

Amato tells us, in no uncertain terms, that Jonathan Toews is your Hart winner

The Chicago Blackhawks captured the President's trophy last week and will now turn their attention to lifting the Stanley Cup. It took Chicago nearly two months to lose a game in regulation and this shortened season has been somewhat of a dream campaign for Blackhawks fans. That dream, however, could quickly become a nightmare if the team doesn't replicate its success in the post-season. As those who follow the game know, dominating the regular season doesn't guarantee anything come spring time.

Toews Has Shown Hart In 2013

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One such player who has been an integral part of Chicago's excellence this year is <u>Jonathan</u>

Toews

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reality, the 24-year-old captain has always been arguably the most important player to the Blackhawks ever since he broke into the league. This season though, Toews seems to be getting considerable recognition for his efforts and has even garnered some Hart Trophy buzz. And in the process has helped fantasy owners by being a stud in many different categories.

Now I'm not going to diminish the efforts of other candidates like <u>Alex Ovechkin</u>, <u>Sidney</u> . <u>Ma</u> rtin St. Louis

Steven Stamkos

John Tavares

, or

Sergei Bobrovsky

and say Toews deserves it more, but you could make a case that he is easily the most complete all-around player of the bunch. The Hart Trophy is supposed to be voted on by writers, for the player who meant the most to his team. However, many have a different definition of what that exactly means and usually points attract the most attention.

This is why delving deeper into Toews' game this year will give you a greater appreciation of why he is a deserving candidate. He has combined great offensive production with tremendous play in other less sexy areas that don't often get much recognition. You may be thinking that a campaign like that is what the Selke Trophy is for, but Toews has been so good in every area this year that his play is certainly worthy of an MVP.

Toews' offensive prowess has always been solid, but this year he has ratcheted things up a notch. In this shortened campaign he scored an impressive 23 times and finished just outside the top 10 in total scoring. He was also on pace for an 84-point season when you average things out over a regular 82-game year, which would have been a career high. Not only that, but Toews was very consistent as he was only held pointless for more than two straight games once all season.

Toews also added important goals for both poolies and the Blackhawks. His two shorthanded tallies ranked fourth in the NHL and his five game winners put him in the top 10 in that category as well. His play on special teams may be most impressive as you won't find too many players that do things so well on both the power play and penalty kill. Toews averaged 2:41 of ice-time

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per game with the man advantage and added 1:25 while shorthanded. There has often been a debate about who is more important to Chicago, <u>Patrick Kane</u> or Toews. Kane might be more gifted offensively, but he doesn't play at all on the penalty kill and doesn't have the all around responsibilities that Toews does.

Before we get into some more unique parts of Toews' game, let's look at his plus/minus which can be viewed as both an offensive and defensive statistic. He finished with a plus-28 rating that was ranked third in the league. That's impressive for two reasons. The first is the fact that no other Blackhawk finished higher than plus-20, and the second becomes clear when you look at the top five ratings in the NHL in 2013. Of that group, three played on the same line this season in Sidney Crosby, Pascal Dupuis, and Chris Kunitz. Now I'm not knocking the play of Kunitz and Dupuis, but I will go out on a limb and say they wouldn't even be in the top 20 without Crosby.

The aforementioned numbers are ones that stand out when many are deciding who to give their Hart vote to, but how about some others that you have to dig a little deeper for and don't just jump right off the page. Toews sits second in face-off percentage with nearly a rate of 60%, behind only Patrice Bergeron. He has also upped his game in the takeaway department this season and is tied with Pavel Datsyuk for the league lead at 56. Lastly, he ranks in the top 10 when it comes to penalties drawn in 2013. All of these things won't often catch your eye right away in a box score, but they are all part of the complete player Toews has developed into.

It would also be remiss not to talk about the Chicago captain's great leadership ability at such a young age. His body of work mentioned above certainly plays a role, but it's much more than that. Out of all the candidates for the Hart Trophy this season, Toews is the only one to have a rookie on his line for most of the year. He played with Marian Hossa and Brandon Saad for the majority of 2013, and Saad has benefited greatly. The rookie had 10 goals and 27 points to go along with a plus-17 rating, which is impressive in a shortened campaign. Hossa of course is an accomplished player and helps greatly, but with Toews' all around skill set, I'm sure it has made the transition for Saad much easier. It's not like Saad was a top five pick either, as he went 43rd overall in 2011 and only played in 31 American Hockey League games before jumping to the NHL.

It's puzzling why more people aren't beating the drum for Toews when it comes to the Hart Trophy. Maybe it's because he is on a great team and they feel that has a lot to do with his success, or that he isn't even the leading scorer on his own team. Or maybe it's just the fact that Captain Serious' personality is blander than dry toast. Whatever the case, Toews seems to be

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somewhat of an underdog in the MVP race. A race that maybe needs to look into the way they choose the winner.

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