

Tolvanen torching goalies

With another year in North America to acclimate to the smaller ice surface and more rugged playing style of the USHL, Eeli Tolvanen is making his case as a potential top 10 selection in the 2017 NHL Entry Draft.

“We’ve got lots of veterans this year,” Tolvanen said early in the season. “Even more than last year, so we’ve got lots of guys who know how you have to be in this league and how you have to play. With our new goalies and some of [the] new forwards, it’s more getting the guys together and doing the learning process as a team.”

The Vihti, Finland, product is in his second season with the Sioux City Musketeers, having come over a year ago and put up strong numbers as he acclimated to league play. Musketeers head coach Jay

more skilled players over there, but here - there’s lots of opportunities to play and be on the first two lines, power play and things like that. I get a lot of chances here, and the league is good. Guys are big and fast, and so playing in North America has helped me a lot for what I will see in Boston College and after, too.”

Last April, Tolvanen opened eyes with his performance at the World Under-18 Championship, helping Finland capture a gold medal. With a goal per game at the annual U-18 spring tournament, Tolvanen firmly established himself as one of the 2017 draft class’s purest goal scorers, impressing scouts with his NHL-calibre release and the killer instinct to find the back of the net from just about anywhere in the offensive zone.

Eeli Tolvanen File

- ◆ **Ht/Wt:** 5-11/178
- ◆ **Position:** Right Wing
- ◆ **Shoots:** Left
- ◆ **Birthdate:** April 22, 1999
- ◆ **Team:** Sioux City
- ◆ **Scouting Report:** Just an absolute goal scoring machine. Natural sniper has the best one-timer and is the most dangerous power play performer in the entire draft. Phenomenal hands and is money from the top of the circles in. Tremendous release on a very hard shot. Can win 1-on-1 and create off the rush as well. Does need to become a more well rounded, two-way player. Has trouble clearing the d-zone against aggressive pinches and is not going to win many board battles. Defensively challenged.

Varady described Tolvanen as a player “with a special skill set,” and after making the adjustment from Europe, the high scoring winger did not disappoint, netting nearly 20 goals as a rookie.

“The first thing that jumps off the page with Eeli is his release and how hard and accurate it is,” Varady told *Red Line* recently. “He shoots the puck so fast and with so much power in such little space, it really catches goaltenders off guard. His skating and conditioning is exceptional as well; he can skate a 45-second shift, take about 30 seconds on the bench and then go back out and perform another high-level shift. His cardiovascular fitness is a big factor in his consistency from shift to shift.”

In his draft year, Tolvanen has taken another step forward, leading his club in scoring early in the regular campaign. He doesn’t turn 18 until April, but is well ahead of his goal production pace from a season ago.

“The icetime is bigger here,” Tolvanen said, alluding to his success in the USHL. “There’s more space in Finland, so there’s

He’s a player who capitalizes on mistakes and can aggressively turn a neutral zone miscue into a prime scoring chance whenever the puck is on his stick.

“I’m a goal scorer but I like to make plays too,” he said. “I’m a pretty good skater but I’m pretty small, too.”

While Tolvanen lacks ideal NHL height, he’s so skilled and dangerous offensively, it’s easy to get past the physical stature and focus on the dynamic scoring tools. With a quick first few steps and the ability to elude defenders in open ice with speed and slippery agility, Tolvanen is not only a dangerous shooter, but also uses his creativity and soft hands to thread the needle and make his linemates better. Being a little more unselfish with the puck is something he sought to address in the offseason and so far, so good in the early going.

“Probably my playmaking skills,” said Tolvanen when asked what areas he focused on in the offseason. “I like to score goals, but I want to pass the puck and make plays, too. I’m learning to use my teammates more

Tolvanen Report Card

Size/Strength	C
Skating	B+
Shot/Scoring ability	A+
Puckhandling	A
Hockey Sense	A-
Competitiveness	B
Physical play	C-
Composure/Poise	A
Defence	C

and I think that is good for my game.”

Like many players with his body type, Tolvanen doesn’t offer much in the way of physical play, nor is he a defensive stalwart. However, when he’s pushing the pace and filling the net with laser beams, you won’t see many complaints from coaches about the lack of a mature three-zone game.

“I think his desire to get better and desire to be an impact player every night is what drives him,” said Varady. “He’s real good with coaching, too. He’s able to translate a lot of the ideas you give him in practice into his game and that translates to his success and that of our team.”

Tolvanen also passed on major junior, opting for the NCAA after the OHL’s Oshawa Generals took him 17th overall in last summer’s CHL Import Draft. The Boston College Eagles are the beneficiaries of his decision, though in *Red Line’s* opinion, he’s not likely to be there for more than one season.

“I’m pretty excited to be going to Boston College,” he said. “As a Finnish guy I like Boston a lot, and I already know them [the BC coaching staff] pretty well, so I’m very happy to be an Eagle and excited to go there.”

Playing hockey in the U.S. Midwest is quite a departure from what Tolvanen experienced in Europe, but he’s enjoyed the way the passionate Sioux City fans have embraced him along with his pure scoring ability.

“The fans are great,” he said. “I used to play in front of maybe 200 people, and here it’s like 2,000, so that’s really good. I didn’t know much about the USHL before I came, but it’s fun to play the games and see the way the fans go crazy every night.”

With the NHL so starved for offence and Tolvanen proving to be a goal producing machine on a nightly basis, we see a very high selection for him in Chicago next June.