



Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
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PAGE 02: FOX28: CBJ's Zach Werenski serves smiles at Jet's Pizza Meet-and-Greet
PAGE 03: NBC4i: Blue Jackets star meets fans at central Ohio Jet's Pizza location
PAGE 04: The Hockey Writers: 3 Trade Destinations for Blue Jackets' Yegor Chinakhov

Cleveland Monsters/Prospects

NHL/ Websites

PAGE 06: The Athletic: Re-drafting the 2022 NHL Draft: Logan Cooley, Lane Hutson lead Scott Wheeler's do-over

FOX28 / CBJ's Zach Werenski serves smiles at Jet's Pizza Meet-and-Greet

By Kellyanne Stitt – July 21, 2025

Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski serves game-winning moves on the ice, but on Monday, the skilled defenseman served smiles at the Jet's Pizza in Lewis Center.

Hundreds of CBJ fans waited hours in line to meet Werenski, get his autograph, and take a picture. The event started at 1 PM and was supposed to end at 3 PM, but he stayed 15 minutes late to make sure everyone got their time.

"I love coming here and doing this stuff," said Werenski. "They've put on a great event here. Having all the fans come on today was exciting."

CBJ fans were treated to a free t-shirt to be signed, as well as free pizza, water, and popsicles, courtesy of Jet's Pizza. Jet's handed out more than 300 shirts. The fifth line traveled from all over, including a family from Geugua County.

"At first I was nervous, but now I'm like, 'Oh my God, I met Zach!'" said young CBJ fan Brennen Newell.

His mother, Darci, said the two-hour and 40-minute drive to Columbus was worth it. After they met Werenski, they headed to Strongsville for a hockey clinic through the Cleveland Monsters.

"It was unbelievable," said Brennen's mother, Darci. "His eyes lit up. We had an issue last night. He wanted to quit hockey. He said he wasn't good enough. So then meeting Zach today was kind of just reassurance for him to keep playing."

Werenski is coming off his best season as a Blue Jacket, finishing with career highs in goals (23), assists (59), and points (82), and led the team in scoring. He finished runner-up for the Norris Trophy, given to the best NHL defenseman.

The Jackets finished two points shy of making the Stanley Cup Playoffs this past season, even while missing key players from the lineup like Boone Jenner and Sean Monahan for parts of the season. General Manager Don Waddell brought back two key pieces to the Jackets' blue line by re-signing Dante Fabbro and Ivan Provorov. If the team can stay healthy, Werenski is confident they will be a playoff-caliber team.

"I think we have a team that's a playoffs team," said Werenski. "We're excited to get back there and hopefully make the playoffs for our fans and our organization."

The CBJ opens the season on the road in Nashville on October 9. Their home-opener is slated for October 13 against divisional rival New Jersey Devils.

[NBC4i.com / Blue Jackets star meets fans at central Ohio Jet's Pizza location](#)

By Kevin Accettulla – July 21, 2025

Columbus Blue Jackets Star Zach Werenski made an appearance Monday afternoon at Jet's Pizza in Lewis Center.

Fans had plenty to talk about with Werenski, who has had quite the year. He helped the United States win its first gold medal at the World Championships in 92 years.

The defenseman also played a key role for Team USA at the Four Nations tournament.

Now, with some big names coming back to help him in Columbus, he's excited for the future.

"I think health is a big part of it," he said. "We lost Boone [Jenner] pretty early, we lost [Sean] Monahan for a bit and we're still only one or two points short. Yea, we have [Dante Fabbro] and [Ivan Provorov] for a long time, bring [Charlie] Coyle and [Miles] Wood in, we're right there. It should be an exciting year for us. I definitely think we have a team that's a playoff team. We're excited to get back there and hopefully make the playoffs for our fans and for our organization."

Werenski broke the record for most points by a Blue Jackets defenseman last season, and was the runner up for the Norris Trophy, which is awarded to the NHL's best defenseman.

The Hockey Writers / 3 Trade Destinations for Blue Jackets' Yegor Chinakhov

By Nicholas Arnold – July 21, 2025

Another summer, another trade request from a Columbus Blue Jacket. Young Russian forward Yegor Chinakhov has asked for a new home. He's the man through whom the organization shocked hockey pundits everywhere in his selection in the first round of the 2020 NHL Entry Draft, despite not many ranking him on their lists at all. The organization took a chance on him, and he's rewarded them – at times.

The forward has tantalizing potential with one of the hardest shots in the game; his top shot speed in 2024-25 (96.31 miles per hour (MPH)) and average shot speed (68.82 MPH) were each in the 97th percentile among forwards. His 14 22-plus MPH speed bursts were in the 94th percentile. This isn't a one-year outlier, either; he's been consistently in the 90-plus percentile for shooting and skating speeds over the past several campaigns.

However, he's also been affected by the injury bug quite frequently. Through four seasons in North America, his most games played in a single hockey calendar are 62, and he's averaged less than 38 games played over the last three. In his absence, several players have stepped up and claimed the top-six forward positions that he was once thought to inherit, so he clearly feels his opportunity for growth in the Blue Jackets organization has passed him by. That was made evident in a trade request made in a post on X by his agent Shumi Babaev.

He wants out, and there will be a lot of teams interested in his services. The problem here for Columbus is that, like with Patrik Laine last summer, they are not trading him at his highest value. That will significantly hurt the return because, at face value, Chinakhov is an injury-prone middle-six forward who has never recorded more than 29 points and averages 17.75 points per season. Teams will only go so high in terms of value while taking on such risk. Regardless of the return, let's take a look at some of the teams where Chinakhov could be a good fit.

Carolina Hurricanes

This was the first team that came to my mind, because doesn't Chinakhov really fit the mold of a Carolina Hurricane? He's crazy fast, has a heck of a shot, and something I haven't mentioned yet is how defensively responsible he is. 2024-25 was a bit of a step back in that regard, but in 2023-24 (which was his best season by most metrics to date), he was a dog on a bone in the defensive zone. The Hurricanes also have a lot of Russians in their prospect pipeline and have not shied away from adding folks from the Motherland.

The obvious connection is there between current Blue Jackets' general manager (GM) Don Waddell and the Hurricanes, being the team he used to run. If Waddell has a player or two in Carolina's system that he really likes, then he could use Chinakhov as fodder to bring them to his new digs. Put plainly, if he's

dealing Chinakhov for a prospect, there is no team's prospects that he knows better than the Hurricanes'. That could make it easier to facilitate an agreement between the two sides.

Buffalo Sabres

Another obvious connection is between Chinakhov and the man who drafted him. Former Blue Jackets' GM Jarmo Kekalainen has a new zip code in the Empire State as a senior advisor for the Buffalo Sabres. Buffalo had the 11th-worst goal differential in the NHL and could use some scoring touch with defensive responsibility. Kekalainen's influence was surely at play when stealing Justin Danforth from Columbus in free agency, and he could let Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams know some insider information on Chinakhov's potential.

This is a connection several people have made, but I'm not sure where he would slot into their lineup. The Sabres' forward corps looks pretty full at face value and doesn't have room for any of their internal prospects before even considering the addition of another middle-six forward. This one strikes me as unlikely, but bears mention because of Kekalainen.

New York Islanders

I tried to find a Western Conference team, but honestly couldn't find one that made more sense than these three teams. We hear how much Russian players like suiting up for New York-based teams, and the New York Islanders are living proof of that. They've been able to sign several high-profile free agents out of the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) over the years. They recently extended Russian defender Alexander Romanov to an eight-year contract extension, and Ilya Sorokin will be tending their pipes for the foreseeable future.

As a player, he suits their mold well, as they are a team flush with playmakers who are looking for finishers. Mathew Barzal, Jonathan Drouin, Maxim Tsyplov, Bo Horvat, and Maxim Shabanov are all players whose stats tend to skew more to assists than goals, and as such, could use a shooter like Chinakhov on their flank. It also helps that the Islanders are transitioning to a younger core; he fits that age scheme.

Whoever decides to step up and meet Waddell's asking price for Chinakhov will be getting a high-risk, high-reward player. It's a little out of the realm of possibility to expect a point-per-game player for this season, but it's not out of the question to think that he could reach the 50 or 60 point threshold at some point under the right circumstances. The 24-year-old still has a couple more years of growth before his ceiling is reached.

The Athletic / Re-drafting the 2022 NHL Draft: Logan Cooley, Lane Hutson lead Scott Wheeler's do-over

By Scott Wheeler – July 23, 2025

Welcome, for an eighth straight year, to my annual re-draft and ranking review exercise.

Each summer at The Athletic, I re-draft the class of three years prior and begin to review my draft board against the draft order. The goal is twofold: providing you with updated evaluations and projections of the players, and measuring where I was on each of them relative to NHL teams as a litmus test of what I got right and wrong.

While three years obviously isn't the finish line for these prospects, I believe it's the earliest point of re-entry for some takeaways. These players are almost all now 21 or 22 and either established as NHLers or approaching the end of their prospect lifecycle.

This piece — along with my guide to scouting and my annual players I got wrong column (out earlier this week) — is one of several I produce each year to audit my work, my process and my results.

It has never been lost on me how different my job is from that of an NHL scout. Theirs is an unenviable one done under an internal and external microscope, where review and criticism of their choices determine their livelihood. When they stick their neck out on a prospect, it can come with real-world consequences if that player doesn't pan out. It's a cutthroat business where most prospects' odds of not making it are greater than their odds of NHL success, and where most scouts live under the constant pressures of short contracts.

While my job comes with its own form of public criticism and my livelihood is determined by the quality of my work in its own way, the stakes just aren't as high. I get into the same rinks, watch the same tape and talk to the same people about them before building my list. But I don't actually have to make picks.

I do still have to earn your trust, though. That's especially true at The Athletic, where you're paying to subscribe. If you're going to spend your money to read our work, you deserve to know that you can count on it to be not only well-sourced and researched, but also transparent. The rankings and evaluations you read are only as good as the time, energy and purported expertise that fuels them.

And the 2022 draft was a good test because of both the impacts of the pandemic on the 2003 and 2004 age groups and there not being a consensus No. 1 prospect then or now.

Let's look back at how I did and how it would change today.

1. Montreal Canadiens: C Logan Cooley

Actual draft pick: No. 3 (change: +2) to Arizona

My final ranking: No. 3 (change: +2)

Cooley leads the 2022 class in goals (45) and goals per game (0.29), and leads its forwards in assists per game (0.41) and points per game (0.69, or 57 points per 82 games through his first two seasons). He's also the only player in the class who is his team's first-line center, the only player in the class who has a 25-goal season and one of only two players in the class with a 60-point season after registering 65 points in 75 games last year (second to Clayton Keller in team scoring). He has skill and pace as a playmaker, but he's also a driver who plays a competitive game that includes the guts of the ice and he played to positive on-ice and relative results with Utah last year.

There was a time in his draft year when I debated ranking him No. 1, and in hindsight, I wish I leaned into it. I had a five-player tier at the top of the 2022 class, which is the biggest I've had in coming up on 13 years of doing this work. That group was four players for most teams and should have been for me (we'll get to the fifth player in a little bit), but I think Cooley stands atop it now and that his biggest challenger is actually from a long way outside it, all the way at the back of the second round, which brings us to ...

2. New Jersey Devils: LHD Lane Hutson

Actual draft pick: No. 62 (change: +60) to Montreal

My final ranking: No. 19 (change: +17)

What's more valuable, a good but not superstar first-line center, or an elite offensive defenseman? I think there's a case to be made either way, and debated re-drafting Hutson at No. 1 here, but I leaned Cooley for now (I could see myself switching when I redo this at the decade mark, though) and think the league probably would too, rightly or wrongly.

This is one I'm proud of, though, because it's easier to find ways to talk yourself out of picking a player who profiled like Hutson did at the time than it is to stick your neck out for him (see: the other 31 teams talking themselves out of it and even the Habs taking Filip Mesar and Owen Beck before they took him) and I've stuck my neck out for him again and again over the years and trusted and nailed my evaluation of the player.

Here's an excerpt from my report on Hutson at the time:

"The reality is there aren't many defencemen Hutson's size who play in the NHL, even as the game changes. And those guys have never been selected in the first round. But there aren't many players who play like Hutson in hockey either. I often get asked just how high he'd go if he were 6-foot-3 and the reality is that he wouldn't be able to do a lot of what makes him so interesting at that size. He's a unique player who uses a light (though not powerful) stride to create entries and exits, weave past coverage, escape pressure, and find or create seams.

"He sees the ice as well as anyone in the draft, regularly identifying plays a step ahead of the opposition. He has an uncanny knack for executing long east-to-west plays, whether that's feathering high, leading saucer passes with perfect weight cross-ice or flinging a hard pass to a streaking teammate's tape. He makes a ton of plays under pressure when other players would panic (though sometimes he could actually use some hurry-up to his game haha).

“Inside the offensive zone, though his shot lacks power, he acts as a fourth forward with his ability to slide off the line and create. He’s got shakes and shimmies to spare, routinely making opposing defenders miss one-on-one in all three zones. He’s one of the most clever players in the draft. And while his size will continue to make evaluators pause, I actually quite like the way he defends. He gets back to so many loose pucks that he doesn’t have to rely all that much on engaging in battles and even when he does, his positioning and active stick help him disrupt opposing carriers and break up plays.

“But above all else, he’s the kind of player where when you think you’ve put him in a difficult spot or you’ve got him cornered, he’ll show you that he isn’t with a spin (or a spin into a spin!), a fake (with his eyes, or head, or shoulders, or hands, or feet, or each) or his sublime vision through layers. He just looks right past what’s in front of him.

“I’m fascinated to see where he’s picked, because I wouldn’t shy away from taking him in the late first and if he’s around on Day 2 it’d be a no-brainer for me.”

Nailed it.

Juraj Slafkovský was the No. 1 pick in the 2022 NHL Draft. (Minas Panagiotakis / Getty Images)

3. Arizona Coyotes: LW Juraj Slafkovský

Actual draft pick: No. 1 (change: -2) to Montreal

My final ranking: No. 5 (change: +2)

When I included Slafkovský in my players I was wrong about column last year, I wrote that “When I look back at where I was at on Slafkovský pre-draft and actually read over my report, I think it 1) had the player from a makeup/skills perspective accurately scouted and depicted and 2) was quite measured in its analysis and projection” and “You don’t rank a player in the top five and in the top tier of a draft class if you don’t see serious upside.”

I also wrote that I could live with having Cooley, Shane Wright and Simon Nemec ahead of him because, even with the benefit of hindsight, I think my process in slotting those players above Slafkovský was sound.

I confessed in that piece that it was Matt Savoie at No. 4 that I really missed on, though, and wondered if I should give more consideration to draft range and the way it will influence a player’s opportunity, development, usage and ultimately success in my projections. For a long time, I thought about my projections exclusively in my own terms/the way I viewed the player’s upside. But I knew that Slafkovský was in the conversation at No. 1 for Montreal when I published my list and I knew that Savoie was going to go closer to No. 10 and that does influence what follows (i.e., getting an opportunity to play on a first line with Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield, who Montreal was wise to play him with).

Slafkovský was also just a better player and prospect, but I’ve thought about that ripple (the way their players are viewed by others) a little more in shaping my own evaluations since. It’s a delicate balance because the danger is that you stop trusting yourself and groupthink takes over, but at the very top of the draft in a scenario like 2022’s where Slafkovský was going to go No. 1 or close and Savoie wasn’t,

that was going to give Slafkovský a leg up and a higher chance of success, which is what I'm ultimately trying to project.

4. Seattle Kraken: C Shane Wright

Actual draft pick: No. 4 (change: none) to Seattle

My final ranking: No. 1 (change: -3)

It felt like people were starting to write Wright off (pun intended) and then he had a really solid first full season in the NHL last year, registering 44 points in 79 games and finishing fourth on the Kraken in scoring and tied for fourth in the 2022 draft class with Cutter Gauthier (who played three more games than he did) and ahead of Marco Kasper, Jiri Kulich and company.

He shot 20.9 percent, and that'll regress, but his minutes should also go up (he played just 14:04 per game). He also did it as a center who played to respectable defensive results and is known for his detail and commitment off the puck. He's going to have a long career as a very good player in the league still, even if we're never going to look back on him as a No. 1 pick/exceptional status type. I think overexposure has also resulted in overanalysis of Wright, including by fans. I think I over-accounted for that at the time and that I knew deep down some of the offensive ceiling/lack of dynamism would make it difficult for him to stay at No. 1 on my list if I ranked him there, though.

As for where to rank him here, there are two top tiers in this re-draft for me: 1-3 and 4-12/13. I thought about re-ranking him a little lower here, and some would, but he belongs firmly in the second tier for sure, and I think at the front of it somewhere.

5. Philadelphia Flyers: LW Cutter Gauthier

Actual draft pick: No. 5 (change: none) to Philadelphia

My final ranking: No. 18 (change: +13)

Gauthier is another one that I've already written about in my players I was wrong about column. He was a difficult evaluation for a few reasons. Scouts weren't sure if he was a center or a winger (I put too much emphasis on assigning him as a winger). He also played on a line with two other top prospects in Cooley and Jimmy Snuggerud, and there were constant questions about who was driving whom, and who the benefactors were from the talent around them.

His statistical profile was also good but not great (other teammates, such as second-line driver Rutger McGroarty and third-line running mates Frank Nazar and Ike Howard, had out-produced him for most of those two years as well). The place where I miscalculated, though, was in not giving enough credit to his second-half push from the teens into becoming a top-five pick. And that — not reacting quickly enough when players take a big step late in the process — has been a common issue on my lists (see also Moritz Seider and Jake Sanderson, my two biggest misses ever) that I'm now much more aware of.

I think I had the profile right on Gauthier, too. I captured his strengths, game, style and projection. I wrote at the time that I understood the top-10 case and would start to consider him around there. But I

didn't think he warranted a top-five selection, and a couple of minor missteps in my process led to me slotting him a full tier below where he belonged, which isn't a minor mistake in the end.

I also should have known that in a weaker class, the potential 30-30-60 player with size, even if that player is a winger, was a top talent.

6. Columbus Blue Jackets: C Frank Nazar

Actual draft pick: No. 13 (change: +7) to Chicago

My final ranking: No. 11 (change: +5)

I thought about ranking Nazar behind the three defensemen who follow him on this list. I think the three forwards who follow them could all have comparable or better careers, too. But I can't talk the talk about needing to be more nimble in recognizing when guys take a step and not give real weight to what we saw from Nazar in the spring. He had six goals and 10 points in his last 11 games of the season and then followed that up with an excellent showing at men's worlds, registering a team-high six goals and 12 points in 10 games to help Team USA to a gold medal.

I think it matters that he's going to be put in a position to be a top-six player who is relied upon to produce next season in Chicago, too, especially when he has now shown that he can play with top players and make things happen with his skating and skill both in the NHL and at men's worlds. His game still has some areas that need work and he's going to have to prove that he can be more consistently impactful on and off the puck across a full 82 games, but even if I were to slot him at the bottom of the range I considered here, it's still above where he was drafted and right around where I had him ranked.

7. Chicago Blackhawks: RHD Simon Nemec

Actual draft pick: No. 2 (change: -5) to New Jersey

My final ranking: No. 2 (change: -5)

I'm sure there will be some who think this is a little high. But I'd argue that that perception is driven mostly by where Nemec was drafted. If he were taken No. 7 and had had three very successful seasons for an 18-20-year-old D in the AHL, and had registered 23 points in 87 NHL games at his age, and had played well in playoff games, the perception would surely be a little different. Despite some of the ups and downs and the ongoing crowd on the Devils' blue line, there have still been some real high highs for Nemec in the NHL, AHL and at men's worlds, and I predict that he takes a step this season between the NHL and the Olympics and goes on to have a long career as a productive top-four D in the league.

8. Detroit Red Wings: LHD Denton Mateychuk

Actual draft pick: No. 12 (change: +4) to Columbus

My final ranking: No. 13 (change: +5)

I still don't think people realize how good Mateychuk is. The 5-foot-11/6-foot defenseman has had a tougher time cutting through in recent years, but Mateychuk has been one of the very best players in his

age group for as long as I've watched him. He stepped right out of junior and into being a top D in the AHL and one of the best rookie D in the NHL right away last year.

He was drafted where Josh Morrissey was and had a better first pro season. I don't think a similar path as a 30-something point D who breaks out for more in his late-20s like Morrissey is out of the question here, and moving on from David Jiricek cleared the path for him to continue to be prioritized (though it was already pretty clear that he'd leapfrogged Jiricek even before the trade). I'd listen to arguments for Mateychuk behind the next few players on this list, but I'd stop there. At his floor, I think we're probably looking at a better version of what Rasmus Sandin is on a good Capitals team.

9. Buffalo Sabres: RHD Sam Rinzel

Actual draft pick: No. 25 (change: +16) to Chicago

My final ranking: No. 52 (change: +43)

There are some who would probably argue that it's a little overzealous to slot Rinzel ahead of two players in Kasper and Kulich, who just had really solid full rookie seasons in the NHL, and his former University or Minnesota teammate Jimmy Snuggerud, who has a deeper pedigree and was immediately really good for the Blues in the Stanley Cup playoffs in the spring. But I think the excitement around what Rinzel showed in college over his last year and a half there and in the NHL himself in the spring is warranted. He's a 6-foot-4 D with all of the pieces of the puzzle, and they've come together for him really quickly — passing Kevin Korchinski and, in the eyes of some, Artyom Levshunov, in a blink. I saw the raw outlines at the time but erred on the side of caution re: the work that needed to be done and how unproven he was. The Blackhawks took a swing, and it has paid off.

10. Anaheim Ducks: C Marco Kasper

Actual draft pick: No. 8 (change: -2) to Detroit

My final ranking: No. 24 (change: +14)

I think all of Nazar, Nemec, Mateychuk, Rinzel, Kasper, Kulich and Snuggerud could probably be sorted any way you like from No. 6-12 in a re-draft. I'm sure the Red Wings would just take him again at No. 8, too. Kasper was always going to become a real solid, effective NHL player. In a weaker draft, I should have given that more value. If the me of 2025 were back in 2022, I would have had him higher even without hindsight. I might not have landed on him at No. 8 today still, but he would have been in the ballpark.

11. Arizona Coyotes: C/LW/RW Jiri Kulich

Actual draft pick: No. 28 (change: +17) to Buffalo

My final ranking: No. 22 (change: +11)

I think Kulich and Snuggerud are very, very close as players and prospects now, and were then, and I kept flipping them both in this do-over. I leaned Kulich because of his larger NHL sample and that he did

it predominantly as a center, but it's very, very possible that Snuggerud goes higher when their careers are over. Proud of my evaluation on this one over the years.

12. Columbus Blue Jackets: RW Jimmy Snuggerud

Actual draft pick: No. 23 (change: +9) to St. Louis

My final ranking: No. 26 (change: +14)

Jimmy Snuggerud is a good hockey name and Jimmy Snuggerud is a good hockey player. That's kind of what it has always come down to with him. He has above-average tools across the board and higher-grade ones as a shooter. He's going to have a long career as a solid second-line caliber winger, and I could see a couple of years in there where he's more than that. If he is, he's a top 10 or close re-draft guy all day.

13. Chicago Blackhawks: LHD Pavel Mintyukov

Actual draft pick: No. 10 (change: -3) to Anaheim

My final ranking: No. 25 (change: +12)

Mintyukov has always been a complicated, polarizing evaluation for scouts. And while I don't think Greg Cronin got the most out of him and found his on-and-off healthy scratches last year to be odd after an all-things-considered very positive rookie season, it's not surprising that his game didn't match with a coach either. I felt like there was a top 12 that you could feel better about at this stage, but that once you got into that next range of players, he was the clear No. 13 for me at this stage. The talent and ability are still there and always have been. His game does still have some of the same areas of improvement it had a few years ago, though.

14. Winnipeg Jets: RHD David Jiricek

Actual draft pick: No. 6 (change: -8) to Columbus

My final ranking: No. 6 (change: -8)

Jiricek is a player that I was in line with the consensus on ahead of the draft and then quickly turned on when the backwards skating/pivots didn't show any notable signs of improvement. Three years later, they're still an issue, too. He has most of the rest of the makings of an impactful, even commanding NHL D in a lot of ways. This rating is still counting on the feet taking steps they may never take, though, and if they don't, he'll fall further. There are quirks about all of the players left, though.

15. Vancouver Canucks: C/LW/RW Danila Yurov

Actual draft pick: No. 24 (change: +9) to Minnesota

My final ranking: No. 12. (change: -3)

Yurov is one of the more underrated NHL prospects right now for me, and a player I'm confident would have more cachet and notoriety had he played in North America or a couple of World Juniors. His

successful move from the wing to center has further sold me as well — and gave him the edge over some of the wingers that slot in the late teens just after him here). I'm looking forward to NHL fans getting introduced to him next season.

16. Buffalo Sabres: LW Ike Howard

Actual draft pick: No. 31 (change: +15) to Tampa Bay

My final ranking: No. 10 (change: -6)

I think I was a little high on Howard and the consensus was a little more too low on him, if that makes sense. I saw the talent, scoring and production on a deep team where he wasn't always first over the boards and believed that in a weak draft, he was one of the only forwards with top-six upside. I also thought he was harder working than he got credit for. Most NHL scouts saw a sub-6-foot winger (I always thought he was stronger than his listing) with a boom-or-bust profile and worried about him being a net-negative defensively. Then there was the unique swagger, which, in getting to know him, I always appreciated but put some others off. I think both sides were justified in coming to the determinations they did. There are some even today, after his Hobey Baker season and some noticeable improvements in his habits and off-puck play, who wonder if his value has peaked and question whether his game will work in the NHL. I still think he's going to be a second-line scorer and that this is the right adjusted range for him. He and the next player share some of the same profile questions and concerns as well, so I think it's appropriate that they're back-to-back here.

The Canucks took Jonathan Lekkerimäki at No. 15 in 2022. (Bob Frid / Imagn Images)

17. Nashville Predators: RW Jonathan Lekkerimäki

Actual draft pick: No. 15 (change: -2) to Vancouver

My final ranking: No. 9 (change: -8)

See above, more or less. Scoring. Skill. Confident, some consider cocky. A 5-10/11 winger with off-puck questions. This is the range for that player at this stage in the re-ranking for me.

18. Dallas Stars: LHD Lian Bichsel

Actual draft pick: No. 18 (change: none) to Dallas

My final ranking: No. 51 (change: +33)

19. Minnesota Wild: C/RW Matt Savoie

Actual draft pick: No. 9 (change: -10) to Buffalo

My final ranking: No. 4 (change: -15)

I was obviously too high on Savoie and underestimated the role his 5-foot-9ish frame would play him sticking at center and impacting at the NHL level. I really liked what I'd seen in the AJHL, USHL (all-rookie team during the pandemic season) and then WHL (41 goals and 102 points in 75 combined regular-

season and playoff games as the leading scorer on a Winnipeg Ice team that featured Connor McClennon, Conor Geekie, Mikey Milne and Zach Benson). He was one of the better skaters in the draft. He was a driver with his work ethic. He made plays off the rush and inside the offensive zone. I'd spoken with folks in Sherwood Park, Dubuque and Winnipeg about him and knew he was a standout athlete and strong for his size, and I gave that too much clout. My top tier should have been four players, not five.

Savoie was still a top young player in the AHL as a rookie last season, though, finishing second in U21 scoring with 54 points in 66 games (behind only Bradly Nadeau's 58 in 64), and I expect he becomes a contributing middle-sixer in the NHL who can play PK2 and PP2.

20. Washington Capitals: LHD Kevin Korchinski

Actual draft pick: No. 7 (change: -13) to Chicago

My final ranking: No. 15 (change: -5)

Korchinski is a player who has pretty clearly been impacted by the CHL-NHL Agreement prohibiting 19-year-olds from playing in the AHL. He wasn't ready to play in the NHL when he did, and it has stunted his progress and allowed some others to leapfrog him now.

Still, I think I had him in the right spot at draft time as his game had some practical flaws and quirks that should have kept him out of the top 10. He's still going to be an offensively inclined five-on-five contributor and power-play option, but I wonder if he'll have to be moved to realize his full potential now that Rinzel and Levshunov appear in line to run the Blackhawks' power plays. He needs to develop more of an identity and get back to playing freer as well.

21. Pittsburgh Penguins: LW Rutger McGroarty

Actual draft pick: No. 14 (change: -7) to Winnipeg

My final ranking: No. 16 (change: -5)

It's kind of ironic that McGroarty ended up with the Penguins here as well. They obviously used this pick on Owen Pickering. McGroarty has always been one of the top players in his age group and almost all of his tools are NHL quality (shot, hands, smarts, frame, strength, etc.). He has never been a great skater, though, and the adjustment early on last year to pro pace was steeper than a player with his pedigree in college, internationally and at the NTDP would typically have in the AHL. He figured it out and really came on as the year went along, though, and he's now got a chance in front of him to start in the Penguins' top nine this year. It'll be important for him to prove he can hang and never go back. He's going to have a long career still.

22. Anaheim Ducks: RHD Tristan Luneau

Actual draft pick: No. 53 (change: +31) to Anaheim

My final ranking: No. 32 (change: +10)

If you've followed my work, you'll know that I've been very high on Luneau for a very long time, even through the complicated knee troubles and the infection. Today, I believe he's one of the most underrated prospects in hockey, and I actually debated ranking him a little higher here. He was one of the best defensemen in the AHL last season, has looked the part in the NHL and is clearly ready to play in the league full-time. I'm really happy with my evaluation of Luneau over the years. I think he's going to have a long career. I think he was nitpicked a little too much pre-draft as the No. 1 pick in the Q (especially considering what he played through).

23. St. Louis Blues: C Noah Ostlund

Actual draft pick: No. 16 (change: -7) to Buffalo

My final ranking: No. 23 (change: none)

Ostlund is an extremely likable player because of his smarts in all areas of the game and the way he uses his airy skater and heady approach to navigate the ice. Some still wonder about how lean he is and whether he has the body to get to the inside and shoot the puck into the net himself enough, but he was excellent in the AHL last year, and the NHL is around the corner for him now.

24. Minnesota Wild: RHD Elias Salomonsson

Actual draft pick: No. 55 (change: +31) to Winnipeg

My final ranking: No. 39 (change: +15)

Salomonsson, like Luneau, was viewed as a first-rounder at 16 and then became a second-rounder at 17 when his draft year had some ups and downs and didn't meet expectations. And like with Luneau, I was higher on the player through that than most. Now he's a big, strong, competitive, physical, highly mobile two-way D coming off an excellent AHL season on a bad AHL team who looks destined to become a good NHL D.

25. Chicago Blackhawks: C/LW Conor Geekie

Actual draft pick: No. 11 (change: -14) to Arizona

My final ranking: No. 17 (change: -8)

It was always easy to be drawn to Geekie. He was the Manitoba boy with the gregarious personality and a game that flashed real skill for a 6-foot-4 forward. He could play both center and the wing. He's going to have a really nice career in the NHL. The question was always more about pace and whether his skill would reveal itself as much at the NHL level or be a little more limited. Taking him at No. 11 was probably a little overzealous.

26. Montreal Canadiens: LW Liam Ohgren

Actual draft pick: No. 19 (change: -7) to Minnesota

My final ranking: No. 14 (change: -12)

In a draft class where a lot of the forwards were polarizing in one way or another, Ohgren was a well-liked, well-rounded winger who was always going to have a successful pro career. He didn't have a defining or dynamic quality (though he did have a plus-grade shot), and he could just become a bottom-six secondary contributor, but that still probably makes him a late-first in a do-over. He had a really solid first season in the AHL last year as well.

Matt Poitras split last season between Boston and Providence. (Maddie Meyer / Getty Images)

27. San Jose Sharks: C Matt Poitras

Actual draft pick: No. 54 (change: +27) to Boston

My final ranking: No. 64 (change: +37)

Poitras has always been a very smart player who has navigated the ice really intelligently and found ways to facilitate for his linemates and was decently competitive off-puck. The question at draft time was whether, as a 5-foot-11 center, he could score goals at the NHL level. That remains a bit of a question now, too. He was very good for Providence last year, playing to a point per game as one of the most productive players in his age cohort. But he also scored just one goal in 33 NHL games last season. He's a heady player. He's going to have to show he's more than just a guy at the NHL level and carve out a niche beyond the subtle passing feel/vision. I think he, Ohgren and Geekie are all in a similar boat in terms of what they have to prove.

28. Buffalo Sabres: RHD Seamus Casey

Actual draft pick: No. 46 (change: +18) to New Jersey

My final ranking: No. 27 (change: -1)

Casey, like Nemec, is caught up in a numbers game in New Jersey. That doesn't take away from what he has shown over the years, which is that he's one of the top offensive defensemen in his age group. He showed that internationally for Team USA. He showed it at Michigan, where he registered 45 points in 40 games as a sophomore. And he has now shown it in rookie tournaments and in the AHL. Though his results in the NHL were better than his underlings, he was also immediately productive with the big club, registering eight points in 14 regular-season games, outscoring the opposition 8-4 in his minutes at five-on-five, and getting into a playoff game. He's a high-end skater and offensive thinker who I think defends better with his feet and stick than people realize. He may, like Korchinski, need to be moved to fully reach his potential, but I'd bet we see it at some point in his career.

29. Arizona Coyotes: RHD Maveric Lamoureux

Actual draft pick: No. 29 (change: none) to Arizona

My final ranking: No. 85 (change: +56)

The way Lamoureux thinks and processes the game has come a long way since the draft and has made all the difference for his obvious physical tools (the skating, the length, etc.). Guys don't always learn it, either. He's a very successful developmental story and would tell you the same. Full marks to him, his

team and Arizona/Utah for the job they've done — and for the original swing and trust that he'd put it together. He still has some work to do on a couple of things, but he's going to be a unique No. 4-5 NHL D.

30. Winnipeg Jets: LHD Elias Pettersson

Actual draft pick: No. 80 (change: +50)

My final ranking: Honorable mention

Pettersson has always been a what-you-see-is-what-you-get player, and that player is now a solid third-pairing D, which in and of itself is good third-round value. I viewed him as more of a Round 4-5 guy at the time.

31. Tampa Bay Lightning: C/RW Brad Lambert

Actual draft pick: No. 30 (change: -1) to Winnipeg

My final ranking: No. 8 (change: -23)

See this week's players I was wrong about column for more on my Lambert evaluation.

32. Edmonton Oilers: LW Alex Bump

Actual draft pick: No. 133 (change: +101)

My final ranking: Honorable mention

Those with a watchful eye will notice that Bump is the one order change from my drafted prospects ranking last week. I mentioned then that he was No. 101 (the final cut for it) and that there were a couple of players in the 90s that I thought about ranking him ahead of. The more I thought about it, the more I came back to it. So he leapfrogs a couple of guys, who slide into the honorable mentions here. Bump really worked on his game and impressed scouts and Broncos staff alike with the changes he made and the commitment he showed over his two seasons in college, and he's now knocking on the NHL door. The skill, shot and strength on the puck are there. The little things have come. He looks like a potential middle-six secondary scorer.

Honorable mentions (alphabetical order)

C Owen Beck

Actual draft pick: No. 33 to Montreal

My final ranking: No. 46

C Luca Del Bel Belluz

Actual draft pick: No. 44 to Columbus

My final ranking: No. 47

LW/RW Dmitri Buchelnikov

Actual draft pick: No. 52 to Detroit

My final ranking: Not ranked

C Filip Bystedt

Actual draft pick: No. 27 to San Jose

My final ranking: No. 58

RHD Ryan Chesley

Actual draft pick: No. 37 to Washington

My final ranking: No. 31

LHD Artyom Duda

Actual draft pick: No. 36 to Arizona

My final ranking: No. 89

RW Jordan Dumais

Actual draft pick: No. 96 to Columbus

My final ranking: No. 34

RW Jagger Firkus

Actual draft pick: No. 35 to Seattle

My final ranking: No. 29

LHD Isaiah George

Actual draft pick: No. 98 to the Islanders

My final ranking: Honorable mention

C Ryan Greene

Actual draft pick: No. 57 to Chicago

My final ranking: No. 71

C Stephen Halliday

Actual draft pick: No. 104 to Ottawa

My final ranking: Not ranked

RW Joakim Kemell

Actual draft pick: No. 17 to Nashville

My final ranking: No. 7

C Cameron Lund

Actual draft pick: No. 34 to San Jose

My final ranking: No. 72

RHD Victor Mancini

Actual draft pick: No. 159 to the Rangers

My final ranking: Not ranked

C Fraser Minten

Actual draft pick: No. 38 to Toronto

My final ranking: No. 79

LW/RW Ivan Miroshnichenko

Actual draft pick: No. 20 to Washington

My final ranking: No. 28

LW/RW Jani Nyman

Actual draft pick: No. 49 to Seattle

My final ranking: No. 45

LHD Owen Pickering

Actual draft pick: No. 21 to Pittsburgh

My final ranking: No. 53

LW Reid Schaefer

Actual draft pick: No. 32 to Edmonton

My final ranking: No. 83

The results

Overall, I am happy with the results of my evaluations and/or projections on a good group of players. Hutson is obviously the big one, but my board did well and I'm proud of my evaluations and where I landed on Kulich, Nazar, Mateychuk, Salomonsson, Howard, Luneau, Casey, Korchinski, Yurov, Geekie

and Ostlund, as well as some others in the honorable mentions (I was rightly lower on Schaefer, Pickering, Miroshnichenko and Beck, in my view, for example).

There's also obviously a big group that we were aligned on and went where I had them or in that range.

But there were also some slottings that I appear to have misplaced (Savoie, Slafkovský, Kasper, Gauthier, Rinzel, Lambert, Bichsel, plus some of the honorable mentions such as Kemell and Buchelnikov) and a couple of them are big ones. The easy cop-out on those would be to point to lingering challenges of evaluating this age group coming out of the pandemic, or saying that I'm a different evaluator today than I was then. But overall, my 2022 list has performed worse than my others have so far. I want to be beating the field and 2022 is more of a mixed bag than I'd like, with some lessons to take away.