

A New Star on Broadway

Written by Jeff Angus

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When the Rangers made a huge splash last off-season with the signings of Scott Gomez and Chris Drury, it was assumed that those two would stabilize the center position in New York for the next half-decade. Although the center position is very stable, it is due in large part to the emergence of Brandon Dubinsky. His strong play has forced the Rangers to slide Drury to play right wing with Gomez. Dubinsky was fantastic in his rookie season skating with Jaromir Jagr, and he has continued his development this season skating on a line with Aaron Voros and Nikolai Zherdev.

Dubinsky first garnered some attention after potting 30 goals and 78 points in 2004 with the Portland Winter Hawks of the WHL. The Rangers fell in love with his combination of skill and size, but his skating was a bit of a question. He worked his tail off, twice earning Second Team All-Star nominations in the WHL. His skating continued to improve, and he transitioned seamlessly to the AHL, putting up a solid 21 goals in 2007. The Rangers continued to push him to improve his skating and conditioning, and he was rewarded with a six game cup of coffee in 2007.

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It wasn't until 2008 that he was given a permanent spot on the team. He started off on an energy line, but like all good players he simply kept forcing the Rangers to move him up the depth chart. He ended the season hot and put up eight points in only 10 games in his first taste of NHL playoff action. With Jagr bolting to Russia, many speculated that Dubinsky's numbers would suffer. If you were one of those people – tough break. This kid is for real.

It is rare that a team is forced to move a \$7 million star forward away from his natural position to make way for a young guy making less than \$1 million, but that is now the case in New York. Drury has been shifted to wing, and Dubinsky has been given the reigns on the second line. His play this season has been phenomenal (both Zherdev and Voros owe him some thanks), and he will not be slowing down any time soon. It is often tough to peg second round picks because they often are not put under the same microscope as first round picks are. Dubinsky has never really gotten the praise that he would have if he had been a top 10 pick, but he will start to get some of that love this season.

Now on to the stuff that most of you are concerned about – the fantasy upside. In the short term, he is probably a good bet to get 60-65 points and be a huge part of the secondary attack in New York. His balance offensively combined with his tough style of play makes him all the more valuable in rotisserie leagues. Long term, he is still a bit of a wild card. He has the offensive skill to be a point a game player, maybe more. But his true value will be the little things he does all over the ice – back checking, hitting, fighting, and energizing his team. Dubinsky is a fantasy stud, so grab him now before he starts to be treated like one.