

THE SMARTEST, WELL-INFORMED,  
CLUED-IN, ADAPTABLE, CONVERSANT, MATHEMATICAL,  
DEDICATED, EDUCATED, UP-TO-DATE, CUNNING, SCHOLARLY,  
LEARNED, EXPERIENCED, EXPERT, KNOWLEDGEABLE,  
SENTIENT, PROFICIENT, AWARE, SKILLED,  
ADVANCED, PROFICIENT, PHILOSOPHICAL,  
INTUITIVE, RATIONAL, ANALYTICAL, ASTUTE,  
SHREWD, DISCREET, ALL-BALL, PRUDENT,  
PERCEPTIVE, OBSERVANT, KEEN, DEVOTED,  
FERVENT, WISE, CLEVER, A THOUGHT-OUT MIND

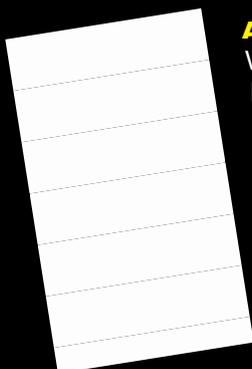
THE GAME OF HOCKEY HAS EVER KNOWN.

There's no shortage of brain wattage in the game, but some minds dwarf the crowd. They're the people who think the game in a flash, are on the cutting edge of innovation, have incredible recall, intuit winning strategies. They're hockey's geniuses, and we've identified 10 of them.

## > SCOTTY BOWMAN

At 76 years old with nine Stanley Cups as a bench boss, William 'Scotty' Bowman has earned the right to idle away his days far from the ice. Instead, he remains the guru of all things hockey

BY KEN CAMPBELL



**A FEW HOURS BEFORE** Game 3 of the Western Conference final in 1998, Detroit Red Wings GM Ken Holland was summoned to ice level from his office by then-Red Wings coach Scotty Bowman.

Bowman pointed up to the scoreboard at the Joe Louis Arena where ESPN had mounted a camera to follow the play. He pointed out to Holland that when Dallas defensemen Richard Matvichuk and Derian Hatcher cleared the zone, they did so by shooting the puck off the glass,

but Wings Nicklas Lidstrom and Larry Murphy were more inclined to flip the puck high into the air.

"He said if one of them hit that camera the faceoff would be in our zone," Holland recalled. "And he said Dallas was 60 percent on the draw and we were 52 percent on the draw; they might win the draw and score and that might be the difference in the game. I just gave him a blank stare and went back to my office and when I came back down there were 15 people taking down the camera."

Later in that same series, the Stars had won Game 5 in overtime and were feeling good about their chances to extend the series with a win back in Detroit.

"I really thought we had momentum and we had a lot of good players who were playing really well," said Ken Hitchcock, who was coaching the Stars. "In Game 6, Scotty had the right players on the ice all game. They dialed up the checking game to where we could barely get it across center ice and that was a real lesson for me. The players all talked about it over the summer and we all learned a valuable lesson."



Scotty Bowman's final hurrah as a coach was Detroit's 2002 Stanley Cup win.

There are hundreds of stories like that about Bowman, far too many to contain here. Everyone who speaks of Bowman or has worked with him describes him as the greatest coaching mind the game has ever seen. Nobody can quite describe what Bowman sees in a hockey game that others don't, but they all agree his ability to do so is uncanny. But what we do know made Bowman such a good coach are four main things – his incredible sense of recall, his attention to detail, his ability to have the right players on the ice almost all the time and his ability to know which players are at the top of their games at that moment.

"He had a great feel for how to manipulate a game from the drop of the puck," said Bowman's son Stan, who is GM of the Chicago Blackhawks.

It helps that Bowman, whose playing career was cut short in junior hockey by a skull fracture after being hit in the head by the stick of Jean-Guy Talbot, spent his formative coaching years learning at the feet of Toe Blake, Sam Pollock, Frank Selke and Claude Ruel. You get the sense, though, that Bowman would have found his way regardless of who mentored him.

"I believe him to be a mathematical genius," said broadcaster and coaching protégé Pierre McGuire. "One of the reasons he was such a great line matcher was that he could break down times for players. He didn't need stopwatches or anything else. He just had it in his head because he could calculate numbers so quickly in terms

I believe  
him to be a  
mathematical  
genius  
-PIERRE MCGUIRE

of time on ice and things like that. He didn't have to look at stat sheets, so he could do it quickly during the course of a game."

To be sure, Bowman's mind moves faster than almost anyone else's in hockey both on and off the ice. His ability to adapt to game situations is legendary, as is his penchant for recalling the most minute details in games that were played decades ago.

"You could ask him about the Stanley Cup final in 1962 and he could tell you who played and who was making all the plays," Holland said. "And he could talk about it like he just saw the game the night before."

As the accomplishments piled up for Bowman they gained him a lot of currency, which he used to be innovative and daring with his strategies.

During the mid-1990s the thought around the league was that you couldn't win with too many Europeans, but he put together the Russian Five in Detroit and it

led the team to successive Stanley Cups. He would measure the distance between benches and the ice to make sure it conformed to standard. He still watches between three and five games a night.

"He's watching matchups most of the time," McGuire said. "He's watching faceoff positioning on the penalty-kill? Most people would think it's ridiculous, but that's how he watches a game."

Friends tell a story about the 1979 final when the Canadiens faced the Rangers in a quest for their fourth consecutive Stanley Cup. Every time Rangers coach Fred Shero tried to get Phil Esposito out on the ice, Bowman countered with checking center



Doug Jarvis, at which point Shero would pull Esposito off the ice. Esposito was incensed and glared down the bench at one point, staring daggers at Bowman.

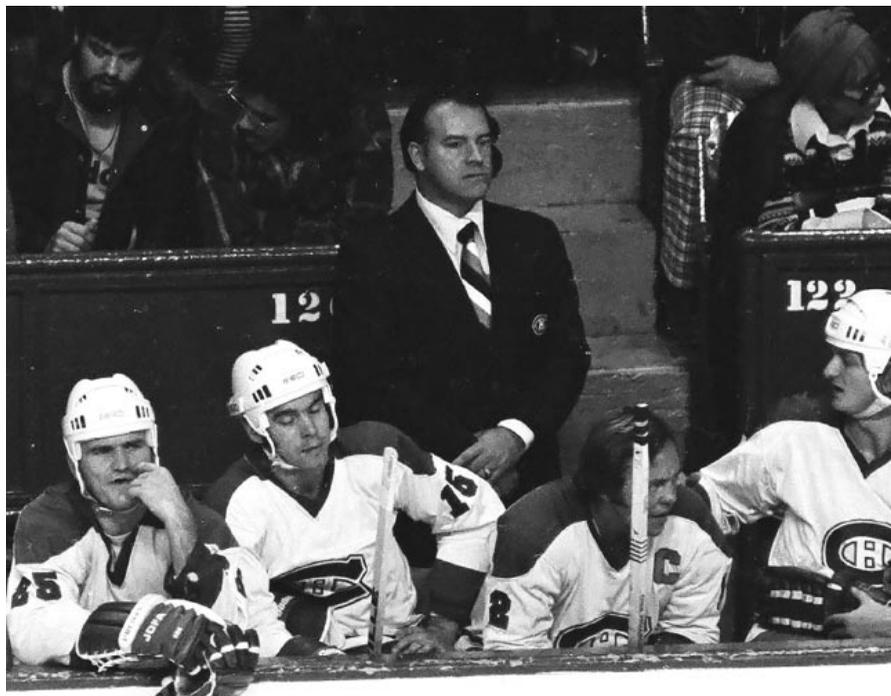
"All night, Phil, all (expletive) night," Bowman said to Esposito.

That Bowman coached in five decades and won Cups in each one but the 1980s is a testament to his ability to adapt to the game. And he's still imparting his wisdom, now as a senior advisor to his son Stan. When the Blackhawks went down 2-1 in the first round to the Nashville Predators and looked terrible in Game 3, the elder Bowman gave the Hawks coaches his take on things.

"We like to control the game by having the puck and having composure," Stan said. "And we weren't doing that so he just told our guys, 'We have a little more time than we think we do. We don't need to be in such a hurry to get rid of the puck!'"

"It took hold as the game went on and we played one of our best games in the playoffs, and it really turned the playoffs around for us."

Just another day at the office for Scotty Bowman. . |



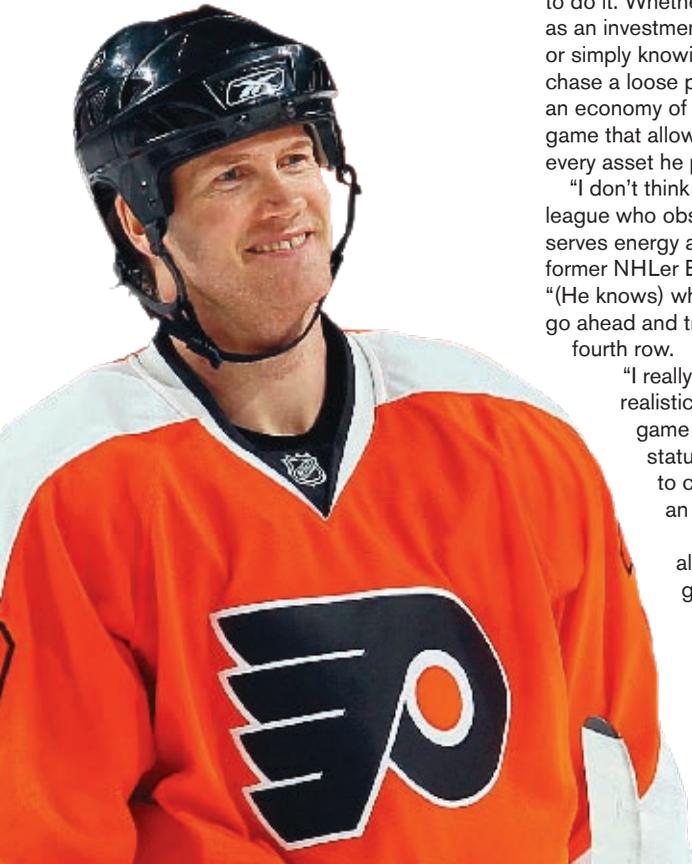
Montreal's five Cups in the '70s under Bowman helped to cement his genius rep.



## > CHRIS PRONGER

Cold calculation is the name of the game for the never-frivolous Flyer

BY RYAN DIXON



**ANYBODY WHO HAS** spent much time playing against Chris Pronger can tell you a lot of what he does smart. The whack on the back of the leg; the little cross-check that lands just above the pants, but below the back of the shoulder pads; the whole thing where he uses his 6-foot-6, 215-pound frame to paste people against the boards.

But for all the advantage his physical attributes and sour state of mind provide him, what stands out most about Pronger to those who really watch him is not so much what he does, but when he decides to do it. Whether it's using an infraction as an investment for future deterrence or simply knowing when to go all out to chase a loose puck in the corner, there's an economy of movement to the big man's game that allows him to get the most out of every asset he possesses.

"I don't think there's a player in the league who observes (the game) and conserves energy as well," said TV analyst and former NHLer Ed Olczyk about Pronger. "(He knows) when to sit back and when to go ahead and try to put somebody in the fourth row.

"I really think he has the ability to – realistically – play 40 minutes in a game because of his smarts, his stature, his awareness, his ability to conserve energy and still be an effective player on the ice."

We understand conceptualizing Pronger as a hockey genius is a bit like imaging

He knows when to sit back and when to go ahead and try to put somebody in the

– ED OLCZYK

fourth row



There's a reason so many people care about what Chris Pronger has to say.

Nelson, noted bully from *The Simpsons*, solving Sudoku puzzles, while shaking down kids for lunch money.

Then again, Pronger has excelled at a thinking man's position for about 15 years. When some theorized he'd go the way of Derian Hatcher following the post-lockout rule changes, he simply re-adjusted his game to the new hockey world and went about leading his teams – the Edmonton Oilers and Anaheim Ducks – to consecutive appearances in the Cup final.

Pronger is an astute follower of all league happenings off the ice ("I like to know what's going on. It is my business and it affects me"), and it would be no surprise if he one day ascends to a GM's position. When he's on the ice, he's as much mathematician as mad man.

"You have to understand the game and understand where guys are going to be," Pronger said. "You have to understand if you're shooting on a goalie's pad, where it's going to bounce. There's mathematics involved, geometry, whatever. You shoot the puck at a pad this way and it's going to bounce over there. Oh, is that where our guy is?"

"A lot of it is just calculating the odds. Now it's instinct."

Joe DiPenta played alongside Pronger on the Ducks blueline during the team's 2007 championship season. When he watches his old teammate play, he's still struck by the subtle things, the little decisions Pronger makes that pay off in a big way.

"I saw the other night when he was in front of his own net and waited until the forward got the puck and had his back to Chris before he went to the corner, where most guys would rush in there," DiPenta said. "The forward did not see Chris coming and he surprised him, took the puck off his stick and the Flyers broke out easily. He changes momentum. It's hard to get anything going when he is on the ice." |



# > ROLAND LEE

Arbitration, salary cap expert doesn't care for the spotlight, but agents understand his value



**ONE OF THE** most important employees of the NHL Players' Association also is one of its most publicity-averse. But operating behind the scenes gives Roland Lee the time and space he needs to fulfill his role as the NHLPA's associate counsel and director, salary cap and marketplace.

"I'm quite comfortable staying in the background," said Lee, the go-to guy for arbitration and the CBA. "I give all the credit to the agents and players. They're on the frontlines...they do all the heavy lifting. I'm just here to help them maximize the players' earning potential. That's my mantra."

Lee's ability to remember any player's salary and put it into a league-wide context is part of the reason why he is so highly regarded among NHL player agents.

"He knows everyone's contract off the top of his head and who anyone is compa-

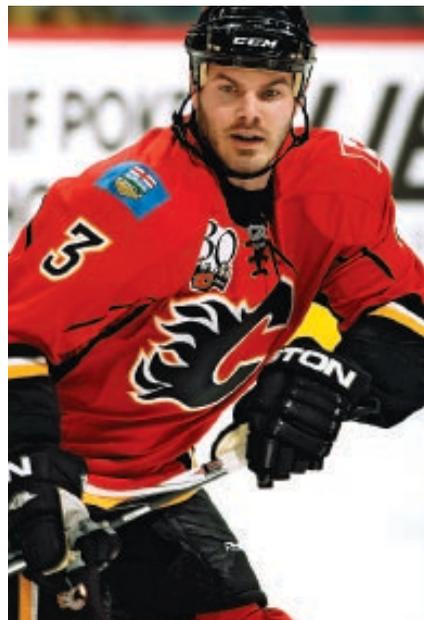
rable to," said one agent. "He knows the good deals, the bad deals and pretty much the story behind every Group 2 contract. He is very analytical and is an invaluable resource, especially as it relates to salary arbitration. I've never understood why an NHL team hasn't tried to hire him away."

For Lee, who has been with the NHLPA for 15 years, success in arbitration can come about in a number of different ways.

"We've done fairly well in salary arbitration, but you don't judge everything based on one player's award," Lee said.

"It's a total collaborative effort with the agent and the player...and the real goal of arbitration is to not have the player go through the arbitration process. So any time a player avoids it, we see that as success as well."

- ADAM PROTEAU



Roland Lee will likely be on the case if Ian White goes to arbitration this summer.

> One of the most important employees of the NHLPA

GERRY THOMAS/NHL VIA GETTY IMAGES

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## The Genius Issue

### > MICHAEL BOYLE

He's been leading the way in what he does since before there was even a title for it

**GETTING STRENGTH AND** conditioning coaches to hero themselves is next to impossible, but raise the name Mike Boyle and you can hardly shut them up.

"He has a huge following, whether it's NHL, collegiate, all up and down," said Ray Tufts, the San Jose Sharks head athletic trainer and president of the PHATS side of PHATS/SPHEM, the organization for hockey trainers and equipment people.

The 50-year-old Boyle has been at Boston University for nearly 30 years and an integral part of BU's hockey program for about 25 of those. From 1991 to '99 he was the Boston Bruins' strength coach. He writes articles that change people's mindsets within the industry and travels the globe to give speaking engagements.

"Mike has always been regarded as the guru out in the Boston area for hockey

training," said Rich Hesketh, the Calgary Flames strength and conditioning coach.

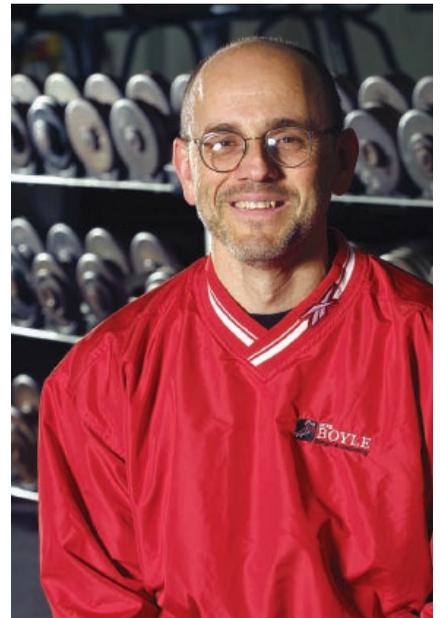
At BU his charges have included Keith Tkachuk, Chris Drury and Tony Amonte, along with countless other future NHLers.

When Boyle got his start, strength coaches were the witch doctors of hockey; their nouveau practices considered dubious at best. But Boyle helped changed that.

In the '80s and '90s he pioneered sprint training in hockey – short bursts followed by longer rest periods – to mimic game situations. Sprint training is now the norm.

Boyle continues to be cutting-edge – single-leg exercises, because you skate one leg at a time, is his latest – but the proof of his genius is so many of his apprentices now have NHL and NCAA jobs; he's the trainer who trains future pro trainers.

– JOHN GRIGG



Mike Boyle's players are consistently some of the NCAA's fastest.

> Mike has always been regarded as the guru – RICH HESKETH

### > CRAIG RAMSAY

The Bruins assistant coach excels in all aspects of his job and young players benefit most

**IF AN NHL** head coach stayed employed for all but one of the past 15 seasons and helped lead a team to a Stanley Cup, he would be hailed as one of hockey's all-time great minds.

But that's exactly what Craig Ramsay has done as, for the most part, an assistant.

Yes, Ramsay has had two stints as a bench boss. The first came in Buffalo, where he followed up a sterling, 14-season playing career with the Sabres by serving as an interim coach and replacement for the immortal Scotty Bowman in 1986; and in Philadelphia, where he took over for Roger Neilson for a season in 2000.

However, for the most part – and fairly or unfairly to Ramsay – he has most often found a home as an assistant (or associate, if you prefer). He's played that role for the Sabres, Flyers, Panthers, Senators, Light-

ning and, during the past three seasons, the Bruins.

He understands what it means to be an assistant – to develop younger players; to focus on and break down the sport's smaller aspects; and to act as a buffer between the players and the head coach.

Ex-Lightning GM Jay Feaster, who worked with Ramsay when the Bolts won the Cup in 2004 under coach John Tortorella, still swears by Ramsay's abilities.

"Rammer is one of the best teachers in the game, if not the best," he said. "He was very cerebral as a player and I think players now respect everything he's done in the league, both on the ice and as a coach.



As much a teacher as he is a coach, Craig Ramsay is valued behind the bench

"In Tampa, he was the good uncle, the patient one, the guy who takes a little extra time to find the right words for players.

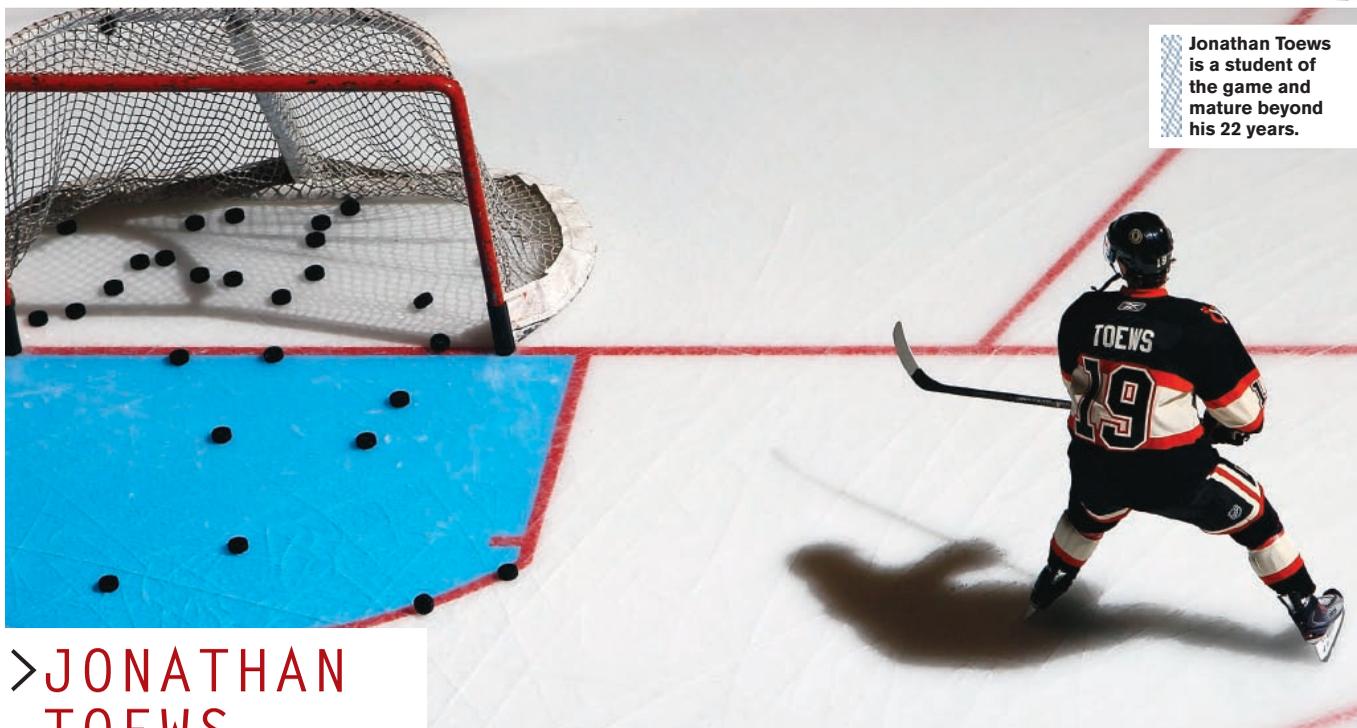
"He was the perfect yin to (Tortorella's) yang."

– ADAM PROTEAU

> One of the best teachers in the game – JAY FEASTER



Jonathan Toews is a student of the game and mature beyond his 22 years.



## > JONATHAN TOEWS

Chicago's captain never even considered the notion being average was an acceptable option

BY RYAN DIXON

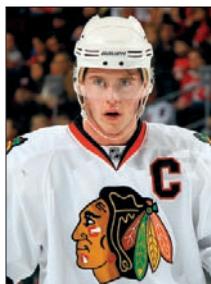
**THERE'S AN EXTREME** irony to the fact young hockey players are almost exclusively referred to as 'kids,' yet it's very easy to forget the fact that's exactly what they are.

Stars. Future millionaires. Role models. Lucky little SOBs. Because they're already household names before being drafted, we tend to think of high-end NHL prospects as a lot of things other than what they really often are, which is a teenager only a few years removed from collecting an allowance and watching cartoons.

Then along comes somebody like Jonathan Toews, a 'kid' who probably had cocksure NHL suits ready to refer to him as 'Mister' by the end of his pre-draft interview.

Stan Bowman worked in the Chicago Blackhawks' hockey operations department for eight years prior to being named the team's GM last summer. He vividly recalls speaking with Toews mere months before the Hawks took him third overall in the 2006 draft.

"It was like night and day with some of the kids you interview," Bowman said. "He looks you in the eye, he gives you straight, thoughtful answers and he's got a presence about him kids that age just don't



He's a very intelligent young man and he's successful because everything he does, he expects to do well

-DAVE HAKSTOL

have. Right off the bat, before you even see him play, he sets himself apart."

Toews was just coming off his freshman season with the North Dakota Fighting Sioux at the time. In order to get to UND by age 17, he crammed three years of high school into two.

And the fact he chose the college route when the majority of top prospects opt for major junior provides further insight into the sharp, determined mind of a 22-year-old who's frequently kidded about the fact he comes off as being 10 years older than he is.

"He's a very intelligent young man and he's successful because everything he does,

he expects to do well," said Dave Hakstol, Toews' coach for two years at UND. "There's no one part of his life that he just pushes aside and says, 'It's OK to be average.'"

That is certainly the case on the ice, where Toews is constantly striving to add to what is already an incredible collection of content between his ears.

"It's apparent when you talk to him, he's clued in to what you're saying," Bowman said. "He's not half-listening. He's a student of the game that way."

The result is a player whose contributions can't always be quantified with stats.

"Right now, it's easy to measure Jonny's play in terms of points," Hakstol said. "But I think what you really have to do to appreciate him as a player is take a sum of all the little things he does during a 60-minute hockey game and you add that up, and usually what you end up with is a guy who has a major impact on the outcome of that game."

Added Bowman: "He's certainly able to anticipate plays, that's why he's such a good penalty-killer. You have to be smart, you have to be able to read what's going to happen and he can certainly do that."

Toews' knowledge base is ever expanding, mostly because he takes every opportunity to improve very seriously.

"It's often said he gets mad when he loses a faceoff, but he really does," Bowman said of Toews' practice habits. "It's not an act. It bothers him."

That's just how Mr. Toews is. . . |



Late-blooming Bruins goalie Tim Thomas is among Acme's late-rounders.



## > BILL ZITO

Acme agency founder cares for a cluster of stars overlooked by teams and other representatives

BY KEN CAMPBELL

**UNLESS YOU'RE EITHER** from Sweden or you're a serious hockey geek, you probably don't know a whole lot about Linus Klasen. But you will. After all, he's represented by Bill Zito.

A batboy for the Milwaukee Brewers when they went to the World Series in 1982, Zito is hockey's version of the Statue of Liberty. "Give me your undrafted, your ignored, your overlooked, your wretched refuse of your teams," might as well be the corporate motto for Acme World Sports, the hockey agency founded by Zito.

Which brings us back to Klasen, a 5-foot-8 sublimely skilled 24-year-old who recently signed a one-year deal with the Nashville Predators. Klasen was never drafted, which puts him in good company with most of Zito's clients. You see, the man has a knack for finding players nobody else thinks can play and getting them chances to prove they belong in the NHL.



Give me your undrafted,  
> your ignored,  
your overlooked,  
the wretched refuse of your teams

Among his high-profile clients are John Madden, Brian Rafalski and Antti Niemi. Not one of them drafted. Madden and former Zito client Glen Metropolit were products of two of the toughest subsidized housing projects in Toronto. One of his first clients was Sami Salo, who was taken with the third-last pick (239th overall) in 1996. Tim Thomas is a client, as is Kimmo Timonen (250th in 1993), Adam Burish (282nd in 2002) and Antti Miettinen (224th in 2000).

In fact, if you take the Zito clients who either were undrafted or cut loose by their teams, there are six Stanley Cups, a Vezina, Selke and Jennings Trophy and five All-Star Games.

"In few other industries in the world are opportunities a captive currency," said the 45-year-old Zito. "If I had a great lawyer and the firms say no, I'll open my own. If he's a great baker and people say no, you make your cakes and walk around giving them to people. But here, it only takes 30 guys to say no and I'm out of luck."

But Zito is increasingly getting those 30 guys to say yes. He and his associates have an ability to spot talent where others don't see it, particularly when it comes to Finnish players or North Americans playing in Europe.

Five years ago, Niemi was a full-time Zamboni driver and a part-time player in Finland's first division league. This summer, Zito will get him a very rich contract.

Zito said former Milwaukee Brewers star Ted Simmons used to make him do his homework in the clubhouse before games. It's obvious Zito listened. He was accepted at Harvard, but went to Yale, where he played hockey for four years before a brief pro career in Finland. When he wrote the LSAT test to get into law school, he scored 47 out of 48.

"And I appealed the one (I got wrong) and said it was a grey area, but they said no," Zito said. "It wouldn't have changed my percentile, but it would have been fun to say I didn't get any wrong."



## > MITCH KORN

Predators goaltending coach has had success churning out plenty of top puck-stoppers

**BY INCLUDING HIM** in this story, we're giving Mitch Korn his 'props.' But he already had lots of props to begin with.

In fact – and let's hope the Predators goaltending coach extraordinaire doesn't take this the wrong way – Korn is the hockey equivalent of a famous prop comedian.

"Mitch is the Carrot Top of the NHL," said Nashville goalie Dan Ellis, one of many elite netminders Korn has helped develop since he joined the Predators in 1998. "He's got screen boards, deflection boards, mini-pucks, white pucks and other props. He has a whole bunch of tools he uses to make our practices as hard as possible, so games will be that much easier for us."



Dan Ellis, left, and Pekka Rinne are two of Mitch Korn's top students.

Korn, who tended net and coached at Kent State in the 1970s and '80s, first gained acclaim when working with Dominik Hasek during the his Vezina and Hart Trophy-winning seasons in Buffalo.

In his dozen seasons with the Preds, Korn has turned out a small army of NHL-caliber goalie talent, including Ellis, Tomas Vokoun, Chris Mason and Pekka Rinne.

The 53-year-old Korn may not do things the 'normal' way, but his ability to steer his students to success can't be debated.

"You're used to doing traditional goalie drills, but what Mitch asks you to do improves your vision and (puck)-tracking," Ellis said. "He's also there to support you from a mental perspective. He's been really good for me – and the whole organization, really."

– ADAM PROTEAU

> Mitch is the Carrot Top of the NHL – DAN ELLIS

## > KEVIN COMPTON

A prescient owner in a market that needs one – Compton has made some good decisions

**ONE DAY WHEN** Kevin Compton was seven years old in southern Missouri, he was playing army with his friends on a construction site. Rather than get captured by his pals in the rafters of the house that was being built, he decided to jump into a pile of sand below. But he missed and was impaled by a steel rod that went in through his thigh and out his intestine.

"So if I'm the smartest guy in the room," Compton said, "it's a pretty small room."

Compton is the majority shareholder in the San Jose Sports and Entertainment Enterprises Ownership Group that owns the San Jose Sharks. Pretty smart investment, given that the Sharks are among the league's most profitable franchises with one of the most rabid and loyal fan bases.

Not quite up there, though, when he led the charge for Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield

and Byers, a high-tech venture capital firm in Silicon Valley, to invest millions of dollars into Google in 1999 that made the company billions of dollars. Compton downplays his part in the move, just as he does his prominence as an NHL owner, but those who know him say differently.

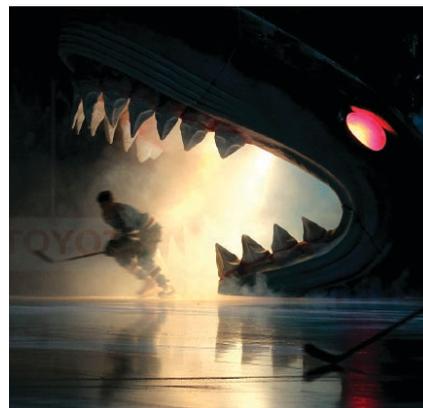
Those close to NHL ownership say Compton has the ear of commissioner Gary Bettman and other new-guard owners around the league.

"He's not going to vote on where the All-Star Game is going in two years," said one source, "but Gary listens to him and other owners listen to him. He could be a kingmaker down the road."

Compton was also instrumental in the team owning the China Sharks of the Asian League and after getting involved in the Sharks bought up a number of local arenas, which are run by the team.

The 52-year-old still plays twice a week and is a devoted family man and devout Christian. He can explain his belief in creationism over evolution using reason rather than passion.

"Show me where you've ever created matter," he once said. "I don't have enough

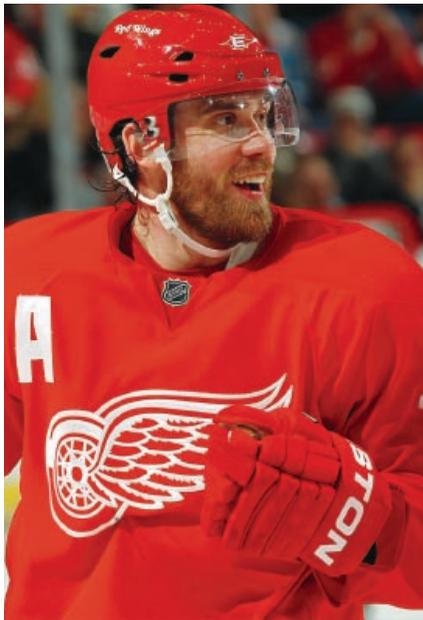


San Jose is a success in part because of Kevin Compton's business acumen.

faith to believe I came from two amoeba meeting in a pond and made their way up through primates and became this. I just don't believe that happened. I happen to believe there's a master plan and a master creator."

– KEN CAMPBELL

> Compton has the ear of the commissioner



One of the Wings best late finds is Conn Smythe winner Henrik Zetterberg.

## > HAKAN ANDERSSON

Detroit's European super-scout has kept the Wings flush without the luxury of high draft picks



**PERHAPS THE MOST** widely recognized name from the scouting realm of the hockey world is Hakan Andersson, the Detroit Red Wings director of European scouting.

A native of Stockholm, Sweden, Andersson has been with the Red Wings for 20 years and been credited with unearthing late-round gems such as Henrik Zetterberg (210th overall), Jonathan Ericsson (291st overall) and Pavel Datsyuk (171st overall).

What makes Andersson so successful is hard work and an innate sense of "special." Red Wings assistant GM Jim Nill noted Andersson doesn't employ any unusual or unique techniques in his job, but does it by the book and with a foundation of dedication to the game.

"Our philosophy here is skill and he focuses on skill players," Nill said. "It's about going to games; you have to go to games."

Scouting is an element that can't be done by just one person, though. While Andersson leads the charge, he is also successful because of the work done by Vladimir Havluj, Evgeni Erfilov and Ari Vouri.

Andersson himself was somewhat of a late-round pick. Before he joined the club, the Red Wings' hot scout was Christer Rockstrom, who was credited with finding stars such as Nicklas Lidstrom (53rd overall). When Rockstrom moved to the New York Rangers, the Red Wings needed to find somebody to take his position. Before long, fate pointed the Red Wings towards Andersson, who was working as a fishing guide for a travel company.

"He was just looking for a job and he was hired," Nill said. "Hakan was the guy and Christer recommended him to us."

- RORY BOYLEN

> He focuses on skill players -JIM NILL

## > INDUSTRY INNOVATORS

Arenas and hockey helmets don't design themselves, these companies do - and they do it better than everyone else

**WHEN IT COMES** to barn-raising, no one designs arenas like Populous, the international sports architectural firm.

Populous is in charge of Pittsburgh's new Consol Energy Center and has worked on many NHL buildings.

"They tend to push the envelope," said Kevin Reichard, editor of leading industry website ArenaDigest.com. "They turn the building inside-out."

That means lots of openness and attention to aesthetics. Reichard cites Minnesota's Xcel Energy Center as a great example of Populous' work.

"One whole city block is glass," he said. "It has a very open footprint whether you're on the ground floor or an upper level."

This means fans aren't crammed into claustrophobic concrete blocks when they want to buy a beer or a pretzel.

"The paradigm of the building has changed," said Brad Clark, a lead designer at Populous. "They used to be functional boxes to hold fans in. From an

aesthetic philosophy, we want to open up the buildings as much as possible."

Clark, who works out of the Kansas City, Mo., office of Populous, also worked on the city's brand-new Sprint Center, which is awaiting either an NHL or NBA tenant.

A designer for more than two decades, he also knows the impact a good arena can have on the team it supports.

"You try to do whatever you can to make the building as intimate as possible," he said. "You want to provide that home-ice advantage."

In the hockey equipment world, it's Easton that is making the most waves in terms of innovation.

"If there's any company that is expected to have a fresh take and execute it, it's Easton," said one industry insider.

"And they weren't even in hockey 30 years ago."

Indeed, but the company with baseball roots has used that non-traditional research-and-development background to



churn out many different products, such as composite skates (much lighter than traditional boots and featuring carbon fibers woven in) and the Z-Shock helmet, another lightweight innovation.

"We wanted it to feel like you weren't wearing a helmet at all," said Easton Hockey vice-president Ned Goldsmith. "We get a lot of feedback from players and that's a critical part of what we do."

- RYAN KENNEDY

TOP: DAVE REGINE/NHL VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: FRANCOIS LACASSE/NHL VIA GETTY IMAGES