

## Summer Sleeper Series - Rich Peverley

Written by Jeff Angus

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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 glimpse 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...

Fantasy hockey is all about trends. Certain players play better on certain days of the week, months of the year, and parts of the season. Certain players perform better in certain situations, certain positions, and on certain teams. Identifying these trends is usually the difference between winning your pool and simply staying afloat. Rich Peverley, once a castoff in the Nashville Predators organization, broke out in a big way after joining Atlanta mid-way through the 2008-09 season. He did the one thing that any center must do in Atlanta – establish chemistry with Ilya Kovalchuk. Peverley torched score sheets (relatively, at least) down the stretch, finishing the season with 13 goals and 35 points in 39 games for the Thrashers. In 27 games with Nashville earlier in the season, he only had a measly two goals and nine points. What was the reason for this dramatic increase in production?

The obvious answer is Kovalchuk. Peverley played the majority of his shifts with Kovalchuk. His linemates also included Colby Armstrong, Slava Kozlov, and Marty Reasoner. His ice time jumped significantly – opportunity number two. He averaged just over 12 minutes a game in Nashville, but was close to 19 minutes a game in Atlanta. Peverley wasn't just scoring and not contributing, either. After his arrival, the Thrashers were a solid .500 hockey club, and even went on a six-game winning streak in March. Lots of players that have been scoring stars in the ECHL and AHL never get opportunities to play in scoring roles in the NHL. However, lots do and

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don't take advantage of it. Peverley is a shining example of a scoring star that toiled in the minors for numerous seasons, and capitalizing on an opportunity.

What does this mean for the future? The Thrashers are much improved this off-season. They signed underrated Nik Antropov, traded for top-four defenseman Pavol Kubina, and will have a full season from phenom Zach Bogosian. Perhaps the key player to watch for is Kari Lehtonen, who has done little with his immense talent up to this point. Conditioning has always been an issue with him, but the Thrashers believe they have that figured out. If Lehtonen can stay healthy, he is a top five goalie.

Getting back to Peverley, expect his scoring to continue. The Thrashers love the line of Kozlov, Bryan Little, and Todd White. They also want Antropov to play with Kovalchuk, to open up some space for his lethal shot. Peverley will fit like a glove between the two hulking wingers. Expect 50-60 points, and do not be shocked if Peverley hits 70. The coaching staff likes him, and Kovalchuk likes playing with him. As a fantasy hockey owner, what else could you ask for?