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Scouting reports from live games.

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Player skill ratings.

Commentary from industry insiders.

Mitch Brown

Mitchell Brown is the EliteProspects Director of North American Scouting. Based out of Canmore, Alberta, in Canada, Brown regularly scouts the WHL along with the BCHL and AJHL, too. His passion for hockey takes him all over the hockey world, though, including brief stops in Sweden, Ontario, and anywhere else where one might find a rink. Mitch never sleeps, because sleep is the cousin of death, and it allows him to manually track obscene amounts of data through developmental leagues where it's otherwise not available. His work can also be found at The Athletic, where he analyzes all things hockey, from prospects to the NHL.

Christoffer Hedlund

Christoffer Hedlund is the Director of European Scouting, based primarily out of Linköping and Stockholm, in Sweden, for EliteProspects Rinkside, where he's worked tirelessly to provide the most thorough, detailed work of its kind anywhere on the internet. Prior to joining EliteProspects, Hedlund worked as a scout for Future Considerations for two seasons. When Christoffer isn't scouting -- all four hours a year -- he's studying law.
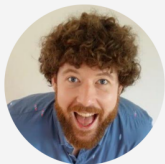
Cam Robinson

Cam Robinson is the Director of Film Scouting for EP Rinkside analyzing and assessing prospects from around the globe. He is also the Managing Editor of DobberProspects, an Associate Editor at DobberHockey and contributor with Daily Hive Vancouver, and Sportsnet650. Cam is also a middle school generalist teacher, a father of two, a husband of one, and an avid reader.

Lassi Alanen

Lassi Alanen's rising star in the realm of player evaluation, particularly on the amateur side, carried him to EliteProspects this year, where he scouts Finland's professional and junior hockey leagues. This year alone, Alanen attended 70 games in person and supplemented that number with many more on tape. Not willing to leave any stone unturned, Alanen manually tracks data from the top draft-eligible prospects in the Liiga, Mestis, and Finnish U20 circuits.

Russ Cohen

Russ Cohen is an American scout for EliteProspects, covering the professional and NCAA ranks mostly, as well as being an accomplished writer for Sportsology and a radio host for the Sportsology Radio Network. He covers the New York Rangers and Philadelphia Flyers on the NHL side of the equation, too. His work has appeared on NHL.com, CSNPhilly.com, FoxSports, EliteProspects Rinkside, The Hockey News, Beckett Hockey, Blueshirt Bulletin, New England Hockey Journal, and countless other venues. He also co-hosted Hockey Prospect Radio on NHL Network Radio as part of the Sirius XM network. He's also a published author. Writers want to be him; editors want to work with him.
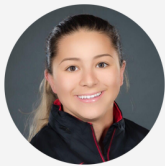
Rachel Doerrie

Rachel Doerrie is an OHL Scout for Elite Prospects based out of Toronto, Ontario, where she is completing her Masters in Sport Science (talent identification) and working with the hockey programme at York University. She spends an inordinate amount of time in front of a computer, tracking and analyzing data, as well as watching hockey. When she's not watching hockey, she can be found discussing hockey tactics with colleagues or hosting the Staff & Graph Podcast.

Daniel Gee

Daniel Gee is a crossover film scout for EliteProspects, having joined the group after the calendar turned to 2020. He's a Marketing and Finance alumni from the University of Northern British Columbia, based out of Prince George, British Columbia, in Canada, where he attends countless Prince George Cougars games. He could without the blistering cold and feet of snow that this environment affords him, but survives nonetheless by spending extra time indoors, covering Canucks prospects on Twitter.
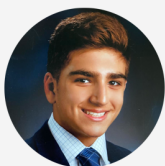
Joey Padmanabhan

Joey Padmanabhan traded in his skates and stick for a pen and notepad this year, joining the EliteProspects Rinkside team as a USHL scout and Data Analyst. He played AAA hockey in Chicago, going toe-to-toe with many of the players he now scouts in the USHL. When he's not taking notes or watching film, he enjoys playing pick-up hockey at his community rink and walking his dog, Jay-Jay. Joey will be attending Cornell University this fall, where he plans on majoring in statistics and economics. Apparently, they have a pretty good hockey program there.

Cat Silverman

Catherine Silverman is the goaltending scout for EliteProspects, providing scouting reports and player grades for targets across the hockey world. Goaltender, coach, journalist, and runner. Bylines at The Athletic NHL, InGoal Magazine, NHL.com, and more along the way. Specialist in goaltending video and analysis, but great for chats about distance running and New York style pizza in her spare time.

David St-Louis

David St-Louis is a writer and QMJHL scout for EliteProspects, based out of Québec City, Quebec, in Canada, where he regularly attends Remparts games. His work can also be found on TheCoachesSite and SBNation's 'Eyes on the Prize' blog, where he covers the Montréal Canadiens. He's watched more hockey than probably everyone in your life combined, and that just accounts for this season's work.

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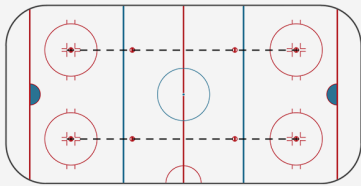
Dot(ted) line:
An invisible line that runs parallel to the boards from the defensive zone faceoff dot to the offensive zone faceoff dots, dividing the "interior" of the ice and "exterior" of the ice.

Stride extension:
The generation of power in a stride, characterized by a push and extension finishing behind the player, ideally with a toe push and ankle twist.

Stride recovery:
The forward movement of the extended leg ideally under the torso finished with a 90-degree knee bend on both edges.

Gap control:
The management of distance between the defender and attacker; an ideal gap is often stick-on-stick to limit options, and increase the odds of a break up and recovery of possession.

Risk-mitigating footwork:
A rush defence strategy that emphasizes middle-and-out backpedal routes, backward momentum, and avoiding weight-committing crossovers until the attacker has as few options as possible.

Problem-solving skills/adaptability:
The ability to locate a secondary or teritary play after an unexpected variable alters or eliminates the primary option.

Small-area game:
The puck control, handling, and skating that allow a player to maneuver through traffic, and often times, escape traffic.

Rush patterns:
The combination of routes, stickhandling, and skating habits (especially crossover usage) that a player uses in transition.

Deception:
The ability to mask intentions by indicating another play, ranging from fakes shots to more complex combinations of look-offs and subtle body fakes.

Lane deception:
Types of rush patterns that use the dot(ted) line, crossovers, and deception to relay false information to the defender; often used to draw defenders to the perimeter, then working the puck inside.

GLOSSARY

Pace:
The speeds at which a player can execute; often characterized by active feet through pressure, passes, and puckhandling.

Off-puck offence:
The movement a player makes into pockets of space for supporting the offence or becoming a scoring threat, often timed with passes or shots to decreases odds of getting tied up by the defending team.

Off-puck defence:
How a player defends players without the puck, including but not limited to: net-front defence and closing gaps to deter passes.

Slip pass:
An alternative to the saucer pass where the player pulls the puck in towards their skates then passes, changing the angle of release.

Hook pass:
An alternative to the saucer pass where the player lengths their grip to change of angle of the pass.

THE RATING SYSTEM ————————————————————————

You'll note that we grade our draft-eligible skaters based on six criteria using a 1-to-9 linear rating scale.

Where necessary, we've applied half-grades to widen the range of outcomes (i.e. Erie Otters defenceman Jamie Drysdale has a 7.5 skating grade rather than a 7 or 8).

The six items that we've identified as most crucial to the evaluation process are as follows: skating, shooting, passing, puckhandling, hockey sense, and one's physical ability. For posterity, the absence of something from our rating rubric isn't evidence of its absence in our evaluation.

We've covered every base, whether it's firsthand analysis gleaned from entire days spent in musky rinks sipping stale coffee or making phone calls to the scouts who hold the levers of power at the NHL draft.

Now, let's get into the specific player tools that help shape the form of our analysis.

🛹 SKATING

This one seems pretty straightforward, right? Think again. So much goes into a player's skating, and then there's a whole heap of contributing factors that help one determine whether there is room for improvement, the capacity for development, etc.

Here are the items on our checklist when evaluating a player's skating.

- Two-step explosiveness.
- Four-way mobility.
- Fluidity through one's hips.
- Footwork.
- Stride depth/kneebend.
- Crossover use.
- Stride recovery.
- Stride extension.
- Stride discipline.
- Boot placement.
- Edgework.
- Motor.
- Stamina.
- Mechanical consistency.
- Most of these items are covered in the glossary section of the EliteProspects 2020 NHL Draft Guide. If it's not, then we feel as though it's relatively commonplace in hockey conversations and not worthy of the space.

⊕ SHOOTING

You know it when you see it. Some players can sling the puck with such thunderous force and surgical precision as to leave their opponents completely helpless.

The Patrik Laines, Auston Matthews, and Shea Webers of the world deploy this threat on a shift-to-shift basis, and they make it look easy.

Then there's everyone else. For the remainder of the league, it's about increasing one's ability to create offence on the

margins with tactical efficiency rather than any overwhelming physical force.

Here are some of the items that help us evaluate the best shooters, the worst shooters, and everyone in-between.

- Power.
- Precision.
- Accuracy.
- Placement.
- Variety.
- Selection.
- Deception.
- Adaptability.
- Shooting while pressured.
- Releases.
- Weight-shift.
- One's ability to shoot off of one or both feet.

We've graded shooting including an off-puck timing/pocket of space identification variable, much like how there are more sense-based attributes in the passing section.

🏒 PASSING

Rigorous, peer-reviewed work in the analytics sphere has shown that playmaking is the ability that holds up best in the fight against Father Time. One can build a lengthy, productive NHL career playing the role of a set-up man rather than a finisher.

It's a pretty valuable skill, even if it doesn't earn one as much time in the limelight.

Here are the items we've honed in on as indicative of one's passing ability.

- Power.
- Precision.
- Selection.
- Adaptability.
- One's ability to complete passes through layers.
- One's ability to pass through one's stride.
- One's ability to pass into space.
- One's ability to integrate the boards into one's passes.
- On the forehand.
- On the backhand.

♗ PUCKHANDLING

The ratio of relative importance to controlling the flow of play or goals to the highlight reel potential of puckhandling is perhaps the most disproportionate of any ability in any sport. The list of phenomenal puckhandlers who couldn't bring enough value elsewhere to justify their position in the NHL is a mile long.

Still, one would rather be an excellent stickhandler than not. It's not worthless; it's just often worth less.

THE RATING SYSTEM ───────────────────────────────────

This is a list of the items we consider when evaluating a player's puckhandling ability.

- Forehand.
- Backhand.
- Upper-body and lower-body independence/control.
- Deception.
- Adaptability.
- One's ability to blend handling into skating, shooting, passing.
- Maneuverability.
- Deke selection.
- One's ability to maneuver through small-ice scenarios.
- One's ability to maneuver through large-ice scenarios.
- One's control of the puck while pressured.
- One's ability to corral difficult passes.
- The way one sets up their dekes and maneuvers.

⚙ HOCKEY SENSE

The EliteProspects Dir. of North American Scouting, Mitch Brown, put it best when describing hockey sense, saying "hockey sense is like borscht; everyone has their own recipe."

We've tried to create our own version of hockey sense, and in so doing created a fairly extensive list of items, some of which would suffice for a player rating all their own.

- Vision.
- Anticipation
- Timing.
- Spacing.
- Pace.
- Manipulation.
- Offensive instincts.
- Defensive instincts.
- Problem-solving.
- Adaptability.
- Puck pursuit angles.
- Decision-making.
- Rush patterns.
- Puck support.
- Off the puck positioning/movement.

⚔ PHYSICAL

The NHL is doubtless a more accommodating environment for smaller, more skilled players. Even so, it's inherently more difficult for players with certain physical profiles than others. Size is one of the few things one can't teach.

THE RATING SYSTEM ——————————————————————

These are the items that helped us determine a player's physical grade.

- Puck protection.
- Controlled physicality.
- Battle level.
- Stamina.
- Fearlessness.
- Hitting.
- Absorbing hits.
- Body positioning.
- Height.
- Weight.
- Growth potential.

THE 1-TO-9 RATING SCALE

We've introduced a 1-to-9 linear rating scale for each of the six player attributes that earned grades. To help contextualize these numbers, we've created this chart with examples and NHL-level comparisons.

Grade	Percentile (Approx.)	Scores in the Top *N* of NHL Defensemen	Scores in the Top *N* of NHL Forwards	In English (Approx.)
1	2	320	570	Possible AHL deal
2	14	280	500	Organizational depth
3	26	240	430	Call-Up
4	38	200	360	Pressbox, ideally
5	50	162	290	Top-11 F, 6 D
6	62	124	220	Top-9 F, 4 D
7	74	85	150	Top-5 F, 3 D
8	86	45	81	Top-2 F, 1 D
9	98	7	12	Top 10 Player

LETTER GRADES

Two competent interlocutors might process the same information and arrive at different conclusions. It's true of almost any field, within reason of course.

The average NHL draft board is somewhere between 80-120 players long, and I've yet to speak with a single team that's ever finished their list.

With that, we wanted to help offer a more holistic, single-use metric to account for a player's acceptable range based on our determination of the player's skill set, upside, and certainty. Someone might not make our final draft ranking, but that doesn't mean there isn't a reasonable range where they should go.

This grading system works as follows.

- A: first-round grade.
- B: second- or third-round grade.
- C: fourth-, fifth-, or sixth-round grade.
- D: seventh-round.
- F: Do not Draft.

2020
2020
2020
2020
2020

pGPS/SEAL

XLS	100%
PTS/82	64.57
SEAL Adj. PTS/GP	2.23

1

Alexis Lafrenière

GRADES

Skating	5.5
Shooting	8
Passing	8
Puck-Handling	8
Hockey Sense	9
Physical	7
Grade	A

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Alexis Lafrenière

Rimouski Océanic
QMJHL

Position	**LW**	Birthdate	**Oct 11, 2001**
Height	**6'1" / 186 cm**	Nation	**Canada**
Weight	**192 lbs / 87 kg**		
Shoots	**Left**		

REGULAR SEASON STATISTICS

52
Games Played

35
Goals

77
Assists

112
Points

PLAYER REPORT

You've doubtless heard Alexis Lafrenière's name roll off the tip of every scout and hockey analyst's tongue at one point or another for nearly half a decade. He's that type of talent.

This season was hardly the last step of a saunter from Saint-Eustache, Québec to the top spot on the 2020 NHL Draft's podium though.

The concerns that many scouts held about Lafrenière's skating, widely panned as below the NHL average, represented a crack in the armour ripe for another top prospect to exploit. "I think a lot of people are going to challenge Lafrenière for No. 1 overall," one scout told me at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. "His feet are a problem."

Correction: his feet were a problem. They're now just a cut above average, as expressed by the 5.5 grade that our QMJHL scout David St-Louis meted to Lafrenière.

Everything else? Well, you can read the player's grades, and they're all at or near the top of the chart.

It should come as no surprise then that the same is true of Lafrenière's standing among the players accounted for in our Dir. of North American Scouting Mitch Brown's tracking project. The SEAL adjusted scoring metric that Jeremy Davis crafted rates Lafrenière as the second-most prolific scorer in his draft class; his draft-season carries a 100 percent XLS rating, too.
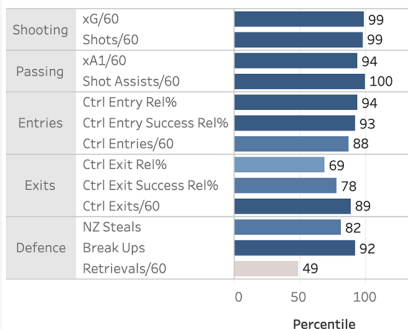
Alexis Lafrenière

Team: Rimouski Océanic
Position: Forward
Draft Year: 2020
NHL Rights: 2020 Eligible
Games Tracked: 10
Data tracked & viz by Mitchell Brown (@MitchLBrown)

		Percentile
Shooting	xG/60	99
	Shots/60	99
Passing	xA1/60	94
	Shot Assists/60	100
Entries	Ctrl Entry Rel%	94
	Ctrl Entry Success Rel%	93
	Ctrl Entries/60	88
Exits	Ctrl Exit Rel%	69
	Ctrl Exit Success Rel%	78
	Ctrl Exits/60	89
Defence	NZ Steals	82
	Break Ups	92
	Retrievals/60	49

PLAYER REPORT

The name of the game for Lafrenière is deception. There's a harmony between his maneuvers, body language, and positioning in traffic that blurs the lines to the point that they're near-indiscernible for the average defender. He'll present one play with his upper-body language and then exploit the opposition's lack of discretion by furnishing a tape-to-tape pass to a teammate out of the frame for a Grade A scoring chance.

As a puck-carrier, Lafrenière attacks through arcs, bending the defensive front and driving the puck like a wedge through any openings that present themselves. He's such an adaptable attacker, maintaining the same grip on his stick through passes and shots alike, leaving the opposition guessing at every turn. Similarly, Lafrenière doesn't need to choose between pace or patience when determining his plan of attack; he can serve both masters at once.

The mental map of the ice that Lafrenière deploys is detailed enough to offer him a wide array ofoptions on the puck, off of the puck, in support of the puck -- you name it! He's never out of the play.

And if he does seem out of the play, that's the defenceman's cue to shoulder-check when en route to the corner for a puck retrieval. Lafrenière is a physically mature 6-foot-1, 192 pounds, and he showed during the U20 World Junior Hockey Championships just how willing he is to inflict that upon his opponents when the stakes are at their highest.

St-Louis even went so far in Lafrenière's Player Report to suggest that his forechecking is the basis for a great deal of what he accomplishes offensively.

As is so often the case with 18-year-olds, Lafrenière has room to grow defensively -- one might wonder whether I'll get more tired of writing it or the audience reading it. He's not especially active defensively, gliding through a low work rate that has him checking in and out of the game at his leisure.

Granted, his smarts shine through even the weakest points in his game. Lafrenière takes smart routes to attack the puck-carrier and generally puts himself in the right spots at the right time. There's a basis on which he might grow at the next level.

Because make no mistake, there is a next level for Lafrenière, and it's the NHL whenever that's a realistic possibility. We rate Lafrenière as a player with elite potential, capable of holding downa first-line spot for many years to come for whichever franchise is lucky enough to call his name.

SCOUTING REPORTS

Mitchell Brown: March 1st, 2020 - Rimouski Océanic vs. Moncton Wildcats - QMJHL
There are so many angles to explore in this game: the deception, the wrist shot, the way Lafrenière drives plays up the middle, and so on. But there's one that I was really interested in with regards for Lafrenière's game next season: the ability to make plays with pressure. Moncton had no shame, double-teaming Lafrenière any chance they had. In situations where Lafrenière pulls away at this level, Moncton kept back pressure on him as the defender closed the gap. It didn't matter. Without fail, Lafrenière would find a way to maintain possession. First, he skated into the backchecker's space and cut off their hands to establish body positioning and made a sharp cut toward the inside. Second, he sensed the pressure and found a teammate up the middle. Third, he upped the pace and dragged the defender with wherever he was going. Sure, Lafrenière's crossovers aren't knee-over-knee, but he's a monster on the puck. Lafrenière seeks pressure because he recognizes the opportunity it provides for his teammates.

As for Lafrenière's shot, he showed off a couple interesting little elements. He used an inside-leg release with an angle change several times throughout the game. Each time had a slightly different twist or set of layers on it. For his goal, he fired the puck out of a series of crossovers and pulled the angle change so quickly it probably didn't make a difference from a goaltender at this level. Placement was next to the ears short-side. Other times, he set up a defender for a screen, then fired. Another shot was Lafrenière showing an open blade to the goaltender for a second, then pulling the angle change around a defender. He added look-offs, too.

Defensively, Lafrenière was a bit more active than normal. Consistently the first man back, disrupting a few players, and stealing possession a few times. No controller disconnected moments. Some edge and physicality, as usual. Impressive performance overall.

David St-Louis: October 25th, 2019 - Rimouski Océanic vs. Shawinigan Cataractes - QMJHL
Lafrenière was tightly covered by the veteran defencemen of Shawinigan all night, but his line still extended their presence in the offensive zone on multiple occasions due to the left winger's ability to adapt to defensive pressure. Instead of sitting directly into coverage, he made sure to skate on its periphery, stretching the defensive box by remaining closer to the point and turning the whole offensive sequence into a power play-like movement. He jumped down for shots or to act on passes when the play favoured it (when defenders had their back to him). Ultimately, Lafrenière only recorded one point, but it should have been more due to the multiple great looks his line still got. Other notable moments from Lafrenière came from multiple powerplay entries where he attacked the middle of the ice, drew the defence on himself and kicked the puck wide to teammates in the empty wide lane.

David St-Louis: October 18th, 2019 - Rimouski Océanic vs. Quebec Remparts - QMJHL
It was only the second time this season that Lafrenière left the game without a point. Not the strongest performance for the prospect, but he still looked like the main candidate for the number one overall pick. What stood out this game is Lafrenière's offensive zone play, or how he uses the support around him. The left winger prefers to attack when he has teammates around, not necessarily to use them, but because it gives him options for fakes, and generally helps him stay deceptive. So, he adapts his pace to his line-mates, slowing down the play to allow them to catch up, and exploding up the ice to be a give-and-go option for them.

There was one particular play that stood out. Lafrenière came down the wall in the offensive zone, reaching the seam between the coverage of the defenceman and the winger. He was skating directly into double coverage. So, he leaned against the defenceman on his back, nudging towards the middle of the ice and into the seam. His physical move created space for his own blue-liner to come down the wall. He faked a drop pass; the opposing defenceman on his back bit on the play, fell behind and it opened space for Lafrenière to continue circling the offensive zone. Just another great display of awareness and Lafrenière's ability to use all the tools (teammates, set plays) given to him.
In a couple of instances, Lafrenière distanced pursuing defencemen with a timely forward cross-over to receive the puck in stride for a scoring chance.

SCOUTING REPORTS ─────────────────────────────

David St-Louis: October 6th, 2019 - Rimouski Océanic vs. Victoriaville Tigres - QMJHL

A lot can be said about Alexis Lafrenière; there isn't much he doesn't do well. But what stood out in this game is the way he creates seams in the defence and how he attacks them. Lafrenière rarely looks at what his final play will be. He turns his head towards supporting teammates, even his shoulders, opens his blades to fake passes, and generally tries to force the defence towards passing lanes he won't necessarily use. As soon as they move along with the fake information, they are done. Lafrenière slips through the hole he creates and attacks dangerous areas. He turns defenders' feet and attacks opposite to them; and when there isn't any room for him, he isn't afraid to make quick give and gos to create that room.

I don't think his skating will be an issue at the NHL level. He won't have the rushing capabilities of some of the best skaters in the league, but his deception and incredibly swift hands will make up for it.

Away from the puck, Lafrenière also takes good angles to close on players and cut their space along the wall while defending the opposing rush.

David St-Louis: September 27th, 2019 - Rimouski Océanic vs. Sherbrooke Phoenix - QMJHL

Monster offensive performance from Lafrenière. Off the puck, he darted in and out of scoring areas, always moving his feet to create a speed difference between him and defenders. With the puck, he showed he could make incredibly quick passes in heavy pressure situations where 99% of other players would have lost the puck; Lafrenière seems to see the tightest of opening to extend the play and find teammates. I liked how he created space for others, too. By challenging defenders and pushing them back; he created pockets for his teammates all game long.

He was hyper-deceptive, faking shots, faking passes, faking turns to freeze the opposition and either get closer to the net or reach teammates. He was a zone-entry machine and controlled the entire play once he established his team in the opposing end. One last thing that stood about his game -- Lafrenière can repair handling mistakes instantly, meaning that if a defender brushes the puck and pushes it away, it is right back on Lafrenière's stick the next second. He finds it again and again and again in traffic, and manages to play keep away for long seconds until he can truly separate. He doesn't over-dangle per se. For him, a dangle is a solution to a problem, not a need.