

## P.K. Subban vs. John Carlson

Written by Steve Laidlaw

Wednesday, 20 April 2011 12:52 - Last Updated Saturday, 23 April 2011 09:54

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I think it's high time we saw the NHL create a new award. Let's tentatively call it the Nalder, awarded to the NHL's best rookie defenseman. In 66 years of giving the Calder to the league's top rookie, only ten defensemen have won the award, most recently to Buffalo's Tyler Myers. A defenseman basically only wins the trophy when there are no better options at forward or in goal. I mean, you'd either have to throw up like 50 points and end up top ten in defensemen scoring in the league or have very little competition from your forward and goaltending compatriots. In other words, to win the award as a defenseman you have to be special or downright fortunate.

The thing is that defensemen are rarely ready enough to step in and produce big numbers right away (or at least that used to be the case). Now we are seeing a steady influx of new exciting young talent on the blueline, such that year after year we see 40-point performances from rookie defensemen that don't even make you blink. This has to be awarded or even acknowledged somehow.

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Not convinced? Yeah maybe not. I'm thinking the Nalder makes a terrible trophy name. Let's call it the Orr Trophy. Isn't it high time we gave this guy his own trophy? It's definitely time to recognize these rookie defensemen for their exploits and there's no one better to represent that than Orr.

Consider that Montreal's PK Subban and Washington's John Carlson are not finalists for the Calder despite the fact they've been their teams' best defenseman over the course of the full season. With the Orr Trophy we wouldn't have to worry about forgetting about them. We could have our cake and eat it too. What a beautiful concept! There's only one problem though; who wins it?

I have Carlson and Subban as the serious front runners for this trophy. Granted, St. Louis's Kevin Shattenkirk was the rookie defenseman scoring leader this season, but he got traded halfway through. Much like my vote for anything else, you can't win a "best of" trophy if you get traded during the season. If you were the best your team had, they wouldn't trade you, period. (This is the reason why I have major beef with Thornton's Hart Trophy win in 2005-06, but that's another story entirely.)

I know that poolies may not be totally concerned with who wins my made up trophy, at least not yet but I'm going to hand it out anyway. Hopefully this will help you glean some insight for your fantasy team and since this is a made up trophy anyway, I can gear this cage match towards fantasy value.

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So here goes, **Subban vs. Carlson** for the Orr Trophy and likely a place on your fantasy squad.

Subban and Carlson are very interesting to compare because they both have a very similar track record going back to their final seasons of junior hockey in 2008-09 where they both were stars in the OHL. In fact, that year they both tallied 76 points.

Scoring has come easy for these two at every level. Following their final OHL seasons they made their pro debuts in the AHL where they both made the AHL All-Rookie Team, lighting up the stat sheet. Carlson scored 39 points in 44 games for Hershey, earning a late season call-up with the Capitals, while Subban scored 53 points in 77 games for Hamilton, earning a late call-up of his own to play with the Canadiens. Both would end up sticking with the big club for playoffs where Subban's Canadiens upset Carlson's Capitals in round one, striking a blow in this battle.

Both Subban and Carlson are international stars as well, having won World Junior gold for their respective countries and even making the All-Tournament teams. PK did so with Canada in '08 and again in '09 while Carlson, who is a year younger, did so in '10.

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You really can't give either one an edge in draft pedigree either. Carlson was a late first round pick (27th) for the Caps back in '08 while Subban was a mid-second rounder (43rd) for the Habs in '07.

This season was no different. Subban outscored Carlson by a mere point so seemingly nothing separates the two. We'll have to look deeper at their standard 6x4 rotisserie value to see if we can't find a winner.

**Goals**

**Assists**

**Plus/Minus**

**PPP**

**PIM**

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### **SOG**

#### **Subban**

14

24

minus-8

18

124

197

#### **Carlson**

7

30

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plus-21

6

44

144

It becomes obvious in a big hurry that we have a clear winner. SOG clearly favours Subban, so do PIM and PPP. With regards to SOG this has a lot to do with style. Carlson has a good shot but he's much more of a puck mover. He doesn't have the big shot that Subban does and he doesn't need to use it as much with the snipers he plays with. So that gives Subban an edge that he'll likely always have. In general that will also lead to more goals where he had an edge this season but it's worth noting that he hasn't historically held an edge here, which is why I haven't indicated it as a clear win for Subban.

Subban has however always been a big winner in the PIM department at every level and I'd expect that to continue. It's not that Carlson is shy when it comes to physical contact but he's a lot smarter about it. I could see him eventually developing a Nik Lidstrom style of positioning where he's always in the right place and never has to play the body. He'd do himself a lot of favours if he did.

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The PPP difference is largely a product of opportunity. Subban played almost a minute more on the powerplay each game than Carlson did. He also played on a much better powerplay as the Capitals were inexplicably mediocre on the powerplay this season. I'd expect this to even up a little bit over time but with Carlson having Mike Green in the way and developing into an excellent shutdown defenseman he could be held back a bit.

I prefer Subban for points only pools because I think he's more aggressive offensively and has a longer leash. He's seeing more powerplay minutes and by shooting and scoring more goals he has more room to manoeuvre upward and score more assists. Carlson will jump into the rush but not the way Subban does.

Carlson did have a major edge in plus/minus this season and I'd suspect he always has an edge in this category because he plays a more sound defensive game on a much better team. Subban won't always be a minus player but it could be a long time before he gets out of the red.

All in all it's clear that Subban has a rotisserie edge because he touches the peripheral categories a lot heavier. Carlson is still a very good option but he gets blown out of the water by Subban's powerful peripheral punch. Give PK the nod and you won't regret it!