

THE NEWS OF HOCKEY

The News of Hockey has always been the readers choice for insight on the NFHL and this year we are bringing back the NFHL Top 50 Players. Without further ado, here is your list.

50 Jari Kurri



This may be the last year Kurri finds himself on the list as he is now on the wrong side of 30 as he just turned 34-years old. Kurri finished the 1993 season with 38 goals, but fell under a point per game for the first time since 1989. The Finnish born winger still has one of the best releases in the game and could easily put up another 35-goals in the upcoming season as he makes a charge at 500 career goals.

49 James Patrick



The 1993 free agent darling signed a massive four-year \$42 Million dollar deal to come to Colorado where he took home his second SMJ Cup. While he wasn't as offensive as years past, he provides a steady dependable top four defenseman. Patrick failed to get 50-points for the first time since 1987, but that has more to do with his team not needing his offence and depending on him to shut down players.

48 Brendan Shanahan



Brendan Shanahan has continually improved each season and is not even in his prime yet. Shanahan averaged more than a point per game for the first time in his career and crossed over 30-goals for the second time in his career while registering a +42 rating. With his vast improvement, We feel Shanahan is getting close to being a consistent player.

47 John LeClair



John LeClair is finally starting to get some help in Philadelphia and we are expecting him to breakout into the 90-point, 40-goal area. The Flyers superstar is on a streak of six consecutive 30-goal seasons and he just turned 25-years old. 500 career goals doesn't seem far fetched, we are more interested to see if he can cross 600 and maybe 700 before his career is over.

46 Brian Leetch



Brian Leetch has kind of been on an island by himself for the last decade, but like LeClair he has help coming. The 1993 season saw Leetch cross the 50-point mark for the first time in his career, however he finished with a -22 plus/minus which was his worst since his sophomore year of 1988. Minnesota will be counting on Leetch to be the leader of this team as they look to jump to the elite of the Campbell Conference.

45 Cam Neely



Cam Neely missed a pair of games during the season which hurt him from becoming a 40-goal scorer for the second time in his career as he finished with 39 on the season. The power forward had some issue with discipline as he crossed the 200 PIM mark last season after two years of sub 100. The now 29-year old is said to be dealing with injuries and will need to calm down on the ice to prolong his career.

44 Pat LaFontaine



Pat LaFontaine, along with his teammates are making the shocking move to Ohio from the center of the hockey universe. LaFontaine had a bit of a step back this season when he dropped back down to 80-points after collecting 97 in 1992, however the speedy forward was able to collect 40-goals for is third consecutive season. LaFontaine will be crossing over 300 career goals this season and many have said he is setting his focus on 45 for the season.

43 Adam Oates



The second Hartford Whaler in the top 50 list, Adam Oates is now a wily veteran that is going to be passing 1,000 career points this season as he currently sits at 993 and has an outside chance of crossing over 1,100 for his career. The play making center is also looking to cross 700 assists as he is just 19 shy of the mark. Oates currently sits 29th all-time in assists and should skyrocket up the list both this season and next year.

42 Don Beaupre



The first goalie and third Whaler on the list, Don Beaupre is among the very few elite goalies in the league. With recent retirements of Mike Palmateer and Doug Soetaert, there really isn't much for elite level goalies left, but Beaupre is one of them. The career Whaler finished just one win shy of 40 for the fourth time in his career. Beaupre currently sits 12th in NFHL history in wins and should join Kelly Hrudey in becoming the 10th and 11th goalies to record 400-wins.

41 Nikolai Borschevsky



Nikolai Borschevsky joined the Winnipeg Jets this past season as an add on in a blockbuster trade that was focused around Joe Nieuwendyk, however the Russian winger turned out to be one of the Jets best players. After never recording more than 24 goals or 54 points, Nikolai potted 36-goals while registering 92 points. The Jets are hoping this is not just a one-off season and the can count on him as a top six forward.

40 Murray Craven



Like Borschevsky, Murray Craven exploded this past season with 93 points nearly a 50% increase from his previous best season he set back in 1993. Craven has the skills to be a top set-up centerman and he did set up 62 goals this year, however this is more than double the average he has had over his career. Craven did score 31 goals this past season, which was the second time he reached that milestone on his career.

39 Mike Modano



The 24-year old Mike Modano exploded last season with 93 points and finished one goal shy of the 40 mark. We are hoping this young stud will continue to take off and be one of the next generation superstars as the Vancouver Canucks have lacked having a big name like the one Modano is projecting to be.

38 Peter Stastny



There are All-Stars, there are Superstars, there are Hall of Famers and there is Superstar Hall of Famers; Peter Stastny is a Superstar Hall of Famer. The Czechoslovakian native has announced that 1994 will be his final year in the NHL and it is going to be a lot of fun to watch. He enters the season third all-time in points and needs just five points to pass Guy Lafleur, while needing 107 to catch Darryl Sittler which is attainable. Stastny has collected that many points three times in his career, including in two of his last four seasons.

37 Gerard Gallant



It doesn't seem like Gerard Gallant has been in Winnipeg that long, but he reached 700 games with the club last season and at the age of 30 he is coming off his career best season as he wracked up 94 points. Once known for his temper, he has got that under control and has become a quiet leader on the club. Gallant is looking to breach the 900-point plateau this year as he currently sits at 829.

36 Igor Larionov



Igor Larionov has really found a home in Colorado after failing to jump into superstardom in St. Louis and Toronto. Larionov recorded 43 goals last season, which marked the sixth time in seven seasons and is going to make a charge at 500 for his career this year and should reach 600-goals before his career is over.

35 Peter Andersson



At one time, the Hartford Whalers had a superstar young defenseman named Paul Coffey and management traded him away for an unknown Peter Andersson, along with Don Beaupre. The scout who suggested that player should have gotten a raise because Andersson has been nothing but a stud for the Whalers. Andersson has now played over 900 games in Hartford and he recorded 50 points last year for the fourth consecutive season. It was his first time not recording 200 hits since 1988, but he still finished with 175.

34 Vincent Damphousse



In typical Mike Smith fashion, he acquired a player on the cusp of taking the next step. Damphousse was coming off a 67 point season in 1992 with the San Jose Sharks, but once he joined the Rockies he took off. Damphousse took home the Bud Light Trophy as the player with the highest plus/minus and added 91 points in just 75 games. We wouldn't be surprised when this guy records 100-points this year in Denver.

33 Barry Pederson



We all thought we knew what Barry Pederson was, coming into 1993 he looked to be a solid second line winger, as by the age of 32 he had steadily finished in the area of 65-71 points and every now and again he would cross over 30-goals. This past season he exploded with 97 points in 80 games and recorded 63 assists which was a huge jump as he had never reached 50 before. We aren't sure if he can repeat in 1994, but if he does you have to wonder if he is just going to continue to get better as he ages.

32 Gary Suter



Gary Suter is part of arguably the best defensive core in the league and is in the midst of his prime. The aggressive defenseman bounced back from a subpar 1992 season and had one of his best seasons yet recording 54 points and having a career high 227 hits. Many worried about his temper early in his career, but he has been able to get that under control and now is one of the best players at his position and is a difference maker each night.

31 Brian Bellows



Brian Bellows had a career season that jumped him into All-Star category. The 29-year old winger recorded 99 points and due to injuries hurt him from cross the triple digit number as he was able to suit up for just 71 points. He finished sixth in Hart Trophy voting and even received one first place vote. Nobody knows what lighted the fire under Bellows as he previous career best was 30 goals and 70 points.

30 Denis Savard



It seemed for the longest time this slick, smooth skating scorer was already in his mid 30s, but he just turned 33 years old. Despite getting older, he continues to rack up points and had consecutive 96+ point seasons while scoring at least 39 goals in each of the last three seasons. He has never reached that illusive 100-point season, but had injuries not sidelined him the last two seasons, he likely would have reached the mark. It sounds like he may start the season outside of Buffalo, so we'll see if a new team can get him to that spot.

29 Kirk Muller



Kirk Muller was challenged by the Winnipeg management before the 1993 season to bring his game to a new level and he delivered. Muller saw a 50% point increase as he climbed to 95 points in just 76 games while also collecting 32 goals, which was nine more than his previous high. The team rewarded him this off-season with a four-year \$24 Million extension so we'll see if he can replicate the year or get even better.

28 Doug Gilmour



No player broke out this past season like career Maple Leaf Doug Gilmour. After collecting 302 points through his first 544 games, the feisty forward recorded 102 points in 79 games in 1993, which included 44 goals that had him fall just shy of the Rocket Richard Trophy. Gilmour was vocal against the Maple Leafs moving to Columbus to become the Blue Jackets and it is unclear if this relationship has been fractured, but if he is back with the club, it will be fun to see if he can record another 100-point season.

27 Mikhail Tatarinov



Many teams would come calling for Mikhail Tatarinov, but previous GM Brandon Clark would just not budge on moving the big Russian and it is because of how well he plays. Tatarinov has always been known as a defensive defenseman, but this past season he almost double his previous offensive scoring as he collected 17 goals and 55 points. When asked about the franchise's move to Columbus, he shrugged it off and stated "I play hockey".

26 Ron Francis



With some of the career Rockies aging and moving towards retirement a younger crop is ready to take the reigns and they are led by Ron Francis. While he has had some up and down seasons in the way of points, he has now had four consecutive 30-goal seasons and had his second 90-point season in 1993. Most our writers have him slated to have the biggest jump next year in the top 50 players and we think he will contend for the Art Ross in 1994.

25 Dale Haverchuk



You can make it three of his last four seasons that Dale Haverchuk has recorded at least 90 points and he was one point shy of going triple digits in 1993. The smooth skating forward recorded highs in assists and points last year, but he says that doesn't mean a thing unless he can take home the SMJ Cup as he is just missing out. Now moving into his early 30s, Haverchuk appears focused to do what it takes to get that big win.

24 Mark Messier



Over the last four seasons, Mark Messier has averaged almost 105 points per season, while averaging 49 goals over his last three seasons. Like many Capitals last year, he struggled with the 200-foot game and the team underachieved which has seen his abilities come into question. Messier is built out of the mold that owner Shane Matheson likes from his team, so we are thinking he will get back to the game that has him dominant all aspects of the ice.

23 John Chabot



John Chabot looked to have some promise earlier in his career when he collected 83 points for the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1987, however after three straight seasons of decline to the point he put up just 26 points in 1992, he turned things around. Chabot went from scoring 10 goals in 1992 to receiving votes for the Hart Trophy as he collected 101 points in 1993. While we give him some credit in this list, he has been rated as the player with the most likely decline on this list next season.

22 Luc Robitaille



It may have been Lucky Luc or Skilled Luc, but either way Luc Robitaille took home his first Rocket Richard Trophy in 1993 as he recorded league leading 46-goals to help him reach 96 points. The All-Star winger is on an island on his own in Los Angeles without much talent to help him, but he was able to boost ticket sales as Hollywood's favorites would come out to watch him. We are hoping to see a 50-goal season out of him in 1994.

21 Larry Murphy



This former Norris Trophy winner continues to be one of the most consistent blue liners in the NFHL. Over the last three and a half seasons since joining the now Columbus Blue Jackets organization, the veteran defenseman is a +133. While he hasn't been a favorite for the Norris, he is always in consideration for the award which is more than you can ask from him.

20 Fred Boimistruck



The Big Boomer, Fred Boimistruck is the defesneman everyone needs, but nobody knows about. While he has never got over 300 hits, he has been awfully close and is always in contention for the Heavy Hitter Award. He has been able to quietly put up 60-points in back-to-back seasons while seeing his penalties drop by more than half from what he was doing earlier in his career. The 1993 season saw him collect 15 goals, 62 points and 273 hits, but somehow only found his name on three Norris Trophy ballots.

19 Sergei Fedorov



One second Sergei Fedorov came in as an 18-year old with a lot of promise, all of a sudden he's 25-years old and a superstar. Fedorov has seen his numbers steadily increase the last couple of seasons to the point he put him 96 points in 1993 and added his fourth consecutive 30+ goal season. He is now being seen as one of the best players in the league as he received one fourth place vote for the Hart Trophy last year. Now the question is can Fedorov lead the Montreal Canadiens to the playoffs and be a 100-point player.

18 Petr Svoboda



The Red Wings had a huge season last year and while some of the forwards received a lot of praise, Petr Svoboda was arguably the teams best player. The league recognized him as he found himself on three Norris Trophy ballots and even got a second place vote.

Svoboda is a defensive wiz, but he is starting to show an offensive side to his game as he collected 15 goals and 49 points. The newest addition the Colorado Rockies is looking to take another step and we are expecting him to jump into the 60-point area this upcoming season.

17 Mario Tremblay



Retirement isn't even on Mario Tremblay's mind right now and why would it when he continues to be utterly dominant in every aspect of the game. Tremblay had his seventh 100-point season of his career last year and despite fighting injuries the last couple seasons there isn't much we can say, he is amazing. He currently sits seventh all-time points, but we'll pass Dennis Maruk in the first weekend then Marcel Dionne later in the year. We fully expect Tremblay to finish top three, maybe top two before his career is over.

16 Craig Muni



After winning the 1992 Norris Trophy, Craig Muni had a minor step back in 1993; however he is still among the elite in the league. Muni pumped out his fourth consecutive 50-point season, while finishing with a career high 18-goals. While he is not a monster, he doesn't have a fear of using the body and finished with over 200 hits for the third time in his career. With such a great cast around him, Muni doesn't get the credit he deserves.

15 Chris Chelios



Chris Chelios finished the 1993 Norris Trophy in voting and he was just one of three defenseman to claim a first place vote, albeit there was just one of them. Chelios has always had offense to his game, but has stepped up his scoring ability with 39 goals over the last two seasons including scoring 21 last season. With fans finally getting a team in Columbus, they are going to love watching everything Chelios brings to the game, including his mean streak.

14 Steve Yzerman



There are rumours amounting that Steve Yzerman might be the next captain of the Colorado Rockies as their veterans are starting to head to retirement. Yzerman is a classic Rockies player as another team develops him right up until he becomes a superstar and Colorado somehow acquires him. He has now played six seasons in Colorado and has four consecutive seasons of at least 92-points, including three 100-point seasons. Yzerman received some consideration for the Hart last year and will likely be in that conversation this upcoming season.

13 Laurie Boschman



The New Jersey Devils acquired superstar Laurie Boschman from the Buffalo Sabres for goalie prospect Jim Carey. The Devils are trying to jump into the upper echelon of the league and Boschman should help them do that.

Boschman is coming off his career season that saw him collect 109 points in just 79 games which included 72 assists. The pending unrestricted free agent will pass 1,000 career games this year, while looking to eclipse both 400-goals and 1,200 points. The playmaking center will have the luxury of playing with net front prescience Dave Andreychuk to help him get there.

12 Steve Thomas



After spending a decade in the Winnipeg Jets organization, Steve Thomas will be joining his fifth team in the last five years as he has played in Toronto, Anaheim, Buffalo and now Edmonton since ending the 1990 season with the Jets. Thomas has increased his output in each season since leaving Toronto as he has put up 89, 91, 100 and 105 points leading into the upcoming 1994 season with Edmonton. The question is whether or not "*Stumpy*" will be able to create routes in Edmonton to finish out his career or if this will just be another stop over.

11 Joe Sakic



There is not much to get excited about in Quebec, but there is one thing and that is Joe Sakic. The now 25-year old is on an island by himself for offence, but is doing what he can to try and get the Nordiques turned around. Sakic is coming off his first 100-point season and now has three consecutive 30-goal seasons. The big question is can he do enough to get his team back in the playoffs and if not, how long will he put up with the poor play and wasting his career away. The Nords need to start pushing for a playoff spot.

10 Dave Ellett



Dave Ellett is entering his seventh season as the captain of the Winnipeg Jets and after a mini retool he looks ready to help lead the team to their first SMJ Cup appearance since the mid to late 1980s. Ellett finished sixth in Norris Trophy voting in 1993 after finish with a career best 18 goals, 65 points and +28 rating. Ellett has had a rocket from the blue line that has helped him finish with double digits in goals in all nine of his career seasons. He will be looking to cross the 500-point career total this upcoming season.

9 Paul Coffey



The Vancouver Canucks made a huge splash this off-season when they picked up one of the best players in the league in Paul Coffey. Coffey finished fourth in Norris Trophy voting and received more third place votes (10) than any other defenseman in the league. The 33-year old is in the first year of his four year, \$24M contract and is coming off his first career 20-goal season. Just one defenseman in league history has reached 1,000 career points, but Coffey looks like he is going to legitimately take a run at that mark, as well as catching Robinson's record of 1,084, as he currently sits at 725.

8 Phil Housley



The Edmonton Oilers don't get enough credit for the big moves they make. GM Mark Jones was ready to hit the throttle in his rebuild after he not only acquired Steve Thomas, but also Phil Housley. Housley finished with the second most first place votes for the Norris in 1993, while finishing fifth overall in voting. Housley has 76 goals over the last three seasons, which includes the Norris Trophy in 1991. The league record for career goals by a defenseman is 274 by Dale Tallon and Housley now sits at 182, which will make it a fun couple of seasons to see him take a run at the record.

7 Michel Goulet



It feels like just a few seasons ago GM Simon Hoggett came into the league with the hype of a generational GM was going to dominate. The now veteran GM made a huge splash and has his Flyers team looking like they could become a powerhouse after acquiring the league MVP Michel Goulet. Goulet is coming off a career best 118 points and looking to help the young Flyers take the next jump in the standings. The question is whether or not Goulet will play with John LeClair or if they will separate the two. If they are together, they could form one of the best combos in the league.

6 Glenn Anderson



Glenn Anderson was the runner-up to the Hart Trophy voting this past season in one of the closest votes in league history, next to the tie in 1980 that saw Kent Nilsson get denied the award. Anderson now has four consecutive 100-point seasons, including his career best 120 last year and has scored at least 40-goals in three of the four previous seasons coming into 1994. The speedy forward currently sits 18th all-time in points, but should pass several players this year and could be pushing for the top 10 by seasons end.

5 Don Sweeney



Don Sweeney has become the most desired defenseman in the league, but everyone knows that the Winnipeg GM won't part with the 1993 Norris Trophy winner. Sweeney finished with 21 of 23 possible first place votes, while earning two second place votes with his remaining two voters. Sweeney led defenseman with 74 points in 69 games last year for the highest points per game by a defender in league history. His only weakness appears to being able to stay healthy as he has yet to play a full season, but the franchise sent him to a durability camp this off-season.

4 Kelly Hrudehy



Over the years the talk about the greatest goalie ever was always between Doug Soetaert, Mike Palmateer and Ken Dryden, but Kelly Hrudehy is likely on the verge of jumping into that conversation. Hrudehy now has a pair of Vezina trophies, along with a couple William Jennings trophies. Hrudehy is coming of a 48-win season which tied him for third best in league history. Had the minute limit not decreased on goalies, Hrudehy would have likely made some bigger runs at the record.

3 Dominik Hasek



Had Kelly Hrudey not had such a superb season, Dominik Hasek would have become the first goalie to win three consecutive Vezina Trophies. The now 29-year old is currently on a stretch of three straight seasons of 40-win seasons. The "*Dominator*" is backstopping one of the top teams in the league and has been loud in saying that it has been gut wrenching for him not to lift the cup over the last two seasons so you know there is some determination in his game; look for Hasek to have his best season yet.

2 Wayne Gretzky



Wayne Gretzky has slipped to number two, but that is not to say he is getting weaker, just that a stud is coming up. The Great One did fall to fifth place in Hart Trophy votes but has now registered 100-points in nine consecutive seasons. Gretzky will likely surpass Guy Lafleur to get into the top three in points this upcoming season and then go after Peter Stastny and Darryl Sittler the season after that. Gretzky has been the best player in league history and the 33-year old has an outside chance of becoming the second player in league history to record 700-career goals this year.

1 Mario Lemieux



The next great one, is now the current great one. Mario the Magnificent finished third in Hart Trophy voting and is coming off his first 100-point season, while now have five consecutive 40+ goal seasons. While Lemieux's name has come up in trade discussions as Hartford decides what to do, we are curious to see if Lemieux finishes with his first 50-goal season and takes home the Hart Trophy.