

The Masters: Sergio wins his first major

Vamos! Vamos! After four days of great golf at Augusta National Golf Club, Sergio Garcia defeated Englishman Justin Rose in a playoff to win his first major championship. After 73 majors without a major championship, Garcia finally won. There was full blown drama in Augusta with some of the biggest names in golf high on the leaderboard. Americans Jordan Spieth and Rickie Fowler were in contention heading into the final round Sunday, but they struggled the whole day, each finishing -1 for the tournament, 8 strokes behind the leaders. Here's a look at the biggest winners and losers of the 81st Masters Tournament.

Winners:

Sergio Garcia

Garcia was by far the biggest winner as the week ended with a green jacket for the Spaniard. Tied for the lead at -6 going into Sunday, Garcia started out hot, birdying 2 of his first 3 holes. Then he started to sputter going into the back 9 with bogeys at 10 and 11 with almost near disaster on 13 when his tee shot ended up in a bush. He saved par and the momentum started to change. After parring 14 and being 1 stroke behind leader and playing partner Justin Rose, Garcia stiffed an 8 iron into the par 5 15th hole ended up with an eagle 3 and tied for the lead, which is where they stood after 18 holes. A playoff was underway. Garcia split the fairway with his drive while Rose hit it into the trees. Rose was on the green in 3 and Garcia in 2. With Rose missing his par putt, Garcia aka El Niño needed just 2 putts to become the Masters Champion. He only needed one as he birdied the playoff hole and sealed his first major victory at the age of 37.

Matt Kuchar

The highest finishing American in the field, Kuchar had a great final round, shooting a final round's best score of 67 (-5). Along with finishing T-4, Kuchar had the shot of the tournament on Sunday with the 19th hole in one in Masters history on the 16th hole. After Kuchar drained the shot, he spotted a young fan and gave the ball to him. What a nice gesture by the 2016 Olympic bronze medalist.

Augusta National

After a rough early part of the week with inclement weather and high winds in the first two rounds, Augusta still had some great moments that many will remember. What a great job by the grounds crew at the club to keep the the course in great shape.

Losers:

Phil Mickelson

After starting hot on the first few days of competition, the third round in Saturday was a rough one for Phil. After Mickelson birdied the first two holes to get within one stroke of the lead, things took a turn for the worse with a double bogey on 3. Mickelson ended his Saturday with a +2 74, 8 shots behind the leaders and would never be seen again. The three time Masters winner hasn't won since the 2013 Open Championship and has struggled in form.

Dustin Johnson

Coming into Augusta as the favorite and winner of his last three events on tour, DJ had his eyes set on a his first green jacket. This mindset suddenly changed Wednesday night before round one when he slipped and fell in his rental house in Augusta, hurting his back and in the end forcing him to withdraw from the tournament. Johnson tried to play and arrived at the first tee before his tee time but then in the end withdrew because of his back. Hopefully the 2016 U.S. Open champion can get back on his feet and make a speedy recovery to defend his title this June in Charlotte.

Penguins lead Sharks 3-1 in Stanley Cup Finals

The 2016 Stanley Cup Finals have brought together two of the NHL's best teams to compete for the championship. Representing the East this year are the Pittsburgh Penguins, while from the San Jose Sharks represent the West. This year's Stanley Cup Finals have begun and the Penguins currently have a 3-1 lead over the Sharks.

The Sharks started the playoffs against the Los Angeles Kings, beating them in 5 games. They went on to play the Nashville Predators, beating them in 7 games. After winning this series they went on to the Western Finals. Here they were up against the St. Louis Blues. The Sharks only needed 6 games to secure their spot in the Stanley Cup Finals.

The Penguins had a similar path to their Stanley Cup spot. In the first round of the playoffs the Penguins played the New York Rangers. This series took 5 games for the Penguins to move on in the playoffs. After the Rangers, the Penguins took on their next opponent, the Washington Capitals. This series took 6 games for the Penguins to move onto the Eastern Finals. Here they faced the Tampa Bay Lightning. This series went to a nail biting game 7, which the Penguins won in Pittsburgh.

After this the Penguins and the Sharks met in Pittsburgh for games one and two. The Penguins took both games and lost one game in San Jose before bouncing back with a win in game 4. The Penguins will try to close out the series Thursday night in Pittsburgh.

2016 NHL MVP Debate

Recently the three finalists for the 2016 Hart Memorial Trophy were announced. Patrick Kane of the Chicago Blackhawks, Jamie Benn of the Dallas Stars, and Sidney Crosby of the Pittsburgh Penguins have all had amazing season and are worthy MVP candidates. However, a couple of key names have been left out and should be recognized. The Hart Trophy description of the winner reads, "the player judged most valuable to his team." While these three forwards are extremely valuable to his team, there may be a couple players that were more valuable this season.

To start, it should be noted that Patrick Kane will easily win this award. Finishing with 106 points, 17 more than the next best (Benn) and being the first U.S. born player to lead the NHL in points sets up the perfect resume. The Blackhawks lost two top forwards in Patrick Sharp and Brandon Saad, and Kane had to raise his offensive play to a new level to make up for their departures. While Kane has been the most valuable to his team this year, there are players just as or more deserving of at least being nominated than Benn and Crosby.

Last season, Carey Price became the seventh goaltender to win the Hart Trophy in its 92 years of existence. This season, no goaltender is even recognized. The goalie is more responsible for a whole half of the game (not giving up goals) than anyone else on the ice and is arguably the most valuable position in hockey. Not many goalies have won the award because they are not producing points and aren't usually as flashy as the centers and wingers on the best teams. However, tying the record for most wins ever in a season as someone did this year should be noted. Braden Holtby of the Washington Capitals had an incredible season, accounting for 48 games of the team's 56

victories. He has been more valuable than Alexander Ovechkin, who led the league with 50 goals but had a career low 21 assists. The Capitals finished with 17 more points than any other team in the Eastern Conference (the Florida Panthers) and 11 more than the leader in the West (the Dallas Stars). The "best player on the best team in the regular season" argument certainly favors Holtby, and he should have at least been recognized as a finalist.

A defenseman is rarely recognized for MVP, but there is one player this year that should have been a finalist. The Ottawa Senators narrowly missed the playoffs this year, but defensemen Erik Karlsson did everything he could to get them there. He led the league in assists (66) and in average time on the ice per game (28:58). He was tied for fourth in the league in points and only finished 3 points behind Sidney Crosby with the same amount of shots. As a defenseman, that is extremely impressive. There is no doubt he will win the James Norris Memorial Trophy for the league's top defenseman. However, he deserves recognition as being one of the most valuable players more than bigger name and more flashy player Crosby.

It is difficult to argue against Jamie Benn being recognized as a finalist for the MVP. Using the same argument as Holtby, he is the best player on the best team in the conference. His play towards the end of the season propelled Dallas into the top spot in the west. While he only had 7 more points than Karlsson, he did enough to make a good team into a great team. Holtby and Benn are close in resumes, and they should be the second and third finalists, with Kane being the first American born player to ever win the Hart.

NHL draft order announced

This past Saturday, April 30, the NHL lottery draft order was announced. The Toronto Maple Leafs were rewarded for having the worst record at 29-42-11, receiving the first overall pick. The top five teams to pick in order are the Toronto Maple Leafs, Winnipeg Jets, Columbus Blue Jackets, Edmonton Oilers, and Vancouver Canucks.

The Maple Leafs struggled immensely this season with the second worst goal differential in the league at -48. P.A. Parenteau led the Leafs in scoring with an abysmal 20 goals. Austin Matthews, the consensus number one overall pick, looks like he can bring the scoring fire back to the struggling team. The young player from Scottsdale, Arizona, had some impressive stats during the 2016 IIHF World Junior Championship, tying the high scorer of the tournament with 7 goals in 7 games and leading the U.S.A. to the bronze medal.

After Matthews, the consensus remaining four skaters in the top five are Pierre-Luc Dubois, Matthew Tkachuk, Alexander Nylander, and Jakob Chytrun. The class doesn't have quite the flash of last year's draft, which featured names like Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel going in the top two last year.

The Erie Otters were lucky enough to have two of the top 50 draft prospects this year in Alex Debrincat and Taylor Raddysh. Debrincat last season set the rookie record for points in a season at 104 and continues to post similarly impressive stats. He projects to be a late first round pick, while Raddysh is expected to go in the second round.

This year's draft will be held on June 24-25 in Buffalo, New York. Hopefully for teams like the Maple Leafs, they are able to find their franchise player.

Erie Otters Advance to OHL Western Conference Finals

The number one seed in the Ontario Hockey League playoffs and the best sports team currently in Erie is advancing to the Western Conference Finals. After sweeping the Saginaw Spirit in four games, the Otters beat the Sault Sainte Marie Greyhounds 4-1 in the Conference Quarterfinals. They won the final game of the series by a score of 5-2 with a dominating performance by team captain Dylan Strome, as he notched his first career hat trick and added two assists. Strome, the top point scorer in the OHL in 2015 and the third overall pick of the Arizona Coyotes last year has an impressive 18 points in 9 postseason games, good enough for fourth most in the playoffs. Additionally, center Alex DeBrincat, a potential first round pick in the 2016 NHL draft, has a solid 16 points in the playoffs so far.

The Otters will face off against the London Knights, who finished one win behind Erie in the regular season, as both teams had a total of 105 points. They defeated the Owen Sound Attack in six games in the first round, and then they swept the Kitchener Rangers to get here. London features the most productive offense in the league, led by stars Christian Dvorak and Mitchell Marner. Dvorak lead the league in goals (52) and was second overall in points (121) and Mitchell was right behind him in points at 116. They have a total of 46 points in the postseason. The team as a whole scored a whopping 319 goals, compared to the 269 scored by Erie.

This series will also showcase the top two goalies in the OHL, Tyler Parsons of London and Devin Williams of the Otters. They finished first and second in goals against average,

respectively, in the regular season, and Williams has the lowest in the playoffs. Two of the top teams in junior hockey will be competing for the Wayne Gretzky trophy, and the Otters are going to give it their all to advance and win their first OHL title since 2002.

2016 NHL Playoffs Preview

It is hockey fans' favorite time of year. The chase for the Stanley Cup is finally on, with more surprises than many fans had expected preseason. The brackets are set, and both conferences look primed to provide fans with some entertaining playoff hockey, which began last night.

The playoff format has a slightly different setup than in previous years. While there are still 16 teams in the playoffs, the playoff bracket is largely division-based.

The top three teams in each division make up the first 12 teams in the playoffs. The remaining four spots were filled by the next two highest-placed finishers in each conference, based on regular-season record and regardless of division.



The 2016 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs c/o NHL.com

The Eastern Conference surprised many with teams like the Boston Bruins, Montreal Canadiens, and Ottawa Senators all missing the playoffs. The Washington Capitals grabbed the number one seed and the presidents trophy for best record in the entire NHL. Their free agent acquisitions like TJ Oshie appear to be paying dividends as they look primed for a long run. Perhaps one of the biggest surprises is the Pittsburgh Penguins grabbing the 2 seed. After a slow start, the team turned it on, as Sidney Crosby began producing as well as the rest of the Penguins depth, even after injuries began taking their toll.

My sleeper team to make a run at the title is the Tampa Bay Lightning. They proved they have what it takes to make it to the Stanley Cup last year and if a few players could get

healthy they look dangerous. My favorite to come out of the East is Washington Capitals. Their combination of scoring and great goaltending from Braden Holtby leaves them in a good position to make a run.

Eastern Conference Finals prediction: Washington over Detroit in 6 games

The Western Conference was more typical this year as many teams that made the playoffs were favorites early on. Dallas grabbed the number one overall seed, which was no surprise with scoring threats Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin. Hopefully they can finally pull it together on the defensive end and make a run. The Anaheim Ducks were a huge surprise after a slow start to the season. Scoring appeared to be a huge issue until finally catching their strides midway through the year and not looking back.

My favorite to come out of the West is the Chicago Blackhawks. This team was built for the playoffs. Great top tier scoring, good depth, stellar defense, and a solid goalie rotation bode well for the experienced team. My sleeper team is the Los Angeles Kings. Once again, it's tough to go against the experience, and Jonathan Quick is a proven stud when playoff time comes.

Western Conference Finals prediction: Chicago over Anaheim in 7 games

I project this Stanley Cup to be one of the most exciting to date. Both teams deserve to be there, but they will have gotten there in different fashions. The heart of the two teams, Patrick Kane and Alexander Ovechkin, are two of the most prolific scorers in the NHL with two completely different playing styles. This series would be an intense battle, with incredibly well matched up teams. In the end, I think the Capitals will be more motivated to win, especially Ovechkin who has yet to win his first Cup.

Stanley Cup Finals prediction: Capitals over Blackhawks in 7 games

McDavid, Eichel prepare for NHL showdown

The champs are here. The number one and two choices in the 2015 NHL Draft, Connor McDavid of the Edmonton Oilers, and Jack Eichel of the Buffalo Sabres, finally faced off in an intense matchup in Buffalo. McDavid missed the first face off between the teams because of a broken clavicle. It was a test for both players and teams. McDavid could solidify his dominance and Eichel could prove the Oilers wrong for not picking him with the first pick.

McDavid stole the show and showed his dominance with a game winning overtime goal. He had two goals in the game, the one in overtime and another in the first period. In an interview after the game McDavid humbly stated, "I'm excited, any time you can score an overtime goal, it feels good. To do it in front of friends and family, it feels even better." He led both teams with 2 points in the game and proved to be a big factor in the game.

Eichel also played a great game, but could not drop any points. However, in the first matchup, which McDavid missed, Eichel scored a big time goal. The goal did not push the Sabres over the Oilers, but made a big difference in the momentum of the game. Head coach of the Oilers, Todd McLellan, had nothing but praise for the both of them stating, "I thought Eichel and McDavid were probably the two best players on the ice tonight, that is a real positive, both for Buffalo

and their future and ours in Edmonton and the League. ... They're fun players to watch and they didn't disappoint tonight by any means." Both players are definitely making a big splash in the league and have definitely lived up to their draft position.

The Oilers won the overtime thriller, 2-1 and have now won both games versus the Sabres. This is the start of a new rivalry versus McDavid and Eichel. They both have something to prove and are surely doing just that.

Cathedral Prep Hockey gears up for another state championship run



The early outlook for the 2015-2016 hockey season looked grim for the Ramblers. They were inconsistent at best and could barely keep their record above .500. Flash forward to March and the Ramblers are looking primed for yet another playoff run.

There was a lot of pressure on the team at the beginning of the season. They lost a number of key players and bounced up to the top-tier AAA level. It took a while for the Ramblers to really catch their stride. Early on, it seemed the team lacked chemistry and a lot of the players looked awkward in their roles. It was not until about halfway through the year that it

seemed things were finally coming together.

The Ramblers have been heating up as of late and look to continue rolling. Ever since their 2-1 overtime loss at the middle mark of the season the Ramblers have been unstoppable, finishing their year with an 8-0-1 record. In the last five games the Ramblers have had 31 goals and a mere 5 against. It appears the team is firing on all cylinders at the right time heading into playoffs.

One reason the Ramblers have been on fire as of late is the depth that they have on all levels. Goaltending plays a crucial role in any hockey team's success. The rotation of senior Trent Faulkner and sophomore Jake Kucharski has been a brick wall in net, allowing a mere goal a game in the last five contests. Senior and assistant captain Jack Becker had to say of the team's chances, "take it one game at a time, try to keep the winning streak and make it back to the state championship."

The team looks to keep the momentum rolling through the playoffs. Coach Barnett had to say but one thing about the playoffs, "Why not us?" The team was slept on early in the year and was on the outside of the playoff picture looking in. Now it appears they are one of the favorites to bring home the cup. The Ramblers kick off their second season tonight at 8:30 p.m. at the Mercyhurst Ice Center. Get out to support the team as they make another run at the title.

The future of the NHL is here

This 2015-16 season in the NHL is the year of the rookie more than it is anything else. Everyone knew this rookie class would be strong and exciting to watch, but few expected to see

this much poise and production across the board. This all comes after Connor McDavid, the number one overall pick from the Erie Otters, missed almost 30 games due to injury. Luckily for fans, his fellow members of first year players more than made up for his absence.

While he has played only 21 games, McDavid is still the most talked about rookie in the league, especially if you live in Erie. The early comparisons to Gretzky and Crosby have already been made. His skating ability is amazing, and his stick-handling is rightfully compared to the great centers. In his short time in the NHL, McDavid has compiled 25 points for an average of 1.19 points per game, which is the highest among rookies. He has put on a show almost every game he has played, just as he did for the Otters. McDavid does need to get a bit stronger and surprisingly, can still improve on his passing, but once he does this, he will be one of the best overall players in this league.

Artemi Panarin of the Chicago Blackhawks leads all rookies and is 6th overall in the NHL in points with 54. While he has benefited from playing with the Hart Memorial Trophy frontrunner Patrick Kane there is no question that he possesses far more skill than typical rookies. While Panarin is older (24) than some of the other top rookies, he is still very relatively young and has plenty of time to grow in the best system in hockey. He has gone above and beyond filling in for key veterans Chicago lost in free agency, such as Patrick Sharp and Brad Richards. As the season goes on, he should only get better and will look to help bring yet another cup to the Windy City.

Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart of the Buffalo Sabres are a clear vision of what the Sabres will be for years down the road. Both have 17 goals and Eichel has 22 assists, giving him 39 points and putting him second in rookies behind Panarin. Reinhart, the second overall pick from the 2014 draft, has found his niche on this young Sabres team, as he can always

find a way to get in front of the net and create traffic. Eichel, the second overall pick from this past draft has excelled in his playmaking ability and already looks like a growing superstar in this league. He currently ranks in the top 5 in pass completion percentage in the NHL. With these two young stars to build around, Buffalo has a brighter future than ever.

Panarin isn't the only rookie skater on the league leaderboards. Detroit Red Wings center Dylan Larkin is tied for sixth in the NHL in plus/minus at +21 and has 19 goals, second among rookies behind Panarin. The Michigan native has been a pleasant surprise, as most people did not expect the 19 year old picked in the first round in 2014 would be this successful this early. The Red Wings have a unique balance of old veterans and young rising stars, but they do not need to look much farther than Larkin when picturing their future.

The next rising star is Shayne Gostisbehere of the Philadelphia Flyers. The third round (78th overall) pick from the 2012 draft has quietly been bringing life to an otherwise disappointing Flyer team. Gostisbehere leads all rookie defensemen with 32 points in only 38 games, and he has 18 power play points, which is good for 8th among NHL defensemen. He is currently riding an incredible 13-game point streak, which is the longest ever by a rookie defenseman. He becomes the first d-man to have a streak this long in 20 years. What Gostisbehere has done already in such a short sample size is remarkable, and it makes it even more interesting and exciting to see what he will do next.

There are also a couple of potential star goalies in this year's rookie class. Josh Gibson of the Anaheim Ducks is currently third in the NHL in goals against average (2.10) and is tied for fourth in shutouts (4). The former second round pick got some good experience last year in the pros, but played few enough games to retain his rookie status. This season, he was named to his first All-Star game and is in

serious contention for the Vezina Trophy if he keeps his hot streak up. Columbus Blue Jacket rookie goalie Joonas Korpisalo and Connor Hellebuyck of the Winnipeg Jets both have a higher save percentage than Gibson, while Mike Condon of the Montreal Canadiens leads all rookie netminders with 14 wins, but they all do not have as good of a support system around them. Still, all three are viewed as the future goalie for their respective franchises and make up one of the most impressive rookie classes in years.

It is clear these rookies are talented and can only get better, but just how good are they and how good can they be? There have been comparisons made to the 2005-06 class made up of Sidney Crosby, Alex Ovechkin Henrik Lundqvist, Ryan Suter, Brent Seabrook, Ryan Miller, and others. The guys mentioned above have the potential to be as great as these veterans and future Hall of Famers, but it's far too early to tell if the 2015-16 class will surpass them. Add in Sam Bennet, the number four overall pick in the 2014 draft made by the Calgary Flames and Max Domi and Anthony Dunclaire of the Arizona Coyotes, and this class has a pretty good chance. McDavid, Eichel, and all the rest all have chance at stardom, and we all cannot wait to see what they can become.

Cathedral Prep hockey team begins playoff push

Following up a state championship season is not an easy task for any high school athletic program. There are a number of different struggles that come with a repeat, including replacing departing players and building a similar team bond. The Cathedral Prep hockey team is faced with this task this

season, trying to repeat as state champions despite having lost seven seniors and moving up a division.

The team got off to a slow start this year with lackluster offense being a huge issue. The team's record was three games below .500 only 6 games into the year and it looked as though even returning to the playoffs would be a hefty task. It seemed the AAA competition might just be too much for the Ramblers early on.

Fast forward to today, and the Ramblers are looking primed for a deep playoff run. They currently sit in a tie for 6th place with a record of 6-5-3. Although that may seem like a dropoff, they only sit one point out of a tie for fourth place and only two points out of a tie for second. They have a mere six games remaining on the schedule before playoffs finally begin, but they have plenty of time to make up the points needed to get a higher seed.

Joe Sala currently leads the Ramblers in points with 22, followed by Jack Becker with 21, and Joe Kelly, Pat Kelly, and Nick Trageser with 20 each. Trent Faulkner leads goalies with 9 wins.

Also, the Ramblers took place in the Meadville Invitational over the weekend. The team cruised through the opening round, grabbing the first seed and a semifinal matchup with tournament host Meadville. The Ramblers grabbed a 5-2 win and were on to the championship against a tough St. Edward's team. Despite out-shooting St. Ed's, the Ramblers were unable to overcome the early 3-0 deficit and fell to the Eagles 5-3. It was a tough loss for the team, but it gave the team some needed confidence heading into their playoff push.

The Ramblers seem to be catching their stride at the right time. The team continues play starting next week with their senior night coming on Thursday, Jan. 28. Finally, congrats to senior Jack Becker and Joe Kelly for being selected to the

all-star game.