

## Under the Radar

Written by Russ Miller

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*Taking a fantasy hockey look at Lars Eller; and why Martin Erat and Brooks Laich will form a fine second line*

It's been three years since the trade that brought [Lars Eller](#) to Montreal in exchange for [Jaroslav Halak](#)

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. In Eller's first season with Montreal, he recorded 17 points in 77 games. The following season, he improved to 28 points in 79 games. Last year, he put up 30 points in only 46 games, finishing fifth in Habs scoring.

Last year's 54 point pace was achieved in spite of receiving the eighth most average time on ice (14:49) amongst Canadiens forwards, including only 0:49 with the man advantage.

In his last 10 games of the regular season, Eller spent over 80 per cent of his even-strength ice time with rookie [Alex Galchenyuk](#) . Eller finished the regular season with 13 points in his last 12 games, including five multi-point efforts.

Unfortunately, in his first playoff game of the season, Eller was knocked into next season thanks to a nasty hit by Ottawa's [Eric Gryba](#) . By all accounts, there are no lingering effects from the concussion and Eller is ready to go this season.

Eller is about to hit what I like to call that sweet spot for prospects, he's 24 years of age and entering his fourth full season. Add in the fact he's playing for a new contract and the only thing holding him back from what could be a monster breakout season is he will have to fight for first unit power play minutes. The Dane has size and can play up the middle or on the wing.

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Many fantasy poolies will forget Eller's 54 point pace and focus on how Gryba ended his playoffs. Yes, it's crowded up the middle in Montreal and there will be competition for top six ice time, but with perennial band-aid boys [Rene Bourque](#), Danny Briere and [Brian Gionta](#) known for missing large chunks of time due to injury, Eller will get his looks. Also working in his favour is that the coach successfully paired him with the offensive-minded Galchenyuk down the stretch.

When Washington dealt away a fine young prospect in Filip Forsberg at the trading deadline last season, they expected the main piece of the deal coming their way to produce more than three points in nine games. While [Martin Erat](#) only missed four regular season games, he did play through several injuries last year.

Not including last season, the oft-injured Czech missed an average of 10 games over each of the previous seven campaigns. The good news is that he averaged 19 goals and 53 points over that same stretch.

Prior to the trade, Erat played 18:55 minutes per game with Nashville. In Washington, he only averaged 13:54 minutes per match. In his three previous seasons with the Preds, Erat averaged 18:28, 18:05 and 17:59 minutes per game respectively.

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While Erat didn't put up as many points as the Caps and Caps fans hoped last year, with a new season comes new hope. He should get a fresh, healthy start this season; look for the 31-year-old's production to return somewhere close to his average.

Erat will likely play on the second line with the offensively under-rated [Brooks Laich](#) . Very similar to Erat, Laich played in nine games last season, recording four points. He only played his first game of the season on March 19 due to a groin injury and then suited up for his last game of the year on April 4.

In his previous four seasons, Laich averaged 50 points a year while missing a total of four games. In those four campaigns, Laich's average ice time was 18:29, 18:25, 18:17 and 17:16 minutes per game.

Don't underestimate his value to the Caps; as it stands right now, the 30-year-old is set to inherit the second line center job. He's no [Mike Ribeiro](#) , but Laich is in an enviable position right now.

Washington has another guy who I have consistently under-rated. Last season, [Marcus Johansson](#) took over 60 per cent of his even-strength shifts with [Alexander Ovechkin](#) and

### Nicklas Backstrom

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Overall last year, the 22-year-old had 22 points in 34 games, a 53 point pace. When we look closer at the numbers, he had 20 points in his final 22 games. The previous season, he scored 46 points in 80 games and in his rookie campaign, Johansson registered 27 points in 69 games.

Johansson logged 16:35 minutes of average time on ice, including 1:39 on the power play. The season before last, he registered 16:48 minutes per game and 2:17 with the man advantage.

Someone has to play on the coveted left side on the Caps top line and it's very likely going to be Johansson with Erat getting some consideration. The only issue is that Johansson is still a restricted free agent, but if he's smart, he'll sign a one year deal and go out there and put up some big numbers.

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