

Nail Breaking Through

Written by Brendan Ross

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Being a star in Sarnia has its ups and downs, but the hockey world is starting to notice a Nail Yakupov, an electrifying star from Nizhnekamsk, Russia. TSN.ca published an [article](#) last week after Yakupov had another spectacular game.

The game last week was one in which Nail Yakupov carried Sarnia to another win which isn't easy to do for such a struggling team. Yakupov registered a point on every Sarnia Sting goal (four of them) and recorded **his second straight four point night** since returning from injury (concussion). The young Russian star registered two first assists, a second assist and the game-winning goal

The [game-winning goal](#) was his 42nd of the season which tied him with Steven Stamkos' team rookie scoring record. Yakupov will surely beat Stamkos' goal record with 11 games remaining in the regular season. With his second straight 4-point effort, Yakupov sits at 86 points through 54 games (missed two to injury and one to suspension). Stamkos recorded 92 points in 63 games during his rookie season. Yakupov needs 7 more points over his final 11 games to beat Stamkos' rookie point totals as well.

How impressive is this feat? To answer simply, VERY.

Not only does this kid have the best name in hockey since Clayton Stoner, Nail is proving that he will be the heavy favourite for the first-overall selection in the 2012 NHL Entry Draft. I am convinced that Yakupov will be the next best first overall pick since Crosby was drafted - as far

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as *pure* talent goes.

Yakupov possesses a full tool box of skills and it allows him to log huge minutes for the rebuilding Sarnia Sting. To start, Yakupov is a strong skater that is difficult to put a body on in open ice. "*Slippery*" is a word that best describes his ability to deflect off of his defenders. There are often times when Nail is skating up the ice cutting from side to side (ala Ovechkin or Kovalchuk) and it appears that he is going to get crushed in open ice. However, when that defender attempts to hit him he simply dodges him and continues on his path to the net. Yakupov has escapeability.

The second-overall pick of the 2010 OHL Import Draft does not possess a large body frame but he plays much larger than his 5-foot-10-inch frame would suggest. Yakupov weighs in at 170-pounds but appears to have no fear of entering into the corners against larger opponents. After scouting more than a handful of his games, Yakupov confidently comes out of the corner with the puck ninety-percent of the time. Yakupov has registered 49 penalty minutes in 54 games this season and definitely has a mean side to his game as well. Yakupov is enjoying his first season playing Sarnia and the local fans appreciate the creativity, dangling puck skills and contagious enthusiasm that he brings to the rink each night.

On the surface Yakupov appears to be strictly an offensive juggernaut; however, if one looks closer they should be impressed by his plus-1 rating. The plus-1 rating may not appear to be that impressive but when the Sarnia Sting have been outscored 259 to 207 it is a significant accomplishment for a rookie import. (*Note: Sarnia only has one other player with a plus-rating (overage defenseman Daniel Broussard)*)

When analyzing Yakupov's accomplishments this season one has to consider how impressive it is for a seventeen-year old import from Russia to come to a new country and perform so well - especially during clutch opportunities. Nail has been learning a new game of hockey in a brand new culture and has shown improvements in the English language since arriving last fall. Yakupov's strives to learn on and off the ice as he continues to make huge strides in becoming one of the future faces of the NHL.

How high can this phenom soar as he enters his second season next year? The Sarnia Sting will miss the playoffs this season but are hoping to bring in some important pieces to compete for next season. Sarnia wants to see Yakupov star in more than just 68 games. Yakupov has given Sarnia more than they asked for this past season. Now is the time that Sarnia gives back to Yakupov as his time in Sarnia is limited.

Projected Stats:

- Nail Yakupov is on pace to score 51 goals, 53 assists and 104 points.
- To put that into perspective, Jeff Skinner finished with 51 regular season goal in his **second full OHL season**

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- Taylor Hall finished with 106 points in his **third and final OHL season**
- Yakupov is in some elite company.