

PRO HOCKEY DRAFTOLOGY 2026

A collective presentation of:
SPORTSOLOGY, NHL DRAFT BUZZ,
FANTASYDRAFTHelp.COM, THE FDH
LOUNGE & AFTER FURTHER REVIEW
WITH JONES under the banner of THE
21ST CENTURY MEDIA ALLIANCE

June 20, 2026

RUSS COHEN/RICK MORRIS/
JASON JONES

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PRO HOCKEY DRAFTOLOGY 2026 Overview

Here we go! Some of the most creative new media sports entities in existence today have joined forces to bring you the ultimate guide to the 2026 NHL Entry Draft and offseason. In these pages, you'll read in-depth assessments of top young stars, gain an insight into the thought process of some of them and gain a look at draft aspects within the sport's developmental arena. Additionally, we look at the state of the NHL – including the upcoming free agent class.

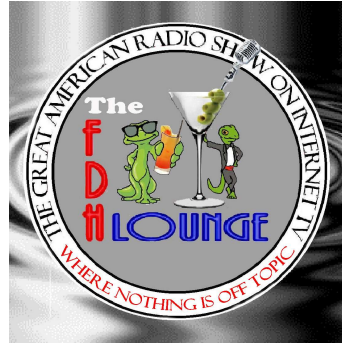
As an added bonus, you can get an early jump on next year's hockey pool with a look at how players fared according to the "Ultimate Quantitative Baseline" statistic in 2025-26. Enjoy your reading and remember the forces who came together for this publication: Sportsology, The FDH Lounge and FantasyDrafthelp.com.

FantasyDrafthelp.com/hockey

THE TOP 75 PLAYERS IN PRO BASKETBALL HISTORY

The NBA's 75th Anniversary has prompted a wave of Best-Of lists, but few with the substance to reinforce the selections. Authors Rick Morris, Ben Chew and Russ Cohen came together to create a list of the top 75 pro basketball players ever, with evidence to justify the placement of each -- as well as biographical details, comparisons of various legends, little-known-but-interesting tidbits, what-if scenarios and much more. Additionally, the book includes our year-by-year ranking of the top players in pro basketball and rosters for hypothetical "Olympic Dream Teams" had they existed prior to 1992. This is a book that is crafted for sports fans who are interested in learning more about the rich history of pro basketball.

Available on Amazon.com



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Top 32 Overall Player Rankings

By Russ Cohen/Sporstology

- 1 Gavin McKenna – LW – Penn State – NCAA
- 2 Ivar Stenberg – LW – Frolunda – SHL
- 3 Keaton Verhoeff – D – North Dakota – NCAA
- 4 Alberts Smits – D – Jukurit – Liiga
- 5 Tynan Lawrence – C – Muskegon – USHL
- 6 Chase Reid – D – Sault St. Marie – OHL
- 7 Caleb Malhotra – C – Brantford – OHL
- 8 JP Hurlbert – LW – Kamloops – WHL
- 9 Ethan Belchetz – LW – Windsor – OHL
- 10 Daxon Rudolph – D – Prince Albert – WHL
- 11 Ryan Roobroek – LW – Niagara – OHL
- 12 Carson Carels – D – Prince George – WHL
- 13 Malte Gustafsson – D – HV71 Jr. – Sweden – Jr.
- 14 Ryan Lin – D – Vancouver – WHL
- 15 Viggo Bjorck – C/RW – Djurgarden – SHL
- 16 Xavier Villeneuve – D – Blainville- Boisbriand – QMJHL
- 17 Adam Novotny – LW – Peterborough – OHL
- 18 Wyatt Cullen – LW – NTDP – USHL
- 19 Jack Hextall – C – Youngstown – USHL
- 20 Oscar Hemming – LW – Boston College – NCAA
- 21 Oliver Suvanto – C – Tappara – Liiga
- 22 Jasper Kuhta – C – Ottawa – OHL
- 23 Nikita Klepov – RW – Saginaw – OHL
- 24 Egor Shilov – C – Victoriaville – QMJHL
- 25 Alessandro di Iorio – C – Sarnia – OHL
- 26 Adam Valentini – C/W – Michigan – NCAA
- 27 Elton Hermansson – RW – Modo – Sweden-2
- 28 Ilya Morozov – C – Miami University – NCAA
- 29 Beckham Edwards – C – Sarnia – OHL
- 30 Alexander Command – C – Orebro Jr. – Sweden – Jr
- 31 Tomas Chrenko – C – Nitra – Slovakia
- 32 Blake Zielinski – C – Des Moines – USHL

FDH Mock Draft

1	Toronto	Gavin McKenna	LW	Penn St
2	San Jose	Chase Reid	D	Sault Ste Marie
3	Vancouver	Caleb Malhotra	C	Brantford
4	Chicago	Ivar Stenberg	LW	Frolunda
5	NY Rangers	Carson Carels	D	Prince George
6	Calgary	Keaton Verhoeff	D	North Dakota
7	Seattle	Alberts Smits	D	EHC Munchen
8	Winnipeg	Viggo Bjorck	C	Djurgarden
9	Florida	Wyatt Cullen	LW	USNTDP
10	Nashville	Daxon Rudolph	D	Prince Albert
11	St. Louis	Ethan Belchetz	LW	Windsor
12	New Jersey	Oscar Hemming	LW	Boston College
13	NY Islanders	Adam Novotny	LW	Peterborough
14	Columbus	Malte Gustafsson	D	HV71
15	St. Louis	Tynan Lawrence	C	Boston College
16	Washington	Alexander Command	C	Orebro
17	Los Angeles	Nikita Klepov	D	Saginaw
18	Washington	Ryan Lin	D	Vancouver
19	Utah	Elton Hermansson	RW	MoDo
20	Buffalo	Liam Ruck	RW	Medicine Hat
21	Philadelphia	Oliver Suvanto	C	Tappara
22	Pittsburgh	Ilya Morozov	C	Miami of Ohio
23	Boston	Mathis Preston	RW	Vancouver
24	Vancouver	JP Hurlbert	LW/C	Kamloops
25	Seattle	Maddox Dagenais	C	Quebec
26	NY Rangers	Marcus Nordmark	LW/RW	Djurgarden
27	San Jose	Jack Hextall	C	Youngstown
28	Montreal	Ryan Roobroek	C	Niagara
29	St. Louis	Casey Mutryn	RW	USNTDP
30	Calgary	Markus Ruck	C	Medicine Hat
31	Carolina	Gleb Pugachyov	RW	ChaikaNizhnyNovgorod
32	Ottawa	Yegor Shilov	C	Victoriaville

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The FDH Lounge Top 10 Songs Per Decade Playlist from the 1950s through the 2010s:
<http://thefdhlounge.blogspot.com/2021/02/the-fdh-lounge-top-10-songs-by-decade.html>

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Parker Trottier Continues to Improve This Season

By Russ Cohen/Sportsology

Parker Trottier has a famous grandfather who is a Hockey Hall of Famer and starred in the NHL for many years. The younger Trottier has worked very hard this past year and I've seen a difference in his play. Now, his last name isn't the focal point.

"It's not much pressure. [My grandfather is] here to support it, and he just wishes me the best of luck," he said at the All-American Game this season.

I've watched the left wing the past few seasons and I noticed right away that he's smart with the puck. Very safe in the neutral zone and first to pucks in the corner. All of these things are hard to teach and it's instinctual for him. Trottier worked a lot on his skating.

"You know, I'd have to credit GBM for that throughout the year. They just kind of bring an importance off the ice," Trottier opined. "I just take credit in the gym and so it's been helping me a lot throughout the past two years."

At 6-1, 183 pounds, I don't worry about his size and he has more physical strength than he had a year ago. His game is getting more mature and the fact that he will attend Notre Dame is a good step for him, coming from the NTDP. There, he will play with the Nelson brothers.

"I've created a great relationship with [head coach] Brock Sheahan. So when I found out that he was going to become the head coach there next year, that's when I knew that's the place where I want to be."

Trottier played third line left wing at the U18s with Sammy Nelson and Casey Mutryn. It's a well-balanced line.

Other positive aspects of his game include winning puck battles and being good in transition. He has a bit of a scoring touch, but even with more improvement, at the next level, Trottier looks like a solid third-line guy.

Trottier will get drafted, and that's half the battle. I think he gets taken somewhere between rounds 2-4 at the 2026 NHL Draft

He's personable. He is humble. He has managed not to let his last name get in the way of his own identity, and that can sometimes be hard to navigate, but he's doing a great job. There is more of a ceiling to his game and that will come in college.

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Links To Top Prospect Videos

Here are links to some of the best players of the '25 Draft in action.
Ethan Belchetz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QMnq4buNQ>
Carson Carels <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrkEZZVBzqM>
JP Hurlbert <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CVCWIPG6rA>
Tynan Lawrence <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jUwjwBhou4>
Caleb Malhotra <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBBIf61e0XQ>
Gavin McKenna <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xych-pjWnLA>
Ilya Morozov <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpg2rD4GVNE>
Chase Reid <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SvXG1KxsO8>
Daxon Rudolph <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbltJEOxPHU>
Alberts Smits <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcHWT1uga44>
Ivar Stenberg <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K23y9mLe90>
Keaton Verhoeff <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1kBJpmWrFw>

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Available at Amazon.com

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Black Draft Tracking Worksheet

- 1 Toronto
- 2 San Jose
- 3 Vancouver
- 4 Chicago
- 5 NY Rangers
- 6 Calgary
- 7 Seattle
- 8 Winnipeg
- 9 Florida
- 10 Nashville
- 11 St. Louis
- 12 New Jersey
- 13 NY Islanders
- 14 Columbus
- 15 St. Louis
- 16 Washington
- 17 Los Angeles
- 18 Washington
- 19 Utah
- 20 Buffalo
- 21 Philadelphia
- 22 Pittsburgh
- 23 Boston
- 24 Vancouver
- 25 Seattle
- 26 NY Rangers
- 27 San Jose
- 28 Montreal
- 29 St. Louis
- 30 Calgary
- 31 Carolina
- 32 Ottawa

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The 21st Century Media Alliance

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The Continued Improvement of Caleb Malhotra

By Russ Cohen/Sportsology

Caleb Malhotra is the son of former NHLer Manny, and that's all I intend to say about that because the younger Malhotra is a different player. A much more offensive player. Bloodline is a bonus, but that wouldn't be the main reason I would draft a player.

The first thing I noticed about him was his skating. It's excellent, and these days, if you want to be a pivot, you need that speed. It's hard to be effective in the NHL if you're not – especially playing in the middle.

His 23% defensive zone starts show that the coaching staff trusts him. He's averaging over 19 minutes of ice time and he plays in all situations. That's good. He does use his frame at times, and I think he will be more aggressive in the future. Malhotra does lose some puck battles, but not an alarming number. I like the fact that he's very active on every shift. His engagement is top-notch. He draws penalties; that's a great trait to have.

According to InStat, he's hitting the net at a 60% clip, and his face-off percentage is up. It's now 49%. I see his potential. I am still unsure if he's a true #1 center; few are, and that's why my early rankings had him at #14. Most centers never turn into #1s in the NHL. It's one of the hardest positions and the fail rate at center alone is very high. He's a #2 for sure, with #1 upside.

He may shoehorn his way into my Top 10, but not yet. I need to see more. He won't be the best center in this draft; Tynan Lawrence is that guy. That's no slight to Malhotra, it's just how the tiers fall for me.

Jack Hextall Is A Top Center In The 2026 NHL Draft

By Russ Cohen/Sportsology

Jack Hextall is a talented center who plays for the Youngstown Phantoms. He is 6'0", 185 pounds, and has gotten physically stronger since last year. I've seen the difference in him over the course of one summer and half of a new USHL season.

His skating is excellent and his shot is something to highlight. His wrist shot has a whipping action to it, but I noticed a tendency in his shooting. When most of his peers are going high, he goes low. To me, that's one part of his game that sets him apart from some others in this draft.

"Yeah, something like my grandpa and my dad have always taught me, and one of my coaches when I was younger, I was just shooting low, and they say it has a higher percentage," said Hextall. "Yeah, I think it's just like a trend to shoot high now, and it looks sick when it goes in. So I think that's why guys go high."

Hockey runs in his family, and that's helped to shape the player he is today.

"Yeah, my dad played college at USC, but they don't have a team anymore. And then my uncle got drafted in the 2nd round of, like, I forget what year, but he got drafted by New Jersey, and then he played in the AHL."

I think Hextall falls in the 20s at the very worst, and Top 15 is a possibility. He is one of the center gems in this draft and his emerging talent is what makes it a bit harder to nail down draft-wise. I've seen the jump in him since last season, and I'm betting teams have seen that as well.

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Top 10 For The Next 10

The FDH Top 10 for the Next 10 is a list attempting to identify the best players in the league -- not necessarily in a pure fantasy sense -- over the course of the entire next decade. It's not a pure 25-and-under draft, but it skews heavily in that direction because most big-time stars are past their primes in their late 30s. Players who are both very young and very skilled already have the biggest edges.

- 1 Macklin Celebrini
- 2 Cole Caufield
- 3 Matthew Boldy
- 4 Cale Makar
- 5 Quinn Hughes
- 6 Jack Hughes
- 7 Connor McDavid
- 8 Nathan MacKinnan
- 9 Leon Draisaitl
- 10 Evan Bouchard

Connor Bedard
Jason Robertson
Juraj Slafkovsky
Lane Hutson
Wyatt Johnston

Sportsology
Baseball,
football,
hoops,
hockey,
pro
wrestling,
music, it
matters
not:
nobody,
but
nobody,
brings it
stronger!

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Myah Master

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2025-26 FDH All-Star Rosters By Division

Atlantic Division	
LW	Tim Stutzle
LW	Lucas Raymond
LW	Brandon Hagel
LW	Juraf Slafkovsky
C	Nick Suzuki
C	Tage Thompson
C	Jake Guentzel
C	William Nylander
RW	Nikita Kucherov
RW	David Pastrnak
RW	Cole Caufield
RW	Alex DeBrincat
D	Zach Werenski
D	Lane Hutson
D	Rasmus Dahlin
D	Charlie McAvoy
G	Andrei Vasilevskiy
G	Jeremy Swayman
Metropolitan Division	
LW	Nikolai Ehlers
LW	Jesper Bratt
LW	Alex Ovechkin
LW	Alexis Lafreniere
C	Sebastian Aho
C	Jack Hughes
C	Sidney Crosby
C	Matthew Barzal
RW	Andrei Svechnikov
RW	Travis Konecny
RW	Kirill Marchenko
RW	Anthony Mantha
D	Erik Karlsson
D	Jakob Chychny
D	Matthew Schaefer
D	Adam Fox
G	Logan Thompson
G	Daniel Vladaf

Central Division	
LW	Karill Kaprizov
LW	Jason Robertson
LW	Kyle Connor
LW	Matt Boldy
C	Nathan MacKinnon
C	Martin Necas
C	Mark Scheifele
C	Wyatt Johnston
RW	Mikko Rantanen
RW	Dylan Guenther
RW	Luke Evangelista
RW	Jimmy Snuggerud
D	Cale Makar
D	Quinn Hughes
D	Miro Heiskanen
D	Mikhail Sergachev
G	Scott Wedgewood
G	Jake Oettinger
Pacific Division	
LW	Artemi Panarin
LW	Adrian Kempe
LW	Cutter Gauthier
LW	Pavel Dorofeyev
C	Connor McDavid
C	Leon Draisaitl
C	Macklin Celebrini
C	Jack Eichel
RW	Mitch Marner
RW	Mark Stone
RW	Beckett Sennecke
RW	Jordan Eberle
D	Evan Bouchard
D	Jackson LaCombe
D	Brock Faber
D	Mattias Ekhom
G	Philipp Grubauer
G	Anton Forsberg

Team Needs

Anaheim	G	RW	D	C
Boston	LW	D	RW	
Buffalo	LW	RW	C	
Calgary	LW	RW	C	D
Carolina	C	RW	D	
Chicago	RW	D	LW	C
Colorado	LW	RW		
Columbus	RW	LW	D	C
Dallas	RW	D		
Detroit	C	LW	RW	D
Edmonton	G	RW	LW	
Florida	G	RW	D	
Los Angeles	C	RW	D	
Minnesota	C	RW		
Montreal	C	LW		
Nashville	RW	LW	D	G
New Jersey	RW	LW		
NY Islanders	RW	LW	D	
NY Rangers	RW	LW	D	
Ottawa	RW	C		
Philadelphia	LW	C	D	
Pittsburgh	LW	D	C	G
San Jose	D	G	LW	RW
Seattle	LW	RW	C	D
St. Louis	RW	LW	C	D
Tampa Bay	LW	RW		
Toronto	G	LW	RW	
Utah	G	LW	C	
Vancouver	LW	RW	C	G
Vegas	G	LW		
Washington	RW	LW	C	

Top 10 NHL Coaches Right Now

- 1 Paul Maurice
- 2 Jon Cooper
- 3 Joel Quenneville
- 4 Rod Brind'Amour
- 5 John Tortorella
- 6 Martin St. Louis
- 7 Jared Bednar
- 8 Lindy Ruff
- 9 Glen Gulutzan
- 10 Rick Tocchet

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The FDH Lounge Top 32 Players In The NHL

NOTE: These players are ranked based not merely on how they have produced this year, but also the past year or two. These are not fantasy rankings, but are based on overall play. Numbers in parentheses indicate where the players ranked on our 2021 rankings, with the ones who fell out of those rankings listed at the bottom. We normally separate players into separate tiers, but this year, they are all on the same tier.

TOP TIER

- 1 Connor McDavid (1)
- 2 Nikita Kucherov (2)
- 3 Nathan MacKinnon (4)
- 4 Leon Draisaitl (3)
- 5 Cale Makar (5)
- 6 Nick Suzuki (NA)
- 7 Macklin Celebrini (NA)
- 8 David Pastrnak (6)
- 9 Martin Necas (NA)

SECOND TIER

- 10 Kirill Kaprizov (12)
- 11 Jack Eichel (10)
- 12 Quinn Hughes (15)
- 13 Cole Caufield (NA)
- 14 Mark Scheifele (NA)
- 15 Evan Bouchard (23)
- 16 Jason Robertson (19)
- 17 Mitch Marner (18)
- 18 Mikko Rantanen (7)
- 19 Kyle Connor (24)
- 20 Matthew Tkachuk (13)
- 21 Jack Hughes (15)
- 22 Auston Matthews (8)
- 23 Lane Hutson (NA)
- 24 Matthew Boldy (NA)
- 25 Jake Guentzel (26)

THIRD TIER

- 26 Zach Werenski (20)
- 27 Artemi Panerin (11)
- 28 Tage Thompson (28)
- 29 Brandon Hegel (21)
- 30 Connor Bedard (NA)
- 31 Aleksander Barkov (27)
- 32 Andrei Vasilevskiy (29)

- Sam Reinhart (14)
William Nylander (17)
Adam Fox (19)
Rasmus Dahlin (22)
Brayden Point (25)
Brad Marchant (30)
Victor Hedman (31)
Alex Ovechkin (32)

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2026-27 NHL Predictions

EASTERN CONFERENCE

ATLANTIC DIVISION

- X-Montreal 112
Y-Florida 104
Y-Tampa Bay 102
y-Buffalo 96
y-Ottawa 94
Boston 86
Detroit 78
Toronto 71

METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

- X-Carolina 114
Y-New Jersey 99
Y-NY Islanders 97
Washington 89
Philadelphia 88
Columbus 87
Pittsburgh 85
NY Rangers 74

WESTERN CONFERENCE

CENTRAL DIVISION

- X-Minnesota 109
Y-Dallas 107
Y-Colorado 105
y-Utah 99
y-Winnipeg 98
Nashville 82
Chicago 80
St. Louis 78
PACIFIC DIVISION
X-Vegas 108
Y-Edmonton 101
Y-Anaheim 100
San Jose 97
Los Angeles 85
Seattle 84
Calgary 72
Vancouver 70

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CONFERENCE QUARTERFINALS

- Montreal over Buffalo in 5
Florida over Tampa Bay in 7
Carolina over Ottawa in 5
New Jersey over NY Islanders in 6
Minnesota over Winnipeg in 6
Dallas over Colorado in 7
Vegas over Utah in 7
Anaheim over Edmonton in 7

CONFERENCE SEMIFINALS

- Montreal over Florida in 7
New Jersey over Carolina in 6
Dallas over Minnesota in 7
Vegas over Anaheim in 5

CONFERENCE FINALS

- Montreal over New Jersey in 6
Dallas over Vegas in 6

STANLEY CUP FINAL

- Montreal over Dallas in 6

CONN SMYTHE TROPHY WINNER

- Lane Hutson

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Ryker Lee Is The Best Will Zellers Scout

By Russ Cohen/Sportsology

I've liked Will Zeller's skill set for a while now. I originally had him in my Top 32 in his draft year, but he fell off my board. Not because he did anything wrong, but the field got stronger. It happens.

He's 5'10", so that makes the road to the NHL a little rockier, but it can be done. Others have done it. His choice of going to North Dakota has been a strong one. Back in 2023-24, when he was at Shattuck, he was the leading scorer with 111 points. The second leading scorer was Ryker Lee.

Fast forward to a tournament that a longtime friend of mine, Adam Wodon was at, and I asked him to keep an eye on Zellers, and he liked what he saw. That's when I started to watch him more, and eventually, I had an interview with Ryker Lee. When I asked him about some players he's played with, he mentioned a few, and Zellers was there. And it was a good report, and that's when I knew that I needed to track him more closely.

After going undrafted in 2023 and getting selected by the Colorado Avalanche in the third round in 2024, he ramped up his game in the USHL. In 2024-25, Zellers had 44 goals in 52 games with the Green Bay Gamblers. That's an incredible number.

I noticed when the Bruins got his rights in a trade last March. I knew that with him and James Hagens, the future was getting a little brighter in Beantown.

I re-watched Zellers this season. I wanted to see if he could make the World Junior roster with a stacked USA team, and he did. Zellers has been getting 26% defensive zone starts in North Dakota according to InStat. He doesn't take dumb penalties, and he has averaged over 16 minutes a game. He's a creative player and a stone cold goal scorer. He isn't afraid to shoot. He's averaging 5.4 shots per game and he has 10 goals in 18 games. Forehand, backhand, he will improvise. For Team USA he was an important source of secondary scoring and a boost to the power play.

The moral of the story is, I listen to teammates and then look for myself based on what they tell me. Lee is a heck of a player in his own right, and I appreciate his hockey brain, and that combination is what's fueling him.

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The Championship Gap Among Players In Their Prime Is Ridiculous Revisited!

By Rick Morris/The FDH Lounge

NOTE: This column ran in this space last year, but it's even more relevant a year later with no change to this dynamic.

Marcel Dionne is commonly regarded as the greatest player in hockey history never to have listed the Stanley Cup. That's in part because the list of his true peers is short. In the NHL, unlike other sports, all-time greatness almost always goes hand-in-hand with championships. There aren't a host of Elgin Baylor/Barry Bonds/Dan Marino players floating around. On the ice, if you're among the best players of all time, there's an overwhelming chance that your name is etched on the Stanley Cup.

But the generation of players now in their prime threatens to upend the foundational plank of hockey history. With their second straight near-miss on the game's biggest stage, Connor McDavid (probably now Top 10 all-time) and Leon Draisaitl (probably now Top 25 all-time) are the most obvious examples. However, they're not the only ones. In taking a conservative sweep of who is likely to be remembered as at least a Top 50 player of all time, Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and Kirill Kaprizov are all on pace for that. That's five players who could end up as good or better than Dionne by the time their careers are done – as well as a few others that we didn't include yet such as Adam Fox – and may match his championship futility in the end.

From an objective hockey historian standpoint, McDavid missing out would be tragic and with few precedents in major North American sports in terms of his overall greatness. And given that his teammate Draisaitl probably has the best chance of running down the newly crowned King of All Goals Alex Ovechkin – albeit with less than 50% of Ovechkin's tallies to date – it would be a similar shame if he didn't get his moment atop the hockey world as well.

The lessons of hockey history tell us that most, if not all, of these five will get their moments together. With McDavid and Draisaitl both on the Oilers and Matthews and Marner both on the Leafs (at this point in time, anyway), four of these five names would get wiped off the list with only two Stanley Cups being awarded if these players remain with their teams long enough. But if this doesn't happen, then we're living in an unprecedented time of a gap between individual achievement and championship glory.

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Whither The Yzerplan? Revisited!

By Rick Morris/The FDH Lounge

NOTE: This column ran in last year's edition of this draft guide. I have updated thoughts at the end.

Admittedly, the Detroit Red Wings are a pet topic of mine. They are my favorite hockey team, so I'm always immersed in whatever their present status is. Additionally, Steve Yzerman is my all-time favorite athlete in any sport, so I'm even extra-invested in the "Yzerplan." So how's it going? Well, any fair read is that the results have been mixed, at best, so far. Now, Stevie Y inherited an absolutely rotten situation in 2019, a failed rebuild from Ken Holland. It was exacerbated by Holland having previously placed such inane and insane emphasis on a then-record 25-year playoff streak that saw the aging core get bounced in the first round repeatedly and pointlessly until it ended in 2016.

Having built up much of what would go on to become a dynasty in Tampa Bay, it seemed that most observers – including yours truly – simply assumed that Yzerman would go on to match his on-ice success in Hockeytown in his front office perch. He may yet, but it seems fair to say that most of us who expected that level of success certainly thought they'd be a bit closer six full years in. It doesn't help that the NHL seems to run its draft lotteries in a more legitimate fashion than the NBA, where the Dallas Mavericks can gift the league's most prized franchise, the LA Lakers, with their next great superstar in Luka Doncic and "miraculously" cash in their 1.8% chance for the top lottery pick with, well, the top lottery pick. Surely the NHL would have an interest in seeing one of its marquee franchises get back on its feet, but the Wings have actually had poor draft luck relative to their poor records over the past six seasons. Nonetheless, Lucas Raymond, Simon Edvinsson and Mo Seider have franchise-player upside, but that's just a starting point.

Regrettably, Yzerman continued Holland's pattern of overpaying merely functional players, such as Andrew Copp and JT Compher. And blue line depth has remained every bit as elusive as it was in Holland's largely-asleep final few years. Some help is on the way at Grand Rapids, but the team seems to have goalie prospect Sebastian Cossa on a track to be promoted by about 2030, so who's to say if he's the answer to what has been a revolving door in net?

It's worth remembering that if then-Philadelphia coach John Tortorella hadn't kicked the integrity of the game squarely in the nuts in the 82nd game of the 2023-24 season, Detroit would have ended their playoff drought instead of having that spot gifted to Washington. Albeit, the Wings surely would have been sitting ducks in the first round. Nevertheless, the team regressed in the initial part of this past season before Yzerman appeared to have made the third time the charm with his latest coaching choice Todd McLellan. The feisty new boss lit a fire under his team and it will be interesting to see if that carries over into the 2025-26 season.

It seems unlikely that it won't carry over. However, if it doesn't, and this team regresses again, then the talk that has seemed foolish and premature to this point – that Steve Yzerman could be on the hot seat in Detroit – may yet come to pass. But we're not there yet and continued improvement would bring renewed hope that Yzerman could replicate his Tampa magic in time. Given the immense pain that would be felt from seeing the failure of one of the franchise's greatest icons, every true fan of the Winged Wheel is rooting as hard as possible for this outcome. The Elias Pettersson rumors would go a long way towards getting the job done!

UPDATED THOUGHTS: Another March/April collapse, another heartbreakingly close playoff miss and yet Yzerman's seat has not moved from hot all the way to molten. Now captain Dylan Larkin wants out. The Wings fanbase is divided about who's at fault. Why choose just one? Choose both. True, Stevie Y hasn't benefited from even the average bit of lottery luck, but his aforementioned overpaying of mediocre vets has left the team bereft of the necessary firepower at the most important point of every season. His communication level with Larkin has been reportedly poor, which is inexcusable. Larkin calling out the perennial lack of support at the trade deadline is not a betrayal of the team, but a validation of the leadership that he owes the room, which somehow only contains one likely superstar (Seider) and one potential one (Raymond). Larkin, of course, is not blameless. He was injured during this season's collapse, but was a full participant in the previous ones. That has to stick to him just a bit. Additionally, coming off of the admittedly indescribable high of the Miracle in Milan, he exhibited no hurry whatsoever in getting back to the team in the midst of the playoff run. And given his initial short list of trade request locations with multiple Team USA superstars (Vegas, Minnesota, Florida), he was almost certainly a part of improper conversations like the ones between Dwyane Wade and LeBron James (allegedly) at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, so there's that. Frankly, Larkin is right, though, that his timeline (30 years old) no longer lines up with the team's contention timeline, much like the dynamic with Myles Garrett and the Cleveland Browns. If only Yzerman's track record in the Detroit front office yielded a viable reason for believing that the team can obtain the young talent for him that they so badly need – instead of potentially being two centers away from where they need to be, instead of just one.

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2026 NHL Free Agency Preview

By Rick Morris/The FDH Lounge

PREFACE NOTE: Whilst not a matter of free agency, the big player movement story of the summer involves the trade demand of Dylan Larkin and where he will end up. While he is a star player as opposed to a superstar, the deal that happens will still easily be one of the biggest of the year. And for more thoughts about Larkin and the Red Wings, check our big-picture view of the franchise on Page 10.

It's rare that a player the quality of Cale Makar – arguably the best defenseman in the world, arguably a Top 5 player in the world and certainly a Top 10 player in the world – hits free agency, but here we are. Most of the players on the next tier have the commonality that they have seen their best days in the league already, but the residue of their once-exceptional abilities could still make them useful. These players include Alex Ovechkin, Evgeni Malkin, Sergei Bobrovsky, Patrik Laine, John Carlson, Shea Weber and Vladimir Tarasenko.

Others of note include Jacob Trouba, Kevin Hayes, Anders Lee, Jaden Schwartz, Evander Kane, Alex Tuch, Rasmus Anderson, Michael Bunting, Nick Foligno, Petr Mrazek, Nick Leddy and John Klingberg.

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FantasyDrafthelp.com Ultimate Hockey Stat For 2026-27

This is the FantasyDrafthelp.com statistic, the Ultimate Quantitative Baseline, based on the statistical principle of standard deviation from the mean. For defensemen and forwards, the relevant statistics are points, goals, assists, penalty minutes and plus-minus. For goalies, the relevant statistics are wins, shutouts, goals against average and save percentage (with the categories being weighted extra since there is one less). In each category, a spectrum is calculated from the best performance to the worst (on a per-game basis for forwards and defensemen). The numbers in each category are added together to create our statistic. An additional equalizer is injected to apply more points to each player at the positions of scarcer depth. What this stat truly does is to quantify beyond doubt how the stronger and weaker performances in each category add up to the absolute fantasy value for each player. As such, it establishes a baseline for performance that is more comprehensive than anything ever developed. A number over 350 is considered elite and 750 constitutes a perfect score. We have listed below the top rankings at each position for last season as well as the Top 35 overall.

Goalies	UQB	Defensemen	UQB	Forwards	UQB	Top 35 Overall	UQB
1T Andrei Vasilevskiy	375	1T Evan Bouchard	375	1T Connor McDavid	375	1T Connor McDavid	375
1T Karel Vejmelka	375	1T Josh Manson	375	1T Nathan MacKinnon	375	1T Nathan MacKinnon	375
1T Jake Oettinger	375	3 Darren Raddysh	350	1T Nick Suzuki	375	1T Nick Suzuki	375
1T Logan Thompson	375	4 Rasmus Dahlin	349	1T Martin Nečas	375	1T Martin Nečas	375
1T Jeremy Swayman	375	5 Darnell Nurse	340	1T Leon Draisaitl	375	1T Leon Draisaitl	375
1T Scott Wedgewood	375	6 Cale Makar	324	1T Macklin Celebrini	375	1T Macklin Celebrini	375
1T John Gibson	375	7 Lane Hutson	289	1T Jason Robertson	375	1T Jason Robertson	375
1T Ilya Sorokin	375	8 Quinn Hughes	283	1T Brandon Hagel	375	1T Brandon Hagel	375
1T Filip Gustavsson	375	9 Zach Werenski	261	1T A.J. Greer	375	1T A.J. Greer	375
1T Igor Shesterkin	375	10 Jakob Chychrun	219	1T Nikita Kucherov	375	1T Nikita Kucherov	375
1T Joel Hofer	375	11 Charlie McAvoy	191	1T David Pastrňák	375	1T David Pastrňák	375
1T Mackenzie Blackwood	375	12 Adam Fox	157	1T Cole Caufield	375	1T Cole Caufield	375
1T Jesper Wallstedt	375	13T Rasmus Andersson	141	1T Mikko Rantanen	375	1T Mikko Rantanen	375
1T Anton Forsberg	375	13T Mattias Samuelsson	141	1T Tom Wilson	375	1T Tom Wilson	375
15 Alex Lyon	329	15 Sam Malinski	137	15 Kirill Kaprizov	348	1T Evan Bouchard	375
				16 Mark Scheifele	347	1T Josh Manson	375
				17 Jack Eichel	337	1T Andrei Vasilevskiy	375
				18 Matt Boldy	329	1T Karel Vejmelka	375
				19 Mark Stone	327	1T Jake Oettinger	375
				20 Jake Guentzel	302	1T Logan Thompson	375
				21 Jack Hughes	293	1T Jeremy Swayman	375
				22 Evgeni Malkin	281	1T Scott Wedgewood	375
				23 Sam Bennett	270	1T John Gibson	375
				24 Brady Tkachuk	254	1T Ilya Sorokin	375
				25 Wyatt Johnston	246	1T Filip Gustavsson	375
						1T Igor Shesterkin	375
						1T Joel Hofer	375
						1T Mackenzie Blackwood	375
						1T Jesper Wallstedt	375
						1T Anton Forsberg	375
						31 Kirill Kaprizov	348
						32 Darren Raddysh	350
						33 Rasmus Dahlin	349
						34 Mark Scheifele	347
						35 Darnell Nurse	340

2025-26 Team UQB Rankings

FantasyDrafthelp.com and The FDH Lounge are expanding the UQB concept to team sports. Our rankings are a mashup of the following measures: FDH power rankings, power play percentage, penalty kill percentage, Fenwick For, Fenwick Against, shooting percentage, save percentage, ESG percentage and ESGA percentage.

1 Tampa Bay	17 Detroit
2 Colorado	18 Columbus
3 Dallas	19 Nashville
4T Carolina	20 Philadelphia
4T Buffalo	21 Toronto
6 Minnesota	22 New Jersey
7 Pittsburgh	23T Anaheim
8 Utah	23T Los Angeles
9 Montreal	25 Winnipeg
10 Ottawa	26 Florida
11 Vegas	27T Seattle
12 Boston	27T San Jose
13 Washington	29 St. Louis
14 Edmonton	30 Chicago
15 NY Rangers	31 Calgary
16 NY Islanders	32 Vancouver

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