

# 2014 RotoRob NHL Draft Grades

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# Introduction

The 2014 NHL Entry Draft is over and with the league well into the offseason and free agency, it's time to see how they did. Dakota Case has gone through the draft with a fine tooth comb, assessing each team's draft class and giving it a grade.

Division by division and team by team, he provides his painstakingly precise analysis of each pick and the overall performance of each team's draft effort.

Pour yourself a huge-ass coffee, sit back and enjoy!

## Atlantic Division



David Pastrnak brings some serious talent to the Bruins. (Czechprospects.blogspot.com)

## Boston Bruins

With an already impressive young prospect pool, a team like Boston can afford to have a so-so draft every now and then. The Bruins' pool is deep in meat and potato players and somewhat lacking in elite talent – an issue the team quickly addressed with the selection of Czech winger **David Pastrnak** with the 25th overall pick of the draft. At 5'11" and 168 pounds, Pastrnak isn't big, but he's speedy, elusive and provides electrifying offense, which he is already showing off at the Bruins developmental camp. The talented youth proved just how dangerous he can be with eight goals, 24 points and a plus-7 rating in 36 games played against grown men with Sodertalje of Sweden's Allsvenskan.

With the 56th overall pick, Beantown then added **Ryan Donato** – a kid who absolutely tore up the high school ranks with 37 goals and 78 points in 30 games last season. Without a third round pick, the 2011 Stanley Cup champs took Surrey Eagles captain **Danton Heinen** with the 116th overall pick. A point-per-game player this past season in the BCHL, Heinen is headed to the University of Denver to play college puck this fall. The Bruins rounded out their draft class with U.S. NTDP forward **Anders Bjork** and Swedish defender **Emil Johansson** with their fifth and seventh round picks, respectively. In all, Boston snatched up four forwards and a defenseman. For having just five picks, GM **Peter Chiarelli** made the most of it, and because of that, we'll give him a B-.

## **Buffalo Sabres**

It's hard not to give a team with six picks in the first three rounds of the draft anything less than an A+. So, we'll stick to our guns on this one.

With the second overall pick, General Manager **Tim Murray** and the Buffalo Sabres selected Kootenay Ice captain **Sam Reinhart**. A total package player, Reinhart dominated the WHL last season, scoring 36 goals and 105 points with a plus-24 rating in 60 regular season games while adding an additional six goals and 23 points in 13 postseason games. As Buffalo continues in rebuild mode, Reinhart is a captain in waiting that is all but guaranteed to make his debut in October.

Buffalo added three more in the second round, collecting long time NHL agitator **Claude Lemieux's** son, **Brendan** with the 31st overall pick before adding big Peterborough Petes pivot **Eric Cornel** and Gatineau Olympiques left winger **Vaclav Karabacek** at 44th overall and 49th overall, respectively. After stocking up on forward talent with their top four picks, the Sabres took a goaltender and a defenseman in the third round in hulking Swedish netminder **Jonas Johansson** and Swift Current Broncos defender **Brycen Martin** with the 61st and 74th overall picks.

Without a fourth round pick, Buffalo picked a pair of high school players – left winger **Max Willman** and centre **Christopher Brown** – with its fifth and sixth round selections before wrapping up its draft with Swedish forward **Victor Olofsson**, an intriguing dark horse candidate that dominated Swedish juniors for Modo's U-20 affiliates this past season.

Definitely sticking with an A+ on this one. The Sabres are well on their way to becoming one of the NHL's elite young clubs.

## **Detroit Red Wings**

The Red Wings haven't missed the playoffs since before this writer was born – and he just turned 24 years old. As you can probably deduce from that statement, there is certainly a proud and rich heritage within this organization that goes far beyond just being an original six team.

The beauty of Detroit's success on the ice is that it all stems from the sheer brilliance of the draft table. **Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg, Gustav Nyquist and Johan Franzen** were all drafted in the third round or later, and current top-six defenseman **Jonathan Ericsson** was the 291st and final pick of his draft year – not bad for the 2002 draft's "Mr. Irrelevant." While the golden era of the 1990s and 2000s is clearly behind it the club does have four Cups and six Finals appearances to show for it. That said, it's time for a rebuild in the Motor City, though it's possible to still do so without a complete overhaul.

The Red Wings' prospect pool is filled with versatile forwards and mostly mobile defenders, but the lack of sizable forwards has been a concern for the club, and it addressed it by taking five big centres and an even bigger left winger in monstrous 6'5" Finn **Julius Vahatalo**. Headlining the draft class is stud U.S. NTDP power forward **Dylan Larkin**, who will continue his development under the watchful eyes of Detroit's scouting department close by at the University of Michigan. In addition to six forwards, the club made sure to address goaltending depth with the selection of **Chase Perry** with its fifth round selection.

In a weak draft, Detroit added size, skill and just depth in general with very little risk involved. It's a solid C, with the potential for much, much more if the Red Wings' scouting staff managed to find another diamond or two.

## **Florida Panthers**

After passing on **Seth Jones** with the second overall pick in the 2013 draft, the Cats finally got their future franchise No. 1 defender when they made Barrie Colts captain **Aaron Ekblad** the top selection in the 2014 NHL Entry Draft. It also can't be said that the Panthers were narrow-minded in their draft selections, as they selected six players – a

defenseman, a centre, two right wingers, a left winger and a goaltender – from six different leagues (OHL, WHL, Finland-Jr., USHL, High-MN and Sweden-Jr. U-18s). Without question, Florida’s biggest weakness heading into this draft was the lack of a clear-cut future All-Star No. 1 defenseman on the horizon. That was instantly addressed with the selection of Ekblad and really, nothing else mattered after that. With a plethora of young forward talent in the system, the lack of right wing depth wasn’t as concerning, but the additions of Finn **Juho Lammikko** and the U.S. NTDP’s **Joe Wegwerth** was enough to put that concern to bed for the time being.

The biggest weakness was addressed, as well as a secondary weakness, and one of the NHL’s best prospect pools just looks even better. It deserves a solid A.



Nikita Scherbak should be a dynamic force the Habs. (Avalanche.nhl.com)

## Montreal Canadiens

The Habs didn’t make their first choice of the draft until the 26th overall selection, but there’s little doubt they hit a home run with the selection (see video below) of high impact forward **Nikita Scherbak**. As a Western Hockey League rookie, the dynamite Russian winger led all freshmen in goals, assists and points and was easily Saskatoon’s leading regular season point scorer with 28 goals, 50 assists and 78 points.

Without a second round pick, Montreal traded up in the third round to snag hulking 6'4" 205-pound Swift Current Broncos defenseman **Brett Lernout**. A big right-handed blueliner, Lernout should address a lack of nastiness on the back end. Nastiness was again the name of the game when the Habs made their next selection, nabbing another big, tough defender in **Nikolas Koberstein** – an intriguing pick as the Alberta Junior Hockey League defenseman was only Central Scouting's 205th-ranked skater. Still, physicality and upside made him too good of a player to pass up with the first of the club's two fifth round picks.

With the 147th overall pick, the Canadiens picked up a familiar face in **Daniel Audette**, the son of former Habs player, and current club scout, **Donald Audette**. The youngster scored 76 points in 68 games with the QMJHL's Sherbrooke Phoenix. In the sixth round, the best name of the draft went off the board as Montreal made **Hayden Hawkey** the team's newest goaltending prospect. The Omaha Lancers goaltender doesn't just have a great name – he has great ability, which the USHL recognized when it made the Providence College commit its 2013-14 Goaltender of the Year.

Finally, the club wrapped up its draft by taking St. Mike's Buzzards forward **Jake Evans**, who put up 16 goals, 47 assists and 63 points in 49 OJHL games last season. Size, skill, goaltending and a potential franchise player in Scherbak makes it very easy for us to give the Canadiens a solid "A" on this one.

## **Ottawa Senators**

With just five picks in the 2014 draft – none in the first, fifth or sixth rounds – there really isn't a whole lot to say about the Senators' draft class. The club did address a general weakness on the prospect pool's back end by taking three defensemen – **Andreas Englund**, **Miles Gendron** and **Kelly Summers** – but it's highly unlikely any of them aside from Ottawa's top selection (Englund, 40th overall) will make the team as a legitimate future top-four option. Already a sizable defender at 6'3" and 190 pounds, talented young Swede Englund is quite mobile and uses his size well. However, he's not too fancy with the puck and is most likely better suited as a physical, stay-at-home defender rather than an offensive catalyst.

In addition to the three defenders, the Sens also added USHL forward **Shane Eiserman** and QMJHL left wing **Francis Perron**, neither of which will see the lights of the NHL anytime

soon. It certainly wasn't a great draft, but it did add some defensive depth. We'll give it a D+.

## Tampa Bay Lightning

If five mediocre picks warrant a D+, **Steve Yzerman** and the Tampa Bay Lightning fared decidedly better.

With the first of its two first round picks, the Lightning made controversial Sarnia Sting defenseman **Anthony DeAngelo** its top pick with the 19th overall selection. He's dynamic, smooth-skating and arguably the best offensive defenseman in the 2014 draft, but attitude concerns also played a heavy role in his draft stock. However, 15 goals and 71 points in 51 regular season games with the Ontario Hockey League's Sting was just too much for Yzerman to pass up. Honestly, it's hard to argue with results like that.

The Lightning then traded the 28th overall pick (**Joshua Ho-Sang**) to the New York Islanders in exchange for the 35th and 57th overall picks. Gaining two second round picks was certainly a plus after Yzerman traded his own to the Vancouver Canucks in exchange for defenseman **Jason Garrison**, the rights to unsigned prospect **Jeff Costello** and a seventh round pick in next year's draft. With those two picks, Tampa added Czech defenseman **Dominik Masin** and U.S. National Development Team blue liner **Johnathan MacLeod**. While MacLeod is Boston University-bound, Masin will play next season in the OHL after having been selected 25th overall by the Peterborough Petes in the 2014 CHL Import Draft. The lack of experienced offensive-minded blueliners has been a weakness in the Lightning's pool of prospects recently, but it appears those days are long gone after this year's draft.

In the third round, Tampa Bay traded the 80th overall pick and a 2015 seventh round selection to the Minnesota Wild in order to move up one spot to nab centre **Brayden Point** at 79th overall. At 5'10" and 161 pounds, Point isn't big by any means, but he certainly put up large numbers last season with the WHL's Moose Jaw Warriors, scoring 36 goals and 55 assists for 91 points in 72 regular season games. As you can probably imagine, it's easy to see why the talented young pivot was so desirable.

Minus a fourth round pick, Yzerman once again worked the phones, trading the 140th and 142nd overall picks to the New York Rangers in exchange for 119th overall. With that pick, the Lightning snatched up another defenseman in Calgary Hitmen's **Ben Thomas**. As a WHL rookie, Thomas had a solid season, scoring seven goals and 24 assists for 31 points and a plus-11 rating in 72 regular season games. He was even better in the club's short-lived playoff run, scoring at a point-per-game pace with a goal and five assists for six points and a plus-5 rating in six games. Thomas will be one to watch closely in his sophomore campaign later this fall.

With its final two picks of the draft, the Lightning selected Windsor Spitfires right winger **Cristiano DiGiacinto** and Cape Breton Screaming Eagles stud right winger **Cam Darcy** with the 170th and 185th overall picks. DiGiacinto had an average to slightly under average rookie season, but Darcy proved himself to be quite capable in the offensive-minded QMJHL, scoring 35 goals and 82 total points in 65 regular season games, albeit as a 20-year-old rookie. Tampa Bay's final pick in the 2014 draft may be the first to play pro puck within the organization.

Tampa Bay loaded up on intriguing defensemen and low risk, high reward forwards while also using picks to bring other important assets into the fold. You can't ask for much better than that. That said, the Bolts get a solid A if not an A+.

## **Toronto Maple Leafs**

For a team that consistently struggles to make the playoffs, yet fails to draft very high at the same time, you can't get a much better No. 1 selection than Swede-Canadian **William Nylander** at eighth overall.

A slick, speedy offensive talent with silky smooth hands, Nylander scored a goal and seven points in 22 regular season games playing against grown men with Modo of the Swedish Elite League. He was a point-per-game player in three games with Modo's J-20 affiliate, adding three goals, eight total points and a plus-7 rating in five postseason games. The son of former longtime NHLer **Michael Nylander**, the Canadian-born Swede also played 35 games last season between the Allsvenskan's Rogle and Sodertalje clubs, scoring a combined 15 goals and 12 assists for 27 points and a plus-2 rating. However, his real coming out party was on the international stage, where he scored 12 goals and 13 assists

for 25 points and a plus-11 in 14 games while playing for Sweden. This kid isn't far away from making his NHL debut.

Without a second round pick, the Leafs chose to select Kootenay Ice defenseman **Rinat Valiev** with the 68th overall pick. As a WHL rookie, the sizable Russian defender had a very solid season with five goals, 28 points and an impressive plus-27 rating in 55 games. He was even better in the postseason, scoring a goal and eight assists for nine points in 13 playoff games. Give him another season or two, and he could be an intriguing one to watch.

In the fourth round, Toronto took Youngstown Phantoms right winger **J.J. Piccinich** with the 103rd overall pick. Nearly a point-per-game player this past season with 27 goals and 58 points in 60 regular season games, he is a talented young playmaker set to further his development with Boston University starting this fall. The Leafs took another USHL forward the very next round in Sioux Falls Stampede centre **Dakota Joshua**. In 55 games with the Herd, Joshua collected 17 goals and 38 points. He's not a superbly talented offensive talent, but he uses his 6'2" 182-pound frame well in a physical, grinding role. We've seen him play quite regularly, so can attest to the fact that Joshua is a fun player to watch, but taking costly penalties is a weakness of his. He's got a pretty cool first name, though.

With their sixth round pick, the Leafs nabbed young South Shore High School forward **Nolan Vesev**. In 48 games, the Maine commit scored an impressive 26 goals and 66 points, but it's important to keep things in perspective – it's only high school. Finally, Toronto wrapped things up with the selection of big (6'4" 191 pounds) Swedish left wing **Pierre Engvall**. As his size would indicate, he's not far from the NHL, and was impressive in 55 games between Frolunda's U-20 and U-18 junior clubs, scoring a combined 28 goals and 43 assists for 71 points and a plus-41 rating. However, he could use some seasoning while playing against grown men.

In all, Toronto put together a solid draft class, none better than Nylander, but a solid group nonetheless. It's worthy of a B+ at the very least.

## Central Division



Chicago traded up to land Nick Schmaltz. (Eliteprospects.com)

### Chicago Blackhawks

The Blackhawks never seem to have to make very many moves in the offseason to stay competitive. A good reason why is because of how well they draft. Even in a draft class that was considered weak this year, Chicago made good use of its nine picks, fortifying prospect depth with the selections of two centres, four wingers, two defensemen and a goaltender.

After trading up to the 20th overall pick from 27th, the Hawks tabbed centre **Nick Schmaltz** of the Green Bay Gamblers as the organization's top pick, and the fourth of four United States Hockey League skaters taken in the first round of the 2014 draft. The younger brother of St. Louis Blues top prospect **Jordan Schmaltz**, Nick is a smart player with good instincts, speed and vision, and silky smooth mitts. A University of North Dakota incoming freshman this fall, the younger Schmaltz will be expected to contribute after two solid seasons in Green Bay. He was particularly impressive last season with 18 goals and 63 points in 55 regular season games.

Minus a second round pick, the Blackhawks got by with two picks in the third, selecting USHL right winger **Matheson Iacopelli** and South Shore High School forward **Beau**

**Starrett** at 83rd and 88th overall, respectively. Already 20, Iacopelli dominated lesser junior leagues before putting up impressive numbers as a rookie with the Muskegon Lumberjacks last season. His 41 goals and 64 points in 58 games certainly made him an easy selection for the Hawks scouting staff late in the third. The 6'1", 192-pound winger will play one more season in Muskegon before beginning his collegiate career with Western Michigan University.

Obviously, what attracted scouts to Starrett was his imposing 6'4", 197-pound frame. Nearly a point-per-game player with 11 goals and 47 points in 48 games playing against his peers, the hulking left winger is bound for the USHL's Dubuque Fighting Saints for a season before playing college puck for Cornell starting in 2015-16. How he does this coming season could be an indicator of whether or not there's more to him than just size.

In the fourth round, Chicago added another left winger in the form of Chicago Steel Swedish forward **Fredrik Olofsson**. The younger brother of Minnesota Wild top defensive prospect **Gustav Olofsson**, Fredrik struggled with the USHL's Gamblers early in the season. A mid-season trade to Chicago saw his production increase significantly. He finished the season with six goals and 15 assists in 52 games, including four goals and 11 assists for 15 points in 24 games with the Steel. He was significantly better on the international stage, scoring a goal and five points in six games for Sweden's U-18 team this season.

The Blackhawks decided to go with two blueliners in the fifth round, snatching up Edina High School's **Luc Snuggerud** and imposing 6'4", 200-pound Swede **Andreas Soderberg** with the 141st and 148th overall picks, respectively. The club added another centre and a goaltender in the sixth round, selecting Ontario Junior Hockey League pivot **Dylan Sikura** and monstrous (6'4", 214) Russian netminder **Ivan Nalimov** with back-to-back picks. Finally, Chicago wrapped up the weekend with the addition of Penticton right winger **Jack Ramsey** out of the British Columbia Hockey League at 208th overall.

In general, it was a solid draft in which the Hawks added a top centre prospect, additional depth on the wings and also welcomed a sizable goaltender to the fold. It's unlikely to be a franchise-altering draft, but it's worthy of a B at the least.

## **Colorado Avalanche**

Last season, the Avalanche emerged as a team with a very, very bright future. However, the 2014 offseason has been mediocre at best, and may have actually set them further back once again. Most of the club's top young prospects have already graduated to the big club, leaving a dearth of elite talent in the minors and prospect pool.

Like Chicago above, this is unlikely to be a franchise-altering draft for the Avs, however, they did manage to add a very solid centre prospect in No. 1 pick **Conner Bleackley**. Captain of the Western Hockey League's Red Deer Rebels last season, the 6'0", 192-pound pivot was nearly a point-per-game player with 68 points – including 29 goals – in 71 games. He's not of the same caliber as current Colorado stars **Nathan MacKinnon**, **Ryan O'Reilly** and **Gabriel Landeskog**, but Bleackley could be an ideal third line centre as he is considered to be a strong two-way player with offensive upside.

Without a second round pick, Colorado added to its defensive depth in the third round with the selection of North Bay Battalion defenseman **Kyle Wood**. A sizable right-handed OHL defender, he helps shore up a position long considered a weakness by many outside of the Mile High City. With two fourth round picks, the Avalanche added a pair of Canadian major junior wingers, taking Kitchener Rangers right wing **Nicholas Magyar** and Gatineau Olympiques left wing **Alexis Pepin**.

Colorado added another defenseman in the fifth round, snatching up 6'0", 191-pound Swede **Anton Lindholm** out of Skelleftea of the Swedish Elite League. More of a stay-at-home defender, Lindholm helps shore up defensive depth – a pressing need on the back end. The Avs took their first and only goaltender of the draft in 6'1", 207-pound Slovak **Maximilian Pajpach** in the sixth round. After struggling in the Slovakian juniors, he'll look for better results next season with Tappara U20 in Sweden's Jr. A SM-Liiga. Finally, Colorado wrapped things up with the selection of Rouyn-Noranda forward **Julien Nantel** with the 204th overall pick.

The Avalanche certainly didn't "wow" anyone with its picks, but the club did add a few nice prospects to the fold. Bleackley is a future NHLer, and Wood certainly intrigues, but the rest are a long way from the bright lights of the NHL. We'll give **Joe Sakic**, **Patrick Roy** and Co. a solid C for this effort.

## **Dallas Stars**

Recent moves by the Stars this offseason have made the club arguably the most dangerous team in the league's toughest division. In addition to trading for Ottawa Senators captain **Jason Spezza** for essentially peanuts – and signing Spezza's recent linemate **Ales Hemsky** – the Stars also addressed a major weakness (lack of potentially elite young

offensive defensemen) with a stellar draft. With nine picks, Dallas snatched up seven blueliners, a goaltender and a forward – an impressive draft class headlined by premier Western Hockey League offensive blueline talent **Julius Honka**.

A small defender (5'10", 181 pounds) hailing from a country known more for its dynamic forwards and elite goaltenders than defensive stalwarts, Honka blew down the doors of the WHL this season. As a rookie, the Finn scored at nearly a point-per-game pace with 16 goals and 40 assists for 56 points and a plus-10 rating in 62 regular season games with the Swift Current Broncos. He also represented his country at the 2014 U-20 World Junior Hockey Championships, notching an assist in seven games while helping his country win the tourney. Honka's size isn't ideal, but he's quite quick, extremely elusive and transitions from offense to defense quite well for an offensive-minded player. Another season or two in the WHL will serve him well, but he's not far from taking his talents to the NHL.

In the second round, the Stars took their first and only forward of the weekend, Edmonton Oil Kings left winger **Brett Pollock**, with the 45th overall pick. A big forward at 6'2" and 182 pounds, Pollock scored a respectable 25 goals and 55 points in 71 regular season games in his sophomore campaign. However, he really impressed in the postseason, scoring 11 goals and 19 points in 20 games as the Oil Kings won the WHL championship and the CHL as Memorial Cup champs. The Stars may have taken just one forward, but they made sure it would count with the selection of this guy.

Speaking of other non-defenseman selections, Dallas used a second fourth round pick to take Niagara IceDogs goaltender **Brent Moran** at 115th overall. After struggling with a 3.85 goals against average and a .891 save percentage in 40 games last season, he'll look to improve in his second season as an OHL starter.

The rest of the team's selections – a third, fourth, fifth, two sixths and a seventh – were used on Canadian defenders **Alexander Peters** (75th overall), **Michael Prapavessis** (105th overall) and **Patrick Sanvido** (195th overall), monstrous (6'5", 205) Finnish blue liner **Miro Karjalainen** (135th overall), American defenseman **Aaron Haydon** (154th overall) and Swedish defender **John Nyberg** (165th overall).

When the Stars see an organizational weakness, it's quite clear they certainly don't mess around. Honka instantly steps in as the club's top blueline prospect, Pollock is already one of the organization's top offensive prospects and Moran adds to some solid goaltending depth. Finally, it's pretty obvious no one will be complaining about the prospect pool's

defensive depth for a long time to come. If this doesn't get at least an A, well, we don't know what does.



Alex Tuch brings a great combination of size and skill to the table. (Lindsay Kramer)

## Minnesota Wild

A series of solid drafts has left Minnesota's prospect pool in good shape, even with most of the cream of the crop already playing in St. Paul. A couple of playoff runs have forced the Wild to draft a little later than it's become accustomed to (though that's hardly a bad thing), but its scouting staff has still managed to get good results each year. This year, with the need for size and skill in the forward ranks, the headlining act was 6'3" 215-pound right winger **Alex Tuch** of the USHL's U.S. U-18 NTDP, who the Wild was quite thrilled to snatch up at 18th overall, even if he was a bit surprised to land there.

With his size alone, the 18-year old power forward is already physically ready to play in the NHL, but he'll continue his development with Boston College starting this fall. In addition, Tuch will likely be a cornerstone on a very talented U-20 World Junior Hockey Championships squad projected to represent the red, white and blue over Christmas break. In 61 games with the U.S. U-18 team this season, he scored at over a point-per-game pace with 29 goals and 64 points while playing on a line with fellow 2014 first round pick **Sonny Milano** and 2015 draft eligible phenom **Jack Eichel**. Interestingly enough, Tuch could still jump to Canadian major juniors as the OHL's Guelph Storm currently hold his rights.

Failing to trade up in time to get into the second round, the Wild selected Tuch's teammate and U-18 team captain **Louis Belpedio**, a diminutive but talented young defender with the 80th overall pick. In 61 games, the Miami (Ohio) recruit scored seven goals and 23 points. Belpedio had a great showing at rookie camp and the Minnesota brass appears to be very high on this kid.

In the fourth round, Minnesota finally got its goaltender, a talented Finn by the lovely name of **Kaapo Kahkonen**. A highly touted European heading into his draft year, Kahkonen – who won't turn 18 until August 16 – struggled mightily this season. However, there's a lot to like with this kid and he's got a lot of awards and hardware sitting in his corner to prove it. This is a slam dunk selection at 109th overall.

The Wild took a flier on big 6'3", 211-pound WHL defender **Tanner Faith** in the fifth round. Despite the fact he was injured for all but 10 games in his draft season, Minnesota's western Canadian scouts still came away impressed. It's up to Faith to prove them right next season. Size, skill, strength and a right-shot made him too good to pass up.

With the club having three sixth round picks, Wild Assistant GM **Brent Flahr** went off the board with his first one, taking little known Swedish defenseman **Pontus Sjalin** from his home country's Division-1 Ostersunds. Flahr followed it up with two intriguing WHL centres in **Chase Lang** and **Reid Duke**. Duke has already endeared himself to Minnesota with an impressive rookie camp showing. Finally, the Wild concluded its draft in the seventh round with Czech **Pavel Jenys**, a big pivot who will make the jump to North American major junior hockey with the OHL's Sudbury Wolves this fall.

For a weak draft year, Minnesota certainly seemed to make the most of it. The club added size, skill, goaltending and depth in general. Even without a pick in the second, there's just a lot to like about the Wild's draft, which is why we'll give them a well-deserved A-.

## **Nashville Predators**

After struggling the past few seasons, Nashville has clearly decided enough is enough. Not only did the team trade for goal scoring winger **James Neal** and sign dependable centre **Olli Jokinen**, it also welcomed some highly talented forward prospects to the fold with a trio taken in the top 62 picks of the draft.

The Predators got the show on the road with Swiss forward **Kevin Fiala** at 11th overall. The elite offensive catalyst Smashville needs, Fiala had a very good season playing for the Swedish Elite League's HV71 and its junior club. However, his coming out party may have been with Switzerland's U-20 team when he lit up the international stage with five goals and 14 points in nine games. Fiala will get a chance to play a starring role with HV71 this fall.

In the second round, Nashville added sizable Russian forward **Vladislav Kamenev** and USHL U-18 defenseman **Jack Dougherty** with the 42nd and 51st overall picks, respectively. Kamenev had two goals and seven points in five games as captain of Russia's U-18 team last season. He's big, talented and a competitor, and will take his talents to either the KHL's Metallurg Magnitogorsk or the QMJHL's Quebec Remparts this fall. Dougherty is a talented defender, though not the fastest. Fortunately, he'll have time to work on that at the University of Wisconsin the next few seasons starting this fall.

With the second pick in the third round, the Predators selected versatile WHL winger **Justin Kirkland** from the Kelowna Rockets. As a rookie, the 6'2", 174-pound winger notched a respectable 17 goals, 48 points and a plus-23 rating. He'll be expected to contribute even more this fall. Nashville added another versatile winger in the fourth round, taking small (5'9") 21-year-old Swedish forward **Viktor Arvidsson**. A 16-goal, 40-point scorer in 50 games with the Swedish Elite League's Skelleftea, he was even better in the playoffs, scoring 16 points in 14 games. Arvidsson is set to join Nashville's top minor league affiliate this fall.

The Preds wrapped up the draft with a pair of defensemen, taking Finn **Joonas Lyytinen** and WHLer **Aaron Irving** with the 132nd and 162nd overall picks, respectively. Nashville added to its defensive depth and added some elite-level blue-chip talent to the prospect pool. This team is on the right track, and this effort is worthy of an A at the very least.

## **St. Louis Blues**

The Blues are bound and determined to win a Stanley Cup, but a surplus of defense and a lack of elite offensive talent have given them a good reason to struggle to get out of the

first round of the playoffs year after year. Enough is enough, and the Blues made sure that was apparent to the rest of the league with the selection of Tasmanian devil **Robby Fabbri** from the OHL's Guelph Storm with the 21st overall pick.

There's nothing about Fabbri's 5'10", 170-pound frame that makes him stand out, but it's what he does with it – amazing speed, a willingness to play physical and silky smooth mitts – that makes him a difference maker. In 58 regular season games last season, Fabbri put together an impressive 45 goals, 87 points and a plus-45 rating. He added 13 goals, 28 points and a plus-16 rating in 16 games in the process of leading the Storm all the way to the OHL championship. He'll play another season or two of major junior hockey, but he's not far from lighting up the NHL with his goal scoring ability.

With two second round picks, St. Louis didn't mess around, welcoming Moncton (QMJHL) forward **Ivan Barbashev** and Youngstown (USHL) pivot **Maxim Letunov** to the fold with the 33rd and 52nd overall picks, respectively. Dynamic yet inconsistent, Barbashev scored 25 goals and 68 points in 48 games. He was particularly impressive with four goals and 10 points in six games during Moncton's short-lived playoff run. Letunov is a talented, gritty forward who put together 19 goals and 43 points in 60 games. He'll play another season of USHL puck before heading to Boston University in 2015.

The Blues added OJHL defenseman **Jake Walman** in the third round. He was impressive in 43 games with the Toronto Jr. Canadiens last season, notching seven goals and 33 points. Walman will continue his development with Providence College this fall.

St. Louis had two picks in the fourth round, taking Finnish goaltender **Ville Husso** and Tri-City (USHL) right wing **Austin Poganski** with the 94th and 110th overall picks. A big goalie at 6'3" and 205 pounds, Husso played very well for the SM-Liiga's HIFK, putting together a 1.99 goals against average and a .923 save percentage in 41 regular season games with a 1.25 goals against average and a .935 save percentage in two playoff appearances. Poganski is a big north-south forward who will continue his development with the University of North Dakota next fall.

It's hard to get a much better fifth round pick than Kootenay Ice forward **Jaedon Descheneau**. A diminutive player at 5'9" and 185 pounds, Descheneau dominated the WHL as an 18/19-year old last season, collecting 44 goals, 98 points and a plus-27 rating in 70 games. He added 10 goals and 20 points in 13 playoff games. It was an impressive season for someone his size, and the Blues are hoping that will eventually translate to the pro level.

St. Louis wrapped up its draft with a trio of wingers in the last two rounds, taking London (OHL) right winger **C.J. Yakimowicz** (172nd), Victoriaville (QMJHL) left winger **Samuel Blais** (176th) and big (6'4") Indiana (USHL) right wing **Dwyer Tschantz** (202nd).

The Blues definitely added some valuable pieces to their organization with Fabbri, Barbashev and Husso among others. If St. Louis truly wants a Cup, it's well on its way if it continues to draft this well. It would be hard to argue against anything less than an A+.

## **Winnipeg Jets**

When any team can kick off a draft with the selection of Halifax Mooseheads winger **Nikolaj Ehlers** at ninth overall, everything else is just icing on the cake.

A 49-goal, 104-point scorer in 63 regular season games last season, Ehlers' skill set as a high octane offensive dynamo was too much for the Jets to pass on. He's an explosive speedster, a lefty that plays the off-wing and a player that will benefit from playing one or two more seasons of major junior before making the jump to the NHL.

Winnipeg waited until the third round to make its next selection, taking USHL U-18 defender **Jack Glover** – a big 6'3", 190-pound skater – with the 69th overall pick. Very mobile and good in all three zones, Glover will continue his development with the University of Minnesota starting this fall.

In the fourth round, Winnipeg had two picks, selecting Portland Winterhawks centre **Chase De Leo** and Saskatoon Blades defenseman **Nelson Nogier** with the 99th and 101st overall picks, respectively. A small, but dynamic pivot, De Leo was impressive with 39 goals and 81 points in 72 games, adding 19 points in 21 games in the WHL playoffs.

A Minnesota State Mankato recruit, stud two-way forward **C.J. Franklin** was certainly a catch in the fifth round. Nearly a point-per-game player with the USHL's Sioux Falls Stampede last season, Franklin's rugged dependability makes him a highly desirable asset, which is why the Jets snatched him up at 129th overall.

Winnipeg wrapped up its draft with a pair of hulking forwards in the sixth and seventh rounds, taking 6'4" Russian pivot **Pavel Kraskovsky** and 6'5" BCHL forward **Matt Ustaski** at 164th and 192nd overall, respectively. Size, skill and tenacity was the name of the game for the 'Peg, and the selection of Ehlers alone is worthy of nothing less than an A.

## Metropolitan Division



Haydn Fleury is a bruising defender. (Eliteprospects.com)

## Carolina Hurricanes

For a team that hasn't made the playoffs since 2009, you'd think Carolina would have a better group of youngsters than it currently has. Unfortunately, 2010 seventh overall pick **Jeff Skinner** appears to be the best of the team's limited youth movement, and he's long since graduated to the big show. The Hurricanes have a skilled group of centres spearheaded by **Elias Lindholm**, and a deep group of defenders, but lack general forward depth and goaltending depth in general.

This year, Carolina added to its defensive depth and acquired a top notch young backstopper, but didn't do much to address the forward corps as just one of the three selected forwards was a winger. Headlining the draft class was Red Deer Rebels (WHL) assistant captain **Haydn Fleury**, a bruising 6'2" 203-pound defender who put up an impressive eight goals and 46 points in 70 games during his second full season. A strong, physical player with great offensive ability – he models his game after **Jay Bouwmeester** – Fleury is the ideal candidate as the next franchise defenseman in Raleigh.

In the second round, the 'Canes added another potential franchise player in Plymouth Whalers (OHL) goaltender **Alex Nedeljkovic**. At 6'0" and 190 pounds, he doesn't have the size considered ideal for the modern NHL netminder, but he's athletic, quick and reads the play in front of him exceptionally well. In 61 regular season games, Nedeljkovic notched a 2.88 goals against average and a .925 save percentage.

With the 67th overall pick, Carolina added an intriguing young left winger in St. Andrew's College (High-ON) forward **Warren Foegele**. It's not Canadian major juniors or North American Junior "A," but Foegele thoroughly thrashed his competition with an over a point-per-game average at all three levels of play St. Andrew's offered. Only time will tell if he can sustain those levels with the University of New Hampshire this fall.

The Hurricanes had back-to-back picks in the fourth round, tabbing Whalers (OHL) defenseman **Josh Wesley** and Lulea (Sweden) centre **Lucas Wallmark** with the 96th and 97th overall picks, respectively. Wesley had a rough first season in the OHL, while Wallmark is a very solid two-way player with good offensive ability, though his skating reportedly is a weakness.

In the fifth round, Carolina nabbed **Clark Bishop** – a heart-and-soul QMJHL grinder that provides little else – before wrapping up the draft with Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds defender **Kyle Jenkins** in the seventh round. A talented yet highly inconsistent player, Jenkins will need to add strength and learn to focus if he's to make the NHL in any capacity.

The Hurricanes had a solid draft, but it didn't quite meet every need. Our take? B.

## **Columbus Blue Jackets**

It's hard to argue there's a better up-and-coming team in the league than the Blue Jackets. It's easy to see why Columbus is quickly becoming so scary when the team keeps drafting as well it has the past few seasons. With their top three picks, the Jackets added a top forward prospect, a monstrous young defender and bolstered goaltending depth with a talented young Latvian.

Hands down, the cream of the crop was U.S. U-18 NTDP (USHL) left winger **Sonny Milano**. A speedy winger with smooth mitts and a dangler's touch, the Boston College-bound forward put together an impressive draft season with 29 goals and 86 points in 58 games

while playing on the same line as fellow 2014 first round pick **Alex Tuch** (Minnesota, 18th overall) and 2015 phenom **Jack Eichel**. Milano is just the latest elite young forward to enter the Jackets' fold.

With the 47th overall pick, Columbus added an imposing young defender in Milano's 6'5", 203-pound U-18 teammate **Ryan Collins**. An intriguing right-handed defenseman, Collins notched a goal and seven points in 59 games. He'll be a fun to watch play college puck at the University of Minnesota this fall.

As mentioned above, the Blue Jackets welcomed a young Latvian netminder to the fold in **Elvis Merzlikins**. His country's go-to goaltender when it comes to U-20 international competitions, Merzlikins (76th overall) had a solid season playing for Lugano in Switzerland, collecting a 2.13 goals against average and a .924 save percentage in 22 games. The very next pick also belonged to the Jackets, who were happy to select Niagara IceDogs defender **Blake Siebenaler** at 77th overall. An offensive-minded blueliner, Siebenaler needs to work on his defensive game, but he did manage six goals and 30 points in 68 games as an OHL rookie.

Columbus picked up an intriguing young forward with the 107th overall pick, snagging Cape Breton Screaming Eagle **Julien Pelletier**, who collected 25 goals and 50 points in 67 games in his first full QMJHL season. An impressively creative playmaker, Pelletier will need to focus more on his skating and overall game before making the leap to the pro ranks.

The Jackets wrapped up their draft with Kimball Union Academy (USHS) forward **Tyler Bird** and Saint John Sea Dogs (QMJHL) defenseman **Olivier LeBlanc** with the 137th and 197th overall picks. A good-sized forward at 6'1" and 201 pounds, Bird dominated the high school ranks with 33 goals and 60 points in 37 regular season games. He'll look to take that success with him to the NCAA when he suits up for Brown University this fall. LeBlanc has proven to be a defensive talent in the "Q," but that doesn't say much in a league so offensively-oriented.

It was a great draft for Columbus, as it added depth at every position in addition to a standout prospect or two. We'll give the Jackets a very solid A on this one.

## **New Jersey Devils**

New Jersey may have finished with the 11th worst record in the 2013-14 NHL regular season, but thanks to the whole **Ilya Kovalchuk** fiasco, found itself drafting dead last in the first round. All things considered, the Devils are lucky it wasn't worse – they could have (and should have) forfeited their first round pick entirely.

With said pick, the Devils made Brandon Wheat Kings (WHL) centre **John Quenneville** the last pick in the opening round with the 30th overall selection. A versatile forward with decent size at 6'0" and 183 pounds, the Edmonton native had a very respectable sophomore campaign in the "W" with 25 goals and 58 points in 61 games. However, his impressive performance in the postseason was what elevated his draft stock. Five goals, 13 points and a plus-4 rating in nine games will do that for you. He'll be a solid two-way option for New Jersey after a couple more seasons of development in Canadian major juniors.

With the 41st pick in the draft, the Devils added Indiana Ice (USHL) rear guard **Joshua Jacobs**. A big (6'2", 194 pounds) right-handed defender, Jacobs established himself as one of the top defensemen in Tier-1 United States hockey. In 56 regular season games, the Michigan native tallied five goals, 23 points and an impressive plus-36 rating, adding three goals and five points in 12 playoff games. Jacobs is very solid in all three zones and uses his body and skating efficiently, but can both over-think and under-think the game at times. A few seasons with Michigan State University should help him develop quite nicely.

New Jersey needed right wing depth, so it addressed it with the selection of **Connor Chatham** in the third round. Another big kid at 6'2" and 223 pounds, Chatham was looking to take his game to the next level with the OHL's Plymouth Whalers after a season with Omaha (USHL). In 54 regular season games, the sturdy winger collected 13 goals, 31 points and a negative-17 rating with three additional goals in five postseason games. We're looking at a third/fourth line grinder here, folks.

The Devils added another hulking righty defender in the fifth round, taking Kamloops Blazers (WHL) assistant captain **Ryan Rehill**. The 6'2" 209-pounder had four goals, 20 points, a negative-4 rating and a massive number of penalty minutes (182) in 72 regular season games.

New Jersey wrapped up its draft with two forwards in the sixth round, taking Kimball Union (High-NH) centre **Joey Dudek** and big Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL) left winger **Brandon Baddock** with the 152nd and 161st overall picks, respectively. Dudek will make the leap to the USHL with the Dubuque Fighting Saints this fall after dominating the high school ranks. Baddock, on the other hand, has the makings of a journeyman grinder, which is good, because he'll never make the NHL as a scorer.

Not a single player taken by New Jersey in this draft has the makings of a game-changing impact player. The Devils did add depth and size, but that's about it – a C will suffice for this effort.

## **New York Islanders**

Well, there may be a considerable lack of depth in prospect pool wingers on Long Island, but the few they have are pretty darn good, and this summer's draft is a big reason why.

The Isles had two selections in the opening round, snatching up OHL wingers **Michael Dal Colle** and **Joshua Ho-Sang** with the fifth and 28th overall picks, respectively. A two-way battler with a good frame and obvious natural talent, Dal Colle piled up 39 goals, 95 points and a plus-8 rating in 67 regular season games with the Oshawa Generals. He concluded his impressive season with eight goals and 20 points in 12 playoff games. Dal Colle is expected to return to Oshawa next season, but isn't far away from plying his trade in the pros.

While Dal Colle is considered to be a pretty good bet, Ho-Sang is somewhat of a wild card. Quick, agile and wielding silky smooth mitts with elite offensive prowess, Ho-Sang's play on the opposite side of the puck – as well as attitude problems – is what made most NHL GMs hesitant to pull the trigger on him in the first round. However, 32 goals, 85 points and a plus-26 rating in 67 regular season games are hard numbers to knock, though his season was cut short thanks to a suspension, four games, three points and a negative-10 rating into Windsor's postseason. He's got a lot to learn and work on, but it may be well worth the wait for the fans and brass on the Island.

Minus a second round pick, the Islanders selected a pair of goaltenders next, taking Russian **Ilya Sorokin** and Swede **Linus Soderstrom** with the 78th and 95th overall picks. Sorokin put together a 2.90 goals against average and a .911 save percentage in 27 games with the KHL's Metallurg Novokuznetsk, while Soderstrom posted a 2.61 goals against average and a .915 save percentage in 23 games with the SuperElit's Djurgarden J20 club.

With the 18th pick of the fourth round, New York took its first and only defenseman of the draft in Quinnipiac's (ECAC) **Devon Toews**. As an older freshman, Toews collected a goal, 17 points and a plus-10 rating in 37 games last season.

The Islanders wrapped up their draft with two centres, taking Ferris State (WCHA) pivot **Kyle Schempp** and Red Deer Rebels assistant captain **Lukas Sutter** with the 155th and 200th overall picks. Schempp had a solid freshman campaign, scoring 10 goals, 25 points and a plus-10 rating in 43 games after scoring 13 goals, 41 points and a plus-26 rating in 64 regular season games in 2012-13 in his first and only season with the USHL's Sioux Falls Stampede. An overage player, Sutter is certainly not known as a scorer, but he may already be prepared to make the jump to pro hockey as a bottom-six grinder or role player.

The Islanders had a great draft in our humble opinion. Not only did the club add two top-tier forward prospects, but it also added a pair of legitimate young goaltending options, forward depth and at least one player that may be ready to make the pros a lot sooner than anticipated. Isles fans have a lot to be happy about with this draft, it's not often GM **Garth Snow** gets an A+.



Brandon Halverson still needs to prove he can handle a big workload in the OHL. (Eliteprospects.com)

## New York Rangers

Minus a first round pick, the 2014 Eastern Conference champions had to wait until the second-to-last pick of the second round before making their top selection of the draft, taking Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds (OHL) netminder **Brandon Halverson** with the 59th overall pick. A tall, lanky back-stopper at 6'3" and 176 pounds, Halverson has technical issues to work on in his game, but boasts good upside. In 19 games with the Greyhounds, the Traverse City, Michigan native put together a 12-6-1 record, a 2.96 goals against average, a .904 save percentage and two shutouts.

The Rangers waited until the 85th overall pick to make their next selection, snatching up Portland Winterhawks (WHL) forward **Keegan Iverson**. A rugged power forward in the prototypical New York Rangers mold, Iverson played an extremely important role as a key shutdown forward with brute strength and offensive ability. He's also shown a willingness to back up his teammates. In 67 regular season games, the St. Louis Park, Minnesota native collected 22 goals and 20 assists for 42 points and a plus-16 rating.

In the fourth round, New York added a pair of prospects – Sioux City Musketeers/Indiana Ice (USHL) defenseman **Ryan Mantha** (104th overall) and Russian goaltender **Igor Shesterkin** (118th overall). Mantha has imposing size at 6'4" and 225 pounds, but mobility, physicality and his overall defensive game are all considered to be serious question marks. He'll get a chance to prove he's more than just a big skater with OHL's Niagara IceDogs this fall. Shesterkin played quite well in Russian juniors, putting together a 1.42 goals against average and a .947 save percentage in 23 regular season games before a 1.75/.937 campaign in 19 postseason appearances.

The Rangers wrapped up the draft with a trio of fifth rounders, taking Brandon Wheat Kings (WHL) right winger **Richard Nejezchleb** (122nd), Blainville-Boisbriand Armada (QMJHL) defenseman **Daniel Walcott** (140th) and Sioux Falls Stampede (USHL) defender **Tyler Nanne** (142nd). Nejezchleb and Walcott are both over-age players, but Nanne – grandson of former North Stars great **Lou Nanne** – is headed for college puck with Ohio State after one more season in Sioux Falls.

It wasn't a great draft, but New York added a couple of solid goaltending prospects, a future second/third line stud in Iverson and shored up the organization's overall depth.

We'll give it a C+.

## Philadelphia Flyers

It happens every year. The trade deadline comes around, and the Flyers are looking for that next great top-four defenseman. This year, they drafted one instead. With the 17th overall pick, Philly fans were perfectly happy to welcome Calgary (WHL) defender **Travis Sanheim** to the fold. A big (6'3") lefty, Sanheim had an impressive rookie season in the "W" in 2013-14, notching five goals, 29 points and a plus-25 rating in 67 regular season games, adding six assists in seven U-18 World Junior Championship games with Team Canada.

In round two, the Flyers added Val-d'Or Foreurs (QMJHL) forward **Nicolas Aube-Kubel**. A native of Slave Lake, Alberta, the versatile righty forward collected 22 goals and 53 points in 65 games in his second full season with the Foreurs. He later added four goals, 13 points and a plus-11 rating in 24 games as Val-d'Or went on to win the league championship.

Philly snatched up another defenseman in the third round, taking Waterloo Black Hawks (USHL) defender **Mark Friedman** with the 86th overall pick. A Bowling Green State commit, Friedman is looking to take his skill set to greater heights after an impressive 10 goals, 40 points and a plus-22 rating in 51 regular season games with Waterloo last season.

The Flyers went without in the fourth round, waiting until the 18th pick of round five to take two-way Swedish winger **Oskar Lindblom**. A versatile forward, Lindblom is just a very solid pick for Philly. He dominated Sweden's J18 leagues with eight goals and 13 points in six games before being promoted to Brynas' J20 team. In 43 regular season games with Brynas J20, Lindblom added 13 goals, 33 points and a plus-2 rating before elevating his game in the postseason with a point-per-game scoring pace through seven games. He'll look for an even better season – possibly even with Brynas' men's club – in the fall.

Philadelphia added another versatile forward in Sanheim's Calgary teammate **Radel Fazleev** in the sixth round. The Russian had a solid, if somewhat unimpressive rookie campaign with five goals and 25 points in 38 regular season games. He'll certainly be expected to produce better numbers with the Hitmen once the 2014-15 season officially gets underway.

With its final pick in the draft, Philly snatched up one more defenseman in Linköping's (Swedish Elite League) **Jesper Pettersson**. Already 20, the 5'9", 187-pound righty spent the majority of the 2013-14 season playing against men in Sweden's premier professional hockey league, notching an assist and a minus-8 rating in 48 regular season games. He's expected to make the jump to North American professional hockey with the Lehigh Valley Phantoms (AHL), the Flyers' top minor league affiliate.

Philadelphia added some solid prospects, a few that may even have the potential to have a serious impact in the coming seasons. However, goaltending depth still remains a big issue, and there were certainly plenty of those still available at different times throughout the draft. Still, this effort is worth a B at the least.

## **Pittsburgh Penguins**

With just five picks in hand for the 2014 NHL Entry Draft – and none in rounds two or three – Pittsburgh made sure to make its top pick count with the selection of Finnish right winger **Kasper Kapanen**. A slippery 6'0", 181-pound youngster, he is an impressive skater with a goal scorer's touch, but could use more velocity on his shot. Kapanen had seven goals and 14 points while playing 47 games against men with KalPa of the SM-Liiga, Finland's premier professional hockey league. Already signed by the Penguins, he is expected to return to KalPa for the 2014-15 season.

Pittsburgh waited until late in the fourth round before making its next selection, snatching up Deerfield Academy (High-MA) forward **Sam Lafferty** with the 113th overall pick. A Pennsylvania native, Lafferty dominated the high school ranks with 21 goals and 55 points in 25 games. He'll make the leap to college puck with Brown University this fall.

In the fifth round, the Pens selected Omaha Lancers (USHL) pivot **Anthony Angello**. A big pivot at 6'3" and 190 pounds, Angello had a so-so rookie season, scoring 11 goals, 21 points and a minus-11 rating in 58 regular season games. He'll play another season of juniors before making the leap to the collegiate ranks with Cornell University in the fall of 2015.

Pittsburgh took a chance on a solid two-way shutdown grinder in the sixth round, picking Owen Sound Attack (OHL) winger **Jaden Lindo** at 173rd overall. Described as a 200-foot team player, Lindo had nine goals, 18 points and a minus-9 rating in 40 regular season games in his second season with the Attack. With their final pick (203rd overall), the

Penguins took another flyer on Union College rear guard **Jeff Taylor**. A smaller defender, Taylor had three goals, 16 points and a plus-21 rating in 41 games as a freshman.

For a team that doesn't have a lot of weaknesses in the prospect pool, one poor draft isn't going to sink the ship, and this was by no means a poor draft for Pittsburgh. Kapanen has the makings of a future stud, and there is enough additional talent in this draft class to add to the overall organizational depth. It wasn't a great draft, but it's worth a solid B at the least.

## **Washington Capitals**

The Capitals are in a quandary. They have the talent to be consistently dominant in the league, but can't seem to do so to save their lives. As such, the organization finds itself in the middle of a bit of a rebuild. What better way to help replenish the team than by adding talented Czech winger **Jakub Vrana** with the 13th overall pick?

A smaller player at 5'11" and 185 pounds, Vrana has a whole bag of tricks at his disposal. He's technically sound, has a nose for the net and a goal scorer's touch, but could use some work on his defensive play. Vrana had two goals and three points in 24 regular season games with Linköping of the Swedish Elite League, but was impressive with Linköping's J20 club, scoring 14 goals, 25 points and a plus-6 rating in 24 games. He should give a better showing with Linköping's top club this fall.

In round two, the Caps added more goaltending depth with the selection of another Czech in Bili Tygri Liberec U20 netminder **Vitek Vanecek**. A smaller netminder at 6'0" and 181 pounds, Vanecek makes up for it with superb athletic ability and great upside. In 38 regular season games in Czech juniors, he collected a 2.64 goals against average and a .921 save percentage.

Washington made history in the third round, taking the first Australian ever drafted into the National Hockey League in Hershey Bears (AHL) left winger **Nathan Walker**. A 6'0", 192-pound forward, Walker dominated Czech juniors (detecting a pattern here?) before joining the Youngstown Phantoms (USHL) and collecting 27 points in 29 games in the 2012-13 regular season. He then signed a deal with Washington's top minor league affiliate — Hershey — where he scored five goals and 11 points in 43 games last season. It was apparently good enough for the Caps.

Without a fourth rounder, Washington waited until the fifth round to select USA U-18 (USHL) forward **Shane Gersich**. After dominating the Minnesota high school ranks, Gersich put up eight goals, 16 points and a plus-8 rating in 26 games as a USHL rookie. A nephew of the State of Hockey's **Brotten** brothers, he'll spend one more season in juniors before eventually joining the University of North Dakota, something that may or may not come at the cost of being disowned by his University of Minnesota Golden Gopher-greats relations.

The Capitals wrapped up their draft with a pair of right wingers, picking Eden Prairie's (High-MN) **Steven Spinner** and Frolunda's (Sweden) **Kevin Elgestal** at 159th and 194th overall, respectively. Spinner is an intriguing, yet raw forward who spent significant time at both the high school and Tier-1 junior levels with Eden Prairie High, the Muskegon Lumberjacks and the Omaha Lancers last season. He'll spend another year with the Lancers before eventually joining the University of Nebraska-Omaha in 2015. Elgestal had four goals and nine points in five games with Frolunda's J18 squads before adding another 13 goals, 35 points and a plus-23 rating in 44 games with Frolunda J20. He'll rejoin the J20 squad later this fall.

There's no doubt this was a solid draft for the Caps. Vrana is certainly the headlining act, but they also added a legitimate goaltending prospect and forward depth in general. They're still thin on defense, though. We'll give Washington a B+.

## Pacific Division



Nick Ritchie (centre) could become a serious power forward for the Ducks. (Bill Streicher-USA Today Sports)

## Anaheim Ducks

The Ducks mean business in Anaheim, and they showed it by making a move for one of the league's best second line centres in **Ryan Kesler** from Vancouver on the first day of the 2014 draft. Shipping a couple of players, and 2014 first and third round picks, Anaheim still managed to keep the 10th overall pick from the **Bobby Ryan** trade, scooping up Peterborough Petes (OHL) assistant captain **Nick Ritchie**. A big, versatile winger at 6'2" and 227 pounds, Ritchie has the size, skill and strength that makes him ideally suited as a legitimate NHL power forward. In 61 regular season games with the Petes, Ritchie had 39 goals, 74 points, 136 penalty minutes and a plus-4 rating, adding five goals and 10 points in 11 postseason games.

In the second round, the Ducks added a pair of defensemen, taking Skelleftea's (Sweden - Jr.) **Marcus Pettersson** and the Waterloo Black Hawks (USHL) **Brandon Montour** with the 38th and 55th overall picks, respectively. A talented string-bean (6'4", 159 pounds) Pettersson is very mobile, strong positionally and has a solid offensive upside after scoring four goals and 18 points with a plus-4 rating in 38 games with Skelleftea J20 last season. As a 19-year-old USHL rookie (he turned 20 during the season), Montour was dynamic, scoring

14 goals and 62 points with a plus-35 rating in 60 games with Waterloo, adding six goals, 16 points and a plus-8 rating in 12 postseason games as he swept the league awards as Player of the Year, Defenseman of the Year, Most Assists/Points by a Defenseman and collected First Team All-Star honours. He'll be one to watch when he takes to the ice this fall with UMass (Amherst).

Without picks in the third or fourth rounds, Anaheim took another defenseman in round five in Ashwaubenon's (High-WI) **Matthew Berkovitz**. Considered to be a smart two-way player, Berkovitz had 11 goals and 37 points in 24 regular season games. He'll make the leap to the USHL with the Chicago Steel next season before joining the University of Wisconsin in the fall of 2015.

The Ducks wrapped up their draft with seventh round pick **Ondrej Kase**, a versatile winger playing for Chomutov (Czech). He dominated Czech J20s with five goals, 15 points and a plus-14 rating in seven games before making the leap to the adult ranks with four goals, seven points and a minus-4 rating in 37 games. The 5'11", 158-pound forward also represented his country in the 2014 U-20 WJHC, scoring a goal and three points with a minus-3 rating in five games.

Anaheim may have only had five picks, but the club made them count, particularly its first three. Ritchie has the makings of a classic top-six power forward, and Pettersson and Montour have the potential to become impact players on the Honda Center blueline. Those three alone make this draft class worth at least an A-.

## **Arizona Coyotes**

With a lack of balance and bottom-six grinders and role players, the Coyotes went on a forward shopping spree with seven of their nine 2014 draft picks. Headlining the show was Niagara IceDogs (OHL) left winger **Brendan Perlini**, who Arizona snatched up with the 12th overall pick. Born in Guildford, Great Britain, Perlini is a very speedy puck-hog with slick mitts and a high hockey IQ. The 6'3", 205-pound forward exploded for 34 goals, 71 points and a minus-2 rating in 58 regular season games in his sophomore campaign. He'll be expected to produce similar numbers this fall.

In the second round, the Coyotes collected another pair of OHL forwards, taking centre **Ryan MacInnis** (Kitchener Rangers) and left winger **Christian Dvorak** (London

Knights) with the 43rd and 58th overall picks. A forward who inherited the heavy shot of his legendary father, **Al MacInnis**, Ryan also brings ideal size with a 6'3", 183-pound frame. He's a project with average skating and he struggles for accuracy, but Ryan MacInnis certainly has potential. In 66 games as a rookie with the IceDogs, he had 16 goals and 37 points. Dvorak is also looking for a better sophomore campaign after collecting six goals, 14 points and a plus-8 rating in 33 regular season games in 2013-14.

Arizona added a versatile winger from the Swedish juniors in Frolunda's **Anton Karlsson** with the 87th overall pick. A fast forward that can play either scorer or grinder, Karlsson had 12 goals, 22 points and a plus-3 rating in 28 regular season games with Frolunda's J20 team. He'll suit up for Skelleftea of Sweden's SuperElit this fall. The Coyotes once again looked to the OHL in round four, taking Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds left winger **Michael Bunting**, who managed to score 15 goals and 42 points with a plus-10 rating in 48 games as a rookie. He added five goals and six points in nine postseason games.

In the fifth and sixth rounds, Arizona finally decided to look to its defense, taking Edmonton Oil Kings' (WHL) **Dysin Mayo** and Brynas' (Sweden-JR) **David Westlund** with the 133rd and 163rd overall picks, respectively. Mayo is a very good two-way puck-moving defender who notched seven goals, 35 points and a plus-17 rating in 63 games in his second WHL season. He added three goals, 15 points and a plus-12 rating in 21 postseason games as he helped Edmonton to the league title and then to the CHL title as Memorial Cup champs. Westlund is a big defender at 6'3" and 207 pounds, and had five goals, 10 points and a plus-9 rating in 33 regular season games with Brynas' J20 club.

Finally, the 'Yotes wrapped up the weekend with a pair of left wingers in the seventh round, selecting Cornell University (NCAA) incoming freshman **Jared Fiegl** and Oil Kings winger **Edgars Kulda**, an intriguing Latvian who scored at nearly a point-per-game pace with 30 goals, 60 points and a plus-30 rating in 66 regular season games. Kulda added 10 goals, 22 points and a plus-14 rating in 21 playoff games. He'll be one to watch this fall.

Arizona needed forward depth going into this draft. We think it succeeded. And we also think it's worth an A.

## Calgary Flames

The Flames haven't tasted a lick of playoff hockey since the 2008-09 season when they finished second in the Northwest Division with 98 points and **Jerome Iginla** had 35 goals and 89 points in 82 games, but it wasn't enough as they fell in six games to the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2009 Western Conference Quarterfinals. Alberta residents – Edmonton Oilers fans aside – are hoping the selection of Kingston Frontenacs (OHL) forward **Sam Bennett** will help Calgary make the leap back into a playoff berth.

A versatile 6'0", 179-pound forward, Bennett dominated the OHL in his sophomore campaign, scoring 36 goals and 91 points with a plus-34 rating in 57 regular season games with Kingston. He added five goals and nine points in seven playoff games. Bennett **may not be able to do a single pull up**, but that's okay – not many in his draft class score so easily as he makes it look. Projected as a legitimate candidate for the first overall pick in 2014 heading into the draft, Bennett won't dazzle like **Nathan MacKinnon** before him or **Connor McDavid** after, but he gets the job done with skill, speed and vision.

Calgary had a pair of picks in the second round, adding Charlottetown Islanders (QMJHL) goaltender **Mason McDonald** and Oshawa Generals right winger **Hunter Smith** with the 34th and 54th overall picks, respectively. McDonald is a big, athletic goaltender at 6'4" and 179 pounds with excellent reflexes and puck-stopping ability. He dominated the 2014 U-18 WJHC tournament for Canada, posting a 1.94 goals against average and a .930 save percentage. That may have been what saved his draft stock as he struggled mightily in the offensive-minded Quebec league. He'll look for a bounce-back season in 2014-15.

Smith is an interesting factor in his size alone. At 6'6" and 207 pounds, the monstrous 18-year old had a solid showing in his third year of OHL play, notching 16 goals, 40 points, 100 penalty minutes and a plus-11 rating in 64 regular season games. He was even better in the postseason, collecting three goals, 11 points and a plus-2 rating in 12 games. Give him one more season of major junior puck and he could be a wild card for a roster spot with the big club as soon as the 2015-16 season.

In round number three, Calgary took its first defenseman of the weekend in Spruce Grove Saints' (AJHL) **Brandon Hickey**. A Boston University commit, Hickey had four goals and 22 points in 49 games with the Saints. The 6'1" 176-pound lefty added five points in 13 postseason games. The Flames added another blueliner with its next pick three rounds

later in Djurgarden's (Sweden-JR) **Adam Ollas Mattsson**. Another big skater at 6'4" and 209 pounds, he uses his size to his advantage, playing a simple, effective game. In 33 regular season games with Djurgarden's J20 club, Mattsson had a goal, nine points and a plus-2 rating. He'll play a more prominent role this fall, and will likely spend a good amount of type with Djurgarden's big club.

The Flames capped off the draft with versatile Victoria Royals (WHL) winger **Austin Carroll** with the 184th overall pick. Yet another big boy (6'3", 216 pounds), Carroll had 34 goals, 57 points, 114 penalty minutes and a plus-18 rating in 70 regular season games. He'll likely turn pro with the AHL's Adirondack Flames, Calgary's top minor league affiliate.

This was actually a very solid draft for the Flames, who added size, skill, grit and depth at all positions. Still, six picks aren't enough to address every need. We'll give them a B+ nonetheless.



The Oilers have yet another young talented forward in Leon Draisaitl. (Ed Kaiser, *Edmonton Journal*)

## Edmonton Oilers

The Oilers had six picks in 2014, but none in rounds two and three. While the lack of those picks made for a somewhat uncertain draft in the latter stages, Edmonton most definitely didn't go wrong with the third overall pick, taking Prince Albert Raiders (WHL) forward **Leon Draisaitl**.

A standout in German juniors, Draisaitl scored 21 goals and 58 points in 64 games with the Raiders as a rookie in 2012-13 before blowing down the doors in his sophomore campaign with 38 goals and 105 points in 64 regular season games this past season. The 6'2", 216-pound forward is a dynamic play-maker with excellent vision, speed and goal scoring ability. However, Draisaitl's hockey smarts are what sets this kid apart. He'll compliment Edmonton's additional young forward talent quite well. We love the fact that he turned down the chance to make money playing professional hockey in Europe to play in the CHL, where he felt he'd become better prepared to be an NHLer.

The Oilers waited until the fourth round to make their next selections, taking Frolunda (Sweden - JR) defenseman **William Lagesson** and University of Michigan (NCAA) goaltender **Zachary Nagelvoort** with the 91st and 111th overall picks, respectively. Lagesson played a solid season in Swedish J20s last year, collecting eight goals and 20 points with a plus-27 rating in 44 regular season games. He'll suit up for the USHL's Dubuque Fighting Saints this season. Nagelvoort played just one USHL game, but was a great goaltender in two seasons in the NAHL. As a freshman, the 6'2", 207-pound netminder had a 2.20 goals against average and a .929 save percentage in 24 regular season games.

Edmonton then took another big forward (6'3", 185 pounds) in Vernon Vipers (BCHL) left winger **Liam Coughlin**. He had 18 goals and 45 points in 53 regular season games, adding seven goals and 13 points in 19 postseason games. Coughlin will play one more season with the Vipers before playing college puck with Boston University. Oil Country added another junior forward in Omaha Lancers (USHL) centre **Tyler Vesel** in round six. A Shattuck St. Mary's stud alum, Vesel transitioned seamlessly into the USHL, notching 33 goals, 71 points and a plus-40 rating in 49 regular season games. The University of Nebraska-Omaha (NCAA) commit added three goals and four points in four postseason games.

The Oilers wrapped up their draft with a goaltender in the seventh round, selecting **Keven Bouchard** of the Val-d'Or Foreurs (QMJHL). In 27 regular season games, the 18-year-old put together a 2.95 goals against average and a save percentage of .887. It certainly wasn't a terrible draft by Edmonton, and it's hard to argue that it could have been much better. Still, we'll give them a B+.

## Los Angeles Kings

The Kings never dominate the regular season, however, they always seem to find a way to be one of the last teams standing when the going gets tough in the extra season. They're big, they're tough and they just don't back down. Plus, having one of the best goaltenders in the league certainly can't hurt. If they keep drafting as well as they did in 2014, there's no reason why this team can't continue to consistently produce good showings season after season.

Thanks to the penalty against the New Jersey Devils, LA was able to draft one slot earlier than most Stanley Cup championship winning teams. With the 29th pick, the Kings made Modo (Sweden) left winger **Adrian Kempe** their top pick in the 2014 draft. Nearly a point-per-game player through 20 games with Modo's J20 club, Kempe added 11 points and a plus-5 rating in 45 games playing against men in the Swedish Elite League. A big, strong forward with offensive ability and a knack for being a pain in the butt to play against, Kempe will fit in well in a third line grinding role in SoCal in the not too distant future.

In the second round, the Kings added a pair of OHL defensemen, taking **Roland McKeown** (Kingston) and **Alex Lintuniemi** (Ottawa) with the 50th and 60th overall picks. McKeown is a strong, "do-it-all" minute-muncher who scored 11 goals and 43 points with a plus-38 rating in 62 regular season games, adding four points and a plus-6 rating in seven postseason games. Lintuniemi, on the other hand, struggled in his first season of North American hockey, collecting four goals, 21 points and a minus-38 rating. However, his size (6'3", 231 pounds) and puck-handling ability make him an ideal future NHL defender – if he'll work on improving his skating, that is.

In the mid-rounds, LA added a forward, defenseman and a goaltender in North Bay (OHL) centre **Michael Amadio**, Omaha (USHL) defender **Steven Johnson** and Victoria (BCHL) netminder **Alec Dillon** with the 90th, 120th and 150th overall picks, respectively. Amadio is looking for a better season after scoring 38 points in 64 regular season games with the Battalion last season. Johnson had 31 points and a plus-23 rating as a rookie in 56 regular season games with the Lancers. He'll suit up for the University of Minnesota (NCAA) this season. A monstrous youngster at 6'6" and 170 pounds, Dillon had a 2.76 goals against average and a .910 save percentage in 33 regular season games with the Grizzlies. He'll play a season with the USHL's Tri-City Storm before making the leap to the collegiate ranks with RPI (NCAA).

The Kings added a pair of OHL forwards in the sixth round in Belleville centre **Jake Marchment** and Plymouth left winger **Matthew Mistele**. Marchment had 10 goals and 32 points in 57 regular season games, while Mistele had 18 goals and 37 points in 56 games.

LA then wrapped up its weekend with the final two picks of the draft, taking Kingston (OHL) winger **Spencer Watson** and Ottawa (OHL) defenseman **Jacob Middleton** with the 209th and 210th overall picks. Watson was a potential second rounder who almost bottomed out of the draft entirely; he had 33 goals, 68 points and a plus-31 rating in 65 regular season games last season. Middleton collected two goals and 23 points with a minus-21 rating in 65 regular season games with the 67s.

It was a great draft for Los Angeles. The club added size, skill, grit and scoring ability, while increasing depth at all positions. We don't see why this team doesn't deserve an A+ for this effort.

## **San Jose Sharks**

The Sharks find themselves in the middle of a rebuild, and there may be no better player to rebuild around than dangerous goal scorer **Nikolai Goldobin**. Taken with the 27th overall pick, Goldobin lit up the OHL for the Sarnia Sting, collecting 38 goals and 94 points in 67 regular season games. Unfortunately, he also added a minus-30 rating. There's no question he's one of the world's best in his age group when it comes to working in the offensive zone, but he'll need to work on his play on the other side of the puck before he makes the leap to the NHL with San Jose.

In the second round, the Sharks added a pair of Europeans, taking Frolunda (Sweden - JR.) defenseman **Julius Bergman** and Geneve (Swiss- JR.) right winger **Noah Rod** with the 46th and 53rd overall picks. Bergman is a talented righty with good size and a good shot. He scored 13 goals and 34 points with a plus-15 rating in 45 games with Frolunda's J20 club. It'll be interesting to see how he transitions to the North American game with the OHL's London Knights this season. Rod has made a name for himself in Swiss juniors as a tough grinder that can score with the best of them. He had 16 goals and 37 points in 31 regular season games with Geneve-Servette's U20 squad.

San Jose collected another pair of players in round three, this time Canadian major junior forwards. Portland (WHL) right winger **Alex Schoenborn** and Saginaw (OHL) left winger **Dylan Sadowy** were welcomed into the fold with the 72nd and 81st overall picks. Schoenborn had 18 goals, 36 points, a plus-19 rating and 121 penalty minutes in 72 regular season games in his first full season with the Winterhawks, adding five points in 21 postseason games. Sadowy is a pure scorer who had 27 goals, 36 points and a plus-14 rating in 68 regular season games last season.

The Sharks added a massive specimen of a defenseman in 6'4", 216-pound lefty Baie-Comeau Drakkar (QMJHL) defender **Alexis Vanier**. In 61 regular season games, Vanier collected 15 goals, 36 points and a plus-11 rating. San Jose wrapped up its draft with a pair of forwards, taking Kelowna (WHL) centre **Rourke Chartier** and Barrie (OHL) right winger **Kevin Labanc** with the 149th and 171st overall picks. Chartier scored 24 goals and 58 points with a plus-26 rating in 72 games with the Rockets, while Labanc had 11 goals and 35 points in 65 regular season games with the Colts.

It was a very solid draft for San Jose, a team that added enough assets to at least restock its prospect pool. As a result, the Sharks definitely get a well-earned B.

## **Vancouver Canucks**

Speaking of teams in the process of rebuilding, Vancouver finds itself in a similar situation. Fortunately, the team's stable of prospects continues to grow and develop nicely thanks to a very solid showing in 2014. Headlining the weekend for the 'Nucks was a pair of first round picks – Calgary (WHL) right winger **Jake Virtanen** (sixth overall) and Sault St. Marie (OHL) centre **Jake McCann** (26th overall).

A speedy forward with a keen mind for the offensive and physical side of the game, Virtanen scored a whopping 45 goals and 71 points with a plus-23 rating and 100 penalty minutes in 71 regular season games with the Hitmen. He's currently recovering from season-ending surgery, making the 2015-15 campaign a big one for his development.

McCann may be the ideal future replacement for second line centre **Ryan Kesler**, who was traded to the Anaheim Ducks at the draft. He's a hard working, two-way talent and has no problems playing either side of the puck. In 64 games with the Greyhounds, McCann had 27

goals, 62 points and a plus-9 rating, adding two goals and seven points in nine postseason games. He's still a few years away from making the Canucks lineup, though.

In round numero dos, Vancouver addressed goaltending with the selection of top draft eligible goaltender **Thatcher Demko**, a Boston College (NCAA) freshman widely rumoured to be going to Minnesota at the 18th overall pick. Instead, Demko went off the board at 36th overall, addressing a need in the Canucks' system after the departures of **Cory Schneider** and **Roberto Luongo**. In 24 games with BC, the 6'3", 192-pound netminder put together a 2.24 goals against average and a .919 save percentage. He's big, athletic and not far away from making the leap to the pro ranks.

Lacking a fourth round pick, Vancouver snatched up a pair of defensemen in the third and fifth rounds, taking Yekaterinburg's (KHL) **Nikita Tryamkin** and Linköping's (Sweden - JR.) **Gustav Forsling** with the 66th and 126th overall picks, respectively. In 45 games playing against men in arguably the second-best hockey league in the entire world, Tryamkin notched a goal, seven points and a plus-2 rating in 45 games, adding a goal, three points and a plus-5 rating in seven games with Russia in the 2014 U-20 World Junior Hockey Championships. Oh, did we mention he's 6'7" and 229 pounds? So, yeah, there's that. Forsling had six goals, 18 points and a minus-3 rating in 44 games with Linköping's J20 team.

The Canucks wrapped things up with Erie Otters (OHL) centre **Kyle Pettit** and Prince Albert Raiders (WHL) defenseman **MacKenze Stewart**, taken with the 156th and 186th overall picks. Pettit is a big customer at 6'4" and 201 pounds, but he had just five goals, 10 points, a plus-3 rating and 24 penalty minutes in 53 regular season games. He'll be expected to bring much more to the table this season. Speaking of big customers, Stewart is 6'3" and a sturdy 240 pounds. He's got NHL size already, but he'll need to put up more than the five goals, nine points and minus-7 rating he collected in 55 games with the Raiders last season.

Honestly, this was a great draft for the Canucks, who added two blue chip forward prospects and a legitimate future No. 1 NHL netminder in Demko. Then there's the intriguing size present throughout the rest of the club's draft class. It's definitely worth an A+.

And – finally – we have come to the conclusion of our 2014 NHL Draft Grades series. Thanks for reading! Now, let's drop that puck, huh?

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