

A surprise near the top of the list, some veterans sneaking in, and a few glaring omissions.

We have a new number one. For this first time since this list debuted on DobberHockey in 2010, Mike Green isn't ranked as the top defenseman to own in a keeper league. The reasons for his fall are obvious – injuries, a shift in playing style by the Capitals, and, most importantly, a lack of production from Green.

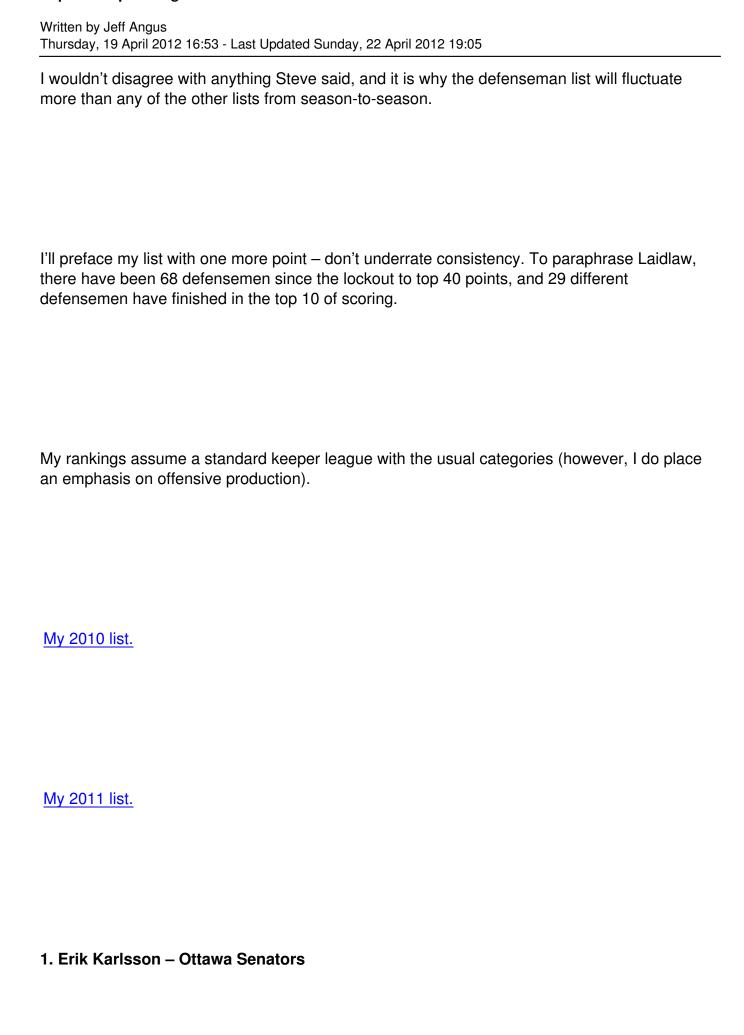
Written by Jeff Angus Thursday, 19 April 2012 16:53 - Last Updated Sunday, 22 April 2012 19:05

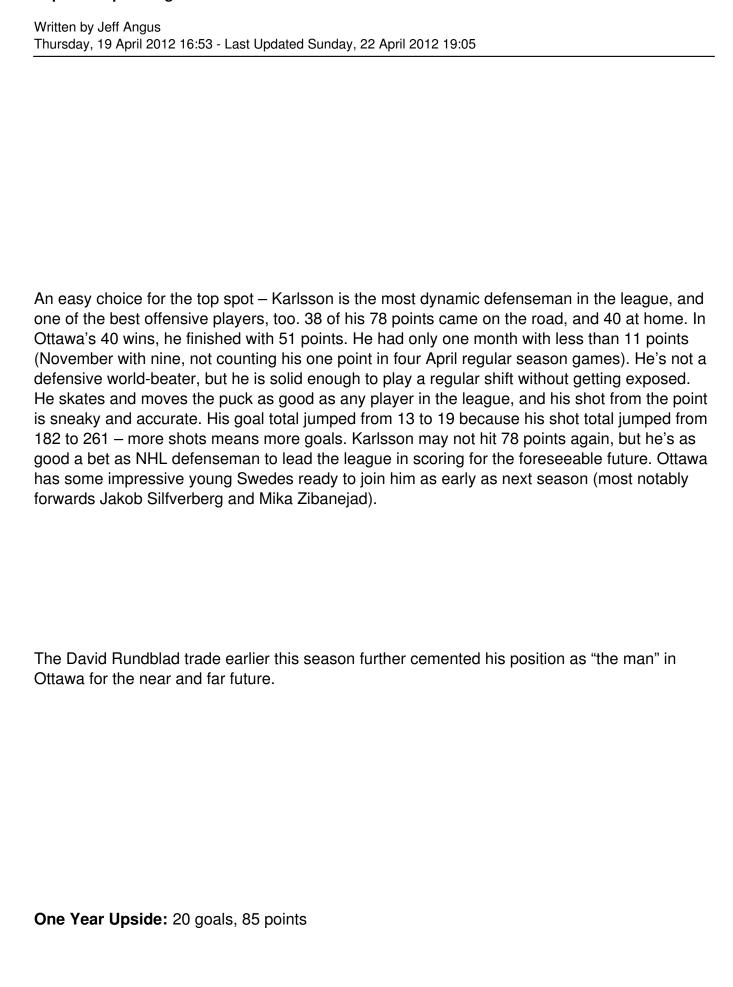
I didn't have to think hard about finding Green's replacement for the top of the list. Erik Karlsson made the surprise debut at number 10 back in 2010. At that time, he was an unproven rookie, and many DobberHockey readers wondered why I was ranking him ahead of proven defensemen like Chris Pronger and Zdeno Chara. Fast-forward two years, and Karlsson now stands alone as the best offensive defenseman in the league (and it really isn't close). He recently concluded one of the most impressive statistical regular seasons for a defenseman in the history of the league (Karlsson outscored the second highest scoring defenseman, Brian Campbell, by a whopping 25 points).

After him, compiling the list was difficult. There was no clear-cut number two (although many in Pittsburgh may disagree). I had a list of 25 defensemen, and slowly took names away until I was left with nine (after Karlsson, of course).

To quote Steve Laidlaw, author of the Cage Match series:

"The problem with defensemen is they rely so much on their teammates, systems and just plain luck to put up points. Also, because they score much less than forwards, their final totals are [at the mercy of] these ups and downs. A player could miss 10 games and those could have been the 10 games where they'd have gotten the bounces to score 10 points, and that could cost them 20-25% of their scoring for the season. That's the difference between being on your roster and being on the waiver wire."





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Three \	Year l	Jpside:	20	goals,	85	points
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2. Dustin Byfuglien - Winnipeg Jets

You were expecting someone else, weren't you? Don't forget, this isn't the Hockey News or NHL.com. This is DobberHockey, and we are evaluating players under a fantasy hockey-tinted lens. With that in mind, there are few defensemen better to own than Byfuglien. Over the past three seasons, Byfuglien ranks among the league leaders in every major statistical category (keep in mind he played parts of one of those years as a forward in Chicago). Since 2009-10, Byfuglien ranks 2nd in goals (49), 7th in points (140), 7th in PIM (259), 1st in SOG (781), 3rd in PPG (18), and 1

in GWG (12) among NHL defensemen. He is better defensively than given credit for, and he was a major reason why the Jets were in playoff contention until the final weeks of the season (and he played through an injury for much of the stretch run).

He defines the term 'multi-category stud.'

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One Year Upside: 22 goals, 60 points

Three Year Upside: 22 goals, 60 points

3. Kris Letang – Pittsburgh Penguins

The only reason Letang wasn't among the league leaders in defensive scoring this season was due to injury. He suited up for only 51 games, but he still managed10 goals and 32 assists. He also had 34 PIM and posted a solid plus-21 rating. If Malkin is Pittsburgh's engine and Crosby is the backbone, Letang may be the pulse. He plays with his heart on his sleeve, and uses every inch of his 6'0" frame to inflict pain on opposing forwards. He has a bomb of a point shot and he loves joining the offensive attack. The Penguins are going to score a lot of goals for a long time, and Letang will be a big part of their offensive attack. He may have ranked higher on this list if it wasn't for injury concerns (he has suited up for more than 74 games only once in his five-year NHL career).

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One Year Upside: 15 goals, 55 points

Three Year Upside: 18 goals, 60 points

4. Alex Pietrangelo – St. Louis Blues

The Blues should be lauded for how they handled Pietrangelo. Many teams end up rushing young defensemen who appear physically mature enough to handle the professional game. Pietrangelo had the size and strength as a 19-year-old to compete at the NHL level, but his game was a bit raw. He went back to the OHL for two more years, and dominated both offensively and defensively. There are few defensemen who can control a game as well as him – he doesn't play with the same physical edge as Chris Pronger, but he can take over a game just as well as a young Pronger could. Pietrangelo is big, mobile, and able to make game-changing plays both defensively and offensively. He finished 2011-12 with 51 points, an eight-point improvement from the season before. I wouldn't be surprised to see his numbers continue to rise next season. His fantasy value gets a slight knock because he is a clean player – in 177 NHL games, Pietrangelo has racked up only 63 PIM.

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One Year Upside: 16 goals, 60 points

Three Year Upside: 20 goals, 70 points

5. Shea Weber - Nashville Predators

Weber may not be in Nashville past the 2012-13 season (he is a restricted free agent this summer, and there is some speculation he may sign a short-term deal in hopes of hitting the open market in 2012). Regardless of where his long term future lies, he is a stud defenseman who can contribute to a successful fantasy hockey team in many ways. Weber scores goals, he shoots the puck a ton, and he likes to throw hits. His PIM numbers are in decline, as he has averaged only 46 PIM over the past three regular seasons. It will be interesting to see how his offensive numbers are affected if Ryan Suter leaves Nashville this summer, as the two have formed the league's best defensive pairing over the past few years. Weber is the flashier defenseman of the two, but many in Nashville believe Suter is the more effective. Weber's numbers may take a slight hit if he is forced to change his game a bit for a new partner (likely impressive Swiss rookie Roman Josi).

Written by Jeff Angus Thursday, 19 April 2012 16:53 - Last Updated Sunday, 22 April 2012 19:05 One Year Upside: 20 goals, 50 points Three Year Upside: 25 goals, 60 points 6. Keith Yandle – Phoenix Coyotes

There are two reasons Yandle has slid down this list – one, the Coyotes aren't exactly money in the bank when it comes to offense, and two, Oliver Ekman-Larsson. The young Swede was Phoenix's best defenseman by the end of the year, leapfrogging past Yandle. Yandle has more offensive talent, but he may lose some of his prime power play minutes to Ekman-Larsson next season and beyond. Yandle is a dynamic skater and he can score goals in a variety of ways, and now may be a good time to acquire him, as his value is probably lower than it has been in a few years. Phoenix has several good young defensemen in the system, but don't forget: proven always trumps unproven. Yandle is a known commodity.

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Yandle's production dropped from 59 points in 2010-11 to 43 in 2011-12. He led all Coyote defensemen with 3:27 of PP time per game, down from 4:05 per game in 2010-11. Power play ice time is one of the most important statistics to keep an eye on with regards to defensive production.

One Year Upside: 15 goals, 55 points

Three Year Upside: 15 goals, 55 points

7. Alexander Edler – Vancouver Canucks

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His forgettable first round against Los Angeles notwithstanding, the soft-spoken Swede has quietly developed into one of the best offensive defensemen in the game. It helps that he has played on one of the best power plays in the league over the last few years, but he has also been a reason why the unit has been so successful. Edler is a great skater for his size (6'3" and 220 pounds), and he makes crisp, accurate passes up the ice. The Canucks have some intriguing young offensive defensemen, including Marc-Andre Gragnani and Kevin Connauton. Both are unproven, and at this point, Edler's position as Vancouver's go-to offensive defenseman is rock solid.

Vancouver's power play struggled mightily in the second half of the season, and Edler's production reflects that. In the final 33 games of the season, he had only 15 points.

One Year Upside: 12 goals, 55 points

Three Year Upside: 16 goals, 60 points

8. Zdeno Chara – Boston Bruins

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The soon-to-be 35-year-old may be too old for many of you, but he isn't for me. Chara is extremely durable – he has played at least 77 games in each of the previous six seasons. He is a fitness fanatic, a trait shared by Chris Chelios, and something that helped him play at a high level well into his 40's. Chara hasn't finished a season with less than 43 points since the lockout – consistency is an attribute that shouldn't be underrated, but it often is. He scores goals, he racks up PIM, he hits, and he shoots the puck, a lot. He trails only Byfuglien in shots on goal among defensemen over the past three years. There are several sexier young names who many people would take in a keeper league over Chara, but if you want to win at some point in the next three years, I'll take the durable and proven commodity, thank you very much.

One Year Upside: 20 goals, 55 points

Three Year Upside: 20 goals, 55 points

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Like Chara, Streit probably isn't the pick most were hoping for or expecting here. Why am I taking him over several defensemen who are a decade younger and have more upside? Well, because Streit is proven, and because he is in a great situation for the next few years. Streit, like Chara, is durable*. He has had at least 47 points (his total in 2011-12) in each of the last four seasons (*not including the 2010-11 season, one he missed entirely due to injury). The Islanders are a team on the rise, and Streit is going to be playing a lot on the power play with a soon-to-be-superstar John Tavares and the rest of the young supporting cast for at least the next three years.

His minus-27 rating is concerning, but he was a plus player for the previous two seasons. A lot goes in to a plus-minus, and it is quite often team related more than player related.

I know what you are asking – am I saying I wouldn't trade Streit for Drew Doughty or Oliver Ekman-Larsson in a keeper league? It depends, of course. I am playing the odds here – if I want to win my league in the next three years, Streit gives me a better chance at doing that (at least in my opinion). I can count on him for about 10 goals and 50 points. Doughty could score 15 and finish with 60 points, or he could do worse (like he has in the past two seasons).

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To be a successful poolie, one must look at players merely as assets with correlating numbers. Don't get deceived by their upside, potential, or pedigree. Winning is a hell of a lot more fun that consistently building for the future, but it appears to be lost on many out there who pass on proven veterans like Chara and Streit in hopes of the next big thing.

One Year Upside: 15 goals, 60 points

Three Year Upside: 15 goals, 60 points

10. Mike Green - Washington Capitals

Green's value will never be lower. He has played only 81 games in the past two seasons combined, and in that time he has only scored 11 goals and 20 assists (pedestrian numbers for the back-to-back 70+ point producer). Green is an injury risk because of the style of game he plays, but if as he matures, that should change. In addition to Green, the Capitals have several defensemen skilled in the offensive zone, most notably Dennis Wideman. Wideman, however,

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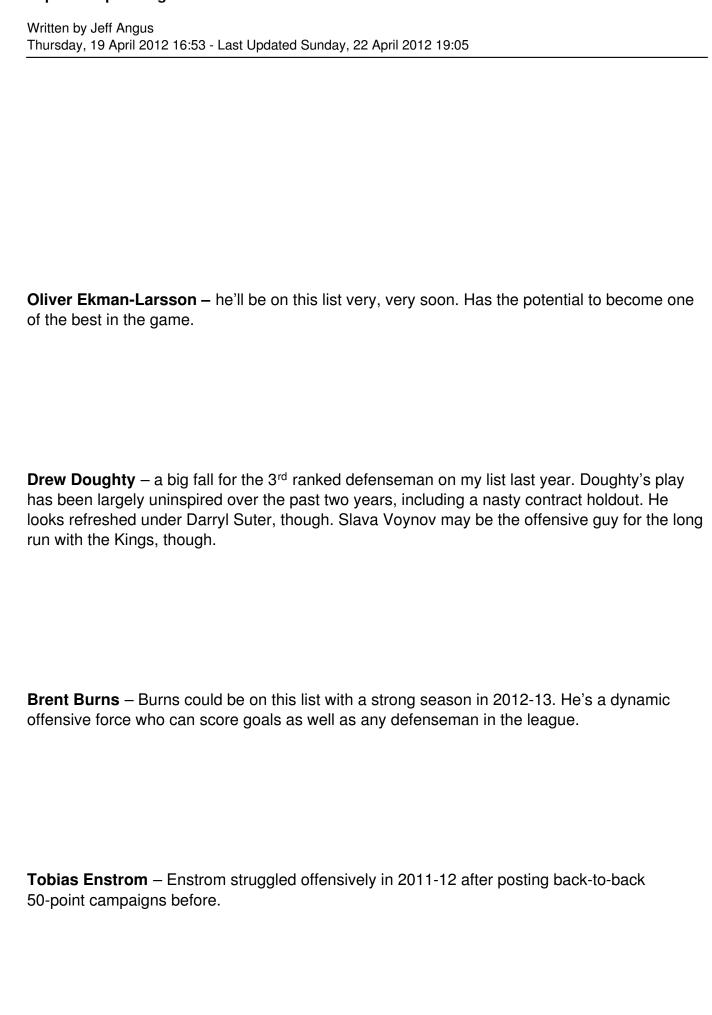
is a free agent this summer, and he likely won't be back in Washington. Wideman led all Caps defensemen with 3:16 of power play time per game this season, and Green was second with 2:53. In 2009-10 (Green's 76 point season), he played an average of 5:10 on the power play. More power play time next season will help him get his production back on track (in a big way).

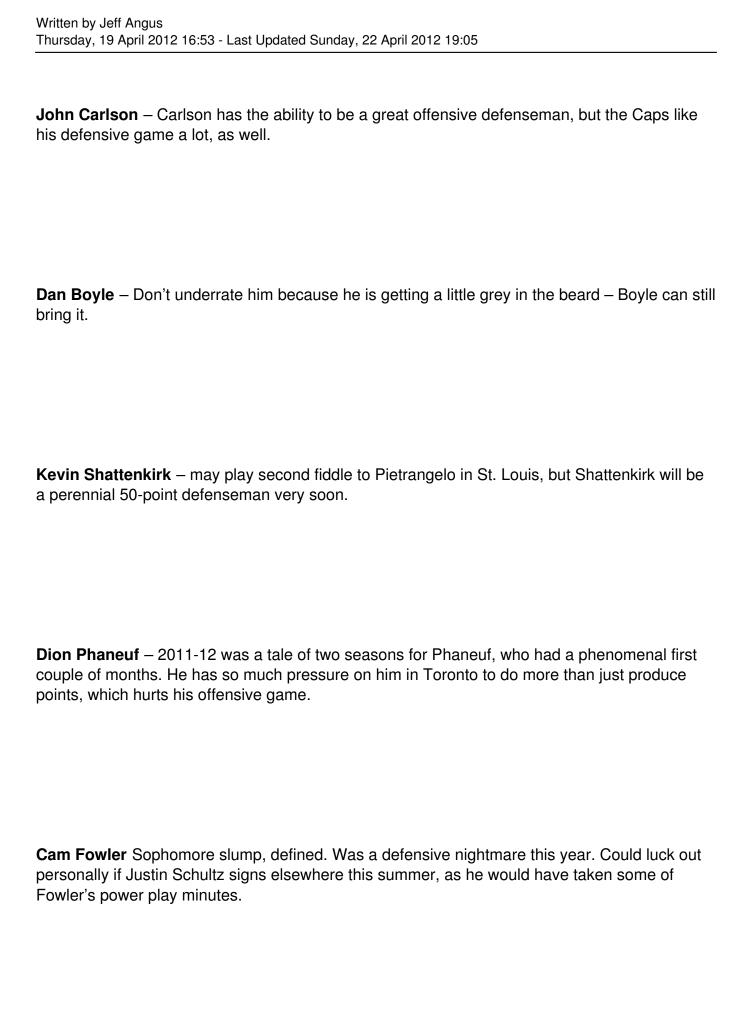
Even when healthy over the past two seasons, Green seemed to be a man without a country. The Capitals radically shifted their playing style from run-and-gun to more chip-and-chase, and the move made little sense at the time with the core of players they had. You don't put the cheap gas in a Ferrari, do you? I'm confident Green will get back to being one of the best offensive defensemen in the league. We have likely seen his peak in terms of production, but it is much too early to write off the rest of his career. Strike while the iron is hit – his value won't ever be any lower.

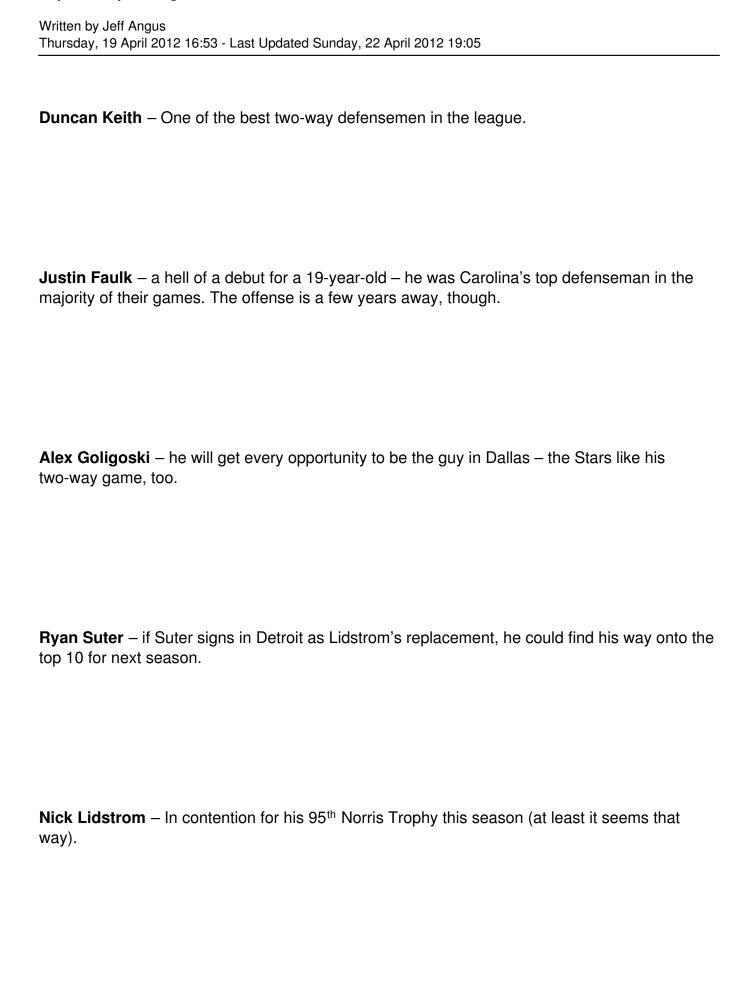
One Year Upside: 20 goals, 65 points

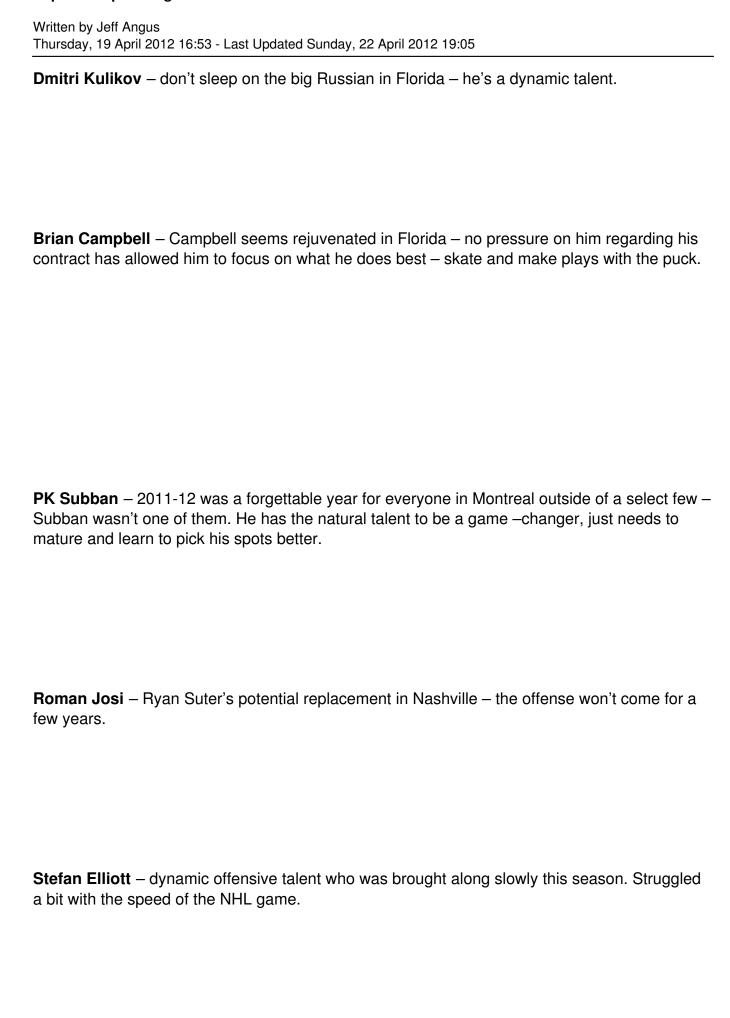
Three Year Upside: 20 goals, 65 points

Honorable Mentions:









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Jack Johnson – Johnson seemed to thrive being "the man" in Columbus. He was second fiddle to Doughty in LA. Perhaps a bigger role on and off the ice will motivate him to use his physical attributes to be a dominant offensive force.

This honorable mentions list is FAR from comprehensive – there could easily be another 10-20 names on here.