

2023-24: Rookie of the Year

The hardest part of identifying the Rookie of the Year this year was identifying the Rookies.

My main data source, NaturalStatTrick.com, would be my normal choice to provide a list of rookies. When I ran a report to get a list of Rookies (the Bios report, selecting Rookies under “More Filters”), I noticed someone was conspicuously absent: Connor Bedard. Are other rookies missing? How was I to know?

So, I went to my emergency backup data source: NHL.com. Its rookies-only report includes Connor Bedard. I decided to use NHL.com to identify rookies and then use Productivity Rating (based on statistics gathered from NaturalStatTrick.com) to identify the Rookie of the Year (ROTY).

The Nominees

In alphabetic order, the three main candidates in the public’s mind for ROTY are Connor Bedard (F, CHI), Luke Hughes (D, N.J), and Brock Faber (D, MIN). They are also the three rookies with the highest PR-Scores, so the public is right.

Bedard is 18 years old and potted 22 goals despite missing 14 games.

Luke Hughes is a 20-year-old defenseman who played 21.5 minutes per game.

Brock Faber is a 21-year-old defenseman who played 25.0 minutes per game.

A player’s age, officially, has nothing to do with his eligibility for ROTY. The NHL awards the prize through a vote, and age may influence some voters who think that the lesser accomplishments of a younger player mean more than the greater accomplishments of an older player.

The 2023-24 Rookie of the Year

At Stapled to the Bench (STTB), the Rookie of the Year will be the rookie with the highest PR-Score this season.

Brock Faber is the runaway winner of the Rookie of the Year Award with a PR-Score 8.70, putting him in the PR-Star category. No other rookie was in the PR-Star category, and only one rookie was in the PR-First5 category: Luke Hughes (PR-Score 7.30). Connor Bedard had a PR-Regular season (PR-Score 5.75).

Faber’s average time on ice per game, 25.0 minutes, is the sixth highest in the league amongst all players (not just rookies). He was no slouch at scoring with 47 points, 22nd amongst all defensemen in the league.

Faber played in defense-first situations. He averaged 3.0 minutes of penalty kill time per game, the eleventh highest in the league. 37.8% of the faceoffs he was on the ice for were in his defensive zone (that figure was 22.3% for Luke Hughes).

Finally, Faber’s PR-Score had him 22nd in the league amongst defensemen.

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Why Luke Hughes Did Not Win

Luke Hughes's statistics do not stand up to those of Brock Faber. He had less time on ice, less penalty-kill time, and was equivalent in scoring. Amongst all defensemen, he ranked 51st in PR-Score. Not bad for a rookie, but not 22nd either.

For the season, over 82 games played, Hughes had 7.4 minutes of penalty-kill time-on-ice. At his average rate, Faber would accrue 7.4 minutes of PK time in 8 periods.

Why Connor Bedard Did Not Win

It's not what you think. It is not because he missed fourteen games. Had he played all 82 games, his PR-Score would have been about 7.1, so he would still be rated behind both Hughes and Faber.

Bedard got more credit for offense than either of the defensemen he was against, but he was only 14 points ahead of them (61 to 47). The defensemen had way more ice time because they were defensemen who played all 82 games.

In a few years, we will be able to compare the seasons these players had at similar ages, and then Bedard's superiority will become evident. I would be willing to bet that Bedard's age-21 season (2026-27) will be better than Faber's age-21 season.

That confidence in his future cuts no ice for his Rookie of the Year candidacy. The award goes to the rookie who had the best season, not to the rookie who has the best future.

Summary

The rookie who had the best season: is the person who should win the Rookie of the Year award. Brock Faber had, far and away, the best season of all 2023-24 rookies. If you want to give the award to Connor Bedard because of his promising future, then rename the award.

If you want to give the award to Luke Hughes, well, you are just wrong.

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