

Eight To Watch in 2007-2008

Written by Jeff Angus

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There is no shortage of players to talk about in the Western Conference for this upcoming season. There are several notable rookies, injury-prone stars, and aging superstars that could be the key to you winning your pool. Here are 10 to keep in mind on draft day (in no order):

Milan Hejduk

- Hejduk is already three seasons removed from his Rocket Richard winning 50-goal season in 2002-2003, but he still has plenty of goals left in the tank. He was extremely hot in the second half last year, and, along with Paul Stastny, gives Colorado the best secondary attack in the West. Look for Hejduk to approach 45 goals if he stays healthy.

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Rick Nash

- Nash has been teasing the Columbus fans the past few seasons with his offensive ability. He won't reach his peak until the Jackets can get him some more talented line mates, but the onus is on him to be among the league leaders in goals in 2007-2008. He will never have the assist totals to compete with the league leaders, but if you need goals, Nash is a good bet. Under Hitchcock's tutelage, he could break out in a big way.

Erik Johnson

- The best young defenseman since Jay Bouwmeester is ready to make his mark in the NHL. Johnson is the total package – he can hit, play sound defense, move the puck, and score. Expect the Blues to ease him in, but expect a quick transition. He won't put up Phaneuf-type numbers in his first year (mostly because Phaneuf played nearly every second on the Calgary powerplay), but expect his impact on the Blues to be just as big.

Igor Grigorenko

- The Red Wings have already penciled in the stocky winger on a line with Pavel Datsyuk. He has finally made it to the NHL after a long recovery from a devastating car accident. Grigorenko has the skill and the talent to be a star in this league, but will he get a chance to sign in Detroit? The Red Wings have a way of finding European talent and developing them into stars (Zetterberg, Datsyuk, and the likes of Filppula and Hudler on the way).

Jonathan Toews

- Toews is one of the most NHL ready prospects to come along in quite some time. He dominated the Blackhawks prospect camp, and will form a formidable duo with fellow stud rookie Patrick Kane. While Toews is behind Robert Lang on the depth chart, don't expect that to last. Toews will force his way onto a line with Havlat sooner rather than later. Many like to sell his offensive production short because he is such a sound defensive player. Don't. He has the talent to be a 90-100 point player in his prime.

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Todd Bertuzzi

- It is hard to criticize Brian Burke after he just led the Ducks to the Stanley Cup, but Bertuzzi's two-year; \$8 million deal dumfounded many around the league. His play has been extremely inconsistent the past three seasons, and he has done little to warrant that kind of money. Still, Burke and Bertuzzi have a close relationship and Bertuzzi may flourish in the aggressive system that the Ducks employ. He has pretty big shoes to fill on wing in Anaheim if Selanne does decide to hang them up, though.

Marian Gaborik

- Gaborik has always been a streaky player, and the past two seasons has battled through nagging injuries. The Wild kept him around this summer to monitor his training, hoping to avoid those same injuries in 2007-2008. Gaborik was absolutely phenomenal down the stretch last season and has the talent to be among the league leaders in scoring. Expect his production to skyrocket with newfound health in 2007-2008.

Alexander Radulov

- Radulov has gone from being a depth contributor on the Predators to being the go-to-guy in a matter of months. Sullivan is out until at least December, making Radulov the top winger in Nashville. He will see a huge increase in offensive minutes, and his production will obviously rise. His upside is not really a mystery, but with the depleted depth in Nashville, how fast he gets there may be. Snatch him up if you can.