Hello,

Please enjoy my columns. I am interesting in keeping track of which communities they go to. I would appreciate it if you could take a moment and send me a quick email at rejeangiguere@rejeangiguere.com when you publish the first one.

Thanks, Rejean.

Connor McDavid: Signs of the Next Great One.

Every once in a while there is a “Can’t Miss” hockey prospect who comes up through the ranks that start the comparisons to Wayne Gretzky and the young player is anointed “The next great one.”

All these supposed “Can’t Miss” players have brought something unique to the table, something that set them apart from the others. Gretzky had vision, he knew where everyone was on the ice, almost without looking, and became the best playmaker we have ever seen.

Lemieux had reach, he was tall and lanky and could move the puck out of an opposing player’s grasp, or tease them out of their position. Lindros had size, he was a bruising power-forward who ran loose on the ice like a bull in a china shop.

With Connor McDavid it will be his stickhandling. He can stickhandle in a phone booth. Yes all players at this level of hockey can handle a puck, but Conner does it continuously. His hand speed, hand-to-eye coordination, and foot work is very fast and he never stops moving.

When most players go to shoot or pass the puck they effectively stop stickhandling in order to make a pass or shoot at goal. This phase of their game effectively becomes a separate step from the stickhandling and positional phase that came before.

However, McDavid does both phases simultaneously. I have watched him still stickhandle behind the goalie, moving the puck once, twice, and then firing it into the open net. He literally controls the puck until the last second when most players would have shot it as soon as they saw their first opportunity.

McDavid doesn’t give the goalie a final chance to get back into the play, or to catch up to a flying puck with a flailing arm or quick leg. He stickhandles it right into the net. I believe that this ability will be his mark on the game.

Part of what made Gretzky “The Great One” was his manner, demeanor, and attitude towards both the game and the fans. He never considered himself above the game and respected it. You can believe that the numbers didn’t mean as much to him as playing the game did.

McDavid has gone quietly to Edmonton, showing that he knows he hasn’t earned anything yet at this level, that he will have to earn what comes in the future. That he hasn’t made any demands, or claimed any expectations of ice time or who he will play with all point to him having the right attitude.

The number two player drafted after McDavid was Jack Eichel. Eichel almost immediately started talking about not signing his contract if he wasn’t going to be staying in the big league all year. He wanted assurances he wouldn’t be sent down to a lower league for part of the season.

That sounds like entitlement to me. Shouldn’t he have to earn the position before getting it? This is another example of why McDavid may be the next great one. Skill combined with attitude.

McDavid has been keeping his head down, getting five goals in one of his first scrimmages. He makes no public comments about his own game or anyone else’s, and is going about trying to earn his spot on the team, and trying to begin the legend.

So far so good.

Rejean Giguere is a Northern Ontario author of six novels whose passion spills over into the sports world. Check out his website at www.rejeangiguere.com.

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