It is that time a year again where the hockey season is firing up on all cylinders – well except for the National Hockey League. With this new hockey season comes high hopes for teams and players. It is also a period whereby the next crop of NHL players is closely scrutinized.

Many scouts and hockey gurus across the globe are constantly evaluating prospects for the entry draft set for next June. Much of the attention this season will be given to Nathan MacKinnon (Halifax Mooseheads), Seth Jones (Portland Winterhawks), and Sean Monahan (Ottawa 67s). There are a couple of Finnish products that many are high on-- Aleksander Barkov and Rasmus Ristolainen.

There is one more playing in Finland's elite division, SM-liiga, who will make some waves this season -- **Juuso Ikonen.**

When you first see Ikonen you think immediately that his lack of size will hurt his game. Last season he played 20 games with Blues Espoo in the top league but spent the majority of the 2011-12 campaign with the Junior A club. This season he is getting an opportunity to show his skill sets full-time in the SM-liiga and will also challenge for a roster spot on Team Finland's 2013 World Junior Championship squad.

In talking to a few NHL scouts in Lake Placid, NY at the National Junior Evaluation Camp this summer, it was evident with Ikonen's performance thathe was starting to hit the radar like his fellow countrymen. There is no question he has some natural abilities in his game. He was able to find the back of the net a variety of ways during the NJEC and also displayed his vision as well.

He got his game going early in the week back in August, as he netted a pair of goals in his first game versus Team USA Blue. He found the score sheet on a rebound from a point shot and then absolutely connected one top shelf for the Finnish (pun-intended) on a 3-on-2 play. He also potted another versus Sweden by simply using good anticipation to place himself in right

position to receive a feed from line mate Teuvo Teravainen on a back-door set-up.

He skates well as he has the lower center of gravity being 5’7” 165lbs., though not overly explosive in his stride. He possesses nice stick skills, can be a playmaker, and holds good hockey sense too. The big knock as mentioned will be his size and strength, and if he will be able to handle the big bodies and physicality of the North American pro ranks.

The Central Scouting Services (CSS) recently released their preliminary rankings of European skaters this week where Ikonen was healthily graded as an ‘A’ skater under the Finland Junior category.

Like all prospects, time will tell as the season progresses and with the WJC around the corner come December in Ufa, Russia. There is no question if Ikonen performs as well as he did on the ice at the Herb Brooks Arena this past summer, he will be hearing his name called at the podium in Newark, New Jersey inside the Prudential Center – a.k.a. “The Rock”.

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