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RULE: Let the Chips Fall Where They May for Vegas Draft



By [Heather Rule](#) - June 19, 2017

The talk all weekend about the NHL has been all about protecting and exposing players. The weird thing is this isn't even about the mumps.

The protection lists for the Vegas Expansion Draft were released over the weekend. Everybody finally knows which players all 30 current NHL teams want to protect and expose as Vegas chooses one

player from each team.

It was no surprise that the Wild went with the 7-3-1 protection list, choosing to hold onto seven forwards, three defensemen and one goaltender, one of two options. The Wild (obviously) chose goaltender Devan Dubnyk, the players with no-move clauses (forwards Zach Parise, Mikko Koivu and Jason Pominville, and defenseman Ryan Suter), and forwards Nino Niederreiter, Mikael Granlund and Charlie Coyle. The not-so-obvious choices came down to defensemen. There would be Jared Spurgeon and Suter. The third slot went to Jonas Brodin.

Before diving too far into the list, let's just remember that only one player from each NHL team is drafted by Vegas. Just one. Every team will look just a bit different next season, and somebody's going to be left in the cold. It's just the way it is.

According to [Michael Russo of the Star Tribune](#), Bruce Boudreau told him recently that if general manager Chuck Fletcher could not get the right deal before the freeze, "Maybe the best thing to do is just understand you're going to lose a good player and be done with it."

That's actually a great perspective on this whole deal. We can all sit here and analyze it to death in the 11th hour, or we can see hold the next few days unfolds until we know what the Vegas team looks like with players plucked from across the league.

And really, I think Boudreau is right. The Wild might just have to surrender one of their better players. The math doesn't add up when you think about the number of players that were allowed to be protected versus the talent on the current roster. Something has to give.

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It's kind of a good problem to have because it's the mark of a solid team with depth.

All four of the [Zone Coverage writers who weighed in with our own projection lists](#) decided to protect Matt Dumba over Brodin. (Actually, the picks were pretty uniform all around.) If there was any question mark as to what the Wild would do, it was going to be a toss-up between Dumba or Brodin. Plenty of trade rumors circulated about Brodin over the weekend, though none was true.

The Wild stuck with Brodin, leaving a top-four defenseman in Dumba exposed for Vegas to draft.

It would be pretty shocking to see Vegas take someone other than Dumba or Marco Scandella as the one Wild player in the draft. Dumba has a tremendous shot and scored 11 goals last season. His downside is some of the careless mistakes he makes on the ice. He's also young, with his 23rd birthday in July, so one would think those mental errors would get left behind as his career continues to unfold as a top-four defenseman.

Scandella is 27 and has also battled injuries here and there. He's another player with a hard shot from the point. That, of course, goes along with solid defense.

When it comes to the forwards, it seems there was a Zucker-not-Staal situation, which was probably a smart move. That's what a great season will do for you. Zucker went from being an easy player to offer up to Vegas, since he's a local lad, to being one of the guys the Wild didn't want stolen from them. Leaving Zucker exposed would have been a no-brainer for Vegas.

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Zucker has battled injuries throughout his career and often had trouble finishing off breakaway chances during the past season. Still, his speed and skill are reason enough to keep him in the Wild organization. He turned in career-highs with 47 points (surpassing his old mark by 21 points), 22 goals and 25 assists. He also was a plus-34 to lead the NHL along with Suter.

This leaves Staal as an option for Vegas if it's looking for a veteran player and leader. Again, it's hard to believe they'll take him. However, in the event he is gone next year, it's not a worst-case situation for the Wild. This way, they'd keep Dumba and Scandella. Sure, Staal was the team's leading scorer last year with 28 goals, but it was a bounceback season after he underperformed in 2015-16. He's 32 years old and looking at the sunset of his career rather than the prime.

Staal had a chance to be protected as well, but only if Pominville would have waived his no-move clause. Nothing has been confirmed, but the theory is the Wild asked Pominville to waive it and he declined. It would have allowed him to be on the exposed list and then the Wild could protect Staal. Even with Pominville exposed, it wouldn't seem likely Vegas would take him over a young defenseman.

Erik Haula and Gustav Olofsson are the other players considered to be the prime exposures on the Wild's roster, though they're a little lower in the spotlight. Staal is still the most tempting forward to take from the Wild's list.

So much angst goes into trying to figure out what teams will do, who they should have protected, what trade they should try and make with Vegas. In the end, maybe it's better to have the mindset of Boudreau. The team's going to lose a good player. Find out who is selected and then go from there looking ahead to 2017-18.

The Vegas roster will be announced Wednesday night during the NHL Awards Show.

Exposed list:

Forwards

Brady Brassart, Patrick Cannone, Ryan Carter, Kurtis Gabriel, Martin Hanzal, Erik Haula, Zack Mitchell, Jordan Schroeder, Eric Staal, Chris Stewart, Ryan White

Defense

Victor Bartley, Matt Dumba, Christian Folin, Guillaume Gelinas, Alexander Gudbranson, Gustav Olofsson, Nate Prosser, Marco Scandella, Mike Weber

Goaltender

Johan Gustafsson, Darcy Kuemper, Alex Stalock

Protected list:

Forwards

Charlie Coyle, Mikael Granlund, Mikko Koivu (NMC), Nino Niederreiter, Zach Parise (NMC), Jason Pominville (NMC), Jason Zucker

Defense

Jonas Brodin, Jared Spurgeon, Ryan Suter (NMC)

Goaltender

Devan Dubnyk

HEATHER RULE



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