(Out a day early to get it to you, the reader, before the draft begins)

Why should you read this series of articles? Not one of Nicklas Lidstrom, Chris Osgood, Tomas Holmstrom, Henrik Zetterberg, Johan Franzen, Valtteri Filppula, Jonathan Ericsson, Darren Helm or Pavel Datsyuk were selected in the first round. Everyone knows about the top prospects in the upcoming draft. How many know about the top scouting staffs and especially, the directors of amateur scouting - the secondary stars of the draft? 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. Four of the five articles will 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.

New York Islanders (F)

Draft day decision makers: Between the 2005 and 2007 drafts, only four members of the Islanders pro and amateur scouting staff were retained. Considering that group usually ranges from 12 to 15 scouting personnel, the Isles had already made significant talent evaluator changes prior to GM Garth Snow's arrival in July 2006. Of the four scouts retained, only Ryan Jankowski remains on the amateur side. Jankowski is the current Assistant General Manager/Director of Amateur Scouting for the Islanders. Jankowski was Chief European Amateur Scout in 2005, so only European draft picks will be evaluated. It's pointless to evaluate other Islanders draft picks prior to 2007 because the people who made draft picks are no longer with the organization.

2005 - No European-based players were selected.
2006 - Labelled a bust by many, Jesse Joensuu came into his own last season scoring 20 goals for AHL Bridgeport. A proto-typical power forward, Joensuu has taken time to grow into his body and his demanding role. If Joensuu turns into a top-six power forward, he'll be a bargain with the 60th pick. Swedish forward Robin Figrin, taken 10 picks later, is proving to be a much less insightful pick. The Islanders also used their 115th, 141st and 173rd picks to draft Europeans without much success. It wasn't a banner year for Jankowski especially if Joensuu never cracks the Islanders top six.
2007 - Without a first or second round pick, it's tough to evaluate the Islanders in 2007. Mark Katic, the first pick in the third round, is a diminutive, point-producing rearguard who is developing slowly but steadily. The Isles drafted Jason Gregoire from the USHL with their third round pick (76th overall). Gregoire is a bottom six forward who transitioned well from junior to the NCAA.
2008 - Josh Bailey's 25 points and -14 in 68 NHL games are decent numbers considering his age, and the team he's with. Bailey was a solid pick at ninth overall but considering the recent success of Cody Hodgson, a similar player taken just after Bailey, it looks as though Bailey might have benefitted from another year in junior. If a team has poor player development, it reflects poorly on the scouting staff. It remains to be seen if that's the case with Bailey who was

rushed to the NHL. Center Corey Trivino and diminutive defenseman Aaron Ness were taken early in the second round. Both transitioned well from junior hockey to the NCAA.

Summary: The Islanders fail in most scouting categories. The current staff is inexperienced, have had little concrete success and are led by Jankowski, a scouting director with a poor draft record. Kyle Okposo was not drafted by the current NY Islanders regime.

New York Rangers (C-)

Draft day decision makers: The Rangers amateur scouting department has remained remarkably consistent under GM Glen Sather. The Head Amateur Scout in 2005 was Gordie Clark, now the club's Director of Player Personnel. Six of the nine amateur scouts in 2005 are still with the club.

2005 - Marc Staal is an important cog in the Rangers defense at the tender age of 22. Taken 12th overall and drafted just prior to four prospects who have yet to see the NHL, Staal was a shrewd pickup. Mike Sauer, taken 40th overall, is well on his way to becoming an NHL regular after suffering a serious knee injury.
2006 - Bob Sanguinetti, taken 21st overall, looks like a winning pick after a 42-point AHL season. The Rangers took Artem Anisimov in the middle of the second round. Anisimov has developed well and could be a solid, second-line center in two years. Taken in the fourth round, winger David Kveton has an interesting upside.
2007 - The Rangers stole Alexei Cherepanov with the 17th pick in a mediocre first round. Cherepanov's tragic death will never allow the Rangers scouting staff to receive credit for the selection, in what was probably the most perplexing free fall in recent memory. Max Campbell, a fifth round pick, has developed nicely in Western Michigan, although he's still a long way from the NHL. 2008 - Taking Michael Del Zotto with the 20th pick makes the Rangers four-for-four in the first round since 2005. Derek Stepan was a decent second round choice, but third rounder Evgeny Grachev was the star of this draft for the Rangers. Grachev's first season in North America, was a monster effort for the 6'3, 205-pound, Russian center. Grachev notched 40 goals and 80 points in 60 games for the OHL powerhouse Brampton Battalion.

Summary: The Rangers consistently draft well in the first round, but aside from Grachev and Anisimov, they have not drafted enough blue chip prospects from the second round onwards. If Kveton and Stepan have good seasons in 2009-10, the scouting staff will move to a C+. Until then, there are too many question marks.

Ottawa Senators (B)

Draft day decision makers: In February 2008, the Senators lost their Director of Amateur Scouting to the Montreal Canadiens. Frank Jay had called the shots on draft day for eight seasons. Despite the loss, seven of the club's 10 amateur scouts have been with the team since 2005. GM Bryan Murray, who moved up from behind the bench in June 2007, should have lots of experienced help on draft day. No Director of Amateur Scouting has been named since Jay left his post.

2005 - With the ninth pick, Ottawa selected defenseman Brian Lee who has proven to be something of a disappointment. Lee will likely never be more than a second-pairing defenseman although he has some offensive upside. Ilya Zubov, taken early in the fourth round, is coming off an extremely productive season with Binghamton in the AHL. Zubov has some upside as a top-six NHL center and was a steal with the 98th pick. Cody Bass was a decent pickup with the 95th selection. Bass has already played 33 NHL games and should be a solid, fourth-line energy player.
2006 - With the 28th pick, Ottawa grabbed Nick Foligno, already a grinding NHL third liner. Foligno has some upside as a second-line winger.
2007 - Taken 29th overall, O'Brien moved from the NCAA to the WHL and flourished. He's at least a bottom-six NHL'er. The Sens drafted Louis Caporusso with the final pick in the third round. Caporusso was outstanding for Michigan in his sophomore year, scoring 49 points in 41 games. He has realistic upside as a second-line center. 2008 - Erik Karlsson has an upside as a No. 1 NHL defenseman. Ottawa stole this Lidstrom-like defenseman with the 15th pick overall. With their second pick Ottawa also scored another blue line gem as Patrick Wiercioch, a 6'4, 190-pound string bean, scored a point-per-game as a freshman for Denver. Like Karlsson, Wiercioch also has upside as an NHL No. 1. Zack Smith scored almost 50 points in his AHL rookie season - not bad for a 20 year old and not bad for Ottawa as they went three-for-three with their first three picks in 2008.

Summary: The Senators have used the middle rounds to acquire blue chip NHL prospects. The Sens have done a decent job with their first rounders, but it's players like Wiercioch and Zubov that make this a successful scouting department.

Philadelphia Flyers (B)

Draft day decision makers: Besides GM Paul Holmgren, there are two key players in the Flyers scouting department. Director of Hockey Operations Chris Pryor is the link between the GM and the scouts, while senior scout Dennis Patterson is Pryor's go-to guy. All three have been evaluating Flyer talent for all four drafts. Six of the Flyers amateur scouts in 2005 are still with the organization in a scouting capacity.
2005 - Now with Tampa, Steve Downie was the Flyers first pick in 2005. Downie, taken 29th overall, already splits time between the Lightening and their AHL club in Norfolk. Despite his troubles, Downie has NHL talent and should develop into a solid third-line irritator in the Steve Ott mold. The Flyers took Oskars Bartulis 91st overall. Bartulis is a pure defensive defenseman who should play in the NHL in a top-six role.
2006 - Poolies now know his name, even though Bob Clarke forgot it at the 2006 draft. Claude Giroux, taken 22nd overall, is a star in the making for Philadelphia. The Flyers drafted winger Andreas Nodl early in the second round. Nodl made the NHL club out of training camp but spent half the season in the AHL. He should be at least a top-six NHL forward. Two relatively smallish defensive defensemen, Denis Bodrov and Michael Ratchuk, were also taken in the second round. Both show promise but need to grow into their roles.
2007 - Power forwards take a long time to develop and although his development slowed, James van Riemsdyk, the second overall pick, has too much size and talent not to play a prominent NHL role. Kevin Marshall, a hard-nosed QMJHL defenseman, was taken early in the second round.
2008 - Philadelphia drafted defenseman, Luca Sbisa with the 19th pick overall. Sbisa shocked everyone and made the Flyers as an 18 year old. Stardom awaits. Marc-Andre Bourdon, a high scoring defenseman from the QMJHL, was the 67th pick. Bourdon could run the Philly power play one day.

Summary: Few teams draft as consistently as Philadelphia in the first three rounds. The Flyers

can also draft potential stars such as van Riemsdyk, Giroux and Sbisa. Unlike some of the elite organizations, however, Philadelphia drafts poorly in the later rounds.

Phoenix Coyotes (C+)

Keith Gretzky is in his third year as Director of Amateur Scouting after five seasons as an amateur scout for Phoenix. GM Don Maloney is in his second year as GM of Phoenix after spending 10 years in the New York Rangers front office. Only Gretzky and Assistant Director of Amateur Scouting, Steve Lyons, are holdovers from the 2005 NHL draft.

Draft day decision makers:
2005 - The Coyotes took Martin Hanzal with the 17th pick. Hanzal has already contributed two full seasons to the young Coyotes but has limited offensive upside. Keith Yandle was a shrewd pickup in the fourth round. Taken out of high school, Yandle is already a legitimate offensive threat from the blue line.
2006 - Peter Mueller somehow dropped to eighth overall, where the 'Yotes grabbed him. Only 21, Mueller has two solid NHL campaigns behind him. Smooth-skating defenseman Chris Summers (29th overall) hasn't worked out as expected, although Phoenix vindicated themselves somewhat grabbing solid defensive prospect Jonas Ahnelov with the 88th pick.
2007 - Kyle Turris was a pretty safe pick at third overall. The Coyotes had three picks between 30th and 36th overall. Brett MacLean has a scorer's touch while Nick Ross and Joel Gistedt have been disappointments so far. Phoenix hit paydirt in the fifth round taking Russian defenseman Maxim Goncharov. Goncharov should play with Phoenix in 2009-10 and has plenty of offensive upside despite modest KHL numbers.

2008 - Phoenix scored twice in the 2008 first round, grabbing Mikkel Boedker and Viktor Tikhonov. Both played full seasons for Phoenix and both appear to be future offensive stars. Michael Stone was a nice pickup with the 69th pick as the big defenseman managed 61 points on the offensive powerhouse Calgary Hitmen.

Summary: The Coyotes are all over the place - hitting when they should have missed and missing when they should have hit. Phoenix has done reasonably well with their high picks but they have also unearthed a few gems in the middle rounds.

Pittsburgh Penguins (B-)

Draft day decision makers: Jay Heinbuck is in his third season as Director of Amateur Scouting. Formerly the United States Head Amateur Scout with the NY Islanders for four seasons, Heinbuck will work closely with GM Ray Shero. Shero has been with the club since the 2006 draft along with eight of the 10 current members of the Pens scouting department.

2005 - Taking Sidney Crosby first overall was a no-brainer but taking Kris Letang 62nd overall required some scouting talent. Letang has massive offensive upside for a blue liner and chipped in 33 points on the way to the Cup.
2006 - Jordan Staal was a solid No. 2 pick, especially considering how he has adapted to his role on the Penguins. The Pens drafted two middling college defensemen with their second and third round picks. Carl Sneep and Brian Strait both play a simple defensive game.
2007 - Although still a bit early, it looks like there were better players available than Angelo Esposito who the Pens took with the 20th pick. Huge winger Keven Veilleux might be one of them. Veilleux, taken 51st overall, has ramped up his game since his draft year and could become a second-line power forward in Pittsburgh. An even better prospect, Luca Caputi was snapped up by the Pens late in the fourth round. A good player down low, Caputi will fit in well with the highly skilled Penguins. Dustin Jeffrey, a solid pickup in the sixth round, has upside as a third line center.

2008 - Pittsburgh had no picks in the first three rounds and were unable to find anything in the middle and later rounds.

Summary: An almost impossible team to rank, the Penguins earn a passing grade based on their mid-round pick ups alone.

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
B Ottawa Senators
B Philadelphia Flyers
B- Pittsburgh Penguins
C+ Chicago Blackhawks
C+ New Jersey Devils
C+ Phoenix Coyotes
C Nashville Predators
C Calgary Flames
C Columbus Blue Jackets
C Atlanta Thrashers
C- NY Rangers
D+ Carolina Hurricanes
D Anaheim Ducks
D- Minnesota Wild
F Florida Panthers
F NY Islanders