

## Sleeper Picks for 2009-2010 □ Part 1 of 3

Written by Jeff Angus

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Here are five players to keep an eye on for next season...

**John Mitchell – Toronto.** Mitchell has become a favorite of both Leafs coach Ron Wilson and GM Brian Burke. He plays a strong two-way game and has the offensive upside to be a regular top-six forward. The Leafs have some salary coming off the books this off-season and they will want to add some players to complement Mitchell for next season. He had 51 points in his best season with the Marlies in 2007-2008, and had an impressive career with Plymouth in the OHL. He will probably hit 30 points this season, but that overall number is not as important as his

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recent level of play is. Look for Mitchell to be a 40-50 point player as early as next season, on a much improved Leafs squad. To give you an example of how highly the Leafs coaches value Mitchell, he has seen over 20 minutes each of the past three games.

**Andrew Ebbett – Anaheim.** The Ducks like Ebbett's game, and they love his contract. He is signed through next season at a measly \$500,000, and figures to have a spot locked up in Anaheim's top six. The Ducks have other pressing cap needs (goaltending and defense, to name two), and having a cheap, dependable player like Ebbett able to play top-six minutes opens up cap space to use elsewhere. Through March 8th he has 22 points in only 34 games after coming off an extremely impressive 72 point campaign for Portland last season. The Ducks need to add some depth scoring next season after moving Chris Kunitz (Teemu Selanne is on the decline and Bobby Ryan can only do so much), so keep an eye on their off-season activity. If they get a scoring winger or two, Ebbett warrants serious consideration in all league formats.

**David Jones – Colorado.** Jones has had a disappointing 2008-2009 season, bouncing back and forth between Colorado and Lake Erie, as well as battling numerous injuries (the latest leading to season-ending shoulder surgery). He came to Colorado without much fanfare, which was surprising considering his dominant college career (he scored 18 goals in his final season at Dartmouth). The Avalanche will be a busy team this off-season, as they have several holes to fill in a lineup needing significant change. Jones definitely figures in their long-term plans, and could score 20 goals next season depending on what role he is placed in. Jones has great size, good skill, and is a smart hockey player. His long-term upside is a 25-30 goal, physical second line winger. At worst he should develop into a useful second-third line winger who can play in all situations.

**Chris Campoli – Ottawa.** The Senators paid a steep price to land Campoli (a 2009 first-round selection), but it was a necessary move. Campoli moves the puck (something the Senators lacked), and he is very effective on the power play. He makes under \$700,000 per season as well, something that increased his value to Ottawa, a team riddled with big contracts. The Senators also surprised many by re-signing Filip Kuba. He and Campoli should form a capable duo on Ottawa's power play for the next few seasons. A trend is starting to emerge among sleepers: young players who can log minutes at a cheap cost. With uncertainty about the salary cap ever increasing, the "young, cheap player" is going to be given every opportunity to play a regular shift.. Campoli probably won't be a regular top-four defenseman in terms of overall play, but anything more than a third-pairing even strength/first-unit power play guy would be gravy for Ottawa.

**Chris Bourque – Washington.** Bourque would have been on the Capitals this season if not for his waiver ineligibility. Eric Fehr, a player who Bourque outperformed at camp, remained up with the Capitals because he was eligible to be claimed if sent down. Bourque was not, so he has spent another year in the AHL. He is on pace for his third-straight 25-goal season for the Hershey Bears. The Capitals are another team with some big contracts, so Bourque's cheap salary will help his chances next season. He will be in the NHL for sure, but the Capitals may decide to use him as trade bait, as they will still have a logjam at forward unless they can shed some salary (Michael Nylander) or move other players instead (names like Eric Fehr, Tomas

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Fleischmann, and so on).