



NCAA MEET THE GAME'S NEXT SUPERSTAR

Not real big, just real good: Fillier looks like she's ready to set the women's game on fire. And she's just 19 **BY JARED CLINTON**

CARA MOREY KNEW SHE was witnessing a superstar in the making the first time she saw Sarah Fillier play. It was an experience that bordered on witnessing the supernatural.

A second-year bantam at the time, the diminutive-then and diminutive-still Fillier moved about the ice as if neither the rules of physics nor the laws of gravity applied. She didn't skate. She glided effortlessly, almost as if she was floating inches above the surface. When she surveyed the

ice, it was as though she wasn't constricted by the limits of peripheral vision. Every move she made, Fillier seemed to be not one, not two, but several steps ahead of every other player.

It's no wonder, then, that a mere two seasons into Fillier's NCAA career with Princeton, Morey, the Tigers' third-year coach, is ready to make a declaration: "She's definitely not perfect, and she's so young in the game, but by the time she has another five or 10 years of experience, she's going to be the best player in the world."

A bold prediction? Perhaps. Though it's not as if the powers

that be at Hockey Canada don't see the same potential. Consider the year she had in 2018, the year prior to arriving at Princeton. She starred for Canada's under-18 squad in January; skated for the senior women's development team in August; and, found her way onto the 4 Nations Cup squad, a rarity for a player her age, in November. At the latter, she roomed with her idol, Marie-Philip Poulin. "Being pushed into that environment with really elite and high-level athletes and playing with that speed, I gained so much knowledge in such a short time that I was able to bring it back to the D-I level," Fillier said.

That knowledge translated to a freshman campaign in which the center tallied 22 goals and 57 points in 29 games. Her performance earned her a spot as a top-10 finalist for the Patty Kazmaier Award as the nation's top women's player. She was the youngest of the finalists and the first 2000-born player to earn a nomination. And she has followed it up

with a sophomore campaign that has been every bit as dynamic. Through early March, her 20-goal, 54-point output landed her among the award's top 10 finalists for a second year running. "The success from last year, it's hard to keep the past in your head," Fillier said. "You kind of have to let it go, but I knew that I wanted to have a better season than last year, and with that I wanted to be in the conversation for Patty Kaz."



PRINCETON ATHLETICS

SHOW YOUR TEETH

Fillier credits some of her growth during her sophomore season to developing a 'killer instinct' on the ice.

Though her ability to produce was evident to those around her, it was never Fillier's focus. She was always more concerned with being responsible in her own zone than stuffing the scoresheet. "But com-

in an effort to distinguish between bad habits and on-ice foresight. It's a balancing act. Morey doesn't want to restrict Fillier's creativity nor make her a pure X's-and-O's player when it's her intrinsic ability to read and react that has allowed her to flourish. "I'm learning as we go because I've never had a player like Sarah," Morey said. "I've never coached a player with this much talent and this much IQ."

Morey also continues to drill into Fillier that she needs to learn to protect herself. Fillier, at 5-foot-5 and 146 pounds, can play with reckless abandon, attempting to slip through defenders when darting around them would do. That's dangerous for a player who is often a target for all manners of physical play, legal or otherwise, and opponents have taken a few liberties.

Most of all, though, Morey



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ing here, I think I've developed more of a killer instinct," Fillier said. "I want to put the puck in the back of the net and want to be a threat offensively."

The challenge for Morey — and, to an extent, for Fillier — is learning how to harness the 19-year-old's outsized ability. During the hours of 1-on-1 video sessions involving coach and player, the pair have had plenty of honest conversations

But there are things Morey has tried to hammer into Fillier and build into her game. One is shot selection. For as talented as she may be, Fillier is prone to slumps where, as Morey said, "she's missing the net on 70 percent of her shots." Becoming more efficient, more accurate and learning to vary her release is something that could turn Fillier into a multifaceted and unstoppable of-

wants to see Fillier play with a confidence and swagger befitting a player with her gifts. "She's so grateful and humble that she holds back a little bit," Morey said. "But she's really worked on that in the last year. I've seen tremendous growth at the national level for her, and I don't think we're far away from having her in the conversation with the top players in the world." **H**

FIVE TO WATCH

Remember these players' names. They're the next generation of stars



1. DARYL WATTS

20, F, WISCONSIN (CAN)

In 2017-18, Watts was the first freshman to win the Patty Kazmaier. She followed that with a sophomore slump at BC, but she's back to dominating after a transfer to Wisconsin. She was the NCAA's top scorer with 73 points in 34 games.



2. ALINA MUELLER

21, F, NORTHEASTERN (SUI)

The reigning two-time Swiss Hockey Woman of the Year has put her national team on the map and her stamp on the NCAA with consecutive 20-goal, 50-point campaigns. She's the youngest player to win an Olympic medal.



3. CAYLA BARNES

21, D, BOSTON COLLEGE (USA)

Barnes captained Team USA to gold at the under-18s a year before arriving in the NCAA, played in the Olympics as a freshman and has been a fixture since. She is becoming a centerpiece of the world's top team.



4. ELIZABETH GIGUERE

22, F, CLARKSON (CAN)

It's laughable now to think there were concerns of a possible downturn in production with the departure of former linemate Loren Gabel. Giguere was the leading goal-scorer and had the second-most points in the nation.



5. AERIN FRANKEL

20, G, NORTHEASTERN (USA)

Frankel will get a chance to make her mark internationally after earning a selection to the 2020 worlds squad. Her 10 NCAA shutouts were second-most in the nation, and she led all netminders with a .959 save percentage.