After a one-week hiatus, the summer sleeper series has returned. This special edition will contain much more than usual. In addition to the analysis of a sleeper pick, I will be announcing my Sleeper of the Year for 2009-2010. Past winners of this prestigious title include Zach Parise, Brent Burns, and Steve Bernier. First, I will start off with the player I had originally planned to discuss last week - Chris Butler. After that I will get to the big announcement.

Buffalo management has very high hopes for defenseman Chris Butler. They are expecting him

to step up and fill some of the minutes (especially on the powerplay) that Jaroslav Spacek is taking with him to Montreal. They also are expecting him to develop into a steady and reliable top-four defenseman very soon. It remains to be seen how Butler will handle the opportunity/responsibility (however you want to word it), as he saw very sheltered minutes with the Sabres in 2008-09. Butler played 47 games in total, scoring two goals and recording six points. He averaged over 16 minutes of ice-time per game, and he can expect to see that jump to 19 or 20 minutes for 2009-10. Those numbers are not all that noteworthy, but Butler did boast a plus-11, tops among Sabres blueliners.

Butler is the prototypical new-age defenseman. He can play at both ends of the ice, he skates well, and he moves the puck up the ice efficiently. His value as a sleeper will come from his increased power play time. In 2008-09, Butler only saw an average of nine seconds of power play time per game. Butler will see upwards of two minutes per game in 2009-2010, as the Sabres will have to find a player/players to fill Spacek's 3:41 of power play time per game. Expect Butler record between 25 and 30 points in 2009-10. His long-term upside is closer to 40 points, but he won't hit that number for a few seasons.

One potential roadblock for Butler is the fact that the Sabres currently have six defensemen signed to one way deals: Rivet, Toni Lydman, Henrik Tallinder, Steve Montador, Andrej Sekera, and Nathan Paetsch. In addition to that, the Sabres expect both Tyler Myers and Mike Weber to challenge for a spot on the back end for 2009-10. The current logjam on the Sabres defense will work itself out, either through a trade or through demotions to the AHL. Paetsch is penciled in as the seventh defenseman; so don't expect him to play regular minutes. Butler's offensive game gives him the inside track at earning a spot as a regular for the Sabres this season.

And now, without further ado, your 2009-10 Sleeper of the Year is Claude Giroux.

This may not come as a surprise to many (any) of you, as I have been a Giroux supporter for quite some time. He is far from an unknown commodity in fantasy hockey. However, he fits the mold as a sleeper because his short-term value (the next three years) is underrated. It is widely agreed upon that Giroux is destined to become a star in the NHL. He possesses an unbelievable arsenal of offensive skills, and his compete level is through the roof. Giroux recorded 27 points in 42 games last season for the Flyers (a full-season pace of 53 points). Will he improve on that for 2009-10? Bet your bottom dollar he will. Giroux will soon become the best Flyers forward to own in fantasy hockey leagues (yes, ahead of Jeff Carter and Mike Richards). He has a shot at hitting 70 points in 2009-10. Long-term, his upside should be somewhere between 90 and 100 points.

The Flyers have an open in their top-six right now with the departures of Mike Knuble and Joffrey Lupul. Expect them to once again try Daniel Briere at wing, as this would allow Richards and Carter to center the top two lines. Assuming Briere lines up with Richards and Simon Gagne, Giroux is a perfect fit to play with Carter and Scott Hartnell on the second line. Both Hartnell and Carter are goal-scorers, and Giroux is an absolute wizard with the puck. Him and Carter could form one of the most dynamic duos in the entire NHL. Expect Claude Giroux to score 70 points in 2009-10.