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## Ten tantalizing teens



PLYMOUTH, MICHIGAN - APRIL 1: SWEDEN'S HANNA OLSSON #26 SCORES THE OPENING GOAL ON SWITZERLAND'S FLORENCE SCHELLING #41 DURING PRELIMINARY ROUND ACTION AT THE 2017 IIHF ICE HOCKEY WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP. (PHOTO BY MINAS PANAGIOTAKIS/HHOF-IIHF IMAGES)

### Playing in U18 & WW in the same year

**It's no easy matter playing in the women's under-18 tournament in January and then the senior Women's Worlds three months later.**

In fact, only twice have players won medals in both events.

In 2009, Canada's Marie-Philip Poulin, current captain, won silver in both tournaments, while in 2011 Finland's Susanna Tapani won a pair of bronze medals.

Here in Plymouth, there are ten Europeans trying to add their names to this very short and exclusive group (no North Americans played in the U18 in January, in the Czech Republic).

That short list includes Petra Nieminen of Finland; Russia's Nina Pirogova; Tabea Botthof of Germany; Hanna Olsson and Maja Nylén-Persson of Sweden; Czechs Klara Hymlarova and Adela Skrdlova; and, three Swiss—Rahel Enzler, Shannon Sigrist, and Lisa Ruedi.

More impressive, they're not here as passengers; they're contributing. Hanna Olsson had a goal and assist yesterday in Sweden's huge 2-1 win over Switzerland, and last night Nieminen scored one of four Finnish goals in the team's stunning victory over Canada.

Botthof, though, is perhaps the most unusual for two reasons: one, she actually played U18 Division I-A, making the leap all the more challenging. Two, she's only 16 years old.

"I've played with the senior team a couple of times and they decided to take me to the Worlds this time," Botthof said. "I'll do

my best. It's a lot faster. The game is smarter, and the players have so much more experience. It's much harder to play. You have to think faster and be more aggressive."

"I'm a defenceman," she continued, "so my role is just to keep the puck out of the net. I think that's what I can do well, and maybe that's how the coaches thought I could help the team."

In all, there are only five skaters born in the 2000s at this year's Women's Worlds, none younger than Skrdlova, who was born in February 2001.

"I just try to do my best and be a good teammate," she said. "The game is much faster, and the tactical skills are greater from the opponents."

Nieminen is an odd "veteran" of this dual participation, having played WW18 and WW in 2016 as well.

"There's a lot more skill and speed, so everything happens a lot faster," she noted. As for her role, the coaching staff just wanted her to do at the senior level what she had done well at the junior level. "They told me to carry the puck," Nieminen said. "I think I have pretty good puckhandling skills and can create scoring chances."

Olsson's Swedes lost to the Russians for bronze at WW18 in the Czech Republic in January, but she was one of the highest-scoring players at the tournament and earned her shot through offensive talent.

"It's a much higher tempo here," Olsson said before noting that, "we played in the top group of the under 18 with Canada and the U.S., and that tempo is really high as well."

Good point. If she can do here what she did in January, Sweden is heading in the right direction. "They want me to work hard, of course, but they expect me to be an offensive player, the same as I was with the under 18," she added.

"I'm looking forward to enjoying everything and gaining a lot of experience," Botthof said with a smile

Ten senior rookies with recent U18 experience, ten stories of success waiting to be told.

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