

Every December, the best junior players from around the world gather to play in one of the most exciting hockey tournaments on earth – the World Junior Hockey Championship. For fantasy hockey owners, it is a great time to check up on keeper league prospects, as well as to see the cream of the undrafted crop. However, it also is a great opportunity to engage in some fantasy hockey arbitrage. The strategy that I am about to lay out for you is one that I have used very successfully year after year (unfortunately, writing an article about it probably will halt my ability to use it in the future, as the majority of my competition reads this site).

Every year there are standouts at the tournament. Players like Dion Phaneuf, Patrice Bergeron, and John Tavares have had fantastic tournaments in the past, and quickly became household names because of it. . Sometimes a great junior tournament can be treated as a coming out party (Phaneuf is the perfect example), while other times it is due to a player being put in a

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great situation to succeed (Justin Pogge, for example).

What my strategy entails is to first focus in on the top teams coming in to the tournament. This year, that would be Canada, Sweden, the United States, and Russia. Other countries like Finland and the Czech Republic bear watching as well. The top prospects from these countries (Cody Hodgson, Jordan Eberle, Jordan Schroeder, Oliver Ekman-Larrson, and so on) are probably already owned in your keeper league, but you still may be able to acquire them. The lesser-touted prospects (Greg Nemisz and Jeremy Morin, for example) may still be available to pick up. There are also the draft-eligible stars like Taylor Hall and Cam Fowler, but since you have to wait until they are drafted (in most pool formats, anyway), they don't bear watching for this strategy.

What you do is stock up on players that you think will excel at the tournament. Hodgson is a great candidate because his value will never be lower. He dominated the OHL and the WJC last season, but struggled in training camp with the Canucks after sustaining a back injury during the summer, and is only now just getting back on the ice and practicing with his Brampton teammates. His upside is still very high, but many are growing impatient and are looking to move him (something I unfortunately did with Bobby Ryan). This strategy works even better if you already own some World Junior-eligible players, as you don't even have to go out and acquire them. If you are able to acquire Hodgson, you should go for it. Say he comes back to the tournament and posts similar numbers to what he did last year (which is a conservative estimation, considering he will once again be playing with his buddy Jordan Eberle on the top line), I have no doubts his trade value will absolutely skyrocket. At the bottom of the article I'll list a few players from each country that you should acquire. Obviously some will be easier to go out and get than others.

Scenario – it is nearing the trade deadline in your fantasy hockey league, and you are looking to win now. The guy in last place wants a blue-chip prospect for his NHL star that he is dangling.

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You think a World Junior sensation like Hodgson, Eberle, or Nazem Kadri may interest him? Being able to read about/watch prospects firsthand at the tournament definitely boosts their value in the eyes of many poolies out there. These prospects can also thank Pierre McGuire, who essentially does the work of an agent by promoting the skills and intangibles of every single player on Canada, and many from other countries as well.

The strategy is simply a case of buying low (or buying even), and selling high. The World Junior tournament is probably my favorite hockey to watch – the intensity, the passion, and the skill is a mind-numbingly awesome combo. Because it is a short tournament, the players push themselves to play at a higher level compared to regular season games. This may create false/inaccurate expectations for some of these players, especially from poolies who own them/want to own them.

However, I am not saying you should go out and overpay for every young Canadian star. Nor should you trade away every player that has a good junior tournament. In some cases, what you see is what you get (Corey Perry, Dion Phaneuf, Sidney Crosby, and so on). However, one of my principle fantasy hockey rules is that proven talent always trumps unproven talent. And since the majority of these young guns are still very unproven at the professional level, using their strong tournaments to help your fantasy team gain some talent to help you win now is what the strategy is all about.

Some players to watch (not a comprehensive list)...

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Wednesday, 11 November 2009 02:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 November 2009 13:52 Canada Cody Hodgson and Jordan Eberle (dynamic duo for Canada, will see tons of ice time in all situations) Nazem Kadri (should battle Hall for top line spot, slick with the puck) Greg Nemisz (Flames '08 pick, big and skilled offensively) Calvin de Haan (slick puck mover, will see lots of PP time) Ryan Ellis (should lead Canada's blue line attack) Brandon Kozun (late-round Kings steal dominating the WHL) Brayden Schenn and Scott Glennie (Brandon teammates and '09 1st round picks, both could play a checking role with Canada) **United States** Jordan Schroeder (off to slow start on struggling club, but will be USA's offensive catalyst)

Written by Jeff Angus Wednesday, 11 November 2009 02:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 November 2009 13:52 John Carlson (adjusting to pro hockey in the AHL, is a lock for team if Caps let him go) Jeremy Morin (will play on the top line, goal-a-game pace so far with Kitchener) John Moore (smooth skating defenseman will see loads of power play time) Kenny Ryan (skilled winger who will see power play time, buried on Windsor juggernaut this season) Kyle Palmieri (skilled winger, Ducks first round pick from '09) **Sweden** Oliver Ekman-Larsson (could be best player at the tournament) Erik Karlsson (struggled at NHL level but very skilled offensively, has absolute bomb of a shot) Matthias Tedenby (water bug forward dominating and ready for NHL) Jacob Josefson (should center top line, like Tedenby a Devils 1st rounder)

The World Juniors - Time to Sell High! Written by Jeff Angus Wednesday, 11 November 2009 02:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 November 2009 13:52 MPS (big, fast, could be Hossa 2.0) David Rundblad/Tim Erixon (smooth-skating defensemen) Russia Evgeny Grachev (monster of a winger, close to being NHL ready) Kirill Petrov (Big winger, Isles 3rd rounder from 2008) Andrei Loktionov (tearing up AHL, will be deadly on the Russian PP) Dmitri Kugryshev (playing in the Q with Quebec, drafted by the Caps) Viatcheslav Voynov (playing in AHL, very close to being NHL ready, defenseman)

Finland

Toni Rajala (made great career move going to WHL with Brandon)

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Mikael Granlund (2010 draft eligible, has been deemed the Finnish Sidney Crosby by a few)

Erik Haula (Wild late round pick, made the jump to North America – skilled winger)

Jyri Niemi (Hulking defenseman with back-to-back 30 point seasons in the WHL)