[1] **Ben Kindel**, C, 18, 2025 1st round (11th overall)

Current team/league: Calgary Hitmen (WHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is fluid with good acceleration and edge work, allowing him to create separation in transition; hockey IQ is elite for his age, with advanced vision and playmaking instincts; compete level is high, consistently engaging in battles and driving play; shot is accurate and quick-release, though not overpowering; puck skills are standout, with soft hands and deceptive moves in tight spaces; defensive acumen is average but improving, showing willingness to backcheck; physicality is moderate, using his 6'0" frame effectively but needing more bulk.

Strengths and standout traits: Exceptional offensive creativity and hockey sense make him a potential play-driver; thrives in high-pressure situations and has leadership qualities evident from junior captaincy roles.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Lacks elite top-end speed, which could limit his transition game against NHL pace; needs to build strength to win more board battles and protect the puck better.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Top-line center with 80-point potential if development tracks well; likely a top-6 pivot with power-play quarterback duties.

NHL readiness timeline: 2-3 years, likely debuting after another WHL season and AHL seasoning.

[2] **Rutger McGroarty**, LW, 21, 2022 1st round (14th overall, acquired via trade from

Winnipeg)

Current team/league: Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins (AHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is strong with good straight-line speed and agility; hockey IQ is high, reading plays well and positioning himself for scoring chances; compete level is elite, playing with intensity and physical edge; shot is heavy and accurate, especially on the power play; puck skills are solid, with good control and passing accuracy; defensive acumen is reliable, contributing on the penalty kill; physicality is a standout, using his 6'1" frame to forecheck aggressively.

Strengths and standout traits: Power forward archetype with scoring touch and leadership; his work ethic and two-way play make him versatile across lines.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Occasional decision-making lapses under pressure; has had off-ice maturity questions from college trade demand, though resolved.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Top-line winger capable of 30+ goals; likely a top-6 forward with special teams impact.

NHL readiness timeline: Immediate to 1 year; could stick full-time in 2025-26 if he dominates AHL preseason.

[3] **Bill Zonnon**, LW/RW, 18, 2025 1st round (22nd overall)

Current team/league: Blainville-Boisbriand Armada (QMJHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is explosive with excellent top speed and quick starts; hockey IQ is advanced, anticipating plays and finding soft areas; compete level is high, relentless on pucks; shot is hard and precise, a natural goal-scorer's release; puck skills are creative, with good dekes and vision; defensive acumen is developing, solid positioning but inconsistent effort; physicality is average, using speed over size (5'9") for engagement.

Strengths and standout traits: Dynamic offensive talent with goal-scoring prowess; his speed and skill make him a transition threat and power-play weapon.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Smaller stature may struggle against physical play; needs to improve to avoid being pushed to the wing permanently.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Top-line scoring winger with 35-goal upside; likely a top-6 forward focused on offense.

NHL readiness timeline: 3-4 years, needing QMJHL dominance and pro adjustment.

4 **Will Horcoff**, RW, 18, 2025 1st round (24th overall)

Current team/league: Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is smooth with good balance and stride efficiency; hockey IQ is high, with strong game-processing and passing; compete level is consistent, working hard in all zones; shot is quick and deceptive, effective from mid-range; puck skills are polished, handling pressure well; defensive acumen is good, reliable backchecker; physicality is growing, using his 6'2" frame to shield and hit.

Strengths and standout traits: Well-rounded skill set with size; his intelligence and versatility suggest future all-situation play.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Not an elite skater, which could cap his upside if not improved; production was solid but not dominant pre-draft.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Middle-six winger with scoring touch; likely a 2 line complementary forward.

NHL readiness timeline: 3-4 years, after WHL and potential college route.

5 **Ville Koivunen**, RW/LW, 22, 2021 2nd round (51st overall, acquired via trade from

Carolina)

Current team/league: Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins (AHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is quick with good edge work; hockey IQ is very high, excelling in playmaking; compete level is solid but can be more intense; shot is accurate with a good wrist shot; puck skills are elite, soft hands for passing and control; defensive acumen is average, improving in pro leagues; physicality is low, avoiding heavy hits.

Strengths and standout traits: Offensive creativity and vision make him a setup man; performed well in Finnish Liiga before AHL transition.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Lacks physical presence, potentially limiting NHL impact; inconsistent scoring in AHL debut season.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Top-6 winger with playmaking focus; likely a middle-6 forward on wing.

NHL readiness timeline: 1-2 years; could earn call-up in 2025-26 if he builds consistency.

[6] **Harrison Brunicke**, RHD, 19, 2024 2nd round (44th overall)

Current team/league: Kamloops Blazers (WHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is excellent mobility and speed; hockey IQ is good, with solid reads; compete level is high, blocking shots; shot is hard from the point; puck skills are good for a defenseman, with passing; defensive acumen is strong, gap control and positioning; physicality is good, using body effectively.

Strengths and standout traits: Modern mobile defenseman with offensive upside; his skating and shot make him a power-play option.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Decision-making can be raw; needs to add strength for NHL physicality.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Top-4 defenseman; likely a 2nd-pair two-way D.

NHL readiness timeline: 2-3 years, after WHL and AHL.

[7] **Owen Pickering**, LHD, 21, 2022 1st round (21st overall)

Current team/league: Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins (AHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is elite for size (6'5"), with long stride; hockey IQ is high, calm under pressure; compete level is good; shot is powerful but accurate; puck skills are smooth, good first pass; defensive acumen is strong, using reach to disrupt; physicality is improving, but not aggressive.

Strengths and standout traits: Size and mobility combo for shutdown role; steady development in AHL.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Offensive game is limited, low point production; needs to use size more.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Top-4 shutdown defenseman; likely 2nd-pair D with PK duties.

NHL readiness timeline: 1-2 years; potential debut in 2025-26.

8 **Peyton Kettles**, RHD, 18, 2025 2nd round (39th overall)

Current team/league: Swift Current Broncos (WHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is solid with good mobility; hockey IQ is good, reading rushes; compete level is high; shot is decent from point; puck skills are average; defensive acumen is strong, physical in zone; physicality is standout, hard hits with 6'3" frame.

Strengths and standout traits: Physical, stay-at-home D with upside; good in defensive zone.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Offensive skills limited; skating needs refinement for NHL pace.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Bottom-pair defenseman; likely 3rd-pair physical D.

NHL readiness timeline: 4-5 years, long development path.

9 **Tanner Howe**, LW, 19, 2024 2nd round (46th overall)

Current team/league: Regina Pats (WHL)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is quick with agility; hockey IQ is high, good anticipation; compete level is very high, relentless; shot is accurate; puck skills good; defensive acumen good, two-way forward; physicality average, but feisty.

Strengths and standout traits: Energy player with skill; his work ethic and versatility stand out.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Smaller size (5'10"), injury history in juniors.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Middle-6 winger; likely 3rd-line energy forward.

NHL readiness timeline: 2-4 years, after WHL overage season.

Tristan Broz, C/LW, 22, 2021 2nd round (58th overall)

Current team/league: University of Denver (NCAA)

Scouting breakdown: Skating is good speed; hockey IQ high, playmaker; compete level solid; shot good, quick release; puck skills excellent; defensive acumen average; physicality low.

Strengths and standout traits: Offensive skill, point production in NCAA; good on power play.

Red flags or developmental concerns: Slow development, needs defensive improvement; may be better on wing.

Projected ceiling and likely NHL role: Bottom-6 forward; likely 4th-line winger with skill.

NHL readiness timeline: 1-3 years, post-college AHL time.

Teenage standouts, high-upside swings, or late-round steals: Teenage standouts include Harrison Brunicke (19), a high-upside RHD with mobility and tools for top-4 potential, and Tanner Howe (19), a feisty winger with compete that could exceed draft slot. High-upside swings are the 2025 draftees like Peyton Kettles, a physical D with tools but raw offense, and late-round steal potential in Melvin Fernström (2025 3rd round), a Swedish winger with skill who could develop into a middle-6 scorer if given time. Mac Swanson (2024 7th round), 19, is a late steal with high IQ from USHL, potentially a center depth piece.

Organizational gaps in the prospect pipeline: The pipeline lacks high-end center depth

beyond Kindel, with no clear future top-2 centers if he doesn't hit ceiling; defense is skewed to left side with Pickering, and overall lacks top-2 caliber blueliners beyond Brunicke as a projection. Goaltending is thin under 23, with no elite prospect, and forward group is wing-heavy without enough physical top-6 centers or power forwards.

Summary evaluation of the farm system's overall health and direction under current management: Under Kyle Dubas, the system has improved from bottom-tier to mid-pack, thanks to trades (McGroarty, Koivunen) and aggressive 2025 draft maneuvering for three first-rounders, adding skill and size up front. However, it's still shallow in premium talent, with no surefire elite prospects, and the emphasis on quantity (11 picks in 2025) over quality risks diluting development resources. Direction is positive toward retooling for post-Crosby era, but gaps in center and goaltending could hinder sustained contention without further trades or hits on mid-rounders; overall health is average, with upside if the 2025 class accelerates.