

Sunday Ramblings

Written by Kent Wilson

Sunday, 24 March 2013 08:34 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 March 2013 14:36

Greetings fantasy enthusiasts.

Before we get to the ramblings, a brief introduction is in order. My name is Kent Wilson and I've been writing about hockey since roughly 2005. I started off ranting exclusively about the Flames in my own little corner of the web, but later branched out to things like fantasy and advanced stats. My work has appeared on Puck Daddy, the Score and Hockey Prospectus as well as the now defunct Fanball. My day job these days is to run the Nations Network (including nhlnumbers.com, oilernation.com and others) and be the main voice at FlamesNation.

And because that just isn't enough work, my weekend fantasy hockey thoughts will now show up here at Dobber every Saturday/Sunday. Expect some snark and a lot of references to stats you may not have heard of before.

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I am currently competing in an annual writers invitational pool headed by the Globe and Mail's James Mirtle. The trade deadline for Mirtle's pool recently came and went, during which I was able to flip Mikael Backlund and Jakob Silfverberg (I picked the former in the last round of the draft and plucked the latter off the waiver wire) for a package including Mikko Koivu and Anders Lindback (I was sorely lacking in the goaltender department thanks to an injury to Cam Ward).

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It seemed like a no-brainer at the time, but since the trade the Senators rookie has been on fire. Last night Silfverberg scored a goal and an assist in the Senators 5-3 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning giving him four goals and five points in his last four contests. The 22-year old only has 13 points in 32 games this year, but figures to be a key piece for the Sens moving forward. A big scorer in the Elitseren and playoff MVP for Brynas in 2011-12, Silfverberg has a strong two-way game and already looks to be comfortable on North American ice. Which, of course, was the reason I was happy to grab him for nothing from the waiver wire, but the youngster ironically didn't really start putting up numbers until I moved him. To make matters worse, Lindback played all of four periods for my team before going down with a high-ankle sprain.

Sometimes the hockey gods are cruel.

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Speaking of the Lightning and cruel hockey gods, this momrning Tampa Bay announced the firing of head coach Guy Boucher. Hailed as something of a genius during his first year in Tampa thanks to his [unorthodox defensive system](#) and the Bolt's unlikely success, Boucher joins the ever growing scrap head of NHL coaches who apparently fell from brilliant to incompetent when the results turned. Perhaps the Avs Joe Sacco is soon to join him...

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The Leafs finally managed to get back into the win column last night, which keeps their playoff hopes alive. The red hot Nazem Kadri scored his 14th of the season and has an eye-popping nine points in just his last four games. Toronto hasn't had a rookie this exciting since, uh...

Kadri's success this year is a mix of good play and good fortune. He currently boasts the best relative corsi rate (that is, the best relative offensive puck possession rate) on the Leafs, which is a rare feat for a young forward. However, the primary reason for his better than point-per-game pace is the percentages: the Leafs are scoring on more than 15% of their shots at even strength when Kadri is on the ice this year, which is almost double the league mean rate of about 8%. In addition, Kadri boasts a personal shooting percentage of 19.4%, which is also abnormally high.

Over time, his on-ice SH% will inexorably drift towards the league average of 8%, while Kadri's SH% will regress towards his true talent level. We can't be sure what that is given his youth and relative lack of experience in the league, but most high-end forwards in the NHL settle around 10-14% so somewhere in that range is a good working assumption.

Kadri's hot streak is goosing his output and his fantasy value right now, but it's unlikely to

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continue indefinitely. The good news for Leafs fans is the youngster looks like he's already a fairly complete player so his value to the club doesn't merely rest in the counting stats.

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Nicklas Lidstrom and Teemu Selanne are the two guys most fans think of when it comes to unnaturally good longevity in the modern game. Another player who should be added to that short list is Patrik Elias. The Devils' captain scored his 10th of the season in New Jersey's 2-1 win last night and now leads the team with 29 points in 32 games played. Elias will turn 37 on April 13, but nevertheless remains one of the Devil's best players and indeed one of the most complete forwards in the league: Elias also sports [a double digit corsi rate](#) (+19.75/60), the second best amongst regular forwards on his club (behind the surprising David Clarkson).

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They didn't play last night, but the Flames already meagre playoff hopes took a fatal blow on Friday night when they fell 5-1 to the Columbus Blue Jackets. The Flames have been fecklessly battling the inevitable for the last four years in their stubborn refusal to engage in any kind of meaningful rebuild, but with the club falling to the bottom of the Western Conference and the truncated season meaning little time to turn things around, Feaster and company are left with few options heading into the trade deadline.

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Calgary faces the St. Louis Blues tonight, but the outcome for the Flames is all but academic. The question now is will the club finally start dealing major pieces like Jarome Iginla, Miikka Kiprusoff and Jay Bouwmeester in an effort to re-stock the cupboards and change the downward trajectory of the franchise. Fantasy-wise, current Flames players don't have a great deal of value, although that can change in an instant if they are dealt to a contender on April 3. Pending free agent and long-time captain Jarome Iginla is the most obvious rental target, with teams like Pittsburgh, Boston and Chicago rumored to be interested in his services. If Iginla is dealt for a package of futures and lands on the wing of, say, Jonathan Toews or Sidney Crosby, his fantasy value shifts from just okay to exceptional. Plan your own fantasy acquisitions accordingly - with the proviso that it's still entirely possible the Flames organization decides not to trade the 35-year old given their reluctance to move from the Iginla era to this point.

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Three hours north of Calgary, the Edmonton Oilers are at the other end of the spectrum with their roster peppered with kids and high-end draft picks. They fell to the Blues 3-0 Saturday night, meaning their hopes of finally making it back to the post-season are now only marginally better than the Flames. Edmonton has been "rebuilding" in earnest for at least three seasons (longer, if you count their bumbling for a few seasons before that as unwitting start to the "rebuild") but are learning it can be tough to get over the hump even with a collection of high-end youngsters like Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and Justin Schultz. GM Steve Tambellini has been great at announcing first overall picks at the podium every June at the NHL entry draft, but has utterly failed to fill in the blanks around his collection of first rounders. As such, Edmonton's roster remains top heavy and overly reliant on players who are still finding their legs at the NHL level and likely at least a few seasons away from their peak.

Jordan Eberle is one such player in Edmonton. A 76-point getter in his sophomore season, Eberle was a subject of great debate amongst Oilers fans/writers and advanced stats buffs in the off-season. Like Kadri this season, Eberle "ran hot" in 2011-12, scoring on 18.9% of his shots and boasting an on-ice shooting percentage at even strength of 12.84%. Many fans declared these numbers to be indications of Eberle's scoring prowess. Others, [like Tyler Dellow](#), argued that Eberle was rather fortunate to pile up the points in such a fashion and is probably closer to a 50-60 point guy in reality.

So far this year, Dellow and advanced stats guys have been vindicated: Eberle's personal shooting percentage has fallen to just 8.8% in 2013 and his on-ice shooting percentage at 5on5 is just 5.91%. As a result he has just 20 points in 30 games played, or a 55 point pace over the course of an 82 game season.

Which isn't to say Eberle's fantasy value is poor or that he's going to struggle at these levels forever - like his unnatural high percentages last year, his current rates will regress towards his true talent level (which is undoubtedly higher) and he'll start putting up better numbers. The good news for Oilers fans and Eberle fantasy owners is that his shot and possession rates have improved this year, meaning he won't need above average percentages in the future to put up better than average results. For those of you in a keeper league, Eberle is therefore a strong "buy low" candidate; either now or during your dealings in the summer.

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Find Kent's daily work at Flamesnation.ca .

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