Jeff Angus shares his thoughts on the Karlsson injury.

Seth Jones, Nathan MacKinnon, or Jonathan Drouin? Unfortunately, after the Erik Karlsson injury yesterday, that question will start getting asked more and more in Ottawa.

The Senators were able to weather the Jason Spezza injury (the offense struggled, but they were competitive in most of the games they played in after Spezza was placed on the injured reserve), but they won't be able to replace Erik Karlsson.

What can poolies expect from Ottawa players for the rest of the season?

Read on to find out.

The Situation: Erik Karlsson out for the season with a torn Achilles

The Fantasy Impact: Significant

Not to take away from Craig Anderson 's phenomenal start to the 2013 season (seriously, his numbers are ridiculous), but Karlsson is arguably the most dynamic player in hockey at this moment. He was on pace for over 30 goals (prorated to an 82 game season, of course).

He led the Senators in shots on goal by almost 30, and he led the entire NHL in shots on goal, too (his 63 shots on goal is currently four more than Zach Parise , who is in second with 59).

Simply put, Karlsson is a fourth forward on the ice. Unlike most defenseman who have that written about them, he isn't a defensive liability. He has been playing with a more noticeable physical edge this season, and he is smart positionally and with his stick.

What To Do?

What do you now do if you own a Senators player or two? First thing would be to readjust your expectations. Karlsson and Spezza were the two offensive facilitators on this team, and without them, I'd expect Ottawa to start playing much more conservative offensively and rely on Anderson to steal them as many points as possible.

The team isn't completely devoid of talent – Kyle Turris has quietly developed into a capable top six center, and there is some talent on the wing (

Daniel Alfredsson
and
Milan Michalek
, most notably). On the back end,
Sergei Gonchar
can still shoot the puck. He is a liability defensively at times, and he doesn't bring Karlsson's skating to the table, but he can get it done on the power play. After him, there isn't much in the way of proven talent. But as the saying goes, with injury comes opportunity.

Does Patrick Wiercioch step up and chip in offensively? Jared Cowen is also out for the season (he underwent surgery a few months ago), and Ottawa could really use his two-way play right about now. The blueline has a solid collection of defensive guys, but they will need to find some offense and passing from somewhere.

This injury is all about readjusting expectations:

All three players will return to the team healthy next year. Spezza may even return to the team before this year ends, even if the playoffs are out of reach--that's what he did the last time he was hurt in Pittsburgh. Whatever this team's record turns out to be, it won't be indicative of where the team truly stands. If you jump ship now, you reveal yourself as nothing more than the kind of fairweather fan I ranted about two years ago. Maybe the season is lost--it's too soon to say, no matter how bad things look--but the future of the team is not.

Now what? It's time to find different positives than we were originally expecting, that's all. Just like last year, when we got the pleasant surprise of a playoff appearance instead of a lottery pick. The reverse may turn out to be true this year, but so what? There's still a lot of good, young talent on the team, and that's exciting in its own way. There will still be reasons to cheer on most nights regardless of the final score once the shock of losing Karlsson wears off.

I wouldn't recommend trading any Senators right now – other GMs will sense that you are trying to dump off assets for pennies on the dollar. Anderson is going to be a very busy man for the next few months (and he'd make a good sell high candidate, but that ship may have sailed already).

Ottawa has gotten solid play from Jim O'Brien, Erik Condra, and the other depth forwards this season. But they simply don't have the talent to skate with most NHL teams right now.

Karlsson's Recovery

Canucks defenseman Kevin Bieksa had a very similar injury a few years ago. He returned to play three months later, but said he didn't feel 100% for up to a year. It is amazing that the NHL (and other leagues) haven't mandated Kevlar socks yet. I know many players are more comfortable playing with no socks, but for such a routine play this is a really significant/serious injury. Getting used to socks is a lot easier of an adjustment than adding a visor, for example.

Karlsson is done for 2013. Even if the Senators make it to the Cup Final, I doubt he comes back. I imagine he is already targeting next September as a return date – just in time for training camp. Ottawa wasn't expected to win anything this year, but it is still a significant blow to the team, and hockey in general, as arguably the most exciting player in the league will be gone for a while.

My fantasy advice, as a Karlsson owner – in between the tears, put him on your IR, cross your fingers, and hope for a speedy/full recovery. And if you own any of the healthy Senators, now may be a good time to go and buy a lucky rabbit's foot or something.

Sidney Crosby on Karlsson's playing ability:

"It's pretty amazing to watch," Penguins star Sidney Crosby said of Karlsson's game. "Hopefully we don't have to deal with that (Wednesday), seeing him rush up the ice too much, but he's definitely a guy who just finds a way to create every night. For a defenceman, I don't think that's very easy, especially today the way teams are defensively.

“He’s up on the rush, he finds ways to produce. He’s pretty tough to stop.”