

Five Teams to Invest In

Written by Jeff Angus

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There are numerous strategies that you can employ to win your hockey pool. One of them is to load up on a specific team. This strategy works better in rotisserie or points-only leagues, as having multiple players from the same team may hurt you during weeks with only a game or two in head-to-head leagues .

A few years ago, Pittsburgh was the hottest thing going in fantasy hockey. Three years ago, it was Buffalo. Over the past few years, Washington and Chicago have risen to the top. There are a number of factors that weigh in to the equation with regards to figuring out which teams to target – management and coaching philosophy, team style of play, quality of start players, quality of scoring depth, quality of NHL-ready prospects, and player age (of course, using my standard three-year window to win).

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I am going to break down the top five teams to focus your drafting on in terms of a one-year window (the five best teams right now), and I will also list five more teams to keep an eye on for the longer term (three years from now). I will rate each team using the criteria mentioned above. The higher the number, the better the team scores in that particular area.

1. Washington Capitals

Coaching/management philosophy: 10/10

Bruce Boudreau loves offense, and ever since taking over as head coach in Washington, his teams have delivered. The defensemen are encouraged to join the rush, and the forwards are encouraged to take chances with the puck.

Quality of stars: 10/10

Ovechkin, Backstrom, and Green are three of the best players to own in all pool formats.

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Quality of scoring depth: 9/10

Washington also has a solid supporting cast – Semin, Fehr, Fleischmann, Laich, and Knuble are all steady offensive players. On defense, there isn't much after Green, though.

NHL ready prospects: 8/10

John Carlson is one of the best young defensemen in the world. Karl Alzner is a great prospect too, but his offensive upside isn't high enough to give him much fantasy relevance. Up front, the Capitals have some intriguing prospects, led by Marcus Johansson. Keep an eye on defenseman Dmitri Orlov – he will be coming over in 2011-12 and could make the team out of camp.

Player age: 10/10

Washington's core is very young. They won't be losing steam any time soon.

Overall: 9.4/10

If you want to win your pool this coming season, draft as many Capitals as you can. Fehr is a

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good sleeper option – he'll score 25-30 if he gets a regular PP shift. His value will skyrocket once Knuble retires or Semin/Fleischmann leave the team. Jeff Schultz will break the 30-point mark, and Tom Poti should put up decent numbers as well. Don't expect Carlson to take away minutes from Green just yet.

2. Vancouver Canucks

Coaching/management philosophy: 8.5/10

Head coach Alain Vigneault quickly changed the Canucks from a defensive team to an aggressive, offensive powerhouse, as per the request of new general manager Mike Gillis. The Canucks trailed only Washington in terms of goals scored in 2009-10.

Quality of stars: 9/10

Few goaltenders can go save for save with Roberto Luongo when he is at his best (which he needs to be on a more regular basis this season for the Canucks to do what many are expecting from them), and the Sedin twins have emerged as legitimate super stars. On the back end, there isn't a Green or a Boyle, but the top four are all very capable puck movers. Alex

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Edler has elite upside; he just needs to play with more confidence on a regular basis. He took his game to another level during the playoffs this past spring.

Quality of scoring depth: 9/10

Kesler, Raymond, Samuelsson, and Burrows are all capable offensive producers. Malhotra will take some of the tough defensive minutes from Kesler, freeing him up for more offensive responsibilities.

NHL ready prospects: 9/10

Cody Hodgson and Jordan Schroeder both have a shot at cracking the club this fall. The star of training camp last season, Sergei Shirokov, has a shot as well. On the back end, Kevin Connauton will make the leap to professional hockey after dominating the WHL last season. His offensive potential is immense.

Player age: 8/10

The Sedin twins have yet to turn 30, and Vancouver's other core players are all younger.

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Overall: 8.7/10

The weakness of the competition Vancouver faces in the Northwest Division also factors in to the equation.

3. Chicago Blackhawks

Coaching/management philosophy: 9/10

The young Hawks are all about puck control, transitional play, and attacking the opposition with regularity.

Quality of stars: 10/10

Arguably the best defenseman in the league (Keith) stars up an attack featuring the likes of

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Kane, Toews, and Hossa.

Quality of scoring depth: 7/10

Last season, the Hawks would have scored a 10/10 in this category, but most of their key secondary scorers were casualties of the salary cap this summer. Most notably absent are Versteeg, Ladd, and Byfuglien.

NHL ready prospects: 8/10

The Hawks were able to acquire some very good young prospects this summer. One to keep an eye on is Jeremy Morin. He has earned comparisons to Jeff Carter – big, good skater, and a deadly wrist shot. The Blackhawks have Kyle Beach in the mix as well, who has the potential to be the next Todd Bertuzzi (the good version).

Player age: 9/10

Overall: 8.6

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The Hawks lost a lot of depth this summer, but they have the top end stars and the potential on the farm to continue to be among the league's elite offensive teams.

4. Philadelphia Flyers

Coaching/management philosophy: 8/10

The Flyers were eighth in the league with 2.83 goals for per game last season. They were fifth in 2008-09, and sixth in 2007-08. They have three lines capable of scoring with regularity, and perhaps the strongest blue line in the league as well. It's a lot easier to score goals and make plays when the puck is moved up the ice with both skill and efficiency.

Quality of stars: 8/10

Philadelphia's top forwards are not among the league's best, but Richards, Carter, and Briere are all very good fantasy options. Pronger is one of the best three defensemen in the league, and the perennially underrated Timonen is one of the best in the league at moving the puck up the ice.

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Quality of scoring depth: 10/10

The Flyers have seven legitimate top six forwards (eight if you want to count Villie Leino), and two of them still have a lot of developing left to do (van Riemsdyk and Giroux). On defense, Coburn, Meszaros, and Carle are all very capable puck movers.

NHL ready prospects: 6/10

Pat Maroon is the best option to have an impact at the NHL level.

Player age: 9/10

Overall: 8.2/10

If the Hartnell/Briere/Leino line can rekindle their playoff magic, the Flyers will be set. The team has high expectations for newcomer Nikolai Zherdev, who will see ample power play time.

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5. Pittsburgh Penguins

Coaching/management philosophy: 8/10

The Penguins don't sacrifice defense for scoring goals, but they have the talent at forward and defense to do both.

Quality of stars: 10/10

Not much to say here.

Quality of scoring depth: 7/10

The forward group outside of the top two isn't very good, but two additions on the back end (Martin and Michalek) will help with the break out. As long as Crosby and Malkin can get the

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puck in good areas, their linemates will be productive.

NHL ready prospects: 6/10

Eric Tangradi and Dustin Jeffrey wouldn't be notable prospects in most other situations.

Player age: 10/10

Overall: 8.2/10

Pittsburgh is toying with the idea of moving Malkin to wing with Jordan Staal, which would give them a much more dangerous second line to support Crosby.

Coming next week - "Five Teams to Invest In For the Future."