To start off the month of November *the Dean's List* continues its focus on the 2013 NHL Draft Class as we head west to take a look at several names popping up in the Western Hockey League as potential first round talents. DobberProspects' WHL scout Zenon Herasymiuk helps us out with his own first-hand observations of these prospects, each special in their own right.

At the 2012 NHL Entry Draft in Pittsburgh, the Western Hockey League produced six first round selections and five of those were snatched up within the first eight picks. Ryan Murray (Everett) was the first WHL skater off the board when Columbus Blue Jackets' drafted the two-way defender 2nd overall, and the dominos quickly fell after him as Griffin Reinhart (Edmonton), Morgan Rielly (Moose Jaw), Mathew Dumba (Red Deer) and Derrick Pouliot (Portland) were selected by the Islanders, Maple Leafs, Wild and Penguins respectively.

Henrik Samuelsson (Edmonton) was the lone WHL forward selected in the first round as the Phoenix Coyotes stepped up to the podium making the 27th overall selection. As we look ahead to the 2013 NHL Draft, it appears that the first round talent from the WHL crop will be highlighted by both high-end defensemen and forwards.

Seth Jones, D (Portland Winterhawks)

Featured over a year ago on *The Dean's List* series, Texas-born defenseman Seth Jones has quickly ascended to the top of the 2013 draft class. With an athletic lineage (father was NBA'er "Popeye Jones") it is not unexpected that Seth Jones acquired the natural athletic ability that his hockey game is so strongly built around. Jones opted to join the Portland Winterhawks for his draft year and the rookie defender has made lasting impressions early in his first WHL campaign. Currently ranked second on *TDL's* draft rankings, Jones is a toolsy defender that plays a complete game – a true franchise defender. His ability to move the puck, defend the attack, or intimidate the opposition with his physicality truly defines his versatility as a potential franchise defender. At 6'4" and over 205-pounds, Seth Jones is an intelligent defenseman that can out muscle and out think the opposition in so many ways that he will be leaned on as a minute-munching defenseman in all situations.

Jones has already been featured in some rankings as the top-ranked prospect available and while this rare type of coveted defender could certainly be worthy of first overall selection, *TDL* still feels as though Mooseheads' Nathan MacKinnon holds the slight edge over Jones based solely on his elite upside. Jones has been compared to veteran NHLer Chris Pronger as he shares his compete level, incredibly complete package and ability to raise his game to elite levels when his team needs him most. As Seth Jones prepares himself on 2013 draft day, the rangy defender could very well find himself in a similar situation as Chris Pronger was back in 1993 when Hartford drafted the future hall of famer second overall.

After posting 12 points in 20 games as the captain of the USNTDP Junior team last season, Seth Jones has debuted in the WHL scoring four goals and 10 points, sitting with shiny plus-7 rating, through 13 regular season games.

Early Professional Projection (Upside): Franchise Defenseman

{youtube}oOsBb4jz7yk{/youtube}

Ryan Pulock, D (Brandon Wheatkings)

Knocking Seth Jones from his pedestal as the top ranked WHL defender will be impossible, but Wheat Kings' offensive blueliner Ryan Pulock will certainly strive to push him. Currently sitting third in WHL defensive scoring with seven goals and 18 points, Pulock is this year's most offensive defenseman available from the WHL. Pulock is an instinctual rearguard that uses his on-ice vision and hockey intelligence to read unfolding plays well in advance. "Pulock is a confident defenseman with an ability to make crisp outlet passes but can also skate the puck up the ice with poise", explains Herasymiuk. He owns a "boomer" of a shot that features the quickness, heaviness and accuracy any NHL squad would love to add.

Herasymiuk points out that, "Pulock is decent defensively, but has room to grow in that area of his game. Ryan could also engage himself more physically as he does possess a good-sized frame". Look for Pulock to be a hot commodity and finish among the leading defensive scorers in the WHL in both goals and points. *The Dean's List* placed Ryan Pulock in the 6th position for its November 2013 NHL Draft rankings.

Early Professional Projection (Upside): Top-four offensive defenseman

{youtube}SpCGb35m46g{/youtube}

Hunter Shinkaruk, LW (Medicine Hat Tigers)

The second 2013 prospect to be featured last year by *TDL*, Hunter Shinkaruk has been turning heads for several years now since being selected 14th overall by the Tigers in the 2009 WHL Bantam Draft. Shinkaruk is quickly making a name for himself as a dangerous forward capable of exploding with huge offensive games, as evident by his two four-point games and one five-point game already this season. "Elite offensive skill set" is the response *TDL* received from Zenon Herasymiuk after asking him what Shinkaruk's standout trait was. "Hunter has an ability to generate offense in a variety of ways – driving wide, gaining the line and pulling up to feed a teammate or using his quick shot", explains Herasymiuk. Hunter Shinkaruk owns elite skating skills that feature smooth edgework, good agility and the elusiveness to shake off opponents. Herasymiuk confirms that Skinkaruk's current weakness remains his "limited size and strength" but adds that the small winger "often suffers from narrow-mindedness and can be individualistic at times".

Early indications appear to have Shinkaruk as a potential top-20 pick in the upcoming draft class but *The Dean's List* has the offensively dangerous winger ranked ninth to start the month of November. In his sophomore season, Hunter Shinkaruk registered 49 goals and 91 points to finish among the WHL's best and already has 25 points, including 11 goals, in his opening 18 games this season. Zenon Heramysiuk likes Hunter Shinkaruk's playing style to current Calgary Flames' winger Michael Cammalleri.

Early Professional Projection (Upside): Offensive scoring winger

{youtube}gZUtHOfsd6g{/youtube}

Curtis Lazar, C (Edmonton Oil Kings)

Scouts are enthusiastic about Edmonton Oil Kings' forward Curtis Lazar and his professional style of game. Dobber Prospects' writer Zenon Herasymiuk identified Lazar's strength, "Curtis has an ability to make an impact at both ends of the ice. Lazar owns elite hockey intelligence and his adaptability as a player is certainly intriguing." Herasymiuk informed *TDL* that Lazar can acclimate himself as a scorer, playmaker, penalty killer and excels in the shot blocking game as well.

The former 2nd overall selection in the 2010 WHL Bantam Draft, Lazar is skating in his second full WHL season and has already shown his value as a critical member of the Edmonton Oil Kings' 2011-12 WHL Championship team. As a 17-year-old rookie, Curtis Lazar led his Oil Kings team in playoff scoring with 19 points in 20 post-season games. The 6'0", 200-pound pivot packs a remarkable compete level and drive to win making him a coach's luxury to have on the bench. As a centerman, Lazar is very responsible but could stand to improve in the faceoff dot. Furthermore, he doesn't pack the offensive punch that one would expect from a top 10 draft pick and comes with less upside than most of his projected opening round peers.

Through 15 games, Lazar has tallied eight goals and 11 points and owns a very responsible plus-4 rating. Herasymiuk throws out a Ryan Kesler as a comparison for Curtis Lazar's playing style. Lazar currently sits 13th in *TDL's* 2013 NHL Entry Draft rankings.

Early Professional Projection (Upside): Second line versatile center

Josh Morrissey, D (Prince Albert Raiders)

Morrissey really came to the forefront of this WHL draft crop after his exceptional showing at the Ivan Hlinka Memorial Tournament this past August when he was among Team Canada's top defensemen. Formerly a sixth overall pick in the 2010 WHL Bantam Draft, Josh or J.T. Morrissey has become one of the WHL's premiere puck-moving defenseman with a complete arsenal of offensive weaponry. Considered a two-way defenseman by most experts, Morrissey is extremely efficient as a member of the Raiders' penalty kill and power play units. With the man advantage, Morrissey is the team's powerplay quarterback utilizing his ability to walk the line and make clean crisp passes. Herasymiuk confesses, "Morrissey is an outlet specialist that uses his high-end hockey sense and smooth skating abilities to find open lanes for his teammates." In his freshman season, Morrissey put up 10 goals and 38 points, as well as a minus-2 rating, on a last place team and those numbers are impressive considering the situation.

Morrissey's most glaring weaknesses are his smaller stature for a defenseman (6'0", 185 lbs) and lower level of strength, although he does play with an edge. "Josh Morrissey has room to improve defensively as he relies too much on stick-checking in the defensive zone rather than playing the body physically", Herasymiuk recognizes.

As the WHL season rolls over to November, Josh Morrissey currently sits seventh in WHL defensive scoring with three snipes and 14 points over the course of 16 games. When asked for a comparison from Dobber Prospects' Zenon Herasymiuk, he directs us to Toronto Maple Leafs' Jake Gardiner as a defenseman Morrissey models his game after. *The Dean's List* has Prince Albert Raider Josh Morrissey ranked 14th in the 2013 NHL draft class for the month of November.

Early Professional Projection (Upside): Top-pairing puck moving defenseman.

{youtube}aBtWkVaTa3g{/youtube}

A special thanks to DobberProspects' WHL Scout Zenon Herasymiuk for his contributions. Feel free to follow him on Twitter

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