

Karlsson Among Best Centers

By Dave Lukow

The NHL Network has ranked the top 20 centers in the NHL. William Karlsson, of the Vegas Golden Knights, has made the cut.

Chosen by a panel of the network's experts, the list is topped by Edmonton's Connor McDavid. Only 21, McDavid has been the league's leading scorer in each of the last two seasons. For 2017-18, he had 41 goals and 108 points. He totaled 30 goals and 70 assists the previous campaign.

Pittsburgh pivot Sidney Crosby, who had 89 points in 82 games last year, is ranked second. The 31-year-old veteran, with 38 power-play points, was third in the league in that category.

"Sidney Crosby does everything," NHL Network analyst E.J. Hradek said. "That's why it's hard to put him behind anybody, because you want him in all facets of the game."

Crosby's teammate with the Penguins, Evgeni Malkin, is listed third. The winner of three Stanley Cups, Malkin had 42 goals and 56 assists in 2017-18. The 32-year-old Russian netted 14 power-play goals.

Karlsson, a big reason Vegas made the Stanley Cup Final in its first season, finished with 43 goals and 78 points in 82 games. Before joining the Golden Knights via the 2017 NHL Expansion Draft, he had 18 goals and 50 points in 183 NHL contests (with Columbus and Anaheim).

The 25-year-old Swede added seven goals and 15 points in 20 playoff appearances with Vegas.

The NHL Network ranked him 17th.

"He played in all situations and (for) a lot of the centers on our list, some of those guys played 21-22 minutes," the NHL Network's Mike Johnson said. "Vegas, with the way they did things last year, he was only playing about 18:30 a game and he still put up these great numbers."

Toronto's Auston Matthews is ranked fourth. Despite being limited by injuries, Matthews had 34 goals and 63 points in 62 games. He won the Calder Trophy - given to the league's best rookie - after the 2016-17 season.