Early Success is a Good Omen

When I started Stapled To The Bench, one of the things I was most interested in was looking into questions about the careers of players. Is there a normal age for a player to have his "peak value"? How long does a player hold onto his peak value? Does the age that a player has when he starts playing have any implications on his career?

In this study, I will compare the peak value of players who have a first good season at an early age to players whose first good season came "later in life".

Study Method

To do this study I needed to use my two main rating systems.

I used Productivity Rating (PR) to identify good seasons, which is any season with a PR-Regular or higher rating. I used Value Rating (VR) to find a player's peak value.

To ensure that there are a satisfactory number of players in each category, players will be placed in age pairings. The three pairings of interest on players who had their first good season at age 18 or 19; at age 20 or 21, and; at age 22 or 23. Players who have their first good season at age 24 don't have a significant amount of success later in their careers (see the section Dropping the Seniors for details).

The assembled data will include a player's name, the season-age at which he first had a good season, and his Career Maximum VR (which I'll call CMVR from now on).

For more information on PR and VR, please see the articles *Introduction to Productivity Rating* and *Introduction to Value Rating*.

Some Hands on Deck!

2,765 players have played at least one game in one season since the 2007/2008 season, the earliest season for which PR and VR calculations are possible.

An 18-year-old player in 2007/2008 would have been born in 1989, so only players born in 1989 or later qualify for this study. Players born before 1989 cannot be included because their first good season may have occurred before 2007/2008. 1,301 players were eliminated from consideration.

In order to see a bit of a player's future, only players whose first good season happened before the 2018/2019 season are included. Of the 1,464 remaining players, 274 have had a PR-Regular or better season before the tender age of 24 before the 2018/2019 season.

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What a Good Season Looks Like

The following table shows the average season statistics of players in the four highest PR-Categories. These averages are from players born after 1988. GP is games played in a season and TOI is time-on-ice per game played. They are followed by goals, assists and points.

Category	Forwards					Defensemen				
	GP	TOI	G	A	Pts	GP	TOI	G	A	Pts
PR-Regular	74	15.5	16	20	36	69	19.0	4	15	19
PR-First5	78	17.9	24	32	56	77	21.5	7	24	31
PR-Star	79	19.7	32	46	78	79	24.0	11	36	47
PR-Elite	80	21.3	42	57	99	81	25.7	16	52	68

While the big five stats represent nothing more than "attendance and scoring", those statistics are the biggest contributors to the PR formula and they describe the players in the categories in a manner that is friendly to the public.

The first good season for a forward would be almost any season that he played at least 75 games, played 16 minutes a game, scored 16 or more goals and had 36 or more points. We'll take better seasons, but we won't take worse seasons.

Maximum VR Attained of Qualified Players

This first table shows data from the 542 players. Age F.G.S. is the age of their first good season, and count is the number of players who had their first good season at that age. For example, 64 players had their first good season in the 18-19 age range.

Players Born 1989 or Later, F.G.S Before 2018/2019					
Age F.G.S.	Count	Maximum VR Attained				VR-Star Plus Pct
		Regular	First5	Star	Elite	
18-19	64	7	24	20	12	50%
20-21	98	23	48	22	3	26%
22-23	112	44	50	12	1	12%

The next four columns show the count of the maximum VR attained by the players in that group. Twelve players who had their first good season at age 18 or 19 have, at some point in their career, attained a VR-Elite rating.

 "VR-Star Plus Pct" is the percent of players in the group who went on to have a VR-Star or better season. As an example, 50% of players who had their first good season at age 18 or 19 went on to become VR-Star or better players.

The data shows that the earlier a player has a good season, the more likely it is that he will have a higher VR later in his career. It must be pointed out that almost all of these players are still active, and it is very possible that some of them have yet to hit their career maximum value.

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Dropping the Seniors

As the age of a player's first good season increased, the likelihood of that player achieving a VR-Star or better rating went down.

- Only two of the 50, 24–25-year-old players, hit a VR-Star rating (4%).
- No player in the 26-27 age group went on to have a VR-Star of better rating (0%).

Late bloomers can have a career, but they aren't going to become all-stars or anything. And there is nothing wrong with an older player putting up a couple of PR-Regular seasons for your team.

Teenagers Who Are Up And Coming

Name	First Good Season	Age	Pos	Max VR
Miro Heiskanen	2018	19	D	VR-Star
Rasmus Dahlin	2018	18	D	VR-First5
Lucas Raymond	2021	19	F	
Jack Hughes	2020	19	F	VR-First5
Brady Tkachuk	2018	19	F	VR-First5
Jamie Drysdale	2021	19	D	
Andrei Svechnikov	2018	18	F	VR-First5
Jesperi Kotkaniemi	2018	18	F	VR-Regular
Cole Sillinger	2021	18	F	
Kaapo Kakko	2020	19	F	VR-Regular
Tim Stutzle	2020	18	F	VR-Regular
Seth Jarvis	2021	19	F	
Alexis Lafreniere	2020	19	F	VR-Regular

Up and Coming Players

There are thirteen players who have yet to play five seasons and who had a good season in their teenage years. They are shown on the "Up and Coming Players" table on the left.

The order of players in the table is the PR-Score of their first good season (Miro Heiskanen had the best first good season of this group).

One has already achieved a VR-Star rating, and it is hard to conceive that most of the others won't by the time they've played six seasons.

There are four players on this list who debuted in 2021: they haven't had a chance to play enough games to qualify for a Value Rating, so their Max VR column is empty.

ESIAGO

No, I didn't misspell asiago. ESIAGO is the acronym of Early Success Is A Good Omen. Players that have the potential to be stars later in their career have success very early in their career.

The idea that a late bloomer can become a star is not supported by the data but may be supported by your local sports media and fan clubs. Jake Evans had his first good season in Montreal last year at age 26. It is a safe bet that he won't achieve VR-Star status.