

## Jack Johnson's Time to Shine

Written by Jeff Angus

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Jack Johnson has gone from promising rookie to “the man” on Los Angeles’ back end without even playing a game. The Kings have parted ways with Rob Blake (signed by San Jose), and Lubomir Visnovsky (traded to Edmonton), who were both above Johnson on the defensive depth chart. He is now positioned as the top defenseman in Los Angeles. What does that mean for his fantasy value?

Johnson’s offensive numbers were modest last year – three goals and 11 points. His lack of production was pretty frustrating for many in the fantasy hockey world who pegged him as an immediate offensive stud. Johnson’s defensive game and understanding of what it takes to be

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an NHL player improved dramatically, which bodes well for a potential breakout campaign in 2007-2008. The Kings were conservative with him on the power play, where he saw only a quarter of the ice-time that Blake and Visnovsky saw (92 minutes all season), and half the ice time that Tom Preissing saw. However, he did lead the Kings in even strength ice time on the back end, which shows his capability to play defence at the NHL level (even if the Kings were awful).

Johnson is going to get a lot of ice time this year, both power play and otherwise. He is a dynamic skater and has a howitzer of a shot, but his greatest trait is his self-confidence. If he can get off to a good start, next season could be a huge one for him. He has 60 point upside, and next year could realistically hit 40 or 45, which is a huge bump up from 11.

Another potential beneficiary of the new regime in Los Angeles is Tom Preissing. Preissing is a very smart, puck-moving defenseman who moves up to the first power play unit to complement Johnson. He had 24 points last year, and could very well come close to doubling that. He isn't flashy, but steady at both ends of the ice. Expect him to break 40 points with the possibility for more. Drew Doughty will also probably make the team, and he will see some time on the power play for sure. It is tougher to predict how he does, because he has to make the team first.

If you still can, now is the time to try and trade for Johnson. Nothing is a guarantee (especially when dealing with potential), but few – if any – young defensemen will get the kind of opportunity that Los Angeles is giving to Johnson this season.