# ROOKIE WATCH: YOUNG STARS ON THE RADAR ENTERING 2023-24

The 2023-24 NHL season is likely to feature the highly anticipated debut of No. 1 pick **Connor Bedard**, part of a rookie class that could include a mix of 2023 draftees and players who already have had a taste of NHL action.

## BUILD-UP FOR BEDARD'S DEBUT
* **Connor Bedard** could make his much-anticipated NHL debut with the Blackhawks against **Sidney Crosby** and the Penguins on Oct. 10 – a contest that could feature three No. 1 picks in Bedard (2023), Crosby (2005, PIT) and first-year Chicago forward **Taylor Hall** (2010, EDM). Bedard would be the third straight No. 1 pick to face another No. 1 pick in his NHL debut, following Montreal's **Juraj Slafkovsky** (2022) and Buffalo's **Owen Power** (2021), who each faced the Toronto tandem of **John Tavares** (2009, NYI) and **Auston Matthews** (2016, TOR) in their debut. Overall, Bedard would be the 19th No. 1 pick to face another top selection in their first taste of the NHL.

## "BY THE NUMBERS" #NHLSTATS FOR 18-YEAR-OLDS IN THE NHL

* Bedard would become the 10th active No. 1 pick to have another top selection *play as his teammate* during his League debut. This would be the sixth time Hall has skated alongside a fellow No. 1 pick *during that player's League debut* (also: **Jack Hughes** in 2019-20 w/ NJD, **Nico Hischier** in 2017-18 w/ NJD, **Connor McDavid** in 2015-16 w/ EDM, **Nail Yakupov** in 2012-13 w/ EDM & **Ryan Nugent-Hopkins** in 2011-12 w/ EDM).

* Bedard, who had twice as many five-point outings (10) than games in which he was held without a point (5) during the 2022-23 WHL season, produced at a rate not seen in that league in 20-plus seasons (71-72—143 in 57 GP). His 71 goals were the most by a WHL player in 24 years (**Pavel Brendl**: 73 in 1998-99) and his 143 points were the highest single season total since 1995-96 (**Mark Deyell**: 159 in 69 GP, **Frank Banham**: 152 in 72 GP & **Hnat Domenichelli**: 148 in 62 GP).

* Bedard had the most by a first-overall pick in the season leading into his draft since **Patrick Kane** had 145 points in 2006-07 with the London Knights of the OHL before being picked by Chicago in the 2007 NHL Draft.

* Bedard claimed an NHL Award before skating in his first career game and received the 2022-23 E.J. McGuire Award of Excellence, presented annually "to the NHL Draft prospect who best exemplifies commitment to excellence through strength of character, competitiveness, and athleticism."

* If he gets named to Chicago's opening-night roster, Bedard (18 years, 85 days on Oct. 10) would be the fifth-youngest player in franchise history at the time of his NHL debut behind **Gord Buttrey** (17 years, 228 days on Oct. 31, 1943), **Grant Mulvey** (18 years, 22 days on Oct. 9, 1974), **Eddie Olczyk** (18 years, 56 days on Oct. 11, 1984) and **Vic Heyliger** (18 years, 60 days on Nov. 25, 1937).

* Should Bedard record a point in his first NHL game, he would be the second-youngest player in franchise history to notch a point *in his NHL debut*, behind Olczyk in the game noted above (he scored at 11:57 of the third period).

* The #NHLStats team published more information on Bedard before he was selected first overall in the 2023 NHL Draft, including a special "10 Things to Know" document and a draft preview.

* In the last 25 years, the No. 1 pick has played in his team's ensuing season-opening game 21 times (with Bedard able to become the 22nd in that span).

* The first selection in the NHL Draft has gone on to lead his team in scoring in the season following his draft 11 times in NHL history, with **Auston Matthews** (2016-17 w/ TOR) the last to do so.

* Eleven No. 1 picks have won the Calder Memorial Trophy: **Auston Matthews** (2016-17), **Aaron Ekblad** (2014-15), **Nathan MacKinnon** (2013-14), **Patrick Kane** (2007-08), **Alex Ovechkin** (2005-06), **Bryan Berard** (1996-97), **Mario Lemieux** (1984-85), **Dale Hawerchuk** (1981-82), **Bobby Smith** (1978-79), **Denis Potvin** (1973-74), and **Gilbert Perreault** (1970-71). Berard is the only player on that list who did not win in the season after his draft (Ovechkin did so in 2005-06, the next season played after he was selected with the No. 1 pick in 2004).

**CARLSSON, FANTILLI AND BENSON ALSO EYE NHL ROSTER SPOT**
Forwards **Leo Carlsson**, **Adam Fantilli** and **Zach Benson**, selected second, third and 13th overall in the 2023 NHL Draft, respectively, will also look to make the jump to the NHL in 2023-24.

* Carlsson was named Swedish Junior Hockey Player of the Year in 2022-23 after topping Sweden's top professional league (SHL) in assists (15) and points (25) as well as finishing second in goals (10) in his age category.

* Fantilli (30-35—65 in 36 GP) led all U.S. College Hockey skaters in goals (tied), points and points per game (1.81) as a freshman and became the third freshman in NCAA history to win the Hobey Baker Award (also **Jack Eichel**: 2015 & **Paul Kariya**: 1993).

* Benson had 98 regular-season points (36-62—98 in 60 GP) and 17 playoff points (7-10—17 in 15 GP) to help the Winnipeg Ice reach the WHL Championship Series in 2022-23.

* The *first three selections* in the NHL Draft have each played in their team's ensuing season-opening game a total of 17 times to date, most recently in 2018 when **Rasmus Dahlin** (No. 1 w/ BUF), **Andrei Svechnikov** (No. 2 w/ CAR) and **Jesperi Kotkaniemi** (No. 3 w/ MTL) all did so. Only one of those 17 instances saw all three players record a point in the season-opener: the 2009 draft class of **John Tavares** (1-1—2; No. 1 w/ NYI), **Victor Hedman** (0-1—1; No. 2 w/ TBL) and **Matt Duchene** (0-1—1; No. 3 w/ COL) combined for the feat to start the 2009-10 campaign.

* The most draftees to crack a season-opening lineup in the campaign after their selection is 25, by the 1979 draft class to begin the 1979-80 season. The last time at least eight players went from NHL Draft to a season-opening lineup was 2008-09 when eight members of the 2008 draft class made their club's opening-night roster.

* A rookie goaltender has started at least one season-opening game in each of the past three seasons. Should that extend to 2023-24, it would mark the longest stretch since 1979-80 to 1992-93 (14).


**TAKING THE NEXT STEP: OTHER ROOKIES LOOKING FOR FULL-TIME NHL SPOTS**
A snapshot of other recent draftees and players with NHL experience also looking to make an impact in 2023-24:

*Forwards*
**F Logan Cooley (ARI; No. 3 in 2022)**
* Cooley (22-38—60 in 39 GP) led the NCAA in assists (38) and was named a Hobey Baker Award finalist with the University of Minnesota in 2022-23. He helped guide the Golden Gophers to a 29-10-1 record – the most wins by the team in over 15 years – and an appearance in the Frozen Four for the second consecutive season. Cooley led the United States to a bronze medal during the 2023 World Juniors, totaling 7-7—14 in 7 games, which trailed only **Connor Bedard** for the most points in the tournament.

**F Pavel Dorofeyev (VGK)**
* Dorofeyev recorded 7-2—9 in 18 games for the Golden Knights in 2022-23. He scored the game-winning goal in back-to-back contests for Vegas on March 19-21, becoming the first rookie in franchise history to achieve the feat.

**F Luke Evangelista (NSH)**
* Evangelista (7-8—15 in 24 GP) ranked second (tied) in rookie scoring after making his NHL debut on Feb. 28. His 15 points were the most by a player *who retained rookie status for the next season* since **J-P Dumont** had 9-6—15 in 1998-99 (25 GP), his debut campaign, before collecting 10-8—18 in 1999-00 (47 GP), also as a rookie.

**F Tyson Foerster (PHI)**
* Twenty-one-year-old Tyson Foerster (20-28—48 in 66 GP) was the youngest player to lead his team in scoring during the 2022-23 AHL season. Foerster recorded 3-4—7 in 8 GP with the Flyers last season, including registering a point in each of his final five games with the club.

**F Ridly Greig (OTT)**

\* Greig recorded his first career point in his NHL debut on Jan. 25, assisting on Claude Giroux's game-winning goal against the Islanders. Ridly grew up around the game after his father, Mark Greig, was drafted 15th overall by the Hartford Whalers in 1990 and went on to play nine seasons in the League.

**F Matthew Knies (TOR)**
\* Knies was named NCAA Big Ten Player of the Year and a finalist for the Hobey Baker Award in 2022-23. Upon signing with the Maple Leafs on April 9, Knies played three regular-season contests (0-1—1) and seven playoff games (1-3—4), a run highlighted by a primary assist on Toronto's first series-clinching goal in 19 years.

**F Jakub Lauko (BOS)**
\* Lauko (4-3—7) was one of four rookies to suit up for the Bruins during the team's record-setting season and led all Boston rookies in goals, assists and points in 2022-23. He scored his first game-winning goal on March 2 to help the Bruins extend their winning streak to nine games, a run which reached a season-high 10 contests.

**F Jakob Pelletier (CGY)**
\* Pelletier, who split time between the NHL and AHL in 2022-23, recorded 3-4—7 in 24 games with the Flames – his seven points were the second most among Calgary rookies. He averaged 1.06 points-per-game with Calgary's AHL affiliate (16-21—37 in 35 GP), which ranked second on the team.

**F Elmer Soderblom (DET)**
\* Standing at 6'8", Soderblom was one of the tallest players in the League in 2022-23. Soderblom scored the game-winning goal in his first career NHL game and became just the fifth player in Red Wings history to achieve the feat (regular season and playoffs).

**F Logan Stankoven (DAL; No. 47 in 2021)**
\* After winning a gold medal with Canada during the 2023 World Juniors, Stankoven went on to be named the top point scorer in the WHL playoffs (10-20—30 in 14 GP) and CHL Memorial Cup (2-7—9 in 4 GP) as captain of the Kamloops Blazers. Stankoven (34-63—97 in 48 GP) averaged over two points-per-game in 2022-23, trailing only **Connor Bedard** (2.51) for the highest total in the WHL's regular season (min. 10 GP).

**F Shane Wright (SEA)**
\* Wright captained Team Canada to a gold medal in the 2023 World Junior Championship before heading to Coachella Valley of the AHL where he recorded 4-2—6 in eight regular-season games and added 2-7—9 in 24 playoff contests en route to the Calder Cup Final in the Firebirds inaugural season.

*Defense*
**D Brandt Clarke (LAK)**
\* Clarke had 0-2—2 in nine games with the Kings last season. The 2022-23 OHL campaign saw Clarke (23-38—61 in 31 GP) lead all players in points-per-game in both the regular season and playoffs. Clarke added two assists in the 2023 World Junior final including a helper on the overtime winner that secured a gold medal for Canada.

**D Luke Hughes (NJD)**
\* Hughes (10-38—48) tied for the most points by a defenseman in the NCAA in 2022-23 before making his debut for New Jersey on April 11. Hughes recorded 1-1—2 in his first two career regular-season games and later became the second teenager in Devils franchise history to have a multi-point game in his postseason debut.

**D Simon Nemec (NJD; No. 2 in 2022)**
\* Nemec (12-22—34 in 65 GP) spent the 2022-23 season with the Utica Comets of the AHL and concluded the campaign fifth in scoring among teenagers. The second-overall pick to New Jersey in the 2022 NHL Draft led Utica rookies in goals, assists and points and finished the season second in scoring among Comets defensemen.

*Goaltenders*
**G Samuel Ersson (PHI)**

* Ersson won each of the first six decisions of his NHL career, joining Bob Froese (8 W in 1982-83) as the only netminder to do so in Flyers history. Ersson also backstopped the AHL's Lehigh Valley Phantoms to 24 wins in 2022-23, the most by a goaltender in a season for the team since Alex Lyon in 2016-17 (27).

## G Pyotr Kochetkov (CAR)
* Kochetkov (12-7-5 in 24 GP) led all rookies with four shutouts in 2022-23 and matched a Hurricanes/Whalers record for the most in a single season by a rookie netminder, tying **Peter Sidorkiewicz** (4 in 1988-89).

## G Devon Levi (BUF)
* Before winning five of his first seven career NHL games, Levi added to his trophy case in 2022-23, being named the NCAA (Hockey East) Goaltender of the Year as well as Player of the Year while also earning the Mike Richter Award for top goaltender in the NCAA and a gold medal for Canada at the 2023 World Junior Championships.

## G Mads Sogaard (OTT)
* Sogaard appeared in 19 games for Ottawa last season, compiling a record of 8-6-3 with a .889 save percentage and 3.32 goals-against average. Sogaard's eight victories were the most by a Senators rookie goaltender since Brian Elliott in 2008-09 (16). He was crowned the NHL's Rookie of the Month in February after posting a 4-0-1 record along with a a .922 save percentage and 2.33 goals-against average.

## G Jaxson Stauber (CHI)
* In six games with Chicago in 2022-23, Stauber recorded a 5-1-0 record with a .911 save percentage and 2.81 goals-against average. Stauber won each of his first three NHL appearances, becoming the fourth goaltender in Blackhawks history to achieve the feat and first since Gary Smith in 1971-72 (3).

## G Joseph Woll (TOR)
* Woll (6-1-0 in 7 GP) ended 2022-23 on a six-game winning streak and became the second Maple Leafs rookie in the last 40 years to record a win streak of that length, joining **Jonas Gustavsson** in 2009-10 (7 GP).

*2022-23 NHL Regular-Season Points Leaders, Skaters Retaining Rookie Status in 2023-24*

| Name | Team | GP | Stats | Drafted |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Luke Evangelista | NSH | 24 | 7-8—15 | 42nd in 2020 |
| Pavel Dorofeyev | VGK | 18 | 7-2—9 | 79th in 2019 |
| Ridly Greig | OTT | 20 | 2-7—9 | 28th in 2020 |
| Elmer Soderblom | DET | 21 | 5-3—8 | 159th in 2019 |
| Jakub Lauko | BOS | 23 | 4-3—7 | 77th in 2018 |
| Tyson Foerster | PHI | 8 | 3-4—7 | 23rd in 2020 |
| Jakob Pelletier | CGY | 24 | 3-4—7 | 26th in 2019 |

*2022-23 NHL Regular-Season Wins Leaders, Goaltenders Retaining Rookie Status in 2023-24*

| Name | Team | GP | W-L-O | SV% | GAA | Shutouts | Drafted |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pyotr Kochetkov | CAR | 24 | 12-7-5 | .909 | 2.44 | 4 | 36th in 2019 |
| Mads Sogaard | OTT | 19 | 8-6-3 | .889 | 3.32 | 0 | 37th in 2019 |
| Joseph Woll | TOR | 7 | 6-1-0 | .932 | 2.16 | 0 | 62nd in 2016 |
| Samuel Ersson | PHI | 12 | 6-3-0 | .899 | 3.07 | 1 | 143rd in 2018 |
| Jaxson Stauber | CHI | 6 | 5-1-0 | .911 | 2.81 | 0 | Undrafted |
| Devon Levi | BUF | 7 | 5-2-0 | .905 | 2.94 | 0 | 212th in 2020 |

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