel Williams with the 51st pick. Williams, 6'4, 220 pounds, has some upside as a top-four/five defenseman but he's got a few years to go. Mike Carman was a decent third round pickup.

2007 - The Avs hit a triple to right drafting Kevin Shattenkirk 14th overall. Definitely a top-four defenseman, Shattenkirk could become an all-star. Colby Cohen, a dark horse offensive prospect could be a steal if he can learn to get over himself and smarten up. Drafting solid goalie prospect Trevor Cann at 49th overall made this draft a good one for the Avs while picking up T.J. Galiardi at 55th overall made it a great one.

2008 - Blue chip defenseman Cameron Gaunce, the club's first pick at 50th overall, has developed nicely and was an excellent pick. The other 2008 picks haven't fared as well and it appears the lack of first rounder hurt the Avalanche in 2008.

Summary: This was one of the better drafting performances of the last four years. Without first rounders in two of the four drafts, the Avs added a franchise player, a number of solid blue line prospects, a developing power forward, a good goaltending prospect and two sure thing NHL forwards. Except for the GM position, the organization is stable, and as odd as it seems, the Avs draft day group shouldn't be affected much by his loss.

Columbus Blue Jackets (C)

Draft day decision makers: GM Scott Howson who joined the club prior to the 2007 draft was a successful Asst. GM with Edmonton for seven years. Howson promoted Paul Castron to Director of Amateur Scouting when he arrived. Castron, previously the club's director of player personnel, has been with Columbus since 2002. Senior amateur scouts Sam McMaster, Andrew Dickson and John Williams will help Castron on draft day along with Columbus' rather large contingent of eight regional scouts.

2005 - With the sixth pick, Columbus blew a tire, drafting small, aggressive center Gilbert Brule. Small aggressive players are always prone to injury and Brule is the poster boy for what happens when you combine the two. Grabbing Kris Russell in the third and Jared Boll in the fourth were good pick-ups but only Russell appears to be more than a second-tier NHL'er.

2006 - Columbus scored twice in the early rounds grabbing future stars Derick Brassard and Steve Mason with the sixth and 69th picks. Brassard has a small frame and appears to be injury prone although there is no denying his talent. Mason could very likely win the Calder and is Columbus' goalie of the future.

2007 - With the seventh pick the Blue Jackets drafted Jakub Voracek, likely the second best player in this draft. The Jackets scored again in the fourth round grabbing Maxim Mayorov 94th overall. Mayorov appears to be a steal and as long as he doesn't succumb to the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), could be a good scoring forward one day. Stefan Legein appeared to be

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an elite checking prospect until he decided he no longer wanted to play hockey. The 37th pick's development was hurt considerably by his decision and his character is now in question.

2008 - Columbus grabbed future star Nikita Filatov with the sixth pick and although Filatov should be a star, this was an extremely deep top-15 and it would have been tough to mess up this pick. Cody Goloubef, taken 37th overall, appears to be a decent if unspectacular second pick while 107th overall defenseman Steven Delisle is a 6'6 defensive project.

Summary: With an enviable group of draft picks in both the first and second rounds, Columbus scouts have had it easy. While Brule was a mistake, Columbus' other three early first round picks were solid. The Jackets haven't done nearly as well in the early second round, but grabbing Mason, Russell and Mayorov with third and fourth round picks certainly proves the amateur scouting department is competent. The lack of any successes in the later rounds prevents Columbus from scoring more than a "C" rating.

Dallas Stars (A-)

Draft day decision makers: Considering the Stars' still have former co-GM's Brett Hull and Les Jackson listed on their web site, it's clear this organization is in transition. To make matters worse, both Hull and Jackson didn't take over until Nov. 2007. Current St. Louis Blues director of player personnel Doug Armstrong, was GM for the 2005-2007 drafts. The Stars current GM Joe Nieuwendyk didn't take over until late May of this year. Nieuwendyk isn't exactly a veteran front office guy either, having been the special assistant to the GM of the Toronto Maple Leafs for only two years. Armstrong is largely responsible for the organization's makeup but thankfully the amateur scouting department hasn't changed much in the last four seasons. Director of Amateur Scouting, Tim Bernhardt will be leaned on heavily as will senior scout Bob Gernander. Eight of the Stars regional scouts have been in place since at least the 2007 draft, so the cast of characters making the decisions have some consistency.

2005 - The Stars picked up Matt Niskanen 28th and James Neal 33rd. Given the relatively slim pickings surrounding these two players, the Stars did an admirable job. They also grabbed forward Tom Wandell, a blue chip Swedish prospect, in the fifth round with the 146th pick.

2006 - Ivan Vishnevsky, the 27th pick overall was a decent but not spectacular pick by the Stars. Vishnevsky should play in the NHL, but hasn't turned into the sure-thing power play quarterback the Stars had in mind when they drafted him. Dallas had no second round pick, however they did unearth decent goaltending prospect Richard Bachman with the 120th pick.

2007 - Dallas had no first rounder in 2007, drafted poorly in the second round, but picked up a decent offensive prospect Sergei Korostin in the third round. Thankfully for the Stars, they hit pay dirt with their fifth rounder Jamie Benn. Probably a year away from NHL duty, Benn, a goal scorer, has upside as a first line winger. Dallas' fourth round pick Colton Sceviour is another

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potential mid-round gem. Sceviour led the Lethbridge Hurricanes with 80 points and could turn into a valuable top-six playmaker.

2008 - Again Dallas had no first round pick and a very low second round pick. They grabbed Tyler Beskorowany, a hulking 6'5 goalie with the 59th pick. Beskorowany showed modest improvement in 2008-09 but it's still too early to tell what the Stars have. With a very late third round pick, no fourth rounder and a late fifth rounder the Stars didn't have much to work with in 2008. If fifth round, dark horse defenseman Philip Larsen pans out, the Stars will have pulled yet another rabbit out of yet another hat.

Summary: It's been all about 'making do' for the Dallas Stars scouting staff. Despite having only two late first round picks and three second round picks (two of them late), the Stars have managed to keep pace with other organizations. Masters of the mid rounds, the Stars drafted excellent prospects Wandell, Benn, Sceviour and Larsen with the 146th, 129th, 112th and 149th picks respectively.

Detroit Red Wings (A+)

Draft day decision makers: Four of Detroit's six players on the ice in the last minute of the recent game seven final were Swedes. Director of European Scouting, Hakan Andersson and his three other European scouts leave no stone unturned in their quest to find Euro-talent. This organization has consistently found good North American talent as well. GM Ken Holland has taken a lesser role at the draft of late, which gives Asst. GM Jim Nill a bigger role. Nill has been Asst. GM in Detroit for 11 seasons. Since late 2005, Joe McDonnell has been the Wings Director of Amateur Scouting. There are seven amateur scouts in addition to Andersson and McDonnell.

2005 - The Wings drafted skilled defenseman Jakub Kindl with the 19th pick overall. Kindl is stuck behind a deep group of Wings defensemen but should play regularly a year from now. Kindl has upside as a top-pairing offensive defenseman. With the 42nd pick the Wings drafted gritty center Justin Abdelkader. Abdelkader garnered some attention in the 2008-09 Stanley Cup Finals with a couple of big goals. His game is better suited to a third line role, although he does have second line potential. Speedy but slight Darren Helm was stolen with the 132nd pick. Like Abdelkader, Helm broke through somewhat with a stellar performance in this season's playoffs. He has upside as an elite checking center although he has to fill out considerably. Fourth round pick Mattias Ritola put up decent numbers in Grand Rapids this season and is a prospective Detroit winger.

2006 - Detroit didn't have a first round pick in this draft but it didn't matter because they grabbed what should have been a first round player with the 47th pick. Since traded to Florida, power forward Shawn Matthias has star potential. The 6'4, 225-pound Matthias was traded to the Panthers in Feb. 2007. Detroit's earlier second round pick (41st overall) Cory Emmerton, is also a blue chip forward prospect, but he's likely to be brought along slowly. With the 92nd pick

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Detroit scored again, drafting Swedish goaltender Daniel Larsson. Larsson has some potential as an NHL No. 1 and could see time in Detroit next season.

2007 - With the 27th pick Detroit snapped up speedy defender, Brendan Smith. Smith, who scored almost a point-per-game in the low scoring WCHA, is on track to become a top-four NHL defenseman. With no second round pick the Wings selected two-way center Joakim Andersson with the 88th pick overall. Andersson is another solid third-line prospect for the Wings.

2008 - Despite not listening to super-scout Andersson who suggested the Wings take Jacob Markstrom, the club still managed to pick an excellent goaltending prospect in Thomas McCollum with the 30th pick. Detroit had no second round pick, missed with their third, but struck gold again (surprise, surprise) with the last pick in the fourth round. Taken 121st overall, Gustav Nyquist came to the NCAA from Malmo Jrs. and proceeded to lead the University of Maine in scoring as a freshman.

Summary: Detroit has by far the best amateur scouting in the NHL. Pay close attention to every pick they make in 2009, especially if it's a European. Andersson might be the best scout in the NHL today. Even Detroit's successful North American picks are abundant. The Wings managed to land at least two solid prospects in every draft and it's still early - some more may emerge. If Dallas are masters of the mid rounds, Detroit are masters of every round. Detroit manages to consistently secure top picks from the late first round all the way into the fifth round.

Edmonton Oilers (B)

Draft day decision makers: It's puzzling why the Oilers would be the only NHL team not to list their scouts on their website. They have detailed biographies on everyone from their dressing room attendant to their massage therapist but not a single scout is even mentioned.

New GM Steve Tambellini has lots of experienced help in the Oilers scouting department. Kevin Prendergast Vice President of Hockey Operations was in charge of the scouts up until September 2007 and is still involved in amateur scouting. Stu MacGregor is the Oilers Head Scout. MacGregor, former GM of the Kamloops Blazers, took over Prendergast's role as the leader of the scouting department. He was previously the Oilers western scout up until he assumed his current role in late 2007. The Oilers are an NHL rarity in that all seven of their regional/amateur scouts have been with the club since at least the 2005 draft.

2005 - Andrew Cogliano was a very solid pick at 25th overall. Cogliano has already had two productive seasons for the Oilers and will be a top-six forward for years to come. The Oilers drafted decent defenseman prospect Taylor Chorney early in the second round. Chorney is still a few years away from consistent NHL production, but he has developed steadily so far. The Oilers scored again in the third round taking Danny Syvret 81st overall. Syvret, traded in June 2008, is coming off a monster year with the AHL Phantoms and will likely be in a Flyer uniform next season.

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2006 - The Oilers had no first rounder but drafted solid defenseman prospect Jeff Petry with the 45th pick. Bruising defenseman Theo Peckham was the 75th overall pick and has already spent some time with the Oilers. Peckham should be a decent pro for some time.

2007 - Sam Gagner was a good pick at sixth overall, however, the Oilers slipped up slightly grabbing Alex Plante with the 15th pick. With its third first rounder, the Oil grabbed Riley Nash who has produced consistently for Cornell in the ECAC. The Oilers deserve a tonne of credit for recognizing the lack of depth in the 2007 draft. Instead of wasting picks on a mediocre second or third round player the Oilers focussed on the first round and will likely end up with two solid NHL'ers because of it. The Oilers draft very well but never seem to grab a superstar player. They may have achieved that with their fourth pick in this draft. Linus Omark is only 5'9, 170 pounds, but managed to finish among the top three scorers in the Swedish Elite League. A phenomenally talented player, Omark will have to overcome his size limitations in order to exhibit his skills consistently at the NHL level.

2008 - If he wasn't 5'10, Jordan Eberle could be pencilled in as a future star. Too many times however, players of his stature get knocked around and become walking injuries. Not only does Eberle have to continue to produce, he has to fill out considerably before he'll reach his true potential. At 22nd overall the Oilers pretty much got what they paid for. Teemu Hartikainen is an Oiler rarity in that he's a decent prospect taken out of the top-100. A sixth rounder, drafted 163rd overall, Hartikainen plays a gritty game reminiscent of Dino Ciccarelli or Tomas Holmstrom. If he can play that game at the NHL level then the Oilers can consider this a good draft. More than likely, however, the young Finn will be a bottom-six grinder.

Summary: The Oilers rarely strike out with their picks but they rarely hit a home run either. They very consistently draft solid players in the early rounds, something that's a lot harder than it sounds. For all of their early round success, however, the Oilers do very little after the third round. And perhaps it's just bad luck, but for all of the Oilers successful picks, only one or two have an outside chance at stardom. That has to improve before the Oilers move to the head of the class.

Team ratings so far:

- A+ Detroit Red Wings
- A Buffalo Sabres
- A- Colorado Avalanche
- A- Dallas Stars
- B+ Boston Bruins
- B Edmonton Oilers
- C+ Chicago Blackhawks
- C Calgary Flames
- C Columbus Blue Jackets
- C Atlanta Thrashers
- D+ Carolina Hurricanes
- D Anaheim Ducks