As mentioned in last week's edition of *The Dean's List*, the 2012 Draft Class is littered with franchise calibre defensemen. There are several game-changing rear-guards who could become very good NHL defensemen over the next few years and when we re-visit the 2012 draft it will likely become the "Year of the Defenseman".
The Dean's List
will feature a few defensemen who should be first round selections and could make some noise next season as the NHL Entry Draft approaches next June.

Ryan Murray – Everett Silvertips (WHL)

2010-11 Statistics: 70 GP – 6 G – 40 A – 46 P

The smooth-skating prairie boy is the current favourite to go first among his draft eligible defensemen. Ryan Murray is entering his third season for the Washington based Everett Silvertips and has some scouts salivating already at his all-around potential. Last season, at the tender age of seventeen Murray became the youngest captain in Silvertips history and exhibited his true leadership qualities finishing as Everett's second-leading scorer.

Murray is a good skater and excellent puck-mover but it is his poise and composure with the puck that elevates his game above most other defensemen his age and earns him the comparison to the former star Scott Niedermayer. In the 2011 U-18 World Championships, Ryan Murray captained Team Canada while leading all defensemen in tournament scoring with four goals and 13 points in seven games. Murray was a force throughout the tournament as he finished as Canada's top scorer and earned the Top Defenseman Award.

Griffin Reinhart – Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL)

2010-11 Statistics: 45 GP – 6 G – 19 A – 25 P

Meet the potential Shea Weber-clone. Griffin has a full tool box of skills that scouts are looking for in today's NHL defensemen - he has the size (6'4", 210 lbs), is a good skater, his shot is cannon-like, and he plays the game with a whole lot of nastiness. Griffin is the son of former NHLer Paul Reinhart who had a successful 11-year career with Atlanta, Calgary and Vancouver and it is looking as though some of his skills are rubbing off on his children (Max, 19, and Sam, 16, are also excellent hockey players). Griffin needs to improve on some of the defensive aspects of his game including positioning and gap control but his total package of size and skill

is impossible to teach. The West Vancouver native is one of the many WHL defensemen to keep an eye out as it looks that he will become a top 10 draft pick.

Matt Dumba – Red Deer Rebels (WHL)

2010-11 Statistics: 62 GP – 15 G – 11 A – 26 P

The defence partner of the aforementioned Reinhart at the U-17 World Hockey Challenge, Matthew Dumba is the one defensive prospect that excites me the most. Dumba could be one of the best skaters in the entire 2012 draft class at this point as he possesses elite agility and can be extremely elusive. His offensive skills should definitely excite fantasy addicts in the near future but on the ice he is a fan favourite for his bone crushing hits earning him comparisons to former Red Deer Rebel Dion Phaneuf (good or bad). Dumba registered a remarkable 12 assists in six games for the Team Pacific at the U-17 WHC. Keep this exciting defenseman on your radar as I feel he could become one of the best offensive defensemen of the 2012 draft. Dumba's defensive game is nothing to sneeze at either but his elite skating skills, great puck control and hard accurate shot are a rare combination. The Calgary-native's rookie production of 15 goals, 26 points and 83 penalty minutes are an indication of his potential to eventually become a multi-cat stud (Note: Dumba played 6 games prior to last year but that's hardly a rookie season).

Nick Ebert – Windsor Spitfires (OHL)

2010-11 Statistics: 64 GP – 11 G – 30 A – 41 P

Turning to the OHL we take a look at another emerging Spitfire defenseman. Ebert has been under the microscope for a few years now as he played for the Waterloo Blackhawks of the USHL at the young age of fifteen before jumping ship to the powerhouse Windsor Spitfires of the Ontario Hockey League. Nick's progression has been steady and having the chance to learn from teammate Ryan Ellis will certainly not hurt. The Windsor Spitfires have grown to rely on Ebert's outstanding defensive game but his 41 points indicate that has some untapped offensive potential. The New Jersey native owns good size at 6-foot-1 with fantastic skating skills and his ability to move the puck should guarantee himself a spot in the top half of next year's NHL Entry Draft. Nick Ebert was named to the OHL First All-Rookie Team joining other 2012 top prospects such as Nail Yakupov, Alex Galchenyuk, and Malcolm Subban (G).

Jacob Trouba – US U-17 (USDP)

2010-11 Statistics: 37 GP – 6 G – 13 A – 19 P

Trouba is a product of the US Development Program and competed last season on both the U-17 and U-18 teams due to his stellar play and he proved that he could handle the senior club. Trouba is one of these kids who have the drive to learn and as a result his compete level is very impressive. Scouts are attractive to Trouba's edgy and physical style of play but he is more than capable of providing offense as a puck-moving defender too. The young defenseman had an impressive U-17 World Hockey Championship as he finished with two goals and nine points in only five games. Trouba will look to continue his development as a two-way defender when he takes on more responsibility next season playing for the US U-18 team. The 6-foot-1 Trouba is another defender who has the complete package that teams are seeking and he could definitely rise up the rankings as he gains more opportunity entering his draft year.

The defensive class for the 2012 NHL Entry Draft is highlighted by the five talented North American skaters above but there are certainly others will challenge their position as more hockey is played over the course of the year. The battle between top forwards and top defenders will certainly be an interesting storyline to follow but when it is all said and done there is a very good chance that teams picking in the top half of the first round will be ecstatic with their team's selection as the talent is projecting to be quite deep.

Be sure to follow *The Dean's List* as the series continues to release names for the upcoming draft and also prospects from past drafts as they look to become fantasy relevant.

Follow *The Dean's List* on Twitter @rossyyoungblood for more prospect information.