

Summer Sleeper Series - Jonathan Ericsson

Written by Jeff Angus

Wednesday, 19 August 2009 09:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 20 August 2009 15:01



Every Wednesday this summer, I will bring you a sleeper to watch for the 2009-10 season (and potentially beyond). Released in no particular order, I will refrain from picking sleepers that have already shown glimpses of breaking out in the past – the obvious candidates. Time to go beneath the surface for a couple of sleepers from the Detroit Red Wings...

Both Nicklas Lidstrom and Brian Rafalski have multiple seasons left in their respective gas tanks. Lidstrom recently told the Detroit Free Press that neither the KHL nor the Eliteserien in Sweden interest him – the NHL will be the only league he will ever play his hockey in. He has only one year left on his current deal, but expect a one or two-year extension to be signed at some point over the course of the 2009-10 season. Rafalski is still under contract for three more seasons. However, with the recent departures of Marian Hossa, Jiri Hudler, and Mikael

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Samuelsson, Detroit will need to make up a lot of offense, especially on the power play. Samuelsson, in particular, was an important part of the second power play unit, where he often played the point. He got a lot of criticism for taking low percentage shots and forcing plays at times, but Detroit liked what he brought to their power play. Niklas Kronwall broke the 50-point barrier for the first time in his career as well, but after those three, there wasn't much in the way of offense on Detroit's blue line. There are two young defensemen coming up in the Detroit system to keep an eye on from a fantasy standpoint.

Jonathan Ericsson is another in a long line of fantastic draft picks by Detroit. Hakan Andersson, Detroit's Swedish scout, noticed a big, talented center playing for a junior Swedish team, and convinced him to make the move back to defense. Detroit took him with their 9th round pick in 2002, and the rest is history. He was very solid in the 2009 Playoffs, and the Red Wings believe that he possesses top-four upside. His ice time went up dramatically in the playoffs, as he was forced to step up and fill in when injuries hit. He averaged just over 17 minutes per game in 19 regular season games, but saw his ice time jump to over 20 minutes against both Anaheim and Chicago. He has an absolute cannon from the point as well, so expect him to put up healthy goal totals throughout his career. 30 points would be a realistic number to expect for Ericsson in 2009-10. Anything more than that would depend on injuries to defensemen ahead of him on the depth chart, as well as power play time. At this point, the die-hard fantasy hockey fan is well aware of Ericsson and what he brings, but he still may fly below the radar in many leagues for his lack of production to date.

Drafted back in the first round of the 2005 Draft, Jakub Kindl has yet to suit up for the Red Wings. He played two more seasons with Kitchener after being drafted, and then moved on to the Grand Rapids Griffins of the AHL, where he played in both 2007-08 and 2008-09. He will finally suit up for the Red Wings in 2009-10, but it remains to be seen for how many games. He probably isn't ready for full-time duty just yet, and there may not be a roster spot for him either, unless he pushes some defensemen down the depth chart. He is very sound defensively, and has also shown flashes of offense with both Kitchener (58 points in 2005-06) and Grand Rapids (33 points last season). Look for him to play 40-50 games this season for the Wings, and become a full-time roster player for the 2010-11 season. His fantasy value is a bit of a question mark, as it is with most young defensemen who have yet to play in the NHL. Look for him to develop into a sound, two-way defensemen capable of scoring 25-35 points on a regular basis.

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