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ABC 6 / Six Columbus Blue Jackets chosen to compete in 2025 IIHF World Championships

By WSYX Staff – May 8, 2025

Six members of the Columbus Blue Jackets organization are set to participate in the 2025 IIHF World Championships.

Head coach Dean Evason and assistant coach Steve McCarthy, along with forwards Adam Fantilli and Kent Johnson, will represent Canada. Defenseman Zach Werenski will play for the United States, and prospect Samuel Knazko will represent Slovakia.

Evason, who led the Blue Jackets to a 40-33-9 record in his first season as head coach, will serve as Canada's head coach. He previously served as an assistant coach at the 2024 tournament and has a storied history with Team Canada, including captaining the team to a gold medal at the 1997 IIHF World Championship.

McCarthy, making his international coaching debut, will assist Evason. He previously won two bronze medals as a player at the IIHF World Junior Championships.

Fantilli, 20, will skate for Canada in his second IIHF World Championships. He led the Blue Jackets in goals this past season and has registered 43 goals and 38 assists in 131 career NHL games.

Johnson, 22, will also represent Canada, having previously earned a silver medal in 2022. He ranked third on the Blue Jackets in goals and points this past season.

Werenski, 27, will compete for the United States in his third IIHF World Championships. He was a finalist for the 2024-25 Norris Trophy and set franchise records among defensemen in goals, assists, and points.

Knazko, 22, will represent Slovakia, having participated in numerous international tournaments. He made his NHL debut at the end of the 2022-23 season and has played in 149 career AHL games with the Cleveland Monsters.

The IIHF World Championships will take place from May 9 to 25 in Stockholm, Sweden, and Herning, Denmark.

WBNS 10TV / Delaware Planning Commission hears proposed development of ice arena and event space

By Collin Dorsey – May 8, 2025

Plans for a large plot of land near the Delaware Municipal Airport are starting to become clearer. The corner of U.S. Route 42 and Sawmill Parkway could be the site of a new ice arena and event pavilion.

The proposal in front of Delaware's planning commission is a development plan and conditional use approval submitted by the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets for the Performance Impact Arena and Pavilion.

The development would fall in the far northwest portion of nearly 258 acres of the Maridel subdivision approved in March. The plan for the indoor/outdoor hockey facility and performance amphitheater would take up roughly 13.5 acres of the land.

According to the plans submitted to the planning commission, a 127,000-square-foot building would be constructed that would house two indoor hockey rinks and one outdoor performance venue that can be converted to an outdoor hockey space in the winter months.

10TV reached out to the Maridel developer Bruce Daniels and President of AAA Blue Jackets Ed Gingher. Daniels did not respond Tuesday. Gingher said it's still early in the process, but the organization is excited about the project and the possible impact to the community.

Both Daniels and Gingher appeared at a Delaware City Council meeting in late February where they provided some insight into the projects planned for the site.

Gingher said the idea is not only to grow the AAA Blue Jackets program, but also grow interest in the sport of hockey. He hopes that the outdoor space would be used to concerts, graduations and other events when not being used as a hockey rink. He said it's being modeled after a facility in St. Louis and due diligence has been done in the project to make sure it has a positive impact on the community.

At the same meeting, Daniels tried to clear up some questions from the community about what could potentially happen on the full site. He said concerns about a race track going onto the site are wrong. Instead, he said it would be a "driving park." He said, at the time, there are plans to put a driving school, capable of handling 5,000 student drivers, on some of the acreage.

Also in that meeting, some of the concerns revolved around potential noise, traffic and loss of the surrounding neighborhood.

"My children are heavily involved in sports as well. I get it, you want to grow the sport, but it's coming at the expense of the neighbors," Shannon Summers, a nearby resident. "There's nothing mentioned about how they're going to prevent the sound from traveling miles and miles away, how it's going to affect our home values, how it's going to affect our children's quality of life and enjoy the things they love."

Harold Bauder owns the small horse farm at the corner of Section Line Road and Route 42, abutting the land slated for development. He's spent his entire life there. He said he's not opposed to the development, it was going to happen eventually and somewhere.

"Growing up, they all be said that Delaware County and Columbus would be joined together and that's what's happening," he said. "Development has changed a lot, you know. I'm to the point, I'm OK with it."

His concern is mainly about being swallowed up by development in the future. His property still resides in Concord Township, but Delaware has slowly annexed closer and closer over the years.

“Will I be able to stop from getting annexed to the city? No, I'm not going to stop that,” he said. “You know, do I want a horse farm in the city?”

As for the plans in front of the planning commission, he’s all right with something for the area’s kids to enjoy and give them something positive to do.

“Personally, that's kind of cool. I mean, I'm not into hockey, but young kids are. It's a growing sport and it's somewhere to keep them off the streets causing trouble,” Bauder said.

If the planning commission approves the request, it then moves on to Delaware City Council.

The Athletic / John H. McConnell II Q & A: Blue Jackets' future owner on his transition, NHL's rising salary cap

By Aaron Portzline – May 8, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets are in transition at the ownership level. While John P. McConnell, 71, remains the majority owner, his son, John H. McConnell II, 41, was elevated to alternate governor last fall and is on track to assume majority ownership of the franchise.

He would be the third member of the family to hold a majority ownership stake in the franchise, and early indications suggest John H. McConnell II will be more integrated with Blue Jackets management and the day-to-day operations than his predecessors.

John H. McConnell, the franchise's founder and majority owner until his death in April 2008, was a beloved figure among Blue Jackets' fans, who often gave him a standing ovation when he waved to the crowd on the scoreboard during games. John P. McConnell has been far less visible to fans, both at games and in public comments, choosing mostly to let club president Mike Priest and others speak on his behalf.

The approach by John H. McConnell II seems most similar to his grandfather and namesake, but perhaps even more engaged. He sat beside general manager Don Waddell during this year's NHL trade deadline, made frequent road trips with the club, and has familiarized himself with management, staff and players along the way.

The Athletic asked to speak with McConnell II several months ago, but he wanted to wait until after the 2024-25 season. We discussed the transition, what he believes should be the role of owners in pro sports, whether the Blue Jackets will be able to keep pace with the NHL salary cap, whether they've had offers to sell the club and more.

Note: Questions and answers have been edited lightly for clarity and length.

How would you describe the transition that's underway?

It's part of family succession planning, similar to what my father and grandfather did when (my father) was around my age. We're right in the middle of that process now. I'm being active in a different way. I've been with the Blue Jackets in multiple full-time roles for about six-plus years.

Is there a timeline in place for when you will become governor?

It's just how it continues forward. There's no set time for this. I'm working with my dad as he slowly steps back with different things as he goes into retirement.

When did this track begin? I saw you around the club quite frequently this season.

I've always been close to it. My dad and I have really always talked through everything. It's never been that I'm *not* involved in some way, but in an official capacity now of being involved and being in this role, in the process, attending the board of governors' meetings and representing the hockey team.

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What has attending the BOGs been like for you?

It's been great. It's nice to see where the league is headed, where we're at as a league as a whole, the dynamics of team ownership, the way they're viewing the future ... it's nice to be able to really see it,

and be in those meetings compared to hearing more about where we're at. Being there, and being the representative of the ownership group, has been really enlightening, and I'm enjoying the time.

What has been the most interesting part of this for you? You sat in with GM Don Waddell at the trade deadline, you've traveled fairly extensively with the club this year, gotten to know the coaching staff.

We're very fortunate to have Don Waddell, having somebody in the organization who has the experience that he has. Just being around him and being able to learn from him, with all of his different perspectives. He had a lot of roles and responsibilities in previous organizations (Detroit, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Carolina) ... so bouncing ideas off him and getting his thoughts, it's been great to have that experience here.

Waddell has seen all of this from the business side and the hockey side.

Correct. He's managed arenas before, the business side and the hockey side. I'm, in general, a hockey guy, passionate about hockey, and him being a hockey guy as well, we've had some great conversations, just individually, in how we view the team and how we're going to work together moving forward.

What do believe should be the role of an owner in professional sports?

For me, it's really how my grandfather and I, and my dad, have viewed this. Hire the right people, give them resources, support them, and we're not going to be the active player in that. We want to make sure we're giving the people who are here, who are in the roles their in, the resources they need to be successful.

Is that a difficult balance? You're a guy who knows hockey, has played hockey ... could it be a challenge to maintain that delineation?

No. Learning from my grandfather in business and with the hockey team, and my father, I represent the ownership group as a whole, I share a deep passion for hockey, and learning how they (the previous two generations) have conducted and carried themselves ... I'll do it differently, because I'm a different person, but I will continue in the way they've done it. I attended some road games this year. I plan in the future to attend more road games, but I have a young family as well, so balancing my family time and responsibilities is part of that.

We have people in place. I want to give them the resources. I can communicate with them directly, figure out what they need. If I have opinions on something, we can bounce ideas at any time. But unless it's a big decision, we're not making a final decision on that. (My role) is really resource allocation at that point.

The draft was a real hit here, now almost 20 years ago. You played a role in preparing for the NHL All-Star Game in 2015. The outdoor game this past season was a big moment. What can you say about the franchise's status and how that's changed through the years.

Man, the fact that the draft here was in 2007, that makes me feel old. Having these events that help put Columbus on the map is huge. That's part of what we wanted to do in bringing professional sports to Columbus. We wanted to elevate Columbus on a national and international stage. The All-Star Game experience for me (as co-chair of the events committee) was fantastic. But, for me, my direct involvement was in 2013, when the All-Star Game was supposed to be coming (before it was canceled due to the lockout). I had taken another role (two years later). The upside of that was, the playbook was established, the new team took it and made some changes to it, which were great, and I got to experience it from a different lens, because I didn't have the responsibility when it actually came. It was exciting for me to watch and be like "Look how this turned out! Look how that turned out!" It was fantastic.

The Stadium Series (in Ohio Stadium) was an incredible experience. It was one of those events where you look back ... we've been trying for years to try and bring that to Columbus. And it showed. The fans were excited. They showed up. The fan support is unbelievable. One of the things about being in position was talking to all of the stakeholders involved in that. The Columbus Sports Commission, the NHL, Ohio State, the Blue Jackets ... everybody in this community worked very well together. It was very collaborative.

It felt like something changed that night. Did it feel that way to you? If nothing else, maybe the relationship between Ohio State and the Blue Jackets.

I don't know if "changed" is the word that I would use. It was really highlighting what we already do well as the Blue Jackets, as Ohio State. I'm a double-Buckeye (two degrees), so I have my lineage there. It was really highlighting what we do as a community and highlighting it to a larger stage. The way the game went ... with (the Blue Jackets) winning, the fan experience .. that was something to highlight what we do.

The NHL salary cap is going up this summer after a long stagnation coming out of COVID. Some estimates suggest it could go up an additional \$20 million over the next two seasons. Are there any concerns, as a small-market club, about being able to keep pace?

I don't think it's going to continue as an astronomical climb. It's more pairing to the hold that was taking place during COVID and now matching economically where it needs to match between the players, the NHL players' association and the NHL. But we're in a good place for the market adjustment, and we don't see any issues with that going forward.

Have there been overtures or expressed interest from others in buying the Blue Jackets? There has been speculation that (Cleveland Browns and Columbus Crew owners) Jimmy and Dee Haslam have been interested. Can you confirm if there has been expressed interest by the Haslams or anybody else, and has there ever been any consideration of selling the franchise?

No. I think part of that is the Haslams coming to Columbus with the Crew and expanding their sports network with the Haslam Sports Group in acquiring (a 25 percent stake as co-owners) of the (NBA's Milwaukee) Bucks. We have a good working relationship with the Haslams. We have to, being in a community here, with them down the street with the Crew. It has been a great relationship. But we have no intention of selling the franchise.

Can you say if the Haslams have inquired?

No. We just have a great working relationship. My discussions and meetings with that team and that (ownership) group have been great. They've been collaborative. I'm also a Browns fan, so that's helped me in enjoying some understanding of what their strategies are and helps us, as a team, in different ways.

How would you describe the current state of the Blue Jackets' franchise and where do you see it going?

We have one of the best prospect pools in the NHL. The young players we're drafted have been in the system and building through it. Some of the changes we made to the roster last season was to get veteran players in here to help get them thinking the way we think, in the way we want to represent our organization and make sure they're getting NHL ready. We've got a great core. We're going to continue to build on that over the next couple of seasons.

Do you anticipate an active summer?

It's going to be interesting to see. We're going to see how we get to the draft timeframe (mid- to late June). We've got seven draft picks. We're going to be able to see what comes to us, in a lot of ways. Two first-round picks this year gives us an opportunity to make some decisions.

And that includes the possibility of not selecting players with those picks.

Correct.

Do you have thoughts on the draft change? This year, for the first time, there won't be a single location where all 32 teams meet to select players. The NHL will have the top 50 players in Los Angeles, but the franchises will set up camp in their own cities and do the drafting from remote.

It makes a lot of sense. It's a big production to put together the draft. Having the league there, and having a war room here, I think it will be conducive to us being able to quickly strategize differently than we would on the floor.

What are the benefits of this year's set-up?

We'll still have the same level of discussion and connectivity (to other NHL GMs) as we go through it, but we can have different, quicker discussions. If you've been to the draft before, you've seen how everybody is moving quietly around the room and people can catch on to what might be happening, and they can counter or make different decisions. This allows us to have better conversations and more quickly.

You're right on, there. There are always a couple of GMs — the ones expected to be active each summer — where everybody has like a GPS read on them as they move about the floor.

Yep. "Look, he's going over there now. Why's he talking to them? What does that mean?" This will allow us to stay focused on making the decisions we need to make and react quicker.

Any parting comment, something you'd like to put out there?

We're very proud of where we're at as an organization. I've been around it. I've been around 25 years of working my way through all of the companies in our family's business.

We're going to fight every year to try and win the Stanley Cup. That's the best way to say it. We're going to put the best players, the best coaches and the best management in place to make that happen. The fans have been huge. It has not been an easy season, with the way it started off (the Johnny Gaudreau tragedy). But the fans commitment and everything they've done to make us continue to have success (as a franchise), we're going to continue to try and reward that with success on the ice and hopefully bring a Stanley Cup.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets News & Rumors: Werenski, Monsters, Marrelli & More

By Mark Scheig – May 8, 2025

The calendar has reached the heart of the spring season. The Stanley Cup Playoffs are churning along in the second round. News from teams not in the playoffs are fast and forthcoming.

While it's seemed a little quiet around the Columbus Blue Jackets of late, the team is in the midst of their offseason preparations in order to be ready for the NHL Combine and the NHL Draft. Then they will turn their attention to free agency as they hope to find the right moves this offseason to add to the momentum from the end of last season.

But before we get there, we have a few items to discuss on this week's News & Rumors. We begin with a new member of Team USA at the World Championships.

Werenski Goes to Worlds

At exit interview day, Zach Werenski was asked if he would be playing for Team USA at the World Championships. He said no citing his upcoming marriage as well as marriages for two of his friends.

But you know hockey players, right? Their job never seems done especially if there is some unfinished business to take care of.

While we haven't spoken to Werenski since exit day, it's clear that his decision to join Team USA at the Worlds has a couple of layers to it. Losing to Team Canada and perhaps having another chance to meet them on the big stage had something to do with it.

Perhaps making another impression on the Team USA decision makers for the Olympics had something to do with it. Maybe going to help honor the legacy of Johnny Gaudreau had something to do with it.

No matter what the exact reasons were, Werenski's decision to go to the Worlds shows one big thing. He is a driven hockey player who wants to be successful in everything he does.

Werenski's performance at the Four Nations opened the eyes of many who haven't seen him play as much. He was one of Team USA's best players.

By playing at the Worlds, Werenski has established himself as one of the leaders of this current iteration of Team USA. He's given everything to the Blue Jackets and to his country. His commitment stands out.

That's exactly why the Blue Jackets need to make sure they nail this offseason so that the playoffs become their new reality. Werenski is in the prime of his career playing the best hockey of his career. But he's not getting any younger.

The Blue Jackets have a young and very talented core that almost made the playoffs last season. As Dean Evason said at exit interviews, they missed their goal. Changes have to be made to ensure they don't miss in 2025-26. This is why it's reasonable to expect one or more significant changes as Don Waddell now gets his chance to put his stamp on the team he took over a season ago.

We'll see what happens down the road. It just feels inevitable that Werenski will eventually replace the 'A' on his jersey with a 'C.' His rise in play and leadership have been noticed. Going to the Worlds now reinforces everything he's about.

Monsters Season Over

The Cleveland Monsters season has come to an end. They lost in four games to the Laval Rocket with a 4-1 loss in Game 4. The Rocket showed everything they're for real. But we should have seen it coming too.

The Rocket were the AHL's best regular season team. Their commitment to defense helped them in that regard. This series was won because of their aggressive approach.

The Monsters had very little time when they had the puck. That's the trademark of a Pascal Vincent coached team. The Rocket forechecked all over the ice. They forced mistakes. They also punished the Monsters with big hits throughout the series.

Yet somehow, it was the Monsters who got in penalty trouble. Power play chances were heavily in favor of the Rocket especially on their home ice. Lack of discipline did eventually catch up to the Monsters although there were some questionable calls along the way.

Jet Greaves again showed why he feels he's ready for a more permanent role on the Blue Jackets. He finished with a .911 save percentage in six postseason games. The games against the Rocket could have been much worse. He was consistently their best player throughout.

Denton Mateychuk was a targeted part of the Rocket's game plan. They made sure he was shadowed and then hit every chance they got. Logan Mailloux got him in Game 3 and had to leave the game. He wasn't able to play in Game 4. He was considered day-to-day going into Tuesday.

In the end, the Monsters best offensive players weren't able to break through. Trey Fix-Wolansky didn't record a goal in the postseason. With his contract up, there's a very good chance he's played his last game for the Blue Jackets & Monsters. What a career it's been to this point. He'd leave as one of the best players in franchise history.

Fix-Wolansky still wants to crack an NHL lineup. His path on the Blue Jackets appears very limited. But through the years, he gave Monsters fans a lot to cheer for. He will be remembered there for a long time.

It's also fair to wonder what the future holds for coach Trent Vogelhuber. He reportedly interviewed for a head-coaching opening in college. We'll see if other opportunities present themselves. He helped lead the Monsters to consecutive playoff appearances. He's only scratching the surface of what he could become as he progresses along.

With a lot of free-agent decisions for Waddell to make, we could see a much different looking Monsters lineup for 2025-26. As for this season, they enjoyed a lot of positive moments with some players making a case for the NHL. They just couldn't overcome the AHL's best team in the playoffs.

Side Dishes

- Luca Marrelli and the Oshawa Generals begin play in the OHL Finals against the London Knights on Thursday. The Knights have yet to lose in the postseason going 12-0-0. They are heavily favored to win in this series but will face their stiffest test yet in the Generals.
- Marrelli has a chance to make OHL playoff history. He leads all scorers in the playoffs with 31. That's pretty impressive for a defenseman. He now has a chance to break the all-time OHL record for points by a defenseman in one postseason. That's Chris Pronger's 40 points. He's quickly becoming someone to watch in the immediate future. He is eligible to join the Monsters next season.

- Since last we spoke here, two Blue Jackets are finalists for major NHL awards. Werenski as expected is a Norris finalist along with Cale Makar and Quinn Hughes. Sean Monahan is a finalist for the Masterton Trophy along with Gabe Landeskog and Marc-Andre Fleury.
- Think Werenski has a side bet going with Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli at the Worlds?
- Here's the timeline to keep in mind of major events. The World Championships are May 9-25. The NHL Combine is the week of June 1-7 at Buffalo's Harborcenter. The media will be there on June 6-7 to talk to the top prospects and witness the annual fitness testing. June 15 or 48 hours after the conclusion of the Stanley Cup Final is the deadline for the first club-elected salary arbitration notification. The NHL Draft in Los Angeles will be Friday June 27 and Saturday June 28. Then free agency commences on July 1.

The Athletic / 2025 NHL Mock Draft 1.0: Scott Wheeler predicts the entire first round

By Scott Wheeler – May 8, 2025

Welcome to my first mock draft for the 2025 NHL Draft.

With the first-round order taking shape following Monday night's draft lottery, and after speaking with agents, scouts, team staff and those around many of the players over the course of the year, this is my first crack at predicting the first round. (I'll have another mock after the combine and a final two-round mock closer to the draft itself.)

As I begin to put together my final top 100 draft board, this is a step back from my own evaluations to consider potential targets and fits for each team — my best guesses based on a combination of team need, my sense for team leanings and amateur scouting department preferences and the consensus.

Wherever I've felt comfortable enough to hypothesize, I've also mapped out potential contingencies and other likely considerations for certain picks.

1. New York Islanders: Matthew Schaefer, LHD, Erie Otters

I think we have to acknowledge that the Islanders will consider local product James Hagens here. I think we also have to remember that, at present, they're GM-less. I think we have to at least wonder about ownership's potential influence in a decision of this magnitude, too. The last time the Islanders drafted first, he left in free agency. Long Island is home for Hagens. He skates there. He trains there. His family and friends are there. The Islanders are his team. That does mean something.

I'm not quite sure it means enough, though, given what Matthew Schaefer could mean for and to them. They traded for a legit center prospect in Calum Ritchie at the deadline. They drafted a legit wing prospect in Cole Eiserman with last year's first-rounder. And their pool is as thin as any in the league on defense. Adding a potential No. 1 D is the logical play, even if Hagens is the emotional one. I think they'll probably come around to that.

2. San Jose Sharks: Michael Misa, C, Saginaw Spirit

Schaefer is the best-case scenario for the Sharks, and if he's here, I expect they'll take him. They've taken Will Smith and Macklin Celebrini with back-to-back top-five picks, they have a No. 7 pick in William Eklund who has established himself as a top young forward on the team and they have impressive depth at forward in their pool behind them in prospects like Quentin Musty, Igor Chernyshov and Filip Bystedt. And while they also have a premium D prospect in 2024 11th pick Sam Dickinson, adding Schaefer to Dickinson would put them in a pretty enviable position.

If Schaefer goes No. 1, there are five consensus forwards they'll likely consider to varying degrees — centers Misa, Hagens, Anton Frondell and Caleb Desnoyers and winger Porter Martone.

Taking one of the natural centers doesn't necessarily lock them into having to make one of Smith or the kid they take a third-line center of the future, either.

Smith already has established chemistry with Celebrini and there are some who believe he's better-suited to be a first-line winger than a second-line center. And there are camps that believe Misa, Hagens and Frondell could be wingers in the NHL as well. Misa's the most likely choice and is the consensus top forward in the draft, but you can find people who favour each of Hagens, Frondell and Desnoyers over him.

Desnoyers makes the most practical sense as a surefire 2C behind Celebrini. He's a winning player type who could give them a pretty formidable one-two punch down the middle, freeing Smith up to play wing. And if they think Smith is a long-term center, then Martone as a skilled 6-foot-3 winger to potentially play with Celebrini or Smith long-term becomes appealing. Concerns about Martone's skating and pace have softened some, but he's still an enticing package.

Misa has the highest upside and still feels like the most likely outcome, though. Of that group, Hagens feels like the least likely to me because they already have Smith.

3. Chicago Blackhawks: Anton Frondell, C, Djurgårdens IF

I think the Blackhawks' decision comes down to three names: Misa, Desnoyers and Frondell. They already have a lot of 5-foot-10/11 forwards with speed and skill and I don't think it makes sense for them to add another one in Hagens. And as much as the Blackhawks fan base anecdotally seems to want Martone for his size-skill-power combination, he doesn't fit their profile because he doesn't have the plus-skating piece.

I think Misa's a best-case scenario for them. He has the skating they prioritize, and he has the skill and smarts to potentially be a running mate for Connor Bedard for the next decade-plus, whether that's as Bedard's winger or as a center if they decide Bedard is better suited as a more frequent winger.

If Misa's gone, Desnoyers and Frondell come into sharper focus for them. Both are 6-foot-1-and-change centers who play the game the right way. A month ago, before a disappointing showing at U18 Worlds for the Swede and an excellent QMJHL playoff run for the Canadian, the consensus favored Frondell more than it does now. I still think Frondell is probably the more likely fit for the Blackhawks, but it's really close.

Either way, I expect the Blackhawks to call one of those three names on draft day.

4. Utah Mammoth: Caleb Desnoyers, C, Moncton Wildcats

In Logan Cooley, Clayton Keller and Tj Iginla, Utah has a lot of skill in the 5-foot-10 to 6-foot mold. I think that probably makes Hagens an unlikely selection here. In an effort to build around Cooley and Keller, the team has prioritized size at the draft maybe more than any other in the league, using high picks on big forwards like Conor Geekie and Daniil But and big defensemen like Dmitri Simashev and Maveric Lamoureux. Utah also drafted a heavyset future bottom-six center in Cole Beaudoin with its second first-rounder last year.

With Keller, Iginla and Dylan Guenther on the wings, I'd expect the Mammoth to look to find a potential 2C behind Cooley here instead of targeting a winger like Martone. With Misa and Frondell off the board, there are three names I believe they'd consider and debate: Desnoyers, Brady Martin and Jake O'Brien.

Martin is a fearless competitor who I believe is in play as early as this — and who fits the hard-working archetype Utah's staff has always prioritized. O'Brien is a 6-foot-1 center who would add even more skill and is still well-liked for his two-way commitment level.

But Desnoyers feels like the perfect winning 2C of the future for them, positioning Utah for a potential Cooley-Desnoyers-Hayton-Beaudoin depth chart of the future down the middle.

This is probably the earliest that wild-card center Roger McQueen gets serious consideration, too, given his size and position checkmarks as a 6-foot-5 center. He'll need clean medicals for teams to trust in taking him but Utah is a team that could take the risk given the decent depth of its pool/young NHL talent up front.

5. Nashville Predators: James Hagens, C, Boston College

I think the Preds could take Martone here and could really use his size-skill combination within their pool. They've prioritized competitiveness with players like Yegor Surin and Zachary L'Heureux and I could see them having interest in Martin for the same reason.

O'Brien could be a fit, too. But Smashville has waited a long time to draft a premium skill forward, and Hagens would give them that. They drafted two other 5-foot-10/11 types with Surin and Teddy Stiga a year ago, but I don't think that can stop you from swinging on a player of Hagens' talent. The last time the Preds picked in the top five, they took Seth Jones. If Hagens is here, I think they should make him their next American star.

6. Philadelphia Flyers: Brady Martin, C, Soo Greyhounds

Even after the Flyers took a center a year ago in Jett Luchanko, the expectation is that they will double down on the middle again this year. If Hagens or Desnoyers were to be here, I'd expect the pick to be one of them. If they're not, I think it'll be Martin, a classic Flyer in the truest sense with real upside and a one-of-one makeup as a competitor. If not him, then the talented and still-competitive O'Brien.

7. Boston Bruins: Jake O'Brien, C, Brantford Bulldogs

If it plays out the way I have it here, this will be O'Brien or Martone. Ultimately, I think the Bruins begin their rebuild down the middle, though. I think they'd be all over Martin if he's here as well. (McQueen is probably in play here depending on his medicals, too.)

8. Seattle Kraken: Porter Martone, RW, Brampton Steelheads

I think Martone could go to the Preds at No. 5 and the Bruins at No. 7, but if he doesn't, I wonder if the Kraken might be his floor. They haven't taken a D with their first-rounder yet, their pool is deep up front, and I fully expect they'll consider guys like Radim Mrtka (who played in their backyard with the Thunderbirds this year) and Kashawn Aitcheson here if they want to fill an area of need. But they're also one of the teams that's well-positioned to take a winger over a center, having already drafted natural centers in Matty Beniers, Shane Wright and Berkly Catton. Martone could be a great running mate for one of those guys.

9. Buffalo Sabres: Roger McQueen, C, Brandon Wheat Kings

I'm sure the Sabres will put this pick in play to try to upgrade their roster and finally work out of the bottom of the Eastern Conference, but if they keep it, they're a team that I think could take McQueen. They've drafted a lot of average-sized or undersized forwards (Konsta Helenius, Zach Benson, Brodie Ziemer, Noah Ostlund, Isak Rosen, etc.) and McQueen would give them something completely different and be a high-upside bet. I could see them look long and hard at Kashawn Aitcheson's competitiveness and Martin if he's still available for the same reason as well.

10. Anaheim Ducks: Radim Mrtka, RHD, Seattle Thunderbirds

Jackson LaCombe, Pavel Mintyukov, Olen Zellweger, Tristan Luneau and Stian Solberg give the Ducks a really strong group of five young D to build an NHL blue line with. But Mrtka would give them something unique with his 6-foot-5 length and skating. If any of the forwards taken ahead of them in this mock drop, I could see them being interested in each, McQueen included. I thought about Victor Eklund here as well. But they took a right-shot winger atop last year's draft and we almost never see just one defenseman go in the top 10.

11. Pittsburgh Penguins: Victor Eklund, LW, Djurgårdens IF

Ideally, I think the Penguins would hope for one of the top centers to fall. If that doesn't happen, though, I don't think their pool — as improved as it is — can afford to reach for a center. The consensus top center left is Braeden Cootes, but he's a lower-upside bet and Eklund, a skilled but competitive and smart right-shot winger, is the Kyle Dubas/Wes Clark type. I could see them looking to add some size, though, as well, and think a player like Lynden Lakovic could fit and go as early as this pick as well.

12. New York Rangers: Kashawn Aitcheson, LHD, Barrie Colts

I think the Rangers take a D here, and Aitcheson and Mrtka are the most likely candidates in this range. They've gravitated to the thorny pest types in the past with Brennan Othmann and Brett Berard, and the heavy hitters with guys like Will Cuyll and Matt Rempe. Aitcheson is both of those and then some as a rare throwback. Jackson Smith could be in the mix here, too, but he's third in the consensus of those three right now.

13. Detroit Red Wings: Justin Carbonneau, RW, Blainville-Boisbriand Armada

Marco Kasper and Nate Danielson mean the Red Wings don't necessarily have to chase a center like some other teams might feel they have to. I'm sure they'd love to get one of the top-end ones in this draft but with those pivots all gone here, I wonder if they consider a winger or a D over centers like Cootes and Reschny (I'd consider Reschny, but I'm not sure they would).

There are also some of their "types" here in the strong, athletic, competitive and skilled Justin Carbonneau and Carter Bear. They drafted a right-shot winger of a similar makeup to Carbonneau last year when they took Michael Brandsegg-Nygård, and Bear is a lefty, but Bear's Achilles injury may be just enough to steer a team toward a player like Carbonneau or even Lakovic (another lefty).

On defense, I'm sure they'd be interested in Mrtka if he were available. He actually gave me Moritz Seider as his comp. Smith could be in the mix as well.

14. Columbus Blue Jackets: Jackson Smith, LHD, Tri-City Americans

The Blue Jackets have two draft picks in the middle of the first round. I expect they'll take a defenseman with at least one of them, and more likely the first one so that they can get their guy. I think Mrtka and Aitcheson are likely gone here, though, which likely leads to Smith or Logan Hensler.

If they take a forward here, Lakovic fits the bill.

15. Vancouver Canucks: Braeden Cootes, C, Seattle Thunderbirds

This is the range where the conversation really heats up around projectable, well-liked wingers like Carbonneau, Lakovic and Bear. I prefer all three of those kids to Cootes and think they could and should be considered by the Canucks here, but the Canucks have almost nothing coming down the middle and most scouts believe Cootes is every bit in the same conversation as those wingers.

16. Montreal Canadiens (via Calgary Flames): Lynden Lakovic, LW, Moose Jaw Warriors

In a best-case scenario, the Habs pick a little higher and get a chance at their 2C of the future. I don't think that's in the cards for them in this range, though, in which case I think a pro-built winger who can play up and down the lineup and a defenseman probably come into focus for their two picks.

All of Lakovic, Bear, Carbonneau and even Malcolm Spence would fit the winger bill, but with Carbonneau off the board, Lakovic is the most natural fit for what they need to surround guys like Cole Caufield and Ivan Demidov with. I could see them targeting a center like William Moore with their early second-round pick in this scenario, too.

17. Montreal Canadiens: Cameron Reid, LHD, Kitchener Rangers

Of the available D, Reid makes the most sense in terms of both their pool and how they've drafted.

18. Calgary Flames (via New Jersey Devils): Cole Reschny, C, Victoria Royals

The belief seems to be that the Flames, who've drafted a ton of defensemen and wingers in recent years, are going to be after a center here. Reschny's combination of skill, smarts and two-way drive makes him a natural fit. They haven't shied away from taking 5-foot-10/11 players either. This is probably the start of the range (plus or minus a couple) where the much bigger Jack Nesbitt could start to go, too.

19. St. Louis Blues: Carter Bear, LW, Everett Silvertips

In Jimmy Snuggerud and Dalibor Dvorsky, the Blues have legit prospects at right wing and center. In Adam Jiricek and Theo Lindstein, they've used a first-round pick in the last two drafts on a D as well. Bear would give them a legit prospect at left wing (Zack Bolduc is a left-shot but plays mostly right wing). If they go D here, Reid could be their guy if he's available — and would give them something different from Jiricek and Lindstein.

20. Columbus Blue Jackets (via Minnesota Wild): Logan Hensler, RHD, University of Wisconsin

The Blue Jackets double down on D prospects and draft Hensler, once thought to be a top-10 prospect in this class. His game doesn't have the identity or shape of the D taken ahead of him but he's going to play in the NHL and should be an effective five-on-five contributor who can help out on both special teams in a pinch. Coincidentally, my comp for Reid is also Denton Mateychuk, so I wouldn't be surprised if they liked Reid for the same reasons they liked Mateychuk. If they go forward here, Benjamin Kindel is their type and this could be the start of Spence's range as well.

21. Ottawa Senators: Jack Nesbitt, C, Windsor Spitfires

It has been a while since the Sens drafted a center, and I expect that's the direction they go with this pick. Nesbitt and Milton Gastrin fit the two-way competitiveness with good size profile they covet more than Kindel or Cullen Potter (who may both be wings at the next level despite their listings as centers).

Lakovic is a winger who really fits their profile, but I doubt he'll last beyond the teens.

22. Calgary Flames (via Florida Panthers): Benjamin Kindel, C, Calgary Hitmen

The Flames double down on skilled, smart centers and draft from within ... their own organization. Reschny and Kindel would immediately give the Flames a potential 2C of the future, and Kindel played his 16-year-old season on the wing and could always move back.

23. Carolina Hurricanes: Cullen Potter, C, Arizona State University

The Canes have a type, or types, and there are a few players in this range that I could see them gravitating toward, including already-picked guys like Reschny, Reid and Kindel. I could see them liking Gastrin as well. But they're also among the teams that could take a swing on the complicated and mercurial Potter, the best skater in the class.

24. Philadelphia Flyers (via Edmonton Oilers): Malcolm Spence, LW, Erie Otters

After taking one of the hardest-working players in the draft in Martin with their first pick, the Flyers take another one of the hardest-working players in the draft in Spence, who fits their identity and projects as an up-and-down-the-lineup, honest, pro-style top-nine winger.

25. Philadelphia Flyers (via Colorado Avalanche): Milton Gastrin, C, MoDo

If the Flyers want to take a defenseman with one of their three firsts, this is the range and a potential fit for Blake Fiddler. But I think they'll double down, down the middle. Suddenly, their center depth looks a lot rosier with Martin, Luchanko and Gastrin.

26. Nashville Predators (via Tampa Bay Lightning): Joshua Ravensbergen, G, Prince George Cougars

It might be a tricky PR question to navigate after trading one of the bright young goalies in the sport in Askarov just months ago, but Ravensbergen's longer-term timeline aligns better with Juuse Saros' contract and age than Askarov did, and the Preds' pool does lack a goalie. He makes sense here once you wrap your head around it.

Fiddler could be in play for the Preds, too, who could use a D prospect with his makeup.

27. Los Angeles Kings: Sascha Boumedienne, LHD, Boston University

After the Kings took a winger in Liam Greentree last year, the belief is that they will take a defenseman or a center this year (if they hold onto their pick). Boumedienne's skating puts him in this range, but they're another team that could have interest in Fiddler.

28. San Jose Sharks (via Dallas Stars): Blake Fiddler, RHD, Edmonton Oil Kings

If the Sharks don't get a chance to take a D with their first pick of the draft, I'd bet they take one with their second. Fiddler gives them a potential middle-pairing guy with length to play behind (or potentially someday complement) the left-handed Dickinson.

29. Chicago Blackhawks (via Toronto Maple Leafs): Shane Vansaghi, C, Michigan State University

The Blackhawks will probably make every effort to package this pick with their seconds and move up if they see an opportunity to, but if they sit tight here, I think you're looking at some of the bigger, projectable bottom-six forwards available to offset some of the little speedsters they have. Nesbitt's probably a best-case scenario, but an unlikely one if they don't move up. Gastrin and William Horcoff could also be of interest. But the idea of the big, strong, powerful Vansaghi on a future fourth line with the big, strong, powerful A.J. Spellacy is pretty appealing, even if this is a little high from a skill standpoint for Vansaghi.

30. Nashville Predators (via Vegas Golden Knights): Jakob Ihs-Wozniak, RW, Luleå HF

The Preds inject more skill with the 6-foot-2 scoring Swedish winger, though defensemen like Fiddler and Boumedienne could be options here if they linger.

31. Washington Capitals: Ivan Ryabkin, C, Muskegon Lumberjacks

The Capitals have drafted boldly in the last couple of years, taking swings on guys like Andrew Cristall, Cole Hutson, Terik Parascak and Ivan Miroshnichenko. I think the Capitals-will-draft-the-Russian knee-jerk reaction over the years has been overstated, so this isn't about that. But Ryabkin — whose attitude and discipline on and off the ice have most teams planning to steer clear — comes with a ton of risk, and I think their staff is among those who'd be prepared to take it on. Also, their pool is much thinner at center than on the wing. From a talent standpoint, he's one of the most skilled players left.

32. Winnipeg Jets: William Horcoff, C, University of Michigan

The Jets are another team that would likely be interested in a D late in the first and among those likely to consider names like Boumedienne and Fiddler. If they're gone, though, I do believe there's a gap into the next group of D. One name that could enter the mix is London Knights defenseman Henry Brzustewicz, who plays with Jets prospect Jacob Julien there.

If the Jets don't feel comfortable with the D, Horcoff is a big forward who would give their pool something that's different from Colby Barlow, Brayden Yager and Brad Lambert up front. He'd be smart to model his game after Adam Lowry, too.

ESPN / 2025 NHL draft: Updated prospect rankings after U18s

By Rachel Doerrie – May 8, 2025

The IIHF under-18 world championships are done, and the draft lottery is also in the rearview mirror, so it is time for the next big board for the 2025 NHL draft in June.

Unlike the earlier iteration, these rankings are not based solely on model outputs. They more heavily include viewings, insight from scouts and an evaluation of how the play styles and skills will translate to the NHL level.

Quite a few players shot up the draft board because of elevated projections, rarity of package and upside. Some fell down the draft board related to concerns of translatable skills, discrepancy in projections and concerns about having a "B" game.

There is such variance this year, with a consensus top two, along with two more players below them ... and then all bets are off. There are a few pathways for teams in the top 10 to choose from: a high-floor, lower-upside player or a unicorn-upside, high-risk player. Each of those is weighted in the rankings, and by no means is this a mock draft.

With all that considered, these are the top 32 players, along with some honorable mentions, for the 2025 NHL draft.

1. Matthew Schaefer D, Erie Otters (OHL)

The Erie Otters defender is projected to become a true No. 1 cornerstone for years to come. A dynamic presence at both ends of the ice, the 6-2 blueliner skates with ease and uses his agility to shut down opponents in one-on-one situations, while creating offense with excellent rush capabilities.

Across the league, executives and scouts view him as a future elite NHL defenseman and a foundational piece for a championship-caliber roster. With the ability to control play from the blue line, play tough matchups and run a power play, Schaefer has the tools to become a top-10 defender in the league.

2. Michael Misa C, Saginaw Spirit (OHL)

Misa, granted exceptional status in the OHL, delivered one of the most remarkable goal-scoring seasons in recent memory, netting 62 goals in just 65 games. He confidently projects to be a top-line forward with the potential to consistently exceed a point-per-game pace at the NHL level.

Misa's offensive instincts are elite. He processes the game at a high level and executes at high speed. He's NHL ready, and has the potential to become an elite top-line center if his development continues on its current path.

His two-way game took a major step this season and, when paired with his explosive speed and offensive firepower, Misa profiles as a foundational piece around which to build a Stanley Cup contender.

3. James Hagens C, Boston College Eagles (NCAA)

A skilled center, Hagens projected to be a top-line center or one of the NHL's best second-line centers. He brings a good work rate with excellent speed and two-way ability that should see him effectively

drive play at the NHL level. The professional details of his game, such as supporting the puck, winning battles and defensive anticipation, will ease the transition to the NHL while he finds his offensive gear.

Hagens likely needs another season at Boston College to further develop his decision-making and add a more dynamic offensive gear to become a top-line NHL center. His understanding of spacing and his anticipation ability stand out among his peers. There's a mix of [Clayton Keller](#) and [Matty Beniers](#) in him in terms of playmaking skill and two-way ability.

4. Porter Martone **RW, Brampton Steelheads (OHL)**

The 6-3 right winger projects as a high-end second-line player with a competitive streak reminiscent of [Corey Perry](#) and [Tom Wilson](#). A big, physical forward, Martone is a dual-threat offensive player with ability to score on his own and facilitate. His competitive nature will make him an effective agitator, and he will physically impose himself on opponents. He needs to hone his competitiveness and physicality to increase his effectiveness, and adjust his skating posture to become a more efficient skater.

His unique combination of scoring ability, size and hard skill make him a very attractive prospect. While his most confident projection is a top-six forward, Martone has a legitimate chance to become a top-line winger if his skating improves.

5. Roger McQueen **C, Brandon Wheat Kings (WHL)**

One of the most hotly debated prospects because of injury concerns -- he played only 17 games this season -- and also his incredible natural abilities.

McQueen is described as "a unicorn" because he's a 6-5 center who skates with the speed and mobility you'd expect from a smaller player, despite some odd mechanics, which may be a function of adjusting to his size. His projection as an elite top-line center lacks confidence due to lack of playing time. Elite right-handed centers are rare in the NHL, and McQueen's size and willingness to physically dictate play add significant value. He has professional defensive habits that are translatable to the NHL, as well as unique offensive upside.

He is a textbook case of high risk, high reward. McQueen needs to play against tougher competition, where he will be forced to develop his ability to protect himself and the puck, and create offense against bigger bodies. If developed properly, he could become a two-way force in the NHL.

6. Anton Frondell **C/RW, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan)**

Frondell is a versatile two-way forward who plays both center and right wing. His flexibility is attractive to teams, although many believe he is most likely to reach his potential as a winger in the NHL. Frondell is coming off one of the most productive seasons by an under-18 player in Allsvenskan history, giving him a confident projection as a first-line NHL forward.

He's a cerebral player who picks apart defenders in one-on-one situations -- and defensive coverage in offensive zone play. The details of Frondell's game are translatable, including excellent forechecking ability, willingness to attack the middle of the ice and high-end anticipation on both sides of the puck.

Frondell has shown play-driving capabilities against senior-level players in the Allsvenskan, which has translated to the NHL in the past. He's projected to produce between 75 and 85 points per season. His play style translates well, and has executives excited about his ability to step in the league in the next 18

months. His two-way ability combined with great anticipation and incredible puck skill make him one of the more captivating prospects in the draft.

7. Jackson Smith
D, Tri-City Americans (WHL)

Smith is a big, physical defenseman who is the consensus second best defender in the draft class. As a pure defender, Smith possesses all the qualities of a top-four matchup guy. He defends the rush very well, closes gaps and steers the play in transition. His offense started to develop more toward the end of the season, and he had a strong showing at the IIHF under-18 tournament. Given the importance of transition defense in the matchup role, Smith has a real chance to reach his ceiling projection of a No. 3 matchup defender.

Smith possesses a blend of skating, size and poise. Smith's development will be about using his excellent mobility to prevent rush offense, becoming a more consistent offensive threat and continuing to develop his decision-making. If Smith can drive play on both sides of the puck in transition, he has a chance to become a No. 2 defender.

8. Victor Eklund
LW, Djurgardens (Allsvenskan)

Eklund projects as a top-six forward with a fair chance of becoming a top-line contributor. Despite concerns about his size, Eklund's play style is very translatable to the NHL. He plays a lot bigger than his measurements suggest, with a high-end motor and excellent forechecking ability. Should he grow, which has happened to other prospects in the past, Eklund's projection becomes more confident as a 70-point producer.

Eklund excels in transition and attacks defenders with speed and fearlessness, darting to the inside and positioning his body to win or protect pucks. His smaller size has forced him to learn how to protect the puck with excellent body positioning. His off-puck play is very mature and should quickly translate to earned trust from NHL coaches. He has the potential to be a difference-maker in the NHL, and there is every reason to believe his blend of hard-nosed play with soft skill will translate seamlessly to the NHL.

9. Caleb Desnoyers
C, Moncton Wildcats (QMJHL)

Desnoyers may go higher than ninth overall because he is one of the best two-way players in the draft. He has been described as a coach's dream in that he can take an offensive or checking assignment and execute consistently. Desnoyers projects to be a quality second-line center, with a decent chance of becoming a first-line player.

He's a cerebral player with excellent playmaking ability. It isn't that he's flashy and will get you out of your seat, it is that he's consistently effective and makes intelligent plays with the puck. In other words, he's reliable. As one scouting director described: "He's the type of player you win with." Some have quietly compared him to Patrice Bergeron and Jonathan Toews.

10. Jake O'Brien
C, Brantford Bulldogs (OHL)

O'Brien projects to be a point-producing top-six center with a chance to become a top-line center. The right-hander is one of the best playmakers in the draft, creating high-danger chances with regularity. O'Brien's elite playmaking skills will be that much more valuable if he can add speed.

O'Brien's two-way ability has consistently improved this season, through puck support, good defensive tracking and quality stick positioning. He lacks dynamic skating but plays a projectable two-way game. There is risk because he's slighter than other players available at the center position, but O'Brien should comfortably be a top-six point producer in the NHL.

11. Carter Bear

C/LW, Everett Silvertips (WHL)

Bear is the type of player that a team looking for high-end skill and playmaking covets. He's versatile and projects as a 65- to 75-point second-line player, with most believing he'll be a full-time winger. He's an excellent playmaker with good hands in tight spaces, making him a threat around the net, and one of the best offensive facilitators in the draft.

In addition to his offensive gifts, Bear has professional defensive habits that will translate well. His skating posture needs to be more upright to allow him to develop a more explosive stride to take advantage of his skills. Bear is a good mix of soft and hard skill with reliable defensive traits, and is the perfect second-line player who should thrive in a matchup role.

12. Brady Martin

C/W, Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds (OHL)

Martin has scouts raving about him after an excellent performance at the IIHF under-18 tournament, tallying 11 points in seven games. He's a workhorse without an off switch, who brings a blend of physicality and hard skill. Martin projects as a middle-six forward capable of scoring 20 goals, with upside as a second-line forward. He's a Swiss Army Knife-type player who will be most effective on the wing because of his strong wall play.

Most top prospects are invisible if their A game isn't there, but Martin finds ways to get involved physically, and those traits are translatable. If Martin's scoring doesn't translate, he'll be a valuable member of a third line. The hard-nosed style is rare in today's NHL, and Martin's play style is attractive to many scouts who believe he's the type of complementary player teams need to win in the playoffs.

13. Justin Carboneau

RW, Blainville-Boisbriand Armada (QMJHL)

Carboneau possesses a toolbox of attributes that teams covet, including powerful skating and dynamic attacking presence. He projects as a top-six forward with significant variance, and is likely end up as a complementary middle-six player. Carboneau can drive offense with his playmaking and skating ability, and though he lacks a standout special talent, he plays a well-rounded offensive game that includes playing through contact, good puck skills and a decent shot.

Carboneau is a player with high upside, and there is inherent risk with his projection. He thrives when given time and space, and his development will come from learning to simplify his offensive attacks, drive to middle ice and play off his teammates. He has tools to become an effective power forward in the NHL with a few years of development.

14. Radim Mrtko

D, Seattle Thunderbirds (WHL)

A 6-6, right-handed defenseman with good mobility who plays in all situations has scouts very excited. Mrtko confidently projects as a top-four shutdown defenseman because of his excellent stick work, mobility and transition defense. Mrtko should develop into a strong transition defender, a reliable penalty killer and be a steady shorthanded presence.

He lacks the offensive prowess scouts would like to see in a top-pair defenseman, but his skating, size and intelligence give him the tools to develop into a reliable, minute-munching, shutdown defender. His late birthday gives him lots of development runway to refine his offensive playmaking, first passes and general understanding of how to best use his physical gifts.

15. Logan Hensler
D, Wisconsin Badgers (NCAA)

The 6-2 defender projects as a second-pairing defenseman with relative confidence. Hensler is very difficult to beat because he moves well and maintains good gap control. He lacks a dynamic offensive trait, but he has looked good when he activates in the rush. There are offensive flashes of head fakes and using his mobility to beat players that, if developed, would be critical to solidifying him as a two-way defenseman.

Hensler is a longer-term project who likely needs three years before he's ready to make an impact in the NHL. His decision-making under pressure and ability to execute quality plays with consistency will make or break him as a high-end prospect. There is lots to like about his game, with the mobility and transition defense expected to translate well, but he lacks the high-end upside of other defenders in the draft class.

16. Lynden Lakovic
LW, Moose Jaw Warriors (WHL)

The 6-4 left winger has translatable scoring ability and excellent speed for his size. He attacks using his big frame to protect the puck and makes plays using good deception. He has the potential to be a dual-threat winger if he can develop his playmaking and decision-making. Lakovic projects to be a middle-six winger with fair confidence because of his scoring ability, speed and size.

Lakovic's development will come on the physical side and in decision-making. He needs to lean on defenders and force his way to middle ice to take advantage of his quick hands and shot. Lakovic has quality offensive upside that projects confidently as an NHL player, with potential to be a 60-point player.

17. Braeden Cootes
C, Seattle Thunderbirds (WHL)

A right-handed center, Cootes was a standout performer at the under-18 world championships. He projects to be a middle-six player with value on both sides of the puck. His floor is likely a third-line checking center, similar to Yanni Gourde. Cootes possesses excellent speed that allows him to push the pace and drive play. He anticipates the game at a high level, allowing him to take advantage of his speed at even strength and on the penalty kill.

Cootes has a longer development path and needs to get a little stronger to truly become a quality NHL center. His relentlessness on the puck and strong playmaking qualities make him a desirable asset in this year's draft. There is a lot to like about his toolbox and, if developed with patience, he could be a solid second-line contributor.

18. Kashawn Aitcheson
D, Barrie Colts (OHL)

There's a very real chance that Aitcheson goes in the top 10 given the type of game he plays, but his projection as a No. 4/5 defender sees him below other players with higher upside. Aitcheson plays with all kinds of truculence and aggression, while possessing an aura of confidence on and off the puck. He

has all the makings of being a complete menace who plays tough minutes and projects as a No. 4 defender.

Scouts see him as a hard-nosed two-way defender with significant bite who can be a momentum shifter with his physical presence.

He needs development time, as his skating and playmaking are very raw, but the competitive attributes and his development curve this season are very promising. Aitcheson's involvement on offense developed as the season progressed, but he's likely two or three years away from being ready to step in. When he does, he's exactly the type of defender every coach and GM would want on their team.

19. Cameron Schmidt
RW, Vancouver Giants (WHL)

While size is not the be-all, end-all, it is exceedingly rare for a player smaller than 5-9 to make the NHL. I fully expect Schmidt to go lower than 19th in the draft, because he is 5-7.

However, every other model input has Schmidt as a top-15 player, with boom-or-bust potential as a second-line winger. He's got breakneck speed and excellent puck-handling capabilities, making him a dangerous offensive threat.

Scoring 40 goals in the WHL is no easy task. Only three players under 19 eclipsed the mark this season (Schmidt, along with Gavin McKenna and Carter Bear). Schmidt has great offensive instincts and needs to be more efficient with his play selection to translate to the NHL level. He can be a bit of a pest and engage physically, but if he's going to reach his ceiling, he needs to round out his off-puck play and be more consistently impactful shift to shift.

20. Benjamin Kindel
RW, Calgary Hitmen (WHL)

Kindel had excellent numbers in the WHL, putting up 99 points in 65 games. The right-winger has skill to burn, and terrific hockey sense. Kindel projects as a middle-six player with the most likely outcome being a third-line winger. He doesn't have blistering speed in top flight, but he is agile and is difficult to pin down because of his water bug style. He needs to refine how he utilizes his skill, because it lacks a dynamic trait. Adding strength will go a long way to improving puck protection and ability to drive to middle ice to create scoring chances.

Defensively, Kindel provides tremendous value. He forechecks and backchecks effectively, plugs lanes and wins his fair share of puck battles. There is real value as a checker and penalty killer that will translate to the NHL level. He consistently competes on pucks and makes life difficult with his pace of play. If his scoring translates, he will likely be a 50-point, two-way player. If it doesn't, a 40-point, two-way checker that is a plus penalty killer will be a good complementary piece at the NHL level.

21. Cameron Reid
D, Kitchener Rangers (OHL)

A slight defender, Reid is a fast and agile skater, consistently activating in the rush. Reid has upside as a top-four defender if he can develop his offensive traits, specifically his playmaking. His skating allows him to create time and space, evade forecheckers and put defenders in precarious positions. The next step is to use the space and lanes he creates to facilitate offense more effectively.

Defensively, Reid is an excellent rush defender because of his excellent skating ability and good stick work. He guides players to the outside with his stick, and uses his skating to disrupt the rush. In the defensive zone, his stick is timed perfectly to lift opponents' sticks as the puck arrives, deflect shots out

of play and plug passing lanes. The upside is there because of his skating, and the development requires patience to allow him to reach top-four level.

22. Cole Reschny
LW, Victoria Royals (WHL)

Reschny may find himself higher on the board when all is said and done after a standout performance at the under-18 world championships. No player has risen the way Reschny has in the second half of the season, due in large part to his offensive production in the WHL playoffs. Reschny's projection elevated from a third-line player with a less confident projection to a relatively confident middle-six player.

He's not as dynamic as his point totals suggest, but his anticipation and reads are among the best in the draft class. He's not big, but he's effective when he physically engages and understands how to play through contact. His development will be about adding speed and strength to complement his two-way ability, and to be a Swiss Army Knife-type player in the NHL who can score 50 points.

23. Cullen Potter
LW, Arizona State Sun Devils (NCAA)

Potter had a strong freshman season in the NCAA, particularly when you consider he didn't turn 18 until halfway through the campaign. He showed consistent growth that culminated in a standout performance at the under-18 world championships. His speed is NHL level, and he's one of the best skaters in the draft class. He understands how to effectively use his skating ability to pressure players, drive pace of play and create offense. He looks to drive to the middle of the ice, makes plays at top speed and understands when to delay on the rush to allow the play to develop.

Potter is a dynamic skater with flashes of dynamic skill. His off-puck play, both offensively and defensively, improved dramatically this season, which resulted in him becoming a play driver. He has boom-bust potential, but if he hits his ceiling, there is a top-six player there. The projection confidence has steadily improved this season, and with two more NCAA seasons, Potter should be one of the best players at the collegiate level by the time he signs his entry-level NHL contract.

24. Malcolm Spence
LW, Erie Otters (OHL)

Spence falls out of the top half of the first round in large part because other players passed him, but his lack of dynamism combined with non-elite production affected his projection. His relentless work ethic, tenacity and two-way ability give him a high floor as an NHL regular. His lack of play-driving ability and playmaking see his upside as a third-line forward.

He's not flashy in any sense of the word, but he's very effective. He's one of the most defensively sound forwards in the draft, and understands how to forecheck to cause turnovers. His tenacity will translate, and his shot is good enough to be a threat from close range. Coaches love this type of player on their third lines in the playoffs, and Spence should develop into a solid complementary piece in the NHL.

25. Ivan Ryabkin
C, Muskegon Lumberjacks (USHL)

Ryabkin is a hotly debated prospect and is up and down on draft boards. Depending on who you talk to, feedback ranges from a potential second-line guy to might not make it at all. That explains his variance in model projection. He's most likely to become a depth NHL player, but there is a fair chance of becoming a middle-six, physical presence who can score 15 to 20 goals.

When he's on, it is easy to see the upside. He is crafty, identifying passing lanes and firing accurate passes to set up scoring chances. When Ryabkin moves his feet to drive to middle ice and create passing lanes, he is a very effective player. His physicality on both sides of the puck should translate to becoming a good checking-line player, with some creative scoring ability if he can develop puck protection and inside ice-battle skills.

26. Joshua Ravensbergen
G, Prince George Cougars (WHL)

It is rare that a goaltender is a consensus first-rounder, but Ravensbergen is that guy. Teams love his 6-5 frame with long limbs and good flexibility. He's able to cover significant portions of the net, and his puck tracking allows him to proactively move and aggressively angle. His lateral movement is explosive while maintaining control, preventing over-sliding and overactivity. He is sharp in his crease play, calmly directing pucks and communicating with his defensemen on coverage.

Ravensbergen has issues with layered screens, a common trait for young goaltenders and NHLers. His elite puck tracking allows him to stay one step ahead of the play, preventing erratic movements. This gives him the aura of calmness that scouts discuss, and is something that will serve him well as he strives to become an NHL starter.

27. Blake Fiddler
D, Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL)

There is a chance that Fiddler goes higher because he's a right-handed defender with NHL bloodlines -- father Vernon played 877 NHL games -- and has an NHL-sized frame at 6-4, 210 pounds. As scouts and executives say, "Those guys don't grow on trees," and Fiddler fits the mold.

He's a strong defender, taking away time and space from opponents and making life difficult in physical battles. He strongly projects as an NHL player with a chance of becoming a No. 4 D-man. Among scouting circles, there is belief he can become a second-pairing defender because he has a long development runway, and his physical play style will translate well.

Fiddler's decision-making leaves something to be desired, but he's always activating and can be taught how to be more effective with his reads. His desire to be a difference-maker and his package of plus skating, physical play and size are attractive to teams. He's a project, and will need three to four years of development to simplify his game and become an effective NHL defender.

28. Jack Murtagh
C/LW, U.S. National Team Development Program

The 6-1, versatile forward is going to provide some value toward the end of the first round. Murtagh projects confidently to be an NHL player, and scouts like his non-flashy, high-motor game. He never cheats for effort, plays a high-pace game and is physically involved. He is most likely to be a third-line forward, which fits his game style of being strong on the puck, winning puck battles and wreaking havoc around the net.

Heading to Boston University will be good for his overall development, offensively in particular. Murtagh has good playmaking ability that lacks creativity or dynamism. He's a hard-skill player, gritting his way to scoring chances in the hard areas and out-battling opponents. That won't always work against NHL defenders, meaning developing some creativity and the ability to manipulate defenders will be critical to translating offense and being a well-rounded, two-way forward in the NHL.

29. Sascha Boumedienne
D, Boston University Terriers (NCAA)

Boumedienne played more than half of his freshman NCAA season as a 17-year-old, and was the youngest player in the NCAA this season. His total of 13 points in 40 games is not the type of offense you expect from a potential first-round pick, but against his peers at the under-18s, Boumedienne set a scoring record for most points by a defenseman and was named the tournament's best defender.

His skating mechanics have improved, leading to more explosive maneuvers and the chance to develop more agile movements for transition play. He's an offensive horse, facilitating scoring chances by manipulating defenders, moving his feet and creating passing lanes. When he gets his chance, his slap shot packs significant power and should be a weapon in the NHL.

Boumedienne's defensive transition will need to improve to hit his ceiling of a second-pairing defender. As of now, he can run an effective power play, break pucks out with clean passes and create offense. His agility and ability to defend middle ice will need to develop to match his perimeter defensive ability. He's got a good stick, and is most disruptive when he engages physically. Improving his anticipation and reads will be critical to reaching his potential.

30. Jack Nesbitt
C, Windsor Spitfires (OHL)

Nesbitt has risen on draft boards in the back half of the season -- and with good reason. The 6-4 center brings a physical, defensive force and he confidently projects to be an NHL player. His upside continues to improve with flashes of one-on-one skill and the speed to drive and create in middle ice. There is a top-nine projection with less confidence; Nesbitt could become a checking center with 40-point potential.

His defensive play excites scouts because the scanning, shot-blocking, lane-filling and tracking to force turnovers under pressure will translate to the NHL. Scouts are confident Nesbitt is going to be an effective player in the NHL, and agree he'll need to show more offensive playmaking ability to provide value on both sides of the puck.

31. William Moore
C, U.S. National Team Development Program

Moore is all over draft boards -- from the mid-20s to the third round -- because he's a long-term project, exactly the type of player that teams drafting in the late first like to target. Moore is a cross between a hard-skill and soft-skill player who needs to pick which play style he wants to be. He projects as an NHL player with an outside shot of becoming a middle-six player if he can add to his offensive toolbox.

He has creativity and the skill to execute, manipulating defenders and playing with pace, and picks pucks off the wall with ease. But, he lacks consistency. His compete level and willingness to engage physically show potential as a power forward. He has reliable two-way abilities that will translate well, and will further develop as he stops on pucks, engages physically defensively and adds strength to improve in puck battles and playing through contact.

32. Bill Zonnon
LW, Rouyn-Noranda Huskies (QMJHL)

Zonnon is a raw prospect that some team in the late first round is going to be thrilled to get. He checks all the boxes, with a high-end motor, elite work ethic and playmaking abilities. The big forward is confidently projected to be an NHL player, and has a fair chance of becoming a third-liner. Scouts view

him as a high-floor player because of his translatable "intangibles" and long runway to develop the raw skill. He's already a reliable, 200-foot player and scouts love his no-quit, relentless effort.

If his skating improves, he will become a very effective two-way player, relying on his awareness, playmaking and competitiveness to bring value on both sides of the puck. He's most likely to be a winger, with excellent wall play and battle skills. He can be a prototypical hard-skill player that teams play on the third line to shut down opponents and rely upon in all situations. He's likely three years away, and would benefit from NCAA time to develop his skating and offensive abilities.

Honorable mentions (in alphabetical order)

Nathan Behm, LW/RW, Kamloops Blazers (WHL)
Henry Brzustewicz, D, London Knights (OHL)
Milton Gastrin, C/LW, MoDo Hockey (J20 Nationell)
Jakob Ihs-Wozniak, RW, Lulea HF (J20 Nationell)
Jack Ivankovic, G, Brampton Steelheads (OHL)
Benjamin Kevan, F, Des Moines Buccaneers (USHL)
Ryker Lee, F, Madison Capitols (USHL)
Cole McKinney, C, U.S. National Team Development Program
Vaclav Nestrail, RW, Muskegon Lumberjacks (USHL)
Shane Vansaghi, RW, Michigan State Spartans (NCAA)