



Every Wednesday this summer, I will bring you a sleeper to watch for the 2009-2010 season (and potentially beyond). Released in no particular order, I will refrain from picking sleepers that have already shown glimpses of breaking out in the past – the obvious candidates. Time to go beneath the surface for some sleepers that you may have not thought about...

Matthew Lombardi's offensive game was sputtering in Calgary, and a trade deadline move over to the Phoenix (for now) Coyotes seemed to jump start his production. Lombardi was a prolific

scorer in his junior days. He tallied 57 goals in his final season with Victoriaville of the QMJHL in 2001-2002, and put up an impressive 25 goals for Saint John of the AHL in the following season. Lombardi's three full seasons with Calgary saw him score 16, 20, and 14 goals, respectively. Lombardi missed most of the lockout season (he would have been playing with Lowell of the AHL) thanks to a nasty elbow from Derian Hatcher in the 2004 postseason. He missed a better part of 2005-2006 as well, only potting six goals for the Flames that season.

Lombardi's combination of speed, tenacity, and defensive acumen made him a valuable player on the ice, but it decreased his value in the fantasy hockey world. He saw lots of PK time with the Flames. However, his PP time was limited. For example, with Calgary in 2007-2008, Lombardi lead all forwards in PK time with 3:01 per game. The next forward was Craig Conroy with 2:29. However, Lombardi only saw 1:07 of PP time per game, good for seventh among Calgary forwards. Trends like this are important, especially with players like Lombardi who have proven in the past (albeit at a competition level below the NHL) that they can score goals.

Lombardi only played 19 games with Phoenix, so the sample size for direct comparison may be a bit small. However, his PK time dropped to 1:48 per game, and his PP time increased dramatically to 2:15 per game. His ice time went up quite a bit as well, as the Coyotes obviously wanted to see what they had with him. He broke the 20-minute mark in 12 of the 19 games with Phoenix (and was within 30 seconds three other times). With Calgary, he played over 20 minutes in only six of 50 games.

What does this mean for next season? First off, the Coyotes have lots of young talent. They are grooming both Peter Mueller and Kyle Turris to be scoring centers, but Mueller has seen considerable time at right wing, and he may be moved there full time (that's what I would do, at least). Martin Hanzal will develop into a premier checking center, but his offensive upside is limited. So Lombardi has a great opportunity to grab a position on one of the top two lines. Phoenix's situation is almost the opposite of Pittsburgh's. The Penguins have three dynamite centers, but not much at wing. The Coyotes have proven talent at wing (Shane Doan), and a lot of promising prospects. They just need a center or two to step up.

Sticking with the Coyotes, there are also a few other names to consider from a sleeper perspective. Both Petr Prucha and Scottie Upshall have more offensive upside than they have been able to show so far at the NHL level (especially Prucha). Watch to see where they wind up in the Coyotes starting lineup for 2009-2010, and draft accordingly!