Best Players Who Debuted 2019, 2020 or 2021

This is going to be a "list article", where a group of players are identified and ranked. It will focus on players who have made their debuts in the last three seasons, all of which were impacted by the pandemic. The 2019 and 2020 seasons were shortened, while the 2021 season started out in empty arenas and many teams suffered significant player losses due to Covid-related issues.

I'll be using PR and VR to rank the new players, so goalies will be excluded. If you want more information about PR and VR, see the articles *Introduction to Productivity Rating* and *Introduction to Value Rating*.
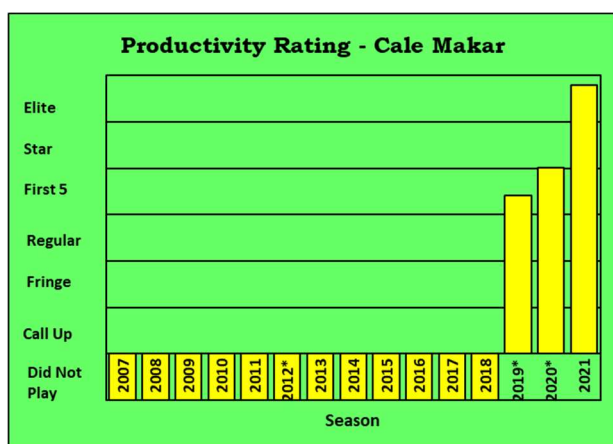
There will be no player biographical information in list articles, as I'm not writing their biography and you have as much access to Wikipedia as I do. I will show some of the players' "Big 5 Stats", stated in the perspective of an 82-game season.

First Played in 2019/2020

118 skaters made their debut in 2019, which is lower than normal. In an average 82-game season, 135 players make their career debuts. 2019 was a 70-game regular season, and based on length of season, the number of new skaters is almost bang-on average.

Only 35 of those players have played enough to merit a Value Rating, which is what I'll be using to identify the best of the group. By VR category there were two VR-Star, four VR-First5, seventeen VR-Regular, eleven VR-Fringe and one VR-CallUp.

The highest rated player who made his debut in 2019 is Adam Fox (D-NYR), while the number two player is Cale Makar (D-COL). Their career PR-Charts are below.

Adam Fox had the better 2019 and 2020 seasons. Both Fox and Makar had PR-Elite seasons in 2021, with Makar having the edge.

Their career Big 5 Stats are:

Big 5 Stats						
Player	Tm	GP	TOI	G/82	A/82	Pts/82
Adam Fox	NYR	80	22.5	9	56	65
Cale Makar	COL	69	23.7	21	61	82

The Big 5 Statistics are: games played per season (GP); time on ice per game (TOI); then goals, assists and points (G/82, A/82 and Pts/82) per 82 games played.

The statistics are based on all seasons since 2019. Cale Makar averaged playing 69 games for every 82 scheduled games, and his goal-scoring pace would have produced 21 goals in 82 games played.

Fox earned first place in the beginners from 2019 because he played more games than Makar. The VR calculation reduces the impact of missed games, but it doesn't entirely remove them.

Four 2019 newcomers are in the VR-First5 category after three seasons. They are Nick Suzuki (F-MTL), Jason Robertson (F-DAL), Vladislav Gavrikov (D-CBJ) and John Marino (D-PIT).

Big 5 Stats						
Player	Tm	GP	TOI	G/82	A/82	Pts/82
Nick Suzuki	MTL	82	18.3	19	37	56
Jason Robertson	DAL	51	17.4	35	43	78
Vladislav Gavrikov	CBJ	81	20.2	5	20	25
John Marino	PIT	74	20.6	4	23	27

While Suzuki is the highest rated of this foursome, Robertson is almost certainly the better player. Robertson's VR calculation is impacted by his three-game 2019 season. Based just on his last two seasons, Robertson would be a VR-Star.

It is unfortunate for Robertson that he played so few games in 2019 and the STTB formulas count that as a season, but the STTB rules were created without the desire to screw over any specific player. VR calculations use three seasons of data where three seasons of data exist, whether a season consists of one game played or 82 games played.

First Played in 2020/2021

115 players made their debut in 2020. Based on the 56-game schedule, the expected number of new players is 92. That there were more new players this season than expected can almost certainly be attributed to Covid.

In total, fifteen players who began in 2020 qualified for Value Rating. Only four of the players who first played in 2020 rated VR-First5 or better. In total, one was VR-Star, three VR-First5, nine were VR-Regular and two were VR-Fringe.

Kirill Kaprizov (F-MIN) is the VR-Star. K'Andre Miller (D-NYR) was 20 years old in 2020, and having this level of talent at this age has got to be a good omen for his future. Artem Zub (D-OTT) is the adult of the four players, at 25. When Chabot is healthy, Zub is one of his more frequent defensive partners.

Big 5 Stats							
Player	Tm	GP	TOI	G/82	A/82	Pts/82	Rating
Kirill Kaprizov	MIN	81	18.7	44	49	93	VR-Star
K'Andre Miller	NYR	80	20.8	7	12	19	VR-First5
Artem Zub	OTT	75	19.8	5	17	22	VR-First5
Yegor Sharangovich	N.J	76	16.6	25	23	48	VR-First5

I was surprised to see Artem Zub on the list. I would have thought if an Ottawa player made this list, it would have been Jimmy Stu, I mean, Tim Stutzle. Speaking of Stutzle, a #3 draft pick, lets look at his Big 5 Stats compared to the #1 pick in his draft class.

Big 5 Stats							
Player	Tm	GP	TOI	G/82	A/82	Pts/82	Rating
Tim Stutzle	OTT	79	17.1	21	32	53	VR-Regular
Alexis Lafreniere	NYR	81	13.9	19	13	32	VR-Regular

An unavoidable part of a rating formula is that a player's statistics are affected by his teammates: hockey is a team game.

Stutzle gets a lot more ice time than Lafreniere because Ottawa isn't close to qualifying for the playoffs, so why the heck not put the kid on the ice? And, somewhat oddly, Tim gets more power play time than Alexis because Ottawa isn't as good a team as the Rangers. Stutzle competes for power play time with Chris Tierney, while Lafreniere competes with Chris Kreider.

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First Played in 2021/2022

160 players made their debut in 2021. This is higher than normal, and I'm going to take a shot in the dark and say this was related to Covid.

No matter how good a player is, he cannot play 124 games in one season, so none of the 2021 rookies can be evaluated using VR: I'll use PR for them.

One player, the guy who should be rookie of the year, was rated PR-Star. One player was PR-First5, six were PR-Regular, eighteen were PR-Fringe and 134 (more than 80% of the group) were PR-CallUp. I'll concentrate on the first three, as the highest rated PR-Regular player just missed being PR-First5.

Player	Tm	GP	TOI	G/82	A/82	Pts/82	Rating
Moritz Seider	DET	82	23.0	7	43	50	PR-Star
Lucas Raymond	DET	82	18.2	23	34	57	PR-First5
Anton Lundell	FLA	65	15.7	23	33	56	PR-Regular

If there is any justice, the 2021 Rookie of the Year will be Moritz Seider (D-DET), who will beat out Lucas Raymond (F-DET) and Anton Lundell (F-FLA). Seider and Lundell were both 20, while Raymond was a teenager (19).

How close was Lundell to being PR-First5? If he had had one more assist, he'd have been PR-First5. If he had had one more goal, if he had played 22 more minutes, if he had blocked 7 more shots, if he had taken the puck away 6 more times - had he achieved any single one of those, he'd have been PR-First5.

Summary

The rankings of the top players who debuted since 2019 can, and will, change over the next few years. Should they both stay healthy, Makar will almost certainly pass Fox. Kaprizov should maintain his placement but needs to stay healthy to do so. The same is true for Seider.

I wonder what the long-term impact of Covid will be (he said, hoping that the ongoing threat of Covid will someday be a thing of the past). What will become of the 2019 and 2020 draft classes? Will they develop differently?

By the way, if you aren't surprised about the players who were identified as being among the best in their groups, that is a sign that the VR and PR formulas work.