

RED LINE REPORT

AN INDEPENDENT SCOUTING REVIEW

2015 DRAFT GUIDE • June, 2015

The Red Line Top 50

Here is Red Line's final identification list of the top eligible prospects for the 2015 NHL Entry Draft.

NO.	PLAYER	POS	HT/WT	S	DOB	TEAM	COMMENTS
1.	Connor McDavid	C	6-1/187	L	13 Jan 97	Erie	Pure hockey savant is brilliance personified.
2.	Jack Eichel	C	6-1/192	R	28 Oct 96	Boston University	The draft's best combo of skills, power, and skating.
3.	Noah Hanifin	D	6-3/202	L	25 Jan 97	Boston College	Mature, advanced game with size & offensive skills.
4.	Mitch Marner	RW	5-11/170	R	05 May 97	London	Slickest east-west lateral moves this side of Datsyuk.
5.	Dylan Strome	C	6-3/187	R	07 Mar 97	Erie	The big, skilled, poised centre everyone's looking for.
6.	Ivan Provorov	D	6-0/193	L	13 Jan 97	Brandon	He may be ready to stick in the NHL right now.
7.	Mikko Rantanen	RW	6-4/209	L	29 Oct 96	TPS Turku	Huge, powerful locomotive has improved his skating.
8.	Denis Guryanov	RW	6-2/192	L	07 Jun 97	Lada Togliatti	Hardest shot and best release in this draft.
9.	Matthew Barzal	C	5-11/171	R	26 May 97	Seattle	Silky smooth with super soft hands and vision.
10.	Pavel Zacha	C	6-3/207	L	06 Apr 97	Sarnia	Mix one part tank and one part gazelle... Voila!
11.	Jeremy Roy	D	6-0/182	R	14 May 97	Sherbrooke	Has the best pure offensive skills of any D-man.
12.	Zach Werenski	D	6-1/203	L	19 Jul 97	Univ. of Michigan	Outstanding puck mover and PP quarterback.
13.	Lawson Crouse	LW	6-3/208	L	23 Jun 97	Kingston	An imposing freight train barreling down the wing.
14.	Nick Merkley	C	5-11/187	R	23 May 97	Kelowna	Tremendous talent combined with tremendous desire.
15.	Evgeni Svechnikov	LW	6-2/195	L	31 Oct 96	Cape Breton	The least talked about high end talent in the draft.
16.	Timo Meier	RW	6-0/209	L	08 Oct 96	Halifax	Thickly built bruiser has heavy shot, plays heavy game.
17.	Travis Konecny	RW	5-10/171	R	11 Mar 97	Ottawa	As exciting as Kate Upton in a wet bikini contest.
18.	Jansen Harkins	C	6-1/181	L	23 May 97	Prince George	Creative, playmaking centre with size and speed.
19.	Joel Eriksson-Ek	C	6-2/187	L	29 Jan 97	Färjestad Jr.	Two-way pivot with size and emerging skills.
20.	Paul Bittner	LW	6-4/202	L	04 Nov 96	Portland	Should be more dominant with his size and skills.
21.	Thomas Chabot	D	6-2/180	L	30 Jan 97	Saint John	No one came farther, faster than he did this year.
22.	Matej Tomek	G	6-3/181	L	24 May 97	Topeka	Goalies aren't drafted in 1st round anymore - he should.
23.	Ilya Samsonov	G	6-3/205	L	22 Feb 97	Magnitogorsk	He's a gamechanger with rare size and athleticism.
24.	Nicolas Meloche	D	6-2/195	R	18 Jul 97	Baie-Comeau	Steady, reliable, and a punishing hitter.
25.	Jake DeBrusk	LW	6-0/177	L	17 Oct 96	Swift Current	42 goals and NHL bloodlines will attract attention.
26.	Kyle Connor	C	6-0/183	L	09 Dec 96	Youngstown	Terrific natural scorer with a lean, live athleticism.
27.	Jakub Zboril	D	6-1/190	L	21 Feb 97	Saint John	Intense, and a physical specimen with a cannon shot.
28.	Noah Juulsen	D	6-1/177	R	02 Apr 97	Everett	Outstanding puck mover who also plays shutdown role.
29.	Alexander Dergachev	C	6-4/200	L	27 Sep 96	St. Petersburg	Huge tank plays with intelligence, but feet are slow.
30.	Brock Boeser	C	6-0/191	R	25 Feb 97	Waterloo	New movie just came out about his life: American Sniper.
31.	Oliver Kyllington	D	6-1/181	L	19 May 97	Färjestad	Best pure skater in draft is a top 5 talent. Head is a ?
32.	Dante Salituro	C	5-9/187	R	15 Nov 96	Ottawa	Unbelievably productive, unbelievably underrated.
33.	Mackenzie Blackwood	G	6-4/211	L	09 Dec 96	Barrie	6-4 goalies with great athleticism are in short supply.
34.	Vince Dunn	D	6-0/185	L	29 Oct 96	Niagara	Smart, mobile D-man with a great shot & PP skills.
35.	Anthony Beauvillier	C	5-10/181	L	08 Jun 97	Shawinigan	Out of his 181 pounds, 180.5 is heart and desire.
36.	Yakov Trenin	LW	6-1/187	L	13 Jan 97	Gatineau	Big offensive horse rounded out his game nicely.
37.	Colin White	C	6-0/178	R	30 Jan 97	U.S. NTDP U-18	Two-way pivot is as safe a bet as you can find in '15.
38.	Daniel Sprong	RW	5-11/179	R	17 Mar 97	Charlottetown	Super soft hands/skills, but has his own agenda.
39.	Dennis Yan	RW	6-1/187	L	14 Apr 97	Shawinigan	Pure sniper with good size must round out his game.
40.	Filip Chlapik	C	6-1/190	L	03 Jun 97	Charlottetown	We love his game, but foot speed keeps him out of 1st.
41.	Brandon Carlo	D	6-4/198	R	26 Nov 96	Tri-City (WHL)	Huge with improving puck/skating skills. Big upside.
42.	Jeremy Bracco	RW	5-9/172	R	17 Mar 97	U.S. NTDP U-18	Dynamically skilled puck wizard, but small.
43.	Matt Spencer	D	6-2/196	R	24 Mar 97	Peterborough	Big, strong, agile puck mover. Not getting enough love.
44.	Julius Nättinen	C	6-2/193	L	14 Jan 97	JyP Jyväskylä	Terrific size & hands, needs to play with more passion.
45.	Nikolai Chebykin	LW	6-4/182	L	01 Aug 97	MVD Balashikha	Huge winger skates well and plays with intensity.
46.	Zach Senyshyn	RW	6-2/195	R	30 Mar 97	Sault Ste. Marie	Love his combination of size, skating, and edginess.
47.	Jordan Greenway	LW	6-5/222	L	16 Feb 97	U.S. NTDP U-18	Gargantuan size and upside, but must engage more.
48.	Ryan Pilon	D	6-2/212	L	10 Oct 96	Brandon	Fine size & hockey sense, must show more intensity.
49.	Jack Roslovic	RW	6-0/182	R	29 Jan 97	U.S. NTDP U-18	Quiet assassin has underrated skills, scoring ability.
50.	Gabriel Carlsson	D	6-4/183	L	02 Jan 97	Linköping	Not flashy, but the definition of steady and mistake-free.

Normally this would be the time of year when speculation about the Entry Draft, and the myriad trade rumours that surround it, dominate conversations around the hockey community. But with a scintillating round of playoffs just ended and the Stanley Cup Finals about to begin, the conversations have thus far been somewhat muted while the end of the season plays out.

However, all the major players recently huddled together under one roof at the NHL Scouting Combine in Buffalo, so some initial discussions did take place, and at *Red Line* we heard a few interesting tidbits. Given the strength and depth of this year's draft class, there appear to be a lot of teams highly motivated to get something done, so our inclination is to think we will see an active trade market at the draft this year.

We say that knowing full well that there have already been seven trades involving first round picks. And one interesting thing to note is that the teams slated to draft in each of the top four slots (Edmonton, Buffalo, Arizona, and Toronto) all have multiple first round picks. And two of them (Edmonton & Toronto) have new upper management staffs in place. How will that impact the first round of the draft?

Edmonton is actually one of the teams we could see being quite active in the marketplace. New GM **Peter Chiarelli** has proven during his years with Boston that he's not afraid to make bold moves involving big-name players (Phil Kessel, Tyler Seguin, etc.). Now of course, the #1 pick is not in play — **Connor McDavid** will be in an Edmonton sweater come June 26. But with McDavid and **Ryan Nugent-Hopkins** in the fold, could **Leon Draisaitl** be in play?

If so, Chiarelli would undoubtedly want a physical, veteran defenceman back in return. Montreal has a crying need for size down the middle and a legitimate #1 centre, and might be willing to part with **Alexei Emelin**. Would Emelin and Montreal's first-rounder, plus another good piece, be enough to entice the Oilers?

Which other teams might we expect to make an impact on Draft Day? Well, Winnipeg made big strides this season and are a team on the rise with a lot of prospect depth. They could also use a strapping winger to replace the size and scoring they lost in dealing away **Evander Kane**. Could **Kevin Cheveldayoff** package the 17th and 25th picks to move up into the #7-10 range to nab one of the blue chip power wingers like **Mikko Rantanen** or **Lawson Crouse**?

Ron Hextall in Philadelphia also has a pair of first rounders (Nos. 7 and 29/30 from Tampa), and a trio of high end defence prospects from recent drafts (**Travis Sanheim**, **Samuel Morin**, and **Shayne Gostisbehere**). We're fairly certain they'll use the #7 pick on one of the high end forwards, but how about a trade of the late first rounder plus a top blue line prospect for either some veteran help or a move up into the top 15?

If Hextall is looking to spring a deal, Boston might make some sense as a trade partner for the Flyers. New GM **Don Sweeney** has the 14th pick, and there have also been some rumblings in Beantown about changing the nature of a lineup that has gotten old and slow. With **Johnny Boychuuk** gone and **Zdeno Chara** no longer able to play 30 minutes a night, the Bruins need a young stud who is ready to step in and take some of the load off Chara and **Dougie Hamilton**. One of those Philly blue-liners might look attractive.

Then of course there's the elephant in the room: Toronto! The Leafs have the Nos. 4 and 24 picks in the draft, and **Brendan Shanahan** taking bold strokes to re-make the organisation. The Leafs will use the #4 pick to get a terrific young player, but #24 is in play, along with many of the big name talents currently on the roster. What could Phil Kessel or **Dion Paneuf** fetch in draft picks? Does Phaneuf

or Kessel plus #24 get them another pick in the top 8?

As for who we think could be surprise first round selections come Draft Day, here are some names that few outside the hockey scouting fraternity will be expecting to hear so early. **Nikita Pavlychev** is an absolutely gi-normous and creative centre who hasn't even begun to scratch the surface of what he could become. Already 6-7/207 pounds with a huge frame to fill out, he can play it tough, protects teammates, and has soft hands and playmaking ability.

Also up front, we know a few teams drafting late in the first are intrigued by the size/skating combination and rapid second half development of **Zach Senyshyn**. He has all the measureables, great drive and passion, and really began putting it all together in the OHL.

On the blue line, several teams have inexplicably developed a serious man-crush on huge Slovak **Erik Cernak**. We don't like his slow decision making process and lack of poise under pressure, but can't deny the obvious tools combination of size and skating ability.

Also, in a draft heavy in smallish but highly skilled puck moving rearguards, but a bit light in the size department, it wouldn't shock us to hear **Gabriel Carlsson's** name called in the top 30. He's nearly 6-5 and, while not a crushing hitter, plays a mistake-free game with good mobility. His name has popped up in our conversations with at least two teams drafting in the mid-to-late 20s that really like him.

Between the pipes, **Ilya Samsonov** is a real wildcard. He's clearly a first round talent, but with the draft stock of goalies down all across the league these days, and his Russian-ness, it's anyone's guess if a team will step up and take the risk for a potential difference maker.

That all brings us to the point in our proceedings where it's time to make our annual statement re-iterating one important fact about *Red Line's* rankings. We must emphasize that *Red Line Report is an independent scouting service*. Since *RLR's* policy is **ALWAYS** to act in a completely independent manner when it comes to fashioning our rankings (we view ourselves as an unofficial 31st team), we **never, ever** take into consideration inside information we have from talking to our many friends and contacts in the scouting community when forming our list. We're frequently aware that some teams which are drafting high like certain players that we may not even have in our top 10, and vice versa.

Our rankings reflect *the order in which we would draft the prospects* if we were doing the selecting. So we recognise that some players will go higher than we have them ranked, and others will go lower. Here then is a list of players whose actual draft position will very likely be either significantly higher or lower than we have them ranked, based on our knowledge of how some teams are thinking.

Player will go higher than *Red Line* ranking: **Lawson Crouse, Zach Werenski, Erik Cernak, Gabriel Gagné, Mitch Stephens, Kyle Connor, Brandon Carlo, Jordan Greenway, Graham Knott, Mitch Vande Sompel, Daniel Sprong, Adin Hill, Jonas Siegenthaler, Will Reilly, Jacob Larsson, Nikita Pavlychev, Gabriel Carlsson, Glenn Gawdin, Filip Ahl, Adam Marsh, Vili Saarijarvi, Radovan Bondra, Giorgio Estephan, Andrew Nielsen, Gustav Bouramman, Tyler Soy, Joe Cecconi, Callum Booth, Jens Lööke, Parker Wotherspoon, Matt Jurusik, Timo Meier, Cooper Marody, and Nikita Korostelev.**

Player will go lower than *Red Line* ranking: **Dante Salituro, Denis Guryanov, Jeremy Roy, Alexandre Carrier, Ilya Samsonov, Matej Tomek, Cameron Hughes, Jason Bell, Dmytro Timashov, Karson Kuhlman, Nikolai Chebykin, Alexander Dergachev, Kirill Kaprizov, Noah Juulsen, Rihards Bukarts, Nicolas Meloche, Jake Morrissey, Keegan Kolesar, Colton White and Andre Mangiapane.**

1. Connor McDavid — Erie**LC**

Consensus number one pick. Electric. Sees the ice exceptionally well, knows where his linemates and opponents are at all times, and reacts accordingly. Uncanny anticipation - doesn't go to where the puck is, but where it's going to be in two seconds. Hands spun out of pure silk; can stickhandle through any traffic. Dangles at full speed. Makes plays at full speed like no one else at his level or any other level. Once he is parallel or in front of an opponent he will never be caught. Off the charts hockey intelligence. His break off the sidewall or out of corners to the net is lightning fast. Makes tape-to-tape passes when it appears no play is there. Understands when to stay out of traffic and avoid the big hit, but the puck still manages to find him. Great edges and balance. Plays with the attitude to win at all costs. Only fear is injuries due to the reckless abandon he plays with. Generational talent.

Projection: Franchise player for championship calibre club.

Style compares to: Gretzky/Crosby hybrid

3. Noah Hanifin — Boston College**LD**

The total package of size, skating, puck skills, and character. Excellent 4-way skater has straight-line speed, fluid footwork and near flawless change-of-direction. Thinks the game at an elite level already. Plays the advanced style of a ten-year veteran. Maintains perfect gap control, activating at the right times and taking proper angles. Uses his long reach to funnel opposing forwards to the outside and to disrupt and break up plays. Although not a big physical presence, he does use his big frame effectively to win puck battles along the walls and keep opponents away from his net. Makes rocket first passes out of the zone. Even under heavy forechecking pressure he will make the right decision and get the puck to the right spot. Distributes well as the PP quarterback. Makes a lot of plays look easy, especially in puck retrieval. Sacrifices his body to make plays. Future franchise cornerstone.

Projection: Franchise cornerstone defenceman.

Style compares to: Alex Pietrangelo

5. Dylan Strome — Erie**RC**

Has a great frame at 6'3" and as he fills out could become the big, power centre all teams covet with the size to win puck battles all over the ice. High-end finisher if given even a brief window to score. Great blend of confident puck skills and moves in tight, and can laser perfectly placed shots. Gets plenty of high quality chances because he's great at carving out space in the slot, and shows very quick hands and a superb release that freezes goalies. Excellent at distributing the puck to wingers. Comes back deep in own zone to contribute defensively. Plays a full 200-foot game and can turn a defensive assignment into a scoring opportunity in a heartbeat. Long reach helps him stickhandle effectively and protect the puck. Skating will have to improve to become a top line centre. Has some struggles against faster teams.

Projection: 1st line scoring centre & PP wiz.

Style compares to: Anze Kopitar

7. Mikko Rantanen — TPS Turku**RW-L**

Imposing and assertive Finnish winger with over 100 pro games under his belt in Finland. A rare blend of size, skill, and effort. Consistently active, dangerous, and forceful. Has gotten much bigger in the upper body and creates problems for defenders who simply can not contain this big freight train barreling down the wing. Uses his size to constantly drive through the slot and jam the net, but is not a big banger. Has really smoothed out his stride since last year by filling out his enormous frame and gaining leg strength. Strong on the puck and an impressive net presence. Creative player with nice vision and very good passing skills. Good stickhandling ability, uses wide body and long reach to control the puck well while moving through traffic. Has a heavy wrister. Less than ideal lateral mobility. A mature player who competes hard every shift. Needs to improve his D-zone coverage.

Projection: Goal scoring first line power winger.

Style compares to: Max Pacioretty

2. Jack Eichel — Boston University**RC**

A true horse in every sense of the word, and in a draft year devoid of McDavid, Eichel would be a very worthy top overall pick. Shows elite skating, puck skills and hockey sense. Has a long, effortless stride; glides across the ice almost as if his blades are not making contact with the surface and edging is as crisp as the very best NHL skaters. Has a rocket shot that he pinpoints to corners. Imaginative passer who sees the entire ice, and uses all his mates, including defencemen at the point. Controls the pace and flow of the game whenever he's on ice. Has an innate feel for the game and anticipates where the puck will be at any given time. Instinctive, creative mind. Dominates on the power play. Controls the puck at will with his dexterity and reach. Very good two-way centre whose overall game has grown by leaps and bounds while playing frequently on the world stage.

Projection: Elite 1st line centre for a top tier team.

Style compares to: Ryan Getzlaf

4. Mitch Marner — London**RW**

Strong skating and quickness enables him to compete in all areas of the ice in spite of his size. Terrific hockey sense and offensive instincts. Exceptional east-west moves at top speed with the puck on his blade make him really tough to defend. Fantastic edging allows him to accelerate coming out of his sharp cuts. Phenomenal hands and stickhandling ability make him impossible to contain in tight spaces. Finds the soft spots in the offensive zone to create scoring chances for himself. Shows great puck patience, waiting for teammates to open up before deftly dropping touch passes off both sides of the blade. Sees the ice very well. Exceptional playmaker running the power play from the half-wall. Supports his teammates well all over the ice. Makes plays under pressure and isn't afraid of physical play. Team catalyst every night; plays at a high tempo and never takes a shift off.

Projection: Elite top line scoring winger.

Style compares to: Patrick Kane

6. Ivan Provorov — Brandon**LD**

Wants to impact the game on every shift. Forces the play aggressively and intelligently at both ends. Great knee bend with powerful thighs to drive into edges when he chooses to increase the tempo on rushes. Constantly skates with head up looking to make plays coming out of his own zone. Aware of outlets at all times, allowing him to hold onto the puck an extra split second, drawing players towards him before executing last minute passes through the seams. Uses shifty upper body movement to feint defenders and tight cuts to drive past contact. Quick reactions in own zone to tie up opposing players' sticks legally. Outstanding 4-way mobility, mirrors puckhandlers perfectly. Closes gaps by taking the body rather than puck. Unquestioned catalyst on Brandon's top-notch PP - will be a good quarterback at the next level.

Projection: Top pairing defenceman and PP quarterback.

Style compares to: Kevin Shattenkirk

8. Denis Guryanov — Lada Togliatti**RW-L**

An absolute horse - he's big and fast with a long, powerful stride that eats up ground. Has without question the best and hardest shot in the draft - an absolute rocket that he can pinpoint with accuracy from anywhere. A true gamebreaker and natural sniper who is deadly from the circles on down. Shows great hand/eye coordination on powerful 1-timers. Great speed and agility, and accelerates to top gear in an instant. Handles and controls the puck well at top gear, and can make even good defenders look foolish either with great lateral moves or just blowing by them with a pure speed/power combination. Just plays the game at a faster pace than anyone else. Clutch player who wants the puck on his stick at crunch time, and delivers lots of big goals. Relentless in puck pursuit. The effort level without the puck is there, but his defensive awariness leaves plenty to be desired.

Projection: Explosive top line scorer.

Style compares to: Chris Kreider

9. Matthew Barzal — Seattle RC

Small body, huge compete level. Highly intelligent with a terrific understanding of different game situations. Reads and reacts extremely well and is outstanding at improvising on the spot. Excellent playmaker with tremendous vision and a soft passing touch. Skates with a wide, bow-legged stride and has great balance and lateral agility. Constantly keeps his feet in motion. Backchecks as hard as he forechecks. Absolutely loves the game. One of the most complete players in the draft. Heart and soul type is an intense competitor every night. Difficult to knock off the puck with surprising upper body strength. Shows tremendous acceleration and does a great job using his speed to beat defenders for loose pucks. Always involved in the middle of the action and never takes a shift off. Generates loads of quality offensive chances. Makes his linemates better.

Projection: 1st line point producer for a good team.

Style compares to: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins

11. Jeremy Roy — Sherbrooke RD

This kid's got a real "It" factor. For *Red Line's* money, is the best pure offensive d-man in the draft. Showed great character playing through a broken wrist and sprained knee, yet still put up 43 points in 46 games. Makes rocket passes up the middle - long leads that hit forwards right in stride and lead to dangerous chances. Loves to handle the puck, and has the ability to carry it out of the zone by himself under pressure, and even lead the break. Jumps up on offence, but usually only at the right times. Outstanding command of the blue line on the PP. Distributes the puck well and also gets pucks to net with a strong shot. Very polished with excellent poise and vision. Dynamic player both on the power play and at even strength in transition. Defensive zone coverage can be spotty - often in the right place, but not aggressive enough in moving or tying up his check.

Projection: Smart, competitive #1-2 d-man & PP quarterback.

Style compares to: Andrei Markov

13. Lawson Crouse — Kingston LW

A big, hulking man-child who moves about like a gazelle with long, uneven strides. Excellent speed for a big player. Battles hard along the walls and dominates down low. Comes out of corners with loose pucks and heads straight to net with reckless abandon. A human wall around the crease who creates good screens in front on the PP. Uses size to carve out space around the slot and wires hard wristers. Surprisingly soft hands for such a big man - gives and receives passes well at speed. Shows fine hockey sense in all three zones and plays on the top penalty killing unit. Responsible defensively. Willing to drop the gloves to protect teammates, but is not a great fighter. His combination of size and aggression will translate well at the next level. Rugged play on the forecheck causes havoc and turnovers by defencemen. Can create chances with wide speed or just by brute force.

Projection: Gritty, physical 2nd liner for good club.

Style compares to: Earlier version of Tuomo Ruutu

15. Evgeni Svechnikov — Cape Breton LW

Exceptional physical tools. Big horse is like a freight train gathering speed as he barrels down the wing. Has a long, deceptive stride, and is agile and well balanced laterally. Breaks through small openings and gets to scoring territory. Skilled winger with soft, quick hands. Can dangle at speed and finishes around net with a sharp, accurate wrist shot. Plays well in traffic and along the boards. Has made a quick transition to North American game and is not afraid to play mean - chippy in scrums and uses his stick to make room for himself. Persistent on the forecheck in puck pursuit, and separates defenders from the puck when he lays on the body. Uses a nice blend of size, skill and hockey sense to generate offence once he gains possession in the offensive zone. Effort away from the puck needs to be much more consistent.

Projection: 1st line scoring winger on a middle tier club.

Style compares to: James Van Riemsdyk

10. Pavel Zacha — Sarnia LC

Big centreman is a dominating force down the middle — just what every team covets. A real horse with the size to bump and grind and the skill to make plays with the puck. Top-notch speed and quickness for a big player. Strong puck skills - handles it well and can distribute off both sides of the blade. Can also bury chances around the slot with a great release - gets terrific wrist snap. Great combination of a physical power forward and skill player at the centre position. Goes hard to the net without hesitation. Plays borderline dirty and on the edge - can intimidate defenders with his pounding forecheck. Perhaps most impressive for a young offensive star is his commitment to defence. Always responsible - comes back hard on the backcheck and consistently helps his d-men down deep below the dots. Very good hand/eye coordination on deflections and 1-timers.

Projection: Elite 2nd line centre for championship contender.

Style compares to: Bobby Holik/Rod Brind'Amour

12. Zach Werenski — Univ. of Michigan LD

Is at his best when he's got the puck on his stick. Highly mobile and active, and makes great decisions in puck movement. Played as the triggerman on Michigan's PP as a true freshman, and showed both a hard, low shot and fine distribution skills. Moves laterally along the blue line to buy time and open lanes before making good feeds. Skates the puck up out of danger from his own end and leads the break. Joins the rush at just the right time to create odd-man situations, showing good timing and judgement. Makes crisp, firm break-out passes like a pro. Excellent lateral agility makes him tough to beat off the rush, but has tendency to back in and give too large a gap to puck carriers. Gets outbattled in the corners during puck scrums, and also takes some false steps in the defensive end. Pins and seals along the walls, but we'd like to see him use his fine frame more in battles.

Projection: Offensively skilled top pairing minutes eater.

Style compares to: Johnny Boychuk

14. Nick Merkley — Kelowna RC

One of the best playmakers and table setters in the draft. Clutch performer is at his best when stakes are highest — elevated his game in the playoffs, leading Kelowna to the WHL championship. His determination is relentless; dictates the pace of the game with the puck on his stick. Battles until the whistle blows and while not tall, has a thick frame that is very tough to contain. Thrives down low in the offensive zone and always wants the puck on his stick at crunch time. Tremendously imaginative with a terrific offensive skill-set. Very strong on skates and wins puck battles in the corners against bigger foes through sheer desire. One knock is he lacks first step explosion and a top-end separation gear. Opens his hips well and gets great weight transfer on 1-timers. Plays with a passionate will to win every shift.

Projection: 2nd line playmaking centre on top echelon club.

Style compares to: Ryan Kessler

16. Timo Meier — Halifax RW-L

His game is built on power and skill. Skates with a very wide, strong base and is impossible to knock off the puck. Physically he already looks like a man - has a thick, sturdy build and plays a heavy game. Takes the puck hard to net and has a heavy, accurate wrist shot. This season his offensive game has really taken off - he added more power and precision to his shot and made huge strides in his playmaking. Started seeing the ice better and using his linemates much more often to diversify his game. Vastly improved hockey sense. Showing more puck poise and vision. He is not fleet of foot, but he's a bulldozer whose straight line speed allows him to get where he needs to go and is pretty solid laterally. Hard on his stick and his strength allows him maintain possession and cycle very effectively down low.

Projection: Big moose of a 2nd line scoring winger.

Style compares to: Nino Niederreiter

17. Travis Konecny — Ottawa**RW**

One of the best pure skating, puckhandling and sniping forwards in the draft. Has both terrific straight line speed and east-west lateral agility. Makes all his moves at top-end speed, and can beat even good defenders off the rush. Slick and elusive with the quickness to get separation in tight spaces. Has quick, soft hands in close. Pressures the defence at full speed whether carrying the puck into the zone or on the forecheck. Excellent distributor - has a nose for the net and creates loads of scoring chances when he's working hard. Looked gun-shy about contact after coming back from early season concussion. Needs more size to win wall battles - must get stronger to take the daily grind at next level. Was often lazy defensively, staying too high on the wall in own end to help his defencemen on outlets. Needs better awareness.

Projection: Top line scoring winger.**Style compares to: Tyler Johnson****19. Joel Eriksson-Ek — Färjestad Jr.****LC**

Two-way centre is a strong competitor at both ends. Development curve is headed straight up - made significant progress each time we saw him. Tough to play against, persistent and tenacious. Physically strong but still gangly and has a great frame to fill out. Wins battles and knocks opposing players off the puck consistently. Works hard every shift. Finishes checks. Strong defensively and does lots of little things away from the puck. Positionally sound, excellent d-zone awareness, comes back deep in own end to help his defencemen and can play a shutdown role late in games. Has a powerful stride and improving quickness. Fine hands and displays great patience and protection skills with the puck. Draws opposing players in, then makes short touch passes to open linemates, showing good vision. Has an awesome drag-'n-shoot move. Gets great torque on his snapshots. Strong on his stick and excellent on faceoffs.

Projection: Two-way, 2nd line centre for legit contender.**Style compares to: Jacob de la Rose****21. Thomas Chabot — Saint John****LD**

Lean blue-liner with excellent footwork and a live, athletic body. Is already physically strong for his size and should easily add another 15-20 pounds to his frame without losing any mobility. Outstanding puck mover from the back end makes rocket, pro-style passes through the neutral zone, but also puts delicate touch on short area saucers. Has a long, fluid skating stride with fine lateral agility and pivots. Terrific vision and creativity from the point on the PP - makes great reads and cross-ice slap passes. No QMJHL draft eligible saw such dramatic development this season. Tremendous in the transition game and shows great offensive instincts jumping up on the rush. Defensively he uses an active stick more than big, booming hits; we'd like to see him become more assertive with his large frame. Gets roaming in his own end and loses positioning at times.

Projection: #2-3 puck moving defenceman.**Style compares to: Jeff Petry****23. Ilya Samsonov — Magnitogorsk****G-L**

Very big and fills up the net. Solid; plays with poise and doesn't get rattled. Exceptionally athletic and positionally sound. Very quick feet/pads make him tough to beat down low. Balance and footwork around crease are phenomenal. Gets good push off either skate and slides cross-crease quickly and under control. His movement and recover-ability to get back in position for second shots is tremendous. Great concentration. His pad placement is precise on saves, and he gives up no rebounds. Kicks shots right out of play on the penalty kill. Big goalie who plays big by staying on his feet - doesn't go down early. Sees over traffic easily and finds shots through crowds. Holds the post hard on wrap-arounds. The most technically sound goaltender in the draft.

Projection: #1 workhorse goalie on an upper echelon team.**Style compares to: Carey Price****18. Jansen Harkins — Prince George****LC**

We're suckers for silky smooth pivots who create tons of chances and make their linemates better. One of the smartest players in the draft. His IQ and puck distribution put him among the best in this class. Really fluid skater with great edge work who accelerates out of his cuts. Has a knack for holding onto the puck that extra split second to give wingers a chance to break free, then hits them with perfectly placed passes. A high energy forechecker who disrupts the breakout and engages aggressively in the offensive zone while killing penalties. Boasts a quick shot from in close, but it lacks power from outside the circles. Needs to go to danger zones more frequently to be more effective. Versatile and plays well in all game situations. A proven leader who is very unselfish and does all the right things to help his team win.

Projection: 2nd line, traditional playmaking centre.**Style compares to: Derek Stepan****20. Paul Bittner — Portland****LW**

Imposing physical specimen is very tough to knock off the puck. Uses his size and strength to keep his feet moving along the boards and in corners. Soft hands in front of the net and is deadly from the slot. His wrist shot is an absolute blur - heavy and handcuffs goalies. Creates space effectively around slot and keeps defenders on his backside. Very mobile for such a huge kid and gets a good read on the play developing from the neutral zone and anticipates well. Good puck possession player who loves to shoot from any angle. Long, powerful stride, making him a tough check for opponents. Good hockey smarts, vision and overall a great skill set. But despite great size, he frustratingly shows virtually no physical game whatsoever. Needs to become more competitive and bring it every night - not just occasionally. Lack of fire and consistency keeps him out of the top 15.

Projection: 2nd line scoring winger with great size.**Style compares to: Nick Bjugstad****22. Matej Tomek — Topeka****G-L**

Long, lean, flexible netminder who is fluid in all his movements. Has the agility and balance of a cat. He's calm under pressure and very quiet in the net, with little wasted motion. Tracks the puck well and reads/reacts to shots like a seasoned pro. Gives opponents very little net to look at with his size and positioning. Good glove, soft pads and a quick blocker to angle rebounds away from danger areas. Spends a lot of time on his knees when puck is in close - needs to focus on keeping his torso upright and not giving away the top corners. Plays a refined, mature game for one so young and had very few rough patches as he transitioned to North America due to outstanding fundamentals and focus. Occasionally kicks out a big rebound, but is quick to recover for second shots. A real student of his craft with the desire and work ethic to continually improve.

Projection: No. 1 netminder for a contending club.**Style compares to: Pekka Rinne****24. Nicolas Meloche — Baie-Comeau****RD**

Plays a very smart two-way game. Defensive zone coverage is outstanding. He's a leader on his team and a rock on their blue line. Mature beyond his years - plays like a 10-year NHL veteran. Reads and diagnoses plays early, allowing him to break up plays before they happen. Has good mobility and strong instincts as a puck mover. Has a chance to develop into a strong power play contributor as well with good vision and distribution skills. Excellent in the transition game, turning the play up ice quickly with lightning fast passes to start the counter-attack. Very strong physically and one of the hardest hitters in the draft - makes opposing forwards pay a steep price for territory around the cage. Rarely ever outmuscled by older players. Played huge, important minutes and handled a lot of responsibility.

Projection: Second pairing shutdown defenceman.**Style compares to: Brent Seabrook**

1. Edmonton — Connor McDavid. Generational talent meets the lottery winner. His No. 97 Oilers sweater is already fitted, stitched and ready for him to put on when the festivities kick off in Florida.

2. Buffalo — Jack Eichel. If your lottery balls don't come up aces, this is the year to finish with the second pick. Massachusetts product could be one of the greatest players ever to come out of that state, and there have been some good ones. Franchise centre.

3. Arizona — Noah Hanifin. Coyotes could opt for Strome here, but after having traded Keith Yandle, will pick up this two-way cornerstone-type defenceman who will be an All-Star calibre player to complement Oliver Ekman-Larsson for years.

4. Toronto — Dylan Strome. The Leafs, fresh off of winning the Mike Babcock sweepstakes, are looking for a legitimate #1 centre with size. Strome checks off both those boxes.

5. Carolina — Mitch Marner. There's a gold discovery in the mountains of North Carolina, and this gritty if average-sized offensive dynamo is going to shoot out the lights in Raleigh.

6. New Jersey — Ivan Provorov. Four years after passing on Dougie Hamilton in favour of Adam Larsson, the Devils nab one seriously talented two-way defender who could end up being the best blue-liner in this class.

7. Philadelphia — Lawson Crouse. Flyers go for a big power forward with the skating and physical game they love. Has the size to make it to the big club quickly, but his ultimate offensive ceiling is a question mark.

8. Columbus — Pavel Zacha. Big Czech horse is going to further bolster the Blue Jackets' impressive group of young forwards, and team with Ryan Johansen to give them a powerful 1-2 punch down the middle.

9. San Jose — Zach Werenski. The underachieving Sharks, who suddenly find themselves thin on the blue line, snap up one of the draft's top two-way puck movers.

10. Colorado — Mathew Barzal. This is simply too good a value for the Avs to pass up at this point. If a freak kneecap injury hadn't cost him two full months, might not have made it out of the top 6.

11. Florida — Mikko Rantanen. The Panthers are looking to add size and skill up front and there are few better with

that kind of combination than this Finnish behemoth.

12. Dallas — Denis Guryanov. If his name was "Dennis Grant" we'd be talking about a player pushing close to top-5 status, but the Russian factor drops him to the Stars. They got Valeri Nichushkin at #10 that way two years ago, and will be ecstatic if lightning strikes twice.

13. Los Angeles — Paul Bittner. When have the Kings ever passed on a skilled, 6'4" scorer? Bittner is a bit enigmatic, but the Kings' coaching staff has a very good recent track record of getting the best out of those talented but puzzling types.

14. Boston — Timo Meier. The Bruins have never drafted a single player from Switzerland before, but they can't pass on the skilled winger they call "Big Swiss."

15. Calgary — Evgeni Svechnikov. With Bennett and Monahan ensconced in the middle, the Flames look to give them a playmate with size and scoring punch on the wing.

16. Edmonton (from Pittsburgh) — Jeremy Roy. When you nab the best player in a decade you're playing with house money. So why not swing for a home run on the blue line as well with a player who is as skilled as any defenceman in the draft.

17. Winnipeg — Travis Konecny. His pure speed and gritty play is right up the Jets' alley here, as they continue to strengthen their organisation with skilled, leader types.

18. Ottawa — Jansen Harkins One of the more underrated players in the first round, and the Sens grab him for his speed up the middle, and fine two-way presence and character.

19. Detroit — Nick Merkley. Last year Dylan Larkin landed in their laps at #15, now the Wings see another offensive playmaker who competes his ass off and has elite hockey sense drop to them. They don't have to think twice.

20. Minnesota — Jake DeBrusk. Not as rugged as his former NHLer dad, Louie. But then again, Louie never scored 42 goals in his entire career, much less a single season.

21. Buffalo (from NY Islanders) — Thomas Chabot. Like the Oilers, the Sabres grabbed an elite forward at the top of the draft, so they'll address defence here with a two-way guy who brings an edge.

22. Washington — Noah Juulsen. The Caps go a bit off the board to take this impressive and rising defenceman. They'll

be losing Mike Green this summer, so it's time to start re-stocking the shelves.

23. Vancouver — Kyle Connor. The USHL's leading scorer is somewhat one-dimensional, but in a league starved for offence, scoring is the best dimension to have. The 'Nucks have to start thinking about life after the Sedins.

24. Toronto (from Nashville) — Vince Dunn. New Leafs scouting boss Mark Hunter loves skilled blue-liners who can facilitate a quick transition, attacking style. And he's very familiar with Dunn, since his team in London played against the kid often.

25. Winnipeg (from St. Louis) — Joel Eriksson-Ek. Smart and industrious Swedish pivot is more than the sum of his parts, and gives the Jets a potential steal at 25. Plus, he's a disciplined player who fits the club's style.

26. Montreal — Brock Boeser. Doesn't really fit the Habs' shutdown defensive style, but all else being equal, they'd really like to get a sniper at this point in the draft. And one thing Boeser will do is put the puck in the net.

27. Anaheim — Jack Roslovic. *Red Line Report* favourite really came on at crunch time and scores goals with the best of them. If there is a late-riser we can see cracking the end of the 1st round, it's this intelligent sniper.

28. Tampa Bay (from NY Rangers) — Oliver Kylington. We've just seen in the playoffs how the Lightning want to move the puck in transition... well, lightning fast to spring their group of tremendously skilled forwards. This kid may have questionable hockey IQ, but nobody skates or moves the puck faster than him. This is the kind of gamble on greatness a team like the 'Bolts can afford to take.

29. Philadelphia (from Tampa Bay) — Jakub Zboril. They need to get back to being a tougher team and harder to play against in their own end. Zboril has superb physical attributes and skating, with a gritty, at times snarly, edge. He will raise their level of competitiveness - just what the doctor ordered.

30. Arizona (from Chicago) — Ilya Samsonov. The big Russian is worth a first-round call in our view, and the 'Yotes will need some help in net sooner rather than later. He's not only the best player on the board here... he makes the most sense if any team is going to grab a goalie in the opening round.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The draft landscape is changing rapidly since, by our count, roughly a dozen teams have hired, or are about to hire, new General Managers in the past 12 months. As teams look ahead to the draft and free agency, those new men at the top will want to put their imprint on their clubs. Here is one NHL insider's look at what each team needs to address this off-season, and who will be entrusted to make those decisions.)

Anaheim Ducks: There's been plenty of talk about how the Ducks need to re-sign Matt Beleskey, but the priority has to be re-signing Francois Beauchemin who, at 34, is still a highly effective two-way defenceman. Losing him would leave the team with a gaping hole on defence. He was the Ducks' top minutes-played guy in the postseason, still has a strong shot, and can play ornery. Even if they lose Beleskey, they still have scoring depth. The Ducks do have a great young nucleus on the blue line with Sami Vatanen, Hampus Lindholm, Cam Fowler, and Simon Despres all under the age of 24, plus another blue chipper coming in Shea Theodore. But Beauchemin is the veteran glue who holds it all together. The Ducks have a team that could be a championship contender for several years, and director of scouting Martin Madden's exemplary drafting is one of the main reasons.

Arizona Coyotes: Because the team's fans have been told the franchise is going through a "reset" and not a major rebuild, the Coyotes are under pressure this summer to act boldly to improve the team's offence. The Coyotes barely averaged two goals per game in 2014-15. Max Domi, Henrik Samuelsson and Brendan Perlini are good building block players, but their best days are still a few seasons down the road. The Coyotes need to put a call in to the Maple Leafs to ask about Phil Kessel, and see if the Blackhawks are going to deal Patrick Sharp. The Coyotes should also try to re-acquire Antoine Vermette whose best hockey has been in Arizona. Longtime Dallas chief scout Tim Bernhardt took over Arizona's amateur scouting operation this past year.

Boston Bruins: New GM Don Sweeney's primary mission has to be rebuilding the team's depth and developing a plan to give this team more cap flexibility moving forward. The Bruins have already told Gregory Campbell and Daniel Paille they won't be offered contracts, and the expectation is that Carl Soderberg will be lost to free agency. Even if they could keep Soderberg, the Bruins need more scoring depth. It turned out Reilly Smith wasn't the scoring answer the Bruins wanted him to be, and Loui Eriksson was never a great fit. Keith Gretzky is the team's director of amateur scouting, but Sweeney said there will be personnel changes coming. People are left to guess what that will mean for the scouting staff.

Buffalo Sabres: It feels like the Sabres lost the lottery twice: once regarding drafting Connor McDavid and again when top coaching prize Mike Babcock chose Toronto over the Sabres. Losing out on Babcock was the tougher loss, since the Sabres can still grab Jack Eichel to move to the head of their impressive prospect class. GM Tim Murray has plenty of work to do this summer, including finding a #1 goalie. Might he talk to Ottawa about Robin Lehner or Craig Anderson? The Sabres also need another scoring winger to play with Eichel and Evander Kane. But mostly the Sabres need some character veterans to help this young team play the game the right way. Rob Murphy and Greg Royce are the new tandem in charge of the whole scouting operation, and haven't compiled a track record yet. But Murray is still a scout at heart, and he's still actively engaged in the scouting process.

Calgary Flames: Not long ago the Flames' long-term future didn't seem promising. Now they are looking at a one-two centre combo of Sean Monahan and Sam Bennett, plus an exciting,

dynamic game-breaker in Johnny Gaudreau. Meanwhile, under-rated Jiri Hudler has had a career re-birth. Calgary's defence is also highly competitive, but they could use another dependable, steady performer back there. Brian Burke is the team president, so you know the Flames would like to get bigger, and pending free agent Matt Beleskey is just Burke's type of guy. The Flames have a decision to make in net. Karri Ramo is a free agent, Joni Ortio will be on a one-way contract, and Jon Gillies is on deck after leaving Providence. You can find plenty of NHL types who believe the Flames might be better off trading Jonas Hiller and re-signing Ramo. Tod Button is the Flames' director of scouting, and he's been on a roll the last three years.

Carolina Hurricanes: The first offseason move the organization should make is buying out the remaining three seasons of Alexander Semin's contract. No one wants to tell an owner he needs to write a check for \$14 million to cover a managerial mistake, but what kind of message does it send to the team and its fans if they keep around a \$7 million-per-season player who scored six goals last year? His presence is now a distraction. Although no one paid much attention, the Hurricanes played some solid hockey in the second half. Justin Faulk, Elias Lindholm, and Victor Rask were three of the team's top four players, and they are all young players on the rise. Is this the summer they trade Jeff Skinner? He seems to have grown stale in Carolina. Tony McDonald is Carolina's longtime scouting director, and he has made a habit of doing more with less on Carolina's shoestring scouting budget.

Chicago Blackhawks: The essential re-signings of Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane have wreaked havoc on the 'Hawks salary cap. Chicago will have to say goodbye to free agents Johnny Oduya and Michal Rozsival, and likely will have to deal away proven scoring in Patrick Sharp. But GM Stan Bowman does a masterful job of keeping the cupboards full. They have Teuvo Teravainen improving every day and Bowman signed KHL standout Artem Panarin, the biggest prize in this year's Euro free agent crop. The Blackhawks also seem to be high on 6'-4" defence prospect Stephen Johns, who has progressed steadily in the AHL and seems ready for full-time duty. Mark Kelley is the Blackhawks' senior director of amateur scouting, and he has kept talent flowing into the pipeline.

Colorado Avalanche: The Avalanche need to continue to add more depth, but their 2014-15 season would've been much better if Nathan MacKinnon was farther along in his development and Erik Johnson could have stayed healthy. The Avalanche do need more scoring, and that means they need to get a long-term deal done with Ryan O'Reilly — Colorado can't afford to lose him. Look for defenceman Chris Bigras to make the team next season. Jerome Mesonero, a longtime GM in the Quebec League, will be presiding over his first draft as director of amateur scouting.

Columbus Blue Jackets: Coach Todd Richards' Blue Jackets finished the season on a 12-0-1 roll, and probably would have been as good as advertised had they not been overrun by injuries. The Blue Jackets believe they are close enough to contention to swing for the fences this summer in their pursuit of a right-shot veteran to help on the blue line. Word around the league is that Columbus is looking to swing a major trade, and will move young forwards to get it done. Kerby Rychel is one prospect who could be moved. Chief scout Ville Siren has long been joined at the hip with GM Jarmo Kekalainen, so they are in sync in their vision for the organisation.

Dallas Stars: Had the Stars been stronger in net, they might have made the playoffs in 2014-15. So if they find a market for goalie Kari Lehtonen, they need to consider heading in a different direction. The healthy return of Valeri Nichushkin next season will seem like the addition of a new 25-goal scorer because he only

Each June just prior to the Entry Draft, the NHL holds its annual star-studded awards ceremony to honour the game's greats for their achievements during the preceding season. The traditional hardware includes such distinguished trophies as the Art Ross (league's top scorer), the Lady Byng (combining skill and gentlemanly play), the Vezina (for the top goaltender), the Hart (most valuable player), etc.

Here at *Red Line*, we minted a new set of hardware 13 years ago specially designed for the incoming draftees that we feel rivals the NHL's prestigious mugs. Here now are the categories and our nominations for the 14th annual *Red Line Report Silverware Collection*.

The Rodney Dangerfield Trophy (Most underrated players)

1. Dante Salituro — We literally don't think he'll go in the top 100, but he's knocking on the door of our 1st round. Uber productive, durable.
2. Matej Tomek — Has zero buzz. So underrated we don't think he'll go in the top two rounds, but he's the top goalie on our board.
3. Alexander Dergachev — Huge tank is both Russian and not a great skater - that's two strikes. But wow, can he dominate below the dots
4. Jeremy Lauzon — When conversation turns to all the great QMJHL d-men this year, this guy never even garners a mention. Why?
5. Nicolas Meloche — Reliable shutdown d-man and big hitter.
6. Cameron Hughes — Mention his name in NHL circles and all you hear is crickets. Unless we're being sandbagged, that's not good.
7. Jeremy Roy — Has the most pure offensive skill of any d-man in the draft - and loads of passion - yet he's not likely to go in the top 20.
8. Nikolai Chebykin — Likely won't get picked in top 60 — big mistake! Raw as hell, but big Russian has great hands, stride, & passion.
9. Andrew Mangiapane — Little bugger is skinny as an eel with bulimia, but we didn't see many players more effective in the "O".
10. Keegan Kolesar -- Sandpaper type who opponents love to hate. Development is on the rise and will do anything to help his team win.
11. Brent Gates — Under the radar? He's like a UFO - he doesn't even register on radar.
12. Nikita Pavlychev — He's 6-7 with hands, vision, and playmaking skill. And no, that's not a misprint: SIX-FOOT-SEVEN!
13. Anthony Cirelli — Got lost in the shuffle on a very deep team.
14. Colton White — Plays so quiet and mistake-free in defensive end that nobody even notices him. He'll be quietly valuable for 10 years.
15. Jake Morrissey — Talented netminder saw action in only 10 games as 3rd string goalie on Kelowna's deep WHL championship squad.

The Alexandre Daigle Trophy (Most overrated players)

1. Gabriel Gagné — He's 6-5 and scored 35 goals. So yeah, he's going to be drafted high. He's also one lazy-assed MoFo.
2. Erik Cernak — Great size and tools will get him drafted in the 2nd round, maybe even 1st. But the Earth orbits the Sun in roughly the same amount of time it takes him to make a routine decision.
3. Jordan Greenway — He's 6-5/222 pounds, and can skate, shoot, and handle the puck. But does he ever really impact games?
4. Graham Knott — Scouts seem mesmerized by his admittedly wonderful skating and size. Unfortunately, his head is another matter.
5. Mitchell Stephens — Scouts all love this little Energizer Bunny. Hockey Canada, too. We're just not seeing it. Small with limited skill.
6. Jens Lööke — An NHL scout told us he will definitely be gone by the end of the 2nd round. We shit you not. If that's true, then... Wow!
7. Giorgio Estephan — He's all style and no substance.
8. Samuel Montembeault — He's got great size and stats, but he's stiff and mechanical, and doesn't react well to pressure situations.
9. Jonas Siegenthaler — Huge and performed well against men in the Swiss Elite league, but... Just always leaves us wanting more.
10. Lawson Crouse — We swear, we actually love this kid. Just not in the 5-7 range that everyone keeps projecting him at.

The Yvan "Roadrunner" Cournoyer Trophy (Best pure skaters)

1. Oliver Kylington — When this defenceman is skating in his own end, he's like a male driver who refuses to ask for directions: hopelessly lost, but making great time!
2. Connor McDavid — Dynamic speed and acceleration forces d-men to back off the blue line. Has a top end separation gear that's a blur.
3. Brendan Guhle — His edging is so clean you never hear his blades touch the ice. Great mixture of fluidity, agility, and burst.
4. Denis Guryanov — Such a combination of raw power and elite first step that he's an unstoppable force who just explodes past defenders.
5. Anthony Richard — A flat-out blazer who uses intimidating speed to blow past even top-flight defencemen.
6. Travis Konecny — Remember Star Wars? He's like the Millennium Falcon making the jump to light speed.
7. Matthew Barzal — Exceptionally light & nimble on skates with outstanding change of pace and direction. Plays game at tremendous pace
8. Tomas Gres — Big guy with a deceptively long, gliding stride. If he gets even a half step on a d-man, there's no derailing that express.
9. Mitch Marner -- Not ranked so much for sustained flat-out speed as for unbelievably elusiveness - fantastic east-west lateral moves that freeze opposing d-men, followed by a quick burst that creates separation.
10. Veeti Vainio — So dynamic with the puck on his stick he reminds us of Paul Coffey. Unfortunately, so does his defensive work.
11. Thomas Chabot — Such a smooth stride that he seems to glide effortlessly over the ice. Makes the game look too easy.
12. Vince Dunn — Tree-trunk thighs generate power like a nuclear plant. Has this year's best stop/start, change of direction, and make-up speed among all defencemen.
13. Mitch Vande Sompel — Able to evade forecheckers like no one else and gets even faster with the puck on his stick.
14. Jeremy Bracco — Never satisfied beating defenders just once, he'll circle back and juke through them again.

The Brad "Quicksand" Marsh Trophy (Slowest-footed players in the draft)

1. Terrell Draude — Just when you think he can't go any slower, he kicks in the after-burners and puts on an extra burst of slow.
2. Rasmus Andersson — Tends to run out of steam faster than a fat kid chasing an ice cream truck - which is basically what he is. Five words of advice: Son, put down the fork.
3. Chris Martenet — My grandmother pivots faster in her walker.
4. Christian Jaros — You've heard of "Deflate-Gate?" Well, this is more like "Can't Skate-Gate."
5. Keegan Kolesar — Only thing preventing this big man-child from being a major prospect is he just can't get off the mark.
6. Alexander Dergachev — Occasionally resembles an elephant riding a Rascal scooter.
7. Jared Bethune — Let's give credit where it's due - he's twice as fast as he was last year. But remember... 2 times zero still equals zero.
8. Loik Leveille — Gets burned worse outside than a redhead stranded in the desert with no sunscreen. Often caught flat-footed.
9. Gustav Olhaver — Enormous winger needs to wear one of those medical alert devices because he has *literally* fallen and not been able to get back up. Stride isn't bad - should improve once he gains leg strength.

Gordie Howe Trophy

(Best character guys and fiercest competitors)

1. Connor McDavid — Is the kind of player on the ice, and the kind of person off the ice, that you want associated with your franchise.
2. Nick Merkley — Relentless. Comes after you hard from the opening faceoff to the last buzzer, and leads by example.
3. Karson Kuhlman — Tenacious, relentless, and edgy. Very Andrew Shaw-like in how he hates to lose.

The European free agency season opened up last month with all the NHL general managers attending the World Championships, and clubs have already put a big dent in the list *Red Line* was compiling of players we felt were ready to step right in and play a role on an NHL roster next season.

At last count, more than a dozen top Euro free agents have already signed lucrative deals, so are no longer available. Of the players who have already signed, the following ones would have ranked highly on our list had they not recently inked contracts:

1. **Artemi Panarin/LW** (Russia) — Chicago Blackhawks.
2. **Joonas Donskoi/RW** (Finland) — San Jose Sharks.
3. **Evgeny Medvedev/RD** (Russia) — Philadelphia Flyers.
4. **Steve Moses/RW** (United States) — Nashville Predators.
5. **Jakub Nakladal/RD** (Czech Rep.) — Calgary Flames
6. **Joonas Kemppainen/LC** (Finland) — Boston Bruins.

Here are *Red Line's* reports on those players:

1. Artemi Panarin/LW-R — St. Petersburg. 5-11/170. 30 Oct 91. Was considered the biggest prize in this year's Euro free agent grab bag after just tearing up the KHL this season with 26-36-62 scoring totals in 54 games, then adding another 20 points in the play-offs. Flashy little flyer is the definition of a waterbug, flitting around the ice at warp speed and changing directions instantly. Can stop/start on a dime, and sharp cuts gain him easy separation. Does everything at an extremely high tempo. Controls the puck well at top end gear and can beat even seasoned defencemen off the rush with a variety of slick moves. Once he's got the puck from the circles in, bing! It's in the net. Lightning fast release and scoring touch. Also very creative and unselfish with the puck. Can be overpowered and is not a defensive wiz - but that's not what you're paying him for.

2. Joonas Donskoi/RW — Kärpät Oulu. 6-0/183. 13 Apr 92. Soft hands and a very good puckhandler. Creative playmaker and quick with his decisions. Quick and agile skater with sharp changes of direction, but not the fastest skater in a straight line. His shot is mediocre. Resilient and hard working, not much of a physical presence though. Likes to dangle around with the puck in the offensive zone and there are quite a lot of east-west elements in his game - transition to North American ice surfaces might be quite difficult for him. Was the playoff MVP in the Finnish league. Florida Panthers' 4th round pick in 2010, but wasn't ready and never signed back then.

3. Evgeny Medvedev/LD — Kazan. 6-3/198. 27 Aug 82. We're surprised the veteran blue-liner is coming over to North America for the first time at his advanced age, but he is a big and very mobile defenceman who really moves the puck out of his own end quickly and efficiently. Smooth four-way skating ability. Is able to stick with quicker forwards down low in coverage, and evade the forecheck with lateral quickness. Sees the ice well and has good hockey sense. Moves the puck to the right spot at the right time. Calm, poised, and a good decision maker. Is not at all physical for his size.

4. Steve Moses/RW — Jokerit. 5-9/172. 09 Aug 89. Top scorer in the KHL this season set a league record with 36 goals. Small American is more quick and elusive rather than pure, flat-out speedy, and the large ice surface served his game well - we're curious to see how his game will translate. On any ice surface, he's a bona fide sniper. Has an excellent wrister with a hard, quick release, and a natural goal scorer's touch around the net. Likes to shoot the puck often and from any angle. Despite lack of size, is feisty and not afraid to play in high traffic areas and takes hit to make plays. Very slippery and hard to contain - creates constant separation in tight areas. Has quick hands and strong puck control; can beat defenders 1-on-1 off the rush. Good competitor away from the puck and disruptive on the forecheck.

5. Jakub Nakladal/RD — TPS Turku. 6-2/200. 30 Dec 87. We've had him on this list before a few years ago, then he went to the KHL, and finally had a terrific year in the fast skating Finnish league this season. Big, tough, strong, and plays a physical, aggressive game. Solid in battles, blocks shots, and is reasonable in d-zone coverage. Not afraid to drop the gloves and stand up for his more skilled mates. Rubs opponents out along the walls. Owns a hard 1-timer from the point, but is not really skilled or creative - more of a stay-at-home defender. Can move the puck when he has time and plays things simply under pressure. Question is if his skating will be good enough to keep the pace in the NHL - his foot speed and lateral agility is very average.

6. Joonas Kemppainen/LC — Kärpät Oulu. 6-2/195. Big, rangy two-way centre is a versatile player. A top face-off guy and excellent penalty killer. Has good balance, is strong on the puck and shields it well. Average skater in terms of speed and agility. Not overly aggressive, but battles well and is smart with his involvement, does all the little things right. Highly consistent performer is strong defensively. Only moderate puck skills and won't be a big scorer at NHL level. His strong net presence on the PP led to him tallying nine points at the World Championships. Has a lot of tools you want to see in a 3rd/4th line centre - given a real chance, could succeed in that role.

Here are our rankings and reports on the top remaining Euro free agents who may be signing soon with NHL clubs:

1. Sergei Plotnikov/LW (Russia) — Yaroslavl. 6-2/198. 03 Jun 90. Bought out his contract with Yaroslavl and will soon sign an NHL contract. Big monster was one of the most consistently dangerous forwards on a loaded Team Russia at last month's World Championships. He's physical and mean on the forecheck. Hits to hurt and wins all the battles down low. Can both create and finish chances. Excellent hands and a quick release. Sees the ice and anticipates very well. Unselfish with the puck. Smart and instinctive all over the ice. Plays a two-way game, hard to knock off the puck, protects and controls it down low. Drives the net hard and competes well every shift. Finishes checks and good at creating turnovers off a heavy forecheck. Fine skills and hockey sense, anticipates well and shows good vision. Has some playmaking skills and good passing touch. Has the potential to be a decent third liner in the NHL right away.

2. Vojtech Mozik/RD (Czech Rep.) — Plzen. 6-3/196. 26 Dec 92. Young d-man has good size and tools, but hasn't made enough progress on his weaknesses. His backwards skating and pivots still aren't good enough. Has trouble containing forwards on the rush and stops moving his feet at times. His shot is a real weapon: heavy and accurate, makes him deadly as the triggerman on PP. Scored a bunch on 1-timers. Needs to make better decisions on when to shoot and when to distribute though. Likes to go deep on pinches and forces the play aggressively at the offensive blue line. Can get out of position both in neutral and own zone. Needs to get stronger and more aggressive along the boards. Good decision making with the puck in own zone. Could use more patience under pressure at times.

3. Dean Kukan/LD (Switzerland) — Luleå. 6-2/203. 08 Jul 93. Has good size and is a skilled two-way defenceman. Moves well for a big man with good balance and lateral agility. Takes the body and pins his man along the wall. Ties up opposing forward's stick legally in front of the net and competes well in 1-on-1 puck battles. Moves the puck well when he has time, but tends to make bad decisions under pressure at times. His play recognition and reads are just average around the defensive zone. Has a heavy point shot and he's able to get it through traffic on net. Makes long homerun stretch passes through the neutral zone. Crisp, pro-style outlets and shows touch to make short area saucers off both sides of the blade.

We've all gotten spoiled with marquee talents over the past decade, starting with **Alexandre Ovechkin** and **Evgeni Malkin** in 2004, and continuing with **Sidney Crosby** in 2005, **Jonathan Toews** in 2006, **Pat Kane** in 2007, **Steven Stamkos** and **Drew Doughty** in 2008, the dynamic duo of **Taylor Hall** and **Tyler Seguin** in 2010, and finally **Nathan MacKinnon** and **Seth Jones** in 2013. This new generation of stars are the brand names this league is built around.

And this year's crop is also well stocked with star power also, starting with **Connor McDavid** and **Jack Eichel**, a pair at the top that rivals anything we've witnessed these past 11 years.

A quick look ahead to 2016 shows a nice blend of speed and power, defencemen and forwards. There are four players from the WHL and three from the OHL.

Let's break things down by leagues. For starters, the OHL has a pair of talented sons of former longtime NHLers. Windsor's **Logan Brown** (son of Jeff Brown) is the type of huge (6-5/215 pounds) and skilled centre every team covets up the middle.

Meanwhile, Sarnia's **Jakob Chychrun** (son of Jeff Chychrun) is a blue-liner like his father, but that's where the comparison ends as young Jakob has a world of puck skills and offensive talent that dad never possessed.

The WHL appears to be the league most loaded with top-end draft talent. Calgary's tremendously skilled defenceman, **Jake Bean**, leads the way. His skating and vision are off the charts good, and at age 16 this past season, he was already one of the best power play quarterbacks the Dub has seen in years.

Big and spirited scoring winger **Tyler Benson** is Vancouver's best hope to shake off the malaise that franchise has been in for years, and Regina's **Sam Steel** is a wonderfully skilled and imaginative centre who makes everyone around him better.

The Québec League's banner will be carried by a pair of power wingers. **Pierre-Luc Dubois** is already the focal point of Cape Breton's attack at 16, while Val-d'Or's **Julien Gauthier** is a man-mountain at 6-4/221 pounds, and already bagged 38 goals this past season.

All this, and we haven't even yet discussed **Auston Matthews**, the odds-on favourite to go #1 overall. Matthews is a big, skilled, physical centre who can play the game any way you like it. The American may also be taking the road less traveled to the draft next year, as he's contemplating playing pro hockey against men in Switzerland's Elite league.

The U.S. National Team has a passel of talented forwards, including the Mutt-'n-Jeff combination of **Matthew Tkachuk** and **Clayton Keller**. Tkachuk, like his father, Keith, is a huge power winger who plays a hard game and scores a lot. Keller is a supremely skilled little offensive dynamo whose size (at 5-9/165) is the only thing keeping him out of our top 10 — for now!

Then we get into the United Nations portion of our program. There are six Europeans we could see cracking the top 15. There's a pair of Russian snipers in **Dmitri Sokolov** and **Vitali Abramov**, as well as their countryman on the blue line, **Mikhail Sergachev**.

The Finns have an extraordinary crop of '98 birthdates, topped by all-world stud **Jesse Puljujarvi** — a likely top three overall selection. Super smooth d-man **Olli Juolevi** is also a top 10 candidate.

Sweden's contribution is tall and offensively powerful rear-guard **Jakob Cederholm**.

We don't see 2016 as a great year for goalies, but some of the best include the WHL trio of **Carter Hart**, **Zach Sawchenko**, and **Evan Sarthou**. Sweden's **Daniel Marmenlind** looks to be the best of the European netminding crop.

Top 2016 Draft Eligibles

NO.	PLAYER	POS/S	HT/WT	DOB	TEAM
1.	Auston Matthews	C/L	6-2/194	17 Sep 97	US NTDP U-18
2.	Jakob Chychrun	D/L	6-2/194	31 Mar 98	Sarnia
3.	Jesse Puljujarvi	RW/R	6-3/198	07 May 98	Kärpät
4.	Logan Brown	C/L	6-5/215	05 Mar 98	Windsor
5.	Jake Bean	D/R	6-0/175	09 Jun 98	Calgary
6.	Tyson Jost	LW/L	6-0/195	17 Mar 98	Penticton
7.	Dante Fabbro	D/R	6-1/185	20 Jun 98	Penticton
8.	Dmitri Sokolov	LW/L	6-2/203	14 Apr 98	Omsk
9.	Tyler Benson	LW/L	6-0/196	15 Mar 98	Vancouver
10.	Sam Steel	C/L	5-10/160	03 Feb 98	Regina
11.	Olli Juolevi	D/L	6-2/185	05 May 98	Jokerit
12.	Mikhail Sergachev	D/L	6-2/205	25 Jun 98	Kazan
13.	Pierre-Luc Dubois	LW/L	6-1/180	24 Jun 98	Cape Breton
14.	Jakob Cederholm	D/R	6-3/176	30 Jan 98	HV 71
15.	Kieffer Bellows	LW/L	6-0/189	10 Jun 98	Sioux Falls
16.	Vitali Abramov	RW/L	5-8/154	08 May 98	Chelyabinsk
17.	Alex DeBrincat	RW/R	5-7/160	18 Dec 97	Erie
18.	Julien Gauthier	RW/R	6-4/221	15 Oct 97	Val-d'Or
19.	Clayton Keller	C/L	5-9/165	29 Jul 98	US NTDP U-17
20.	Alex Nylander	RW/R	5-10/160	02 Mar 98	AIK
21.	Matthew Tkachuk	LW/L	6-1/188	11 Dec 97	US NTDP U-18
22.	Markus Niemelainen	D/L	6-4/190	06 Aug 98	Hameenlinna
23.	Luke Green	D/R	6-0/174	12 Jan 98	Saint John
24.	Ryan Lindgren	D/L	5-11/194	11 Feb 98	US NTDP U-17
25.	Carl Grundström	LW/L	6-0/187	01 Dec 97	MoDo
26.	Vojtech Budik	D/L	6-1/190	29 Jan 98	Pardubice
27.	Nick Pastujov	LW/L	6-0/195	21 Jan 98	US NTDP U-17
28.	Riley Tuft	LW/L	6-5/210	10 Apr 98	Blaine H.S.
29.	Rasmus Asplund	C/L	5-11/176	03 Dec 97	Färjestads
30.	Sean Day	D/L	6-2/229	09 Jan 98	Mississauga
31.	Kale Clague	D/L	6-0/194	05 Jun 98	Brandon
32.	Joey Anderson	RW/R	5-11/189	19 Jun 98	US NTDP U-17
33.	Dillon Dube	C/L	5-10/175	20 Jul 98	Kelowna
34.	Pascal Laberge	C/R	6-1/160	09 Apr 98	Victoriaville
35.	Max Lajoie	D/L	6-0/173	05 Nov 97	Swift Current
36.	Libor Hajek	D/L	6-1/196	04 Feb 98	Brno
37.	Brett Howden	C/L	6-1/183	29 Mar 98	Moose Jaw
38.	Jordan Kyrou	C/R	5-11/169	05 Aug 98	Sarnia
39.	Beck Malenstyn	LW/L	6-1/184	04 Feb 98	Calgary
40.	Tye Felhaber	C/L	5-11/182	05 Aug 98	Saginaw
41.	Victor Mete	D/L	5-10/165	07 Jun 98	London
42.	Evan Fitzpatrick	G/L	6-4/202	28 Jan 98	Sherbrooke
43.	Carter Hart	G/L	6-0/165	13 Aug 98	Everett
44.	Noah Carroll	D/L	6-1/174	02 Dec 97	Guelph
45.	Samuel Girard	D/L	5-9/155	12 May 98	Shawinigan
46.	Ondrej Vala	D/L	6-3/190	13 Apr 98	Pardubice
47.	Charles McAvoy	D/R	6-0/206	21 Dec 97	US NTDP U-18
48.	Patrik Laine	RW/R	6-3/200	19 Apr 98	Tappara Tampere
49.	Chad Krys	D/L	5-11/182	10 Apr 98	US NTDP U-17
50.	Daniel Marmenlind	G/L	6-1/192	14 Nov 97	Orebro
51.	Patrick Bajkov	RW/R	5-11/175	27 Nov 97	Everett
52.	Adam Mascherin	C/R	5-9/202	06 Jun 98	Kitchener
53.	Zach Sawchenko	G/L	6-0/168	30 Dec 97	Moose Jaw
54.	Jacob Moverare	D/L	6-1/185	31 Aug 98	HV 71
55.	Will Bitten	C/R	5-9/154	10 Jul 98	Plymouth
56.	Evan Sarthou	G/L	6-3/170	24 Sep 97	Tri-City (WHL)
57.	Jordan Maher	C/R	5-11/165	11 Mar 98	Acadie-Bathurst
58.	Tim Gettinger	LW/L	6-5/202	14 Apr 98	Sault Ste. Marie
59.	David Quenneville	D/R	5-8/175	13 Mar 98	Medicine Hat
60.	Nathan Bastien	C/R	6-3/195	06 Dec 97	Mississauga
61.	Jake Kryski	C/L	5-11/170	08 Mar 98	Kamloops
62.	Matous Belohorsky	C/L	6-0/184	07 Jun 98	Liberec
63.	Connor Bunnaman	LW/L	6-0/197	16 Apr 98	Kitchener
64.	Michael McLeod	C/R	6-1/184	03 Feb 98	Mississauga
65.	Simon Stransky	LW/L	5-11/172	21 Dec 97	Prince Albert
66.	German Rubtsov	C/L	6-0/174	27 Jun 98	Vitaz
67.	Taylor Raddysh	RW/R	6-1/198	18 Feb 98	Erie
68.	Filip Hronek	D/R	5-11/167	02 Nov 97	Hradec Kralove
69.	Tanner Kaspick	C/L	5-11/184	28 Jan 98	Brandon

McDavid maxes out his potential

Connor McDavid is so good that even when the Erie Otters lose, he still wins.

When the Otters lost the OHL finals to the Oshawa Generals back in mid-May, it was McDavid that was named playoff MVP after tallying 49 points in 20 games, just two shy of the OHL record.

Basically, McDavid is indeed that good and is everyone's unanimous pick to be the No. 1 selection in this year's NHL draft by the Edmonton Oilers.

One former Oilers player — some guy by the name of Gretzky — said in a recent Edmonton Journal interview that McDavid is a player that “can definitely change

incentive of being the top pick at the draft.

“I just try to balance my game out and try to keep working hard each and every day,” said McDavid, a Newmarket, Ont., native. “I try not to think about all the media requests and not worry about it too much. It comes with the territory and that's OK, I know that. [Going No. 1] is something I think about a little bit, I guess. It's there and it's a possibility, so why not strive for that and try and make it one of your goals? I think if you ask anyone going into this draft, they would say the same thing. It's a deep draft with some pretty good players.”

When McDavid was unveiled as the

McDavid Report Card

Size/Strength	B
Skating	A
Shot/Scoring ability	A+
Puckhandling	A+
Hockey sense	A+
Competitiveness	A
Physical play	B
Composure/Poise	A
Defence	B+

tant to myself. It's definitely something I want to succeed in.”

Staying humble all season long through the pre-draft process is something McDavid said could only be possible by surrounding himself “with all the right people.”

Erie coach Kris Knoblauch said he's not sure what more McDavid has to prove at the Major Junior level and sees him stepping into an NHL lineup next Fall.

“I can't say any more about Connor that hasn't already been said,” said Knoblauch. “He's a pretty remarkable player and he's just a treat to watch. As a coach, I'm savoring the days of being able to coach him because it's been nice. Any time he picks up the puck and skates through the neutral zone, that's the time where guys watch. That's when he's the most explosive and he'll take advantage of somebody being out of position because with his speed, his agility and his stickhandling ability, that's what gives me the most excitement watching him. In all my years of coaching junior hockey, I can't imagine anyone else being as good as Connor is.”

And to think that this season, McDavid endured an early-season broken hand during an ill-fated fight with Mississauga's Bryson Cianfrone when he missed and hit the top of the boards.

“When that happened, you hold your breath and hope for the best,” said Knoblauch. “We obviously didn't want Connor to be hurt, but it wasn't so much about our team — we would have been fine — but World Juniors was right around the corner and that was very important to him.”

Now with the NHL draft coming up in suburban Miami, it'll be time for McDavid to don an NHL sweater and start the next journey.

“This is just something that I've always loved to do and I worked hard at it,” said McDavid. “I'm very fortunate to be where I am.”

Connor McDavid File

- ◆ **Ht/Wt:** 6-1/187
- ◆ **Position:** Centre
- ◆ **Shoots:** Left
- ◆ **Birthdate:** January 13, 1997
- ◆ **Team:** Erie Otters
- ◆ **Scouting Report:** What's left to say that hasn't already been said? Not sure which is more impressive: the speed of his skating, the speed of his hands, or the speed of his mind. Just plays the game on a different plane from everyone else, with sublime hockey sense. Plays like a chess grand-master: always three moves ahead. Wonderful imagination and a dangerous finisher anywhere from the circles in. Unselfish, team leader, and high character kid. Works hard in own end. Virtually a flawless prospect.

a franchise's fortunes.”

“When I was going down that path as a young player, Gordie Howe was always pulling for me, and I look at Connor the same way,” Gretzky added. “I hope he brings Edmonton a Stanley Cup and he breaks my records. He's got the talent and the makeup to do it. I hope he leaves a couple for me, though. I could use that. I think it'll be a perfect fit for Connor in Edmonton. Not one bit is Edmonton a suffocating place to play. He'll be treated like an Edmontonian. People will give him his privacy while they're enamored by his ability.”

McDavid, who was also Erie's captain in his third OHL season after being granted “exceptional status” in 2012 to enter the league as a 15-year-old, finished third in OHL scoring with 120 points in 47 games on 44 goals and 76 assists with a league-high plus-minus rating of +60. That was enough to win the OHL MVP award as well. He also won World Junior gold with Canada on home soil this past season.

Ask the soft-spoken McDavid how he has dealt with all the pressure during his three years in the league and he doesn't miss a beat, even when asked about the added

OHL's MVP, he had first-place votes on 94 percent of the ballots, leading some pundits to ask who was named on the other six percent.

“We all know he's an amazing player, playing in an amazing development league,” said Otters GM Sherry Bassin. “The real issue is, I want the world to know that he's an amazing person. It's his character as a person, it's his inner drive to be the best he can. That combination with his ability makes him very worthy of this award. It's a special award for a special person.”

McDavid was also named the OHL's Scholastic Player of the Year in both 2014 and 2015. Sporting a 3.86 GPA in high school in Erie, one would wonder why a surefire NHL prospect would care so much about good grades, but again, McDavid's answer makes it easy to like the kid.

“It's no big deal,” McDavid said. “It helps being in Erie where you're kind of secluded and away from the Canadian market. Studying is just something that has to happen. It's just part of the course and education has always been something that's important to my family and it's also impor-