DAILY NEWS CLIPS

DALLAS STARS VS. VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2024

"No better teammate": How Dellandrea is rising to the occasion for the Stars

By Mike Heika
April 30, 2024

Ty Dellandrea played all 82 games last season and tallied 28 points (9 goals, 19 assists).
Dellandrea played 42 games this season and tallied 9 points (2 goals, 7 assists).
Yet during all of the healthy scratches and emotional struggles this year, the former first-round draft pick was a model teammate. He has supported his friends and waited for his moment to help on the ice. Dellandrea was a healthy scratch for the first two games of the playoffs, but injuries to Mason Marchment and Radek Faksa opened the door for him to play.

And on Monday, the 23-year-old forward was part of a ferocious fourth line and tallied the game-winning goal in a 4-2 win over the Vegas Golden Knights that tied the best-of-seven series at 2-2.

"There's no one in here that deserves that more than him," said good friend and housemate Jake Oettinger. "I live with him, so I've been through everything that he's gone through this year. Some guys carry the way they're playing on the ice, and you would never know with him. He wants what's best for the team. He knows when his number is called, he's going to step up and he's done that."

Dellandrea's routines are noticeable in both energy and diversity among teammates. He's always on the ice early at morning skates to help Joe Pavelski work on tips and go through his methodical routine of getting his hands ready for each game. He's always out in pregame warmup helping Tyler Seguin with his one-timers. He always joins Wyatt Johnston in a ritual of "zooming" down the tunnel into the dressing room to get ready for each game.
"He's a beloved guy in our dressing room, a really popular player and person," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "You can feel the group pulling for him when he jumps in. To his credit, he's ready. He's a playoff type character player. He doesn't shrink in the moment, he's not afraid of the physical piece of it, so I'm not surprised he's having an effect on the games."

He definitely seemed perfect in Game 4. With Vegas intentionally bringing physicality and raising its compete level after losing Game 3, Dellandrea and the fourth line were a great answer. He and Craig Smith each were scratched for Games 1 and 2, but when called upon because of the injuries, both brought fresh legs and energy to the two games in Vegas. The fourth line was given a ton of chances in the first and second periods and responded with some dominating shifts.

On maybe the most important one, the trio was able to trap the Golden Knights in their own zone late in the second period with some fantastic forechecking. Smith got the puck to the right of the goal, whipped a shot into the crease and the puck bounced off Dellandrea and into the

net. That ended up being the game-winner and allowed the Stars to lock things down in the third period while protecting the lead.

"When the puck goes to the net, good things happen," said Smith. "Margins are small out there, a quick stick here, a quick stick there, it changes different plays throughout the game. Whenever we get a chance to chip in, that's huge."

Smith patiently waited for his turn, like Dellandrea, and the two are great examples of just how much forward depth the Stars have.

"I can't say enough about our depth guys stepping in with a couple of injuries," DeBoer said. "We've got three pretty good players out right now in [Jani\] Hakanpää, Faksa and Marchment and guys have not only jumped in, but had an effect on the game. That depth has been great, and you can feel it. It's been contagious to our group. Those guys are really driving a lot of plays for us, so they have been fantastic."

Dellandrea is huge in that department. Taken 13th overall in 2018, he helped the Flint Firebirds go from 16 wins to 40 in one season and got the label of "future captain" by scouts. He then churned out 50 points (23 goals, 27 assists) in 68 games in the AHL and had a great campaign in his first full NHL season last year.

But Dallas pushed to add depth scoring in the offseason, adding Smith, Sam Steel and Matt Duchene to the trade that brought Evgenii Dadonov last season. Mix in the call-up of AHL standout Logan Stankoven and Dellandrea played in just two of the final 12 regular-season games. That was tough for a guy who really thought he had made the jump to "lineup regular" last season.

Yet Dellandrea didn't get down. In fact, he blamed himself for the situation and said he had to get better.

"There has been a part of my game where I needed to improve and sharpen over the year," he said. "A lot of it is on me. I've been challenged in that sense to keep growing my game. We're a deep group and everyone has been playing well, and that's what I've been working for – when the chance comes make sure I'm ready."

Captain Jamie Benn said Dellandrea's energy has been noticeable.
"There's no better teammate than Ty," Benn said. "We all see what he's done throughout the year. He works on his game every day and that's all you can really ask for, a teammate that's fun to be around and works his ass off - and when he gets his time to play, he goes out there and makes a difference."

Now, Dellandrea needs to just keep it going. Faksa and Marchment could return from injury at any time, and AHL MVP Mavrik Bourque also is an option to jump in, so the pressure is still there for Dellandrea every game. His housemate believes he'll handle it well no matter what happens.

"There's no one that puts the team first more than him," Oettinger said. "He works his butt off and never has a bad attitude. Everyone wants to win and not everyone is going to have the exact role that he wants, but if you win the championship at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter."

DallasStars.com

Game Day Guide: Stars vs Golden Knights

By Stars Staff
April 30, 2024

Dallas Stars vs Vegas Golden Knights
First Round: Game 5
When: Wednesday, May 1 at 6:30 PM CT
Where: American Airlines Center
TV: ESPN, Bally Sports Southwest
Radio: The Ticket 96.7-FM, 1310-AM
Live Stats: NHL Game Center
Party on PNC Plaza: 4:30 PM featuring The Calamity James

	Dallas Stars	Vegas Golden Knights
Record	2-2 (0-2 Home)	2-2 (2-0 Away)
Power Play	25.0% (2-for-8)	33.3% (2-for-6)
Penalty Kill	66.7% (4-for-6)	75.0% (6-for-8)

Five Points ⑤

- The Stars face the Golden Knights for Game 5 of their First Round series Wednesday night at American Airlines Center. This series marks the third time the clubs have met in the playoffs, following last season's Western Conference Final (L, 4-2) and the 2020 Western Conference Final (W, 4-2).
- The Stars earned their second win of the series Monday night at T-Mobile Arena, where they defeated the Golden Knights, 4-2. Dallas went 1-for-3 (33.3%) on the power-play and 2-for-2 (100.0%) on the penalty kill. Forwards Wyatt Johnston (3-1—4) and Jason Robertson (2-2—4) and defenseman Miro Heiskanen (1-3—4) share the lead among Stars skaters with four points each in the First Round series.
- Johnston leads the club with three goals in the 2024 playoffs. He recorded two goals (2-0—2) in Game 3 in Vegas, including the game-winning goal in overtime, becoming the youngest player (20 years, 349 days) in franchise history to record an overtime goal in the playoffs.
- Forward Roope Hintz recorded his first goal (1-0—1) in the playoffs against Vegas on Monday night. In the regular season, Hintz shared the lead among Stars skaters with two points (1-1—2) in two games.
- Forward Ty Dellandrea scored his first goal (1-0—1) in the playoffs on Monday night, adding one hit, one blocked shot and three shots in 10:52 minutes of ice time. Last season, Dellandrea recorded his first career multi-goal game (2-0—2) in Game 5 of the Western Conference Final against Vegas.

All-time regular-season record vs Vegas
6-7-4 Overall | 3-4-3 Home | 3-3-1 Road

All-time postseason record vs Vegas
1-1 Series | 8-8 Overall | 3-4 Home | 5-4 Road

Players To Watch 👀

Forward **Wyatt Johnston** scored the game-tying goal (1-0—1) on the power play Monday night in Game 4 against Vegas. His goal marked his 10th career playoff point (7-3--10) becoming the first player in Dallas Stars history and the fifth player in franchise history to record 10 postseason points at age 20 or younger. In Game 3, Johnston tallied two goals (2-0—2), including the game-winner in overtime, becoming them youngest player (20 years, 349 days) in franchise history to record an overtime goal in the playoffs. The Toronto, Ontario native leads Stars skaters with three goals and shares the lead with four points (3-1—4) in the 2024 playoffs. He led Stars skaters with 32 goals and tied for third on the club with 65 points (32-33—65) in 82 games in the regular season.

First Round Schedule

Game 1 vs Vegas: L 4-3

Game 2 vs Vegas: L 3-1

Game 3 at Vegas: W 3-2

Game 4 at Vegas: W 4-2

Game 5 vs Vegas: May 1 at 6:30 PM

Game 6 at Vegas: May 3, TBD

Game 7 vs Vegas: May 5, TBD

The Dallas Morning News

3 keys for the Dallas Stars as series vs. Vegas Golden Knights returns home

By Lia Assimakopoulos
April 30, 2024

After a bumpy start to the postseason at American Airlines Center, the Dallas Stars flipped the script in Vegas, winning Games 3 and 4 to tie the series at 2-2 before it heads back to Dallas.

The series is guaranteed to go to at least six games, but Game 6 in Vegas will be an elimination game for one team or the other. The Stars will seek to become the first home team in the series to win a game Wednesday night so that they hold the series advantage before hitting the road again.

As Dallas prepares for a critical Game 5, here are three keys for the Stars for the remainder of their first-round series:

Veteran forward production
Vegas got its first glimpse of the Stars' depth scoring in Game 4 when Evgenii Dadonov and Ty Dellandrea each added goals in the win. With eight different players scoring 20-or-more goals in the regular season, Dallas has plenty of forwards that can contribute each night. If it can continue getting contributions from its bottom-six forwards, that could be the difference in the series.

However, Dallas also needs to see more from its top-six forwards, especially its more veteran players. Joe Pavelski, Matt Duchene, Tyler Seguin and Roope Hintz — all of whom exceeded the 20-goal threshold this year — haven't made a big influence on the score sheet yet.

Hintz scored an empty-net goal late in Monday's game, which Stars coach Pete DeBoer hopes can jumpstart him.

ADVERTISEMENT

"Sometimes a scorer needs an empty-net goal like that to get going on track again," DeBoer said. "But he did some great work away from the puck [Monday] that doesn't show up on the score sheet."

Duchene was in a similar boat as Hintz, blocking four shots and recording his first point of the series on an assist on Wyatt Johnston's power-play goal. Seguin also recorded his first point of the playoffs, assisting on the same goal.

But for the two linemates that combined for 117 points in the regular season, the Stars need a more consistent offensive output from them.

The same can be said for Pavelski, who has had a rough start to the playoffs so far. He was demoted from the top line for some of Games 2 and 4 and all of Game 3, as the 39-year-old's age is showing late in the season. He has yet to record a point in the postseason.

Pavelski finished second on the team in points with 67 in the regular season. He's only a week removed from the age-defying performances he put on this year.

If Dallas can get contributions from those four guys — similar to the ones it got in the regular season — Vegas likely won't have an answer.

No room for Oettinger error
Like the entire Stars' team, goalie Jake Oettinger has improved game over game throughout the series, putting up his best performance Monday where he made 32 saves for a .941 save percentage.

Oettinger has been across the ice from Vegas goalie Logan Thompson, who has been the Golden Knights' most consistent player this series. Even in the last two games when the team around him wasn't at its best, Thompson was on, recording a .921 save percentage and 2.35 goals-against average through his first four playoff games.

Throughout Oettinger's up-and-down season this year, the Stars have learned how much of a better team they are when he's at his best. In recent seasons, that has lined up with the playoffs.

"When he gets in the zone, he's a really tough guy to beat," DeBoer said. "He made some critical saves at key times. We're going to need that two-out-of-three going home. He's got to be one of our best players."

Oettinger has been noticeably better on the road this year than at home. His .912 road save percentage drops to .898 at home, and his 2.67 goals-against average on the road worsens to 2.78 at home.

The Stars need to win at least one game at home this series, so they'll need their goalie to be at his best on AAC ice Wednesday and again in a Game 7, if necessary.

Discipline and defensive poise
In a physical series against a bigger and stronger defensive opponent, the Stars' discipline and defensive composure have come up big.

Vegas appeared to be chasing hits in Game 4, as DeBoer noted, a similar trap the Stars fell into in Game 2 at home.

The Golden Knights had 41 hits Monday night to just 17 for Dallas. DeBoer and the players noticed this and were able to capitalize.

"We talked about using that over-aggressiveness against them," DeBoer said.

Dallas was able to do so by drawing penalties, as well, including a second-period roughing penalty against Alex Pietrangelo that allowed Johnston to score his power-play goal to tie the game up at 2-2 moments later.

The Stars and Golden Knights were the two most disciplined teams in the league in the regular season, spending less time on the penalty kill than the other 30 teams. Dallas led the league, and Vegas finished second with a single minute separating them.

If Dallas can continue to use Vegas' physicality against it, that can cause some significant swings in games.

At the same time, the Stars have hung tight with Vegas defensively, despite effectively using five defensemen all series. They had a significant 24-14 advantage in blocked shots in Game 4, including one by Hintz that led to his empty-netter, as well as a 7-4 takeaway advantage.

After taking a 3-2 lead at the second intermission, Dallas' defense locked down in the third — with the help of a 14-save period from Oettinger — to seal the game.

Neither the physical game nor defense was Dallas' strength in the regular season, but the Stars have found a way to compete in both. They'll need that to continue when the series returns to Dallas.

The Dallas Morning News

Roope Hintz, after sealing Game 4 in Vegas, needs to become key factor in Dallas advancing

By Tim Cowlishaw
April 30, 2024

For 11 periods of playoff hockey against Vegas, the best thing Roope Hintz had done for the Dallas Stars was get hit in the face. A second-period roughing penalty against elite Vegas defenseman Alex Pietrangelo set the stage for Wyatt Johnston's power-play goal that tied the score and reversed the flow of Game 4 as the Stars went on to even the series late Monday with a 4-2 victory.

But what Hintz did in the final two minutes was even bigger. The Stars' top-line center dropped down to block a shot after Vegas pulled its goalie in the final two minutes, then delivered a long empty-net goal to seal the win. It was Hintz's first goal of the playoffs. It was Hintz's first point of the playoffs. It was Hintz's first goal in a nine-playoff game stretch going back to last spring against the Golden Knights.

Empty-net goals have a way of being dismissed. The puck finds your stick and you can skate in untouched and deposit in into an unprotected net. Only Hintz's shot came from Dallas' end of the ice — that requires at least some hand-eye coordination — and it came with 1:22 left in the game. The significance of the goal only grew when the Stars took a penalty with 50 seconds to play. Without that two-goal lead, the final 50 seconds of 6-on-4 would have been heart-stopping for Dallas fans.

With the series tied and moving into the early part of the evening — a 6:30 p.m. puck drop Wednesday at American Airlines Center — the Stars need Hintz to shine. Yes, they are a deep team as they proved during the season with eight 20-goal scorers. No other team possessed that kind of forward depth. They also have eight goal-scorers in this four-game series. They were probably the better team on the ice for five of the six periods (all but the first in Game 4) in Vegas.

But don't think for a second Dallas has momentum on its side. Don't go too crazy thinking the Stars have "regained" home-ice advantage. The home team hasn't won a game in this series yet. In the Western Conference through Monday's games, home teams are 5-11. What sort of advantage are we talking about here, anyway? And momentum is rarely a real thing in the Stanley Cup playoffs, perhaps within a game but not from game to game.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Stars need Hintz performing at a high level because, through four games, Dallas has had to rely on Johnston to match the play of the series' best player, Vegas forward Jack Eichel. Both have three goals and both have made series-shifting scoring plays. Johnston was promoted to

the No. 1 line in Vegas, replacing Joe Pavelski. Suddenly Johnston being 20 doesn't feel like it matters but Pavelski being 39 feels like it does.

But without any point production from Hintz, until the empty-netter, the Stars were hanging on for dear life. A year ago Hintz was their best player for two rounds, a leading candidate for the Conn Smythe Trophy. One game into the Vegas conference finals last spring, Hintz had 10 goals, 12 assists and 22 points. He carried the Stars past Minnesota and was still playing at a dominant level in a seven-game struggle against the Seattle Kraken. But after the first game in Vegas, he was defended into oblivion and did not score another goal.

The Stars have a chance now to do the things they thought themselves capable of a week ago when they entered the playoffs as the No. 1 seed in the West. Those hopes got ripped in half in the two games in Dallas with the visitors' stifling defensive group putting the clamps on Stars' scoring chances for long stretches in both games.

Being the road warriors that they are — best regular season road record, most franchise road wins (26) ever — the Stars got the series to 2-2 by outskating Vegas badly in Game 3 and then fighting back against Vegas' hardest offensive push of the series in Game 4. To keep moving in the right direction in these playoffs, the Stars count on their depth but really need the top line to be the top line for both teams. That means outplaying Eichel and Jonathan Marchessault, and that means reaching the next level.

Johnston and Jason Robertson have made their contributions and now we have seen signs of Hintz rejoining the battle. It's what he did so well a year ago. It's what $8 million a year centers are supposed to do. A Vegas team that looked impregnable at the AAC just might have trouble dealing with all hands on deck from the Stars' top line.

It's a best-of-three series starting Wednesday and, eventually, you figure a home team is going to win a game in this series. Dallas just has to hope that it doesn't happen in Game 6. And if they can fight their way to a seventh game Sunday, then — finally — home ice tends to make a difference in Stanley Cup playoffs. Pete DeBoer's team showed up from goaltender to top line in Vegas. Hintz scoring early Wednesday when Logan Thompson is actually in the net would go a long way toward getting Dallas back on course to where it thought it was destined to go all along.

Stars Stack

How The Hell Did That Happen? Revisiting the 2021 NHL Draft featuring Wyatt Johnston

By David Castilo

April 30, 2024

Here are just a few names picked above Wyatt Johnston in the 2021 Draft.

- Tyler Boucher (OTT)
- Cole Sillinger (CBJ)
- Matthew Coronato (CGY)
- Zachery Bolduc (STL)
- Isak Rosen (BUF)
- Fedor Svechkov (NSH)
- Xavier Bourgault (EDM)

Some of these players are quite good. In fact, except for Tyler Boucher (my god Ottawa, what the hell were you thinking besides potentially listening to Pierre McGuire mindlessly drone on and on about size?), they're bound to be everyday NHLers, with some of them already getting in their reps. I mention them because they were all names that were in a tier Johnston didn't quite belong in. Here are the names that Johnston would not have belonged in, on *anyone's* list:

- Owen Power (BUF)
- Matty Beniers (SEA)
- Mason McTavish (ANA)
- Luke Hughes (NJ)
- Kent Johnson (CBJ)
- Simon Edvinsson (DET)
- William Eklund (SJS)
- Brandt Clarke (L.A.)
- Dylan Guenther (ARI)

Unlike everyone on this list — or the previous one — the only player making a difference in meaningful games is Johnston. Comparing Johnston to the rest might be a little unfair, but I don't think it's unfair to ask: *how many of them would you say are better than Johnston, right now?* I'm not gonna go through them one by one. Players like Kent Johnson are in impossible situations thanks to the clownshow organization he belongs to. But it's hard for me to look at that list and

think he's not competing for the top spot. Obviously this depends on your mileage on defensemen. Power, Hughes, Edvinsson, and Clarke all look like impact players, and already are in some cases. But if — all things being equal — I had to choose between a true, number one center versus a true, number one defender, I always go with the center.

Of course, players fall all the time. Mat Barzal, Kyle Connor, Alex DeBrincat, Cole Caufield, Logan Stankoven, Valeri Nichushkin, etc. Don't ever let anyone gaslight you into saying "oh but hindsight, the draft is a crapshoot—" No. These players should have gone higher, they didn't, and that egg on team's faces in retrospect is verifiable.

Johnston, however, is not that. Just to be clear, this is not a 'nanny nanny boo boo' post. After all, 2021 was the COVID draft. But even if this were any other draft, Johnston still would have been a curious case. Are there lessons to be learned beyond the fact that Johnston is awesome, and Jim Nill and his scouts did an absurd job on picking him?

Maybe. Below we'll look at quotes from the scouts at the biggest outlets, some of the data available, my own thoughts at the time, and parse what we can about the wisdom of retrospect, and perhaps even answer the question about whether anyone could or should have seen this coming. Johnston is in the middle of a battle between two Cup-worthy teams, and sometimes he looks like he's the best player on the ice. *How the hell did that happen?*

"A paywall? Boooo!" I know, I know. Listen. If I ever feel like I'm writing crap you can find anywhere else, I promise not to charge you. If it's a piece I spent weeks or months on, as I did with my film room analysis of on [Wyatt Johnston](#) and [Thomas Harley](#), then yea, it's getting the Only Fans tax. Here's a [handy list](#) of my paid work so you can decide for yourself. For the new subscribers (thank you!), during the season you can expect two free pieces and one paid piece a week. The postseason will be a little more erratic on the paid front, but outside of the postseason, expect the same schedule, even during the offseason.

In 2021, there was only one player I had my sights set on: [speedy, Swedish winger Fabian Lysell](#). I was also a fan of right-shot defensemen Corson Ceulemans. And you know what? So were many others, especially following the Stephen Johns retirement. For those that don't remember, SB Nation's mock draft had the Dallas Stars [picking Ceulemans at 14](#).

It's worth remembering that Dallas already had Ty Dellandrea and Mavrik Bourque in the system: two players with similar profiles at the time. With Thomas Harley still a then-unknown, you won't find anyone making the case for Johnston in 2021.

What's funny about this is that it kind of highlights how easily the curtain of "BPA vs. Need" gets lifted, even for those who say they don't buy it. Obviously, the shortened season is the real reason, but just because there was little to go on doesn't mean there was none.

(I remember watching Johnston's shift-to-video [in his draft year](#) and I only mention it because it's so much fun that Lian Bichsel is also incidentially featured in this video.)

The Scouts: A retrospective

Johnston wasn't seen as a premiere talent. Bob McKenzie had him at [40th overall](#). The Hockey news [ranked him at 43](#). For the most part, Johnston was considered a borderline first-round talent, with most having him just outside of it ala Mavrik Bourque. One of the few exceptions was Corey Pronman, who seemed to be higher on him than most, [ranking him at #20](#). Here's how he described the Canadian center.

Johnston didn't get a season but was a top-three line center for Canada at the U18s. Johnston didn't get power-play time there, but he is a skilled forward who can make plays and kept seeing his ice time go up as the event went along. This built off a strong underage season. He has great in-tight hands, showing the ability to beat defenders one-on-one and move pucks through small areas. Johnston can create chances under pressure and has the ability to run a power play off the flank. He isn't a perimeter player, though. He attacks the hard areas of the ice, shows good second efforts going for loose pucks and is a responsible defensive center. Johnston has legitimately grown in the past season, going from 5-foot-11 to 6-foot-1. ***He lacks NHL quickness, though, in his skating (emphasis mine).*** In a sentence, Johnston projects as a second-line center.

Hindsight Analysis: Again, I want to reiterate that this section is not about pretending to be know-it-alls. Lysell was my guy, and I was okay with Cuelemans, with Johnston not even on my radar. One thing about the draft, and hockey in general, is identifying patterns, and figuring out when things change, when things stay the same, and where players exist along that shifting spectrum. Forwards who can attack in straight lines are less of a premium nowadays, which puts an emphasis on agility (I feel like the opposite is true of defensemen, who need to be able to skate in order to keep up with the modern pace). The fact that Johnston checked almost every other box should have been the tail.

However, there's something else worth pointing out that no hindsight would have changed: Johnston's very real improvement in his skating. He's always been agile despite lacking in top speed, but his improved edgework has upgraded his already-deceptive movement. This is a credit to Johnston. We take for granted that players will naturally get better at certain things, but this does a disservice to the exceptions. In reality, most hockey players don't improve their skating after

a couple of post-draft years that they couldn't change in their previous ten playing the sport. Same for shooting, puckhandling, etc. Just saying.

Scott Wheeler, whose observations are usually more insightful than most public scouts, [had him at 55](#) (!).

Johnston's a talented, versatile, Jack-of-all-trades-type who is always on the right side of the puck, moulds his game to his linemates, excels in the faceoff circle, and plays with pace. He didn't play this year other than U18s but I've had multiple people around the OHL reach out to me unprompted to pump his tires and tell me to keep an eye on him moving forward. There were people in Windsor who thought he was their best player some nights late last season and they were excited to see him take a step this year. He's not going to break a defender's ankles one-on-one but he's a diligent, up-tempo player with a well-rounded offensive toolbox and a standout two-way game.

Hindsight Analysis: I'm not a scout, amateur or otherwise. But I think how we use language is critical, whether it's in hockey or elsewhere. What exactly is meant by 'jack-of-all-trades'? Does this mean they're good at everything, but great at nothing? Is this shorthand for 'high floor, low ceiling'? Is this another way of calling a player less dynamic than their draft peers?

I'm not ready to come up with my own definition, but I do think it's important to work towards that. As hockey becomes quicker, and more creative, it's important to identify these nuances — i.e. next play mentality, net front anticipation, underhandling, etc — for what they are, rather than merely refer to them in broad strokes. This might seem like semantics, but the words we use to connect things with each other can influence our understanding *of* those things. If we define traits (not directed at Wheeler) with lazy words, chances are we'll end up with a lazy way of thinking about them. Words help frame our understanding. We'd be wise to position them diligently. This is what makes "analytics" so essential: they can clarify that language. Speaking of!

The Data: A retrospective

If you're here, then you know that I take data seriously. I think this is especially true at the level of the draft, where you need some way to cut through your own biases. This doesn't mean following the data without question or skepticism — only that you'd be an idiot to not harness as much info as possible to reach a more informed conclusion. Joe Pavelski's season this year should be a reminder that yes, there can be contradictions in production and performance.

Mitchell Brown's data was publicly available at the time, so this isn't hindsight data. So here's a question: if you were a scout, how would you interpret this?

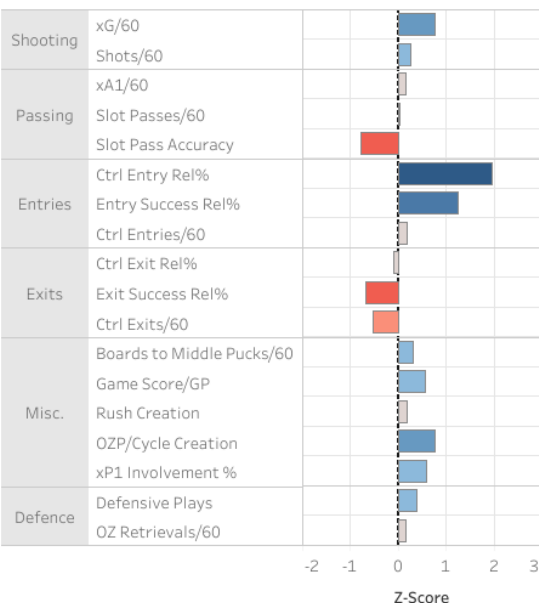## CHL & USHL 2021-22 Tracking Project: Z-Score Comparison

Data tracked and compiled by Mitchell Brown (@MitchLBrown).

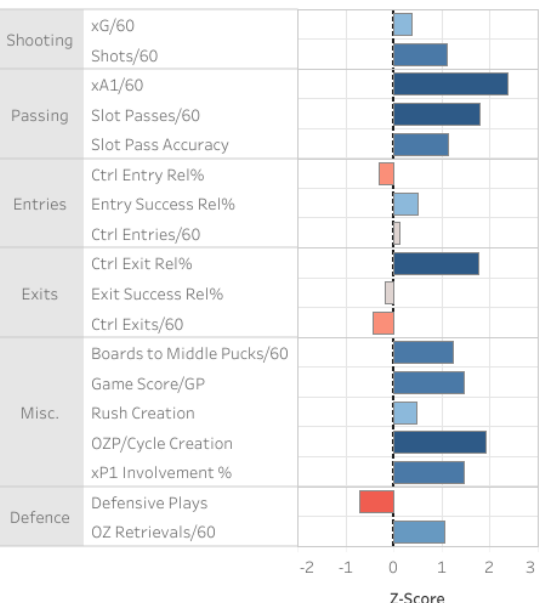| League	All		League	All
Skater	Tyler Boucher		Skater	Wyatt Johnston

Tyler Boucher

F | Ottawa 67's | OTT (2021, 10th)
Games Tracked: 7 | Minutes Tracked: 100.1
Data tracked by Mitchell Brown (@MitchLBrown) | 5v5 only

Wyatt Johnston

F | Windsor Spitfires | DAL (2021, 23rd)
Games Tracked: 3 | Minutes Tracked: 43.5
Data tracked by Mitchell Brown (@MitchLBrown) | 5v5 only

Category	Metric
Shooting	xG/60
	Shots/60
Passing	xA1/60
	Slot Passes/60
	Slot Pass Accuracy
Entries	Ctrl Entry Rel%
	Entry Success Rel%
	Ctrl Entries/60
Exits	Ctrl Exit Rel%
	Exit Success Rel%
	Ctrl Exits/60
Misc.	Boards to Middle Pucks/60
	Game Score/GP
	Rush Creation
	OZP/Cycle Creation
	xP1 Involvement %
Defence	Defensive Plays
	OZ Retrievals/60

Let's start with your reaction. "Oh wow. Johnston seems like a fantastic passer. He also shoots a lot. It looks like he can play poised in his own zone on the break out, and he seems excellent off the wall. Not many weaknesses either. That Boucher kid looks like a massive reach."

Yes, we're talking about 43 minutes tracked for Johnston versus 100 for Boucher, who went 10th overall. The reason this data is at least more instructive than usual is because this was the COVID year, meaning there was very little "eye test" data too. However, when I think about sustainable offense, I think of the transition and passing data that Johnston graded out really well in (this is also a really good sign for Johnston's future since I don't feel like we've really seen his palymaking chops unleashed; or didn't until Stankoven showed up), and certainly far more than Boucher.

What I find interesting is that even if we go higher, for example, Dylan Guenther, who went 9th overall, Johnston would still compare favorably.

CHL & USHL 2021-22 Tracking Project: Z-Score Comparison

Data tracked and compiled by Mitchell Brown (@MitchLBrown).

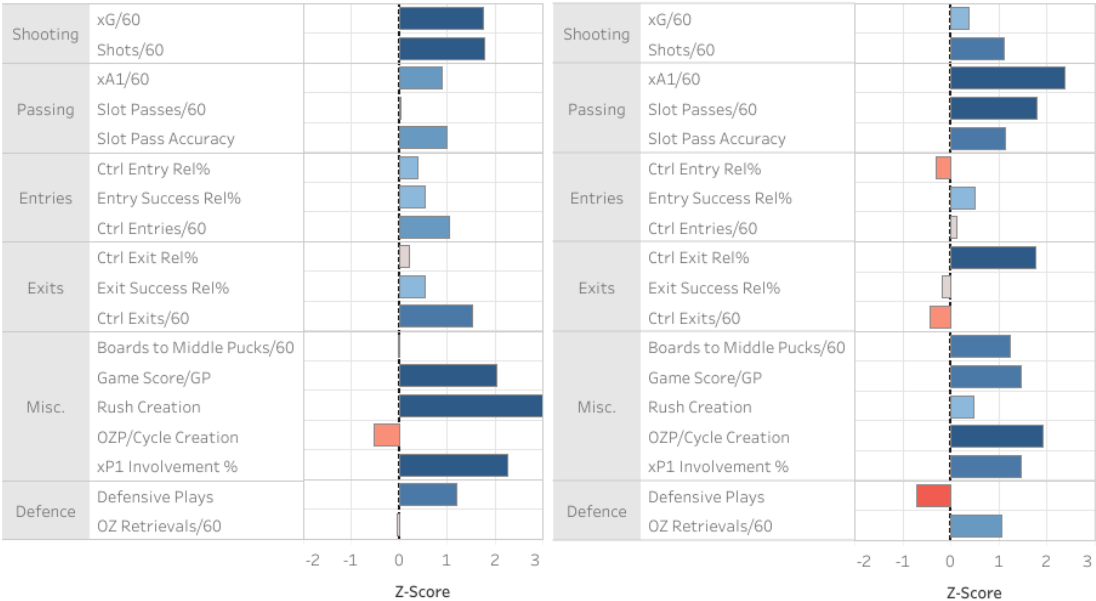| League	All		League	All
Skater	Dylan Guenther		Skater	Wyatt Johnston

Dylan Guenther
F | Edmonton Oil Kings | ARI (2021, 9th)
Games Tracked: 4 | Minutes Tracked: 66.0
Data tracked by Mitchell Brown (@MitchLBrown) | 5v5 only

Shooting	xG/60
	Shots/60
Passing	xA1/60
	Slot Passes/60
	Slot Pass Accuracy
Entries	Ctrl Entry Rel%
	Entry Success Rel%
	Ctrl Entries/60
Exits	Ctrl Exit Rel%
	Exit Success Rel%
	Ctrl Exits/60
Misc.	Boards to Middle Pucks/60
	Game Score/GP
	Rush Creation
	OZP/Cycle Creation
	xP1 Involvement %
Defence	Defensive Plays
	OZ Retrievals/60

-2   -1   0   1   2   3
Z-Score

Wyatt Johnston
F | Windsor Spitfires | DAL (2021, 23rd)
Games Tracked: 3 | Minutes Tracked: 43.5
Data tracked by Mitchell Brown (@MitchLBrown) | 5v5 only

Shooting	xG/60
	Shots/60
Passing	xA1/60
	Slot Passes/60
	Slot Pass Accuracy
Entries	Ctrl Entry Rel%
	Entry Success Rel%
	Ctrl Entries/60
Exits	Ctrl Exit Rel%
	Exit Success Rel%
	Ctrl Exits/60
Misc.	Boards to Middle Pucks/60
	Game Score/GP
	Rush Creation
	OZP/Cycle Creation
	xP1 Involvement %
Defence	Defensive Plays
	OZ Retrievals/60

-2   -1   0   1   2   3
Z-Score

Again, we're not looking at these to substitute for scouting. But we want to know how Johnston could have fallen. Was there something that could have been foreseen? Maybe, maybe not. But at minimum, the data would have had my attention.

Another thing I find critically important about data is that they pack a lot of information into easily-arranged categories. Our brains weren't meant to do this, nor is that how they evolved. Brains are survival organs, not calculation machines. That a small sample of extensive data might have caught something a small sample of biased eyes might not have — is not a crazy notion.

A digression: my "problem" with scouting

If it seems like I have an axe to grind against scouting, it's because yea, I do. The idea that a process of merely looking at something hard enough can potentially equate to understanding and categorization is just — forgive me — shitstorm stupid. Obviously, that's the strawman version of scouting. But it's still part of its foundation, [across multiple sports](#), not just hockey. You can even look at [this year's NFL draft](#) for proof.

Am I classic case of someone who resents authority, and carries with me some 90s angst? Yes. But there's an entire field of study dedicated to upending the notion that we are rational animals. The very concept of "trusting your eyes" runs counter to modern neuroscience. So of course I don't accept anything at face value with a strain of 'trust us' logic. Granted, I'll talk more professionally about this during the draft, and what I think is the correct philosophical framework for scouting, but for now, I just needed to get this off my chest. If you're trying to **categorize** something, you should probably bring more than an attention span and good seats.

In summation

So what have we learned? Should the world have seen this coming? Thanks to COVID, no. But I want to point one thing: it is interesting that, for the most part, the tiers were more or less ranked accordingly. This isn't like 2015 when the back half of the first round had nearly as many elite talents as the top half. 2021 looks like an okay if somewhat mediocre draft, with everyone grading out where they were projected. Everyone, of course, except for Johnston.

How did Dallas' scouts do it? I have no idea. But I think lessons can be found in even the most nebulous areas. Beyond all the hindsight stuff, there's also this: development happens at different rates, and boy did Johnston develop *quick*.
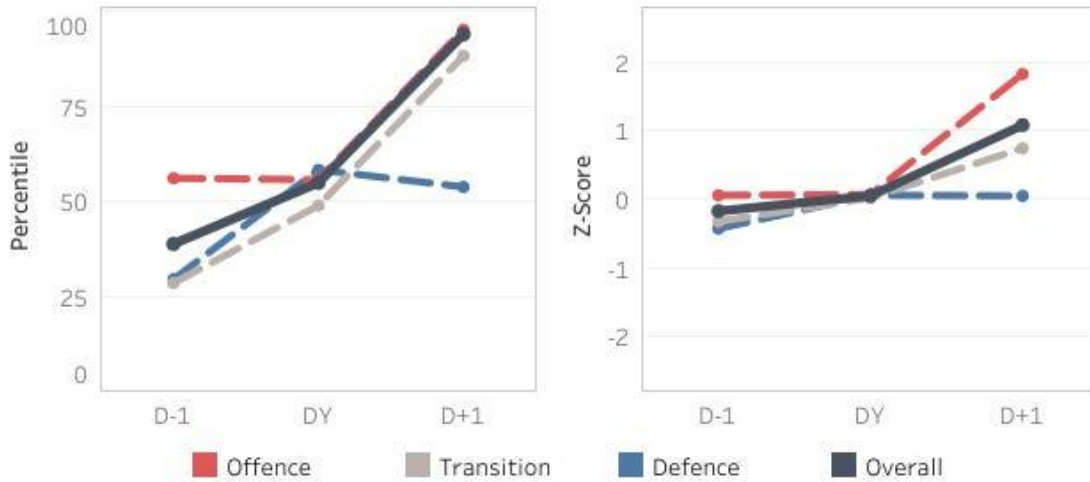
CHL, USHL, & NCAA: Yearly Growth

Skater   Wyatt Johnston

Wyatt Johnston

F | Draft Year: 2021

Games Tracked: 25 | TOI Tracked: 358.5

Offence   Transition   Defence   Overall

Data and visual courtesy of Mitchell Brown.

This is not the kind of thing anyone could have predicted. Basically overnight from his DY (Draft Year) to his post-draft year (D+1), Johnston went super saiyan with his offense, and his neutral zone play. Just look at Johnston's yearly growth compared to Stankoven, who's had his shit together right from jump street.

Skater   Logan Stankoven

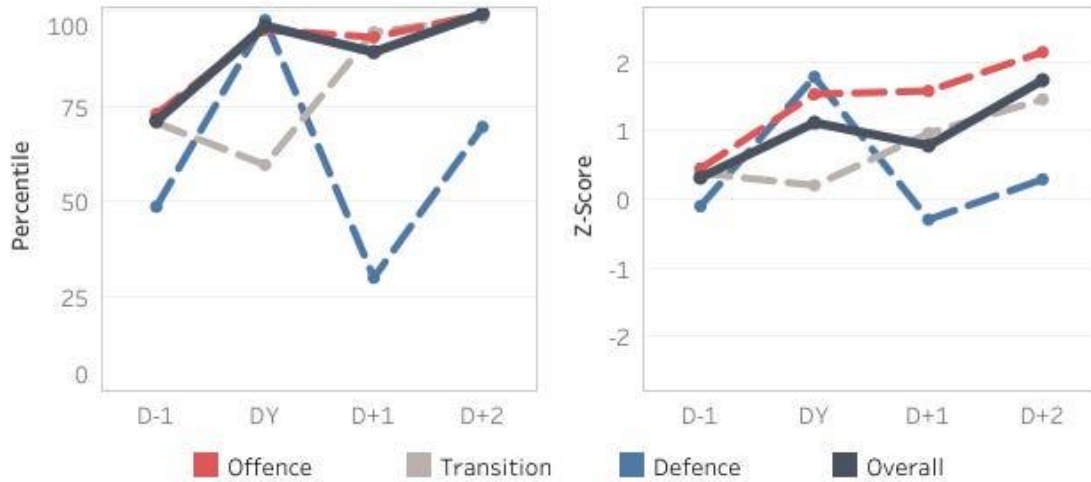# Logan Stankoven

F | Draft Year: 2021

Games Tracked: 41 | TOI Tracked: 676.8

Offence ■   Transition ■   Defence ■   Overall ■

Data and visual courtesy of Mitchell Brown.

I don't know how Dallas did it, and I wouldn't be surprised if Dallas' scouts don't know either. But teams that win Cups have to draft well. In many ways it's fitting that Vegas is their nemesis, since they're the only team that says 'screw the draft.'

It's quite possible that Johnston might be the best forward on one of the deepest offenses in the league. So would I pick him number one overall in a re-draft?

Quicker than a cat on a hot-tin roof.
April 30, 2024