Team's Best Players –Atlantic Division

Being a fan of Ottawa, I was wondering the other day about who were the best players to ever play for the Senators. Being a sports data wonk, I wanted to use numbers, rather than opinions, to answer the question (PR-Score, GxPts: see the first two related articles).

There are four Best Player articles, one for each NHL division. The first part of each article, from here to the divisional Best Players tables, will be identical in each article. The Best Players tables will be presented without extra commentary, but the Summary section may have a little something extra.

Methodology

What did I mean by the best player? I was interested in individual seasons rather than a span of seasons. At the start, I wanted to know which player had the best single season for Ottawa. I could do this very easily using PR-Score: the answer for the Senators is Erik Karlsson in his 2015 season, and it isn't close.

I immediately wanted to complicate my life. What about the best forward? Wait, how about the three best forwards, two best defensemen and a goalie?

For Edmonton, the top three seasons for forwards come from the legal team of McDavid, McDavid and McDavid. I wanted to see three different forwards. This made the data structure a little more complicated, but it was nothing I couldn't handle.

By the way, any player who was traded mid-season had absolutely no chance of qualifying as one of the best three players for either of the teams he played for.

As I'm using PR-Score for skaters, and GxPts for Goalies, I can only go as far back as the 2007-08 season (with apologies to Wayne Gretzky and Guy LaFleur).

In the next section, I will explain the "Best Players table".

Description of the Best Players Table

The example Best Players table shown below is Pittsburgh's "second team": their fourth to sixth-best forwards, their third and four-best defensemen and their second-best goalie.

PIT Season	Name	POS	TOI/ GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2018	Jake Guentzel	F	19.4	40	36	76	248		
2012	Pascal Dupuis	F	17.5	34	31	65	270	26.4	45
2008	Jordan Staal	F	19.8	22	27	49	369		
2023	Erik Karlsson	D	24.1	11	45	56	170	17.4	50
2023	Marcus Pettersson	D	22.5	4	26	30	323		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2021	Tristan Jarry	G	3415	138	144	0.10	146	59.3	51

The top five data lines are show forwards (yellow shading) and defensemen (green shading). The sixth data line is for a goalie (blue shading). While goalies have the same number of data columns as forwards, the data in those columns are different.

For the skaters, I show four NHL statistics: time on ice (minutes) per game played, goals, assists and points. For seasons that played fewer than 82 games (2012, 2019 and 2020) I show extrapolated data, as that puts all player data on the same scale.

"Lg Rank" is league rank: if the players were sorted by Productivity Rating from best to worst, Jake Guentzel's 2018 season would be the 248th best season amongst the forwards.

Unit Score is the total Productivity Score of the three forwards or two defensemen, while Unit Rank is the rank (1 would be best) of those productivity scores. Pittsburgh's second-best set of forwards had a total PR-Score of 26.4, which would place them 45th, while the defensemen have a total PR-Score of 17.4 placing them 50th. In the actual tables, the Unit Ranks will range from 1 to 32. I'm showing the second-best group from Pittsburgh, and there are 64 best and second-best groups in the league.

Goalie data shows games played, total time on ice, goals against (GA) and expected goals against (xGA). SvAA60 is the amount of saves a goalie made above average per 60 minutes of play. Jarry gave up 6 goals fewer than an average goalie would have (138 GA, 144 xGA), and that worked out to 0.10 saves above average per 60 minutes.

GxPts is the rating system for goalies, representing the number of standing points a team should expect with a goalie in nets, playing the amount of time a goalie played. Unit Rank shows how a goalie ranks among the other best goalies. It will range from 1 to 32 when considering the best goalies for each team – Jarry ranks 51st among the top 64 goalies.

Teams will be presented from least impressive to most impressive, based on a formula I cannot describe well as I barely understand it myself.

One thing I noticed while compiling the data for this article is the lopsided seasonal distribution of the best players. An unexpectedly large number of them come from either the first four seasons (2007 through 2010) or the last four seasons (2020 to 2023).

	2007 to 2010 2020 to 2023	2011 to 2019
Seasons	8	9
Forwards	65	31
Defensemen	60	36
Skaters	125	67

The 2011 to 2019 group should have had 100 skaters instead of 67 skaters. I can think of no statistical or methodological reason for this to have happened.

Atlantic Division – Best Players Tables

OTT / Season	Name	POS	TOI/GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2022	Tim Stutzle	F	21.3	39	51	90	86		
2022	Claude Giroux	F	18.8	35	44	79	100	29.7	17
2007	Daniel Alfredsson	F	22.3	40	49	89	148		
2015	Erik Karlsson	D	29.0	16	66	82	1	21.0	7
2019	Thomas Chabot	D	26.4	7	39	46	265		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2011	Craig Anderson	G	3492	165	164	-0.02	160	58.3	31

TOR / Season	Name	POS	TOI/GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2023	Auston Matthews	F	21.0	69	38	107	4		
2022	Mitchell Marner	F	21.3	30	69	99	59	32.9	6
2018	John Tavares	F	19.1	47	41	88	113		
2018	Morgan Rielly	D	23.1	20	52	72	117	18.6	28
2011	Dion Phaneuf	D	25.3	12	32	44	153		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2017	Frederik Andersen	G	3889	182	190	0.12	67	67.5	11

BOS / Season	Name	POS	TOI/GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2020	Brad Marchand	F	18.9	43	59	102	33		
2015	Patrice Bergeron	F	19.8	32	36	68	59	31.6	10
2022	David Pastrnak	F	19.6	61	52	113	68		
2007	Zdeno Chara	D	26.8	17	34	51	46	19.9	17
2021	Charlie McAvoy	D	24.7	10	46	56	87		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2010	Tim Thomas	G	3364	112	146	0.61	50	69.6	22

FLA / Season	Name	POS	TOI/GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2018	Aleksander Barkov	F	22.4	35	61	96	18		
2022	Matthew Tkachuk	F	20.4	40	69	109	24	33.3	4
2023	Sam Reinhart	F	20.3	57	37	94	26		
2007	Jay Bouwmeester	D	27.5	15	22	37	107	19.0	27
2011	Brian Campbell	D	26.9	4	49	53	107		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2009	Tomas Vokoun	G	3695	157	175	0.30	54	69.1	15

DET Season	Name	POS	TOI/ GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2007	Pavel Datsyuk	F	21.4	31	66	97	14		
2007	Henrik Zetterberg	F	22.1	43	49	92	38	32.2	7
2018	Dylan Larkin	F	21.8	32	41	73	100		
2007	Nicklas Lidstrom	D	26.7	10	60	70	46	19.4	23
2012	Niklas Kronwall	D	24.4	9	41	50	153		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2012	Jimmy Howard	G	4178	149	158	0.13	25	72.5	30

BUF Season	Name	POS	TOI/ GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2019	Jack Eichel	F	22.2	42	49	91	113		
2007	Derek Roy	F	21.0	32	49	81	113	29.3	19
2022	Tage Thompson	F	18.6	47	47	94	162		
2023	Rasmus Dahlin	D	25.4	20	39	59	19	20.1	15
2012	Christian Ehrhoff	D	25.2	9	29	38	117		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2009	Ryan Miller	G	4048	150	174	0.36	16	77	3

MTL Season	Name	POS	TOI/ GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2023	Nick Suzuki	F	21.3	33	44	77	136		
2009	Tomas Plekanec	F	20.0	25	45	70	248	27.6	26
2007	Alex Kovalev	F	19.6	35	49	84	270		
2014	P.K. Subban	D	26.2	15	45	60	29	20.4	13
2023	Michael Matheson	D	25.6	11	51	62	72		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2014	Carey Price	G	3977	130	169	0.59	4	82.3	2

T.B Season	Name	POS	TOI/ GP	G	A	Pts	Lg Rank	Unit Score	Unit Rank
2023	Nikita Kucherov	F	21.7	44	100	144	5		
2012	Steven Stamkos	F	22.0	50	48	98	26	33.1	5
2022	Brayden Point	F	19.7	51	44	95	113		
2021	Victor Hedman	D	25.1	20	65	85	3	21.5	5
2022	Mikhail Sergachev	D	23.8	10	54	64	81		

Season	Name	POS	TOI	GA	xGA	SvAA 60	Lg Rank	GxPts	Unit Rank
2022	Andrei Vasilevskiy	G	3596	159	177	0.31	68	67.2	25

Team's Best Players –Atlantic Division

Summary

Ottawa is ranked as having the least impressive group of best players: it is hard to argue with that. But Toronto is second last in this group? That's a combination of them having had no stellar defensemen since 2007-08 and only being allowed to count one season each from Matthews and Marner.

If Detroit, Montreal and Buffalo making the top four in the division seem odd to you, that's probably recency bias at work. Recency bias is a tendency to focus on things that happened recently and overlook things that happened years ago. Twelve of the eighteen players listed for these teams had their good seasons ten or more years ago.

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