I first mentioned the concept of the *"it factor"* way back in December of 2007. I saw something special in New Jersey winger Zach Parise, who was on his way to scoring 32 goals that season. His big offensive breakout came only one season later in 2008-09, when he led New Jersey with 45 goals and 94 points. Like Parise, Edmonton Oiler Jordan Eberle possesses the "*it factor."*

My original definition of the term: *"All of the past greats have possessed that ability to think the game faster than the competition. From Rocket Richard to Wayne Gretzky to Sidney Crosby, they all have had an extremely high level of "hockey IQ." It is a trait that is easy to recognize in the elite, generational talents, but other players do possess it."*

Parise has significant meaning to me because I was one of the few who saw his upside as more than a 60-70 point second line winger. back in 2007 I am not one to pump my own tires (on a regular basis), and if you dig through my past articles I'm sure there will be a few duds and misses along the way (Steve Bernier, to name one). However, the qualities that I saw in Parise before he became the star he is today are the exact same qualities that I see in Eberle. I am learning to rely more on statistical analysis for my projections and predictions, but I always listen to my gut when I get a strong hunch about a certain player.

All Canadian hockey fans are well are of Eberle. He seems to create magic every single time he puts the Canadian sweater on. Like Parise, he is undersized (Parise was 5'10" and 175 pounds when drafted, and Eberle is 5'10" and close to 180 right now). Like Parise, he played center at the junior level, but will be shifted to the wing in the NHL. Eberle and Parise are not identical players. Parise is a better skater, and Eberle is more of a sniper. Parise is a bit grittier, and Eberle a bit sneakier. However, both players love going to the dirty areas to bang in rebounds and create offensive opportunities. Both have engines with no off switch, and both have a history of clutch performances in important situations. Does Eberle have the upside to one day be a 90+ point player like Parise? Yes.

I'd assume most professional hockey scouts have their own definition for this *"it factor."* Hockey IQ could be seen as a parallel term. Other players that possess this special quality include Sidney Crosby, Patrick Kane, TJ Oshie, David Booth, and Jordan Schroeder. It is developed in undersized forwards because those are the players that have to be smart out on the ice to get noticed. The big, strong, natural athletes sometimes don't think the game very well, but they get scouted and ultimately drafted for physical gifts (the old adage that you can't teach size fits in here). One term associated with these smaller players is that they have the ability to be in the right place at the right time. They make goals and plays look easier than they really are because they are able to anticipate the game quicker than the opposition (and unfortunately for Crosby, linemates as well).

Edmonton has a wealth of young talent on the left side (Taylor Hall, Magnus Paajarvi-Svensson), and a very good young center (Sam Gagner). Eberle only has Ales Hemsky ahead of him on the depth chart, and the talented Czech winger has been mentioned in more than a few trade rumors over the past few months. The Oilers appear committed to giving lots of ice time to their young talent, provided they earn it. In the short term, Eberle will slot in on the second line with Hall and either Gagner or Shawn Horcoff.

Short term upside: 25 goals, 45 points

Long term upside: 50 goals, 90 points