It's probably fitting that Marion Gaborik was born on February 14th.

Like St. Valentine's Day, he is a player that many love, but many others only love to hate him. Talented but fragile, Gaborik is a frustrating fantasy player, but as a collective, we poolies can't ever seem to breakup with him permanently – even if the relationship is obviously unhealthy.

Gaborik was recently described as Martin Havlat "multiplied by a 100, or maybe a 1000" in The Hockey News (THN) Yearbook. Considering that the almost equally delicate Havlat led the Chicago Blackhawks in scoring last year with 77 points (ahead of super-talented sophomores Patrick Kane, and Jonathon Toews), this kind of endorsement from a hockey bedrock source like THN is understandably tempting to many.

Further, in THN's most recent issue, Gaborik was listed as the third most important "summer acquisition" in a reader's choice survey, ahead of Michael Cammlleri and Nikolai Khabibulin. Maybe we could write off the readers as either ill-educated (or drunk), but two pages later Gaborik is highlighted as the "comeback player" of the year by an expert team of "hockey observers" that included team correspondents, THN staff, and other hockey journalists.

All that said, as savvy poolies, we know that general hockey commentary doesn't always accurately translate into the stat-heavy world of fantasy hockey. Many great hockey players are not good fantasy choices simply because their contributions are intangible, immeasurable, and therefore useless in your pool.

But Gaborik has received much love in purely fantasy circles too. In the Yahoo system, he currently is being drafted in the second round, 20.7th overall on average (shockingly ahead of Roberto Luongo and Vincent Lecavalier). In Dobber's Expert League more restraint was demonstrated, but barely. He was drafted in the 4th round, 45th overall (to learn more about who the experts drafted and when, pick up the Guide).
The two-time all-star's potential clearly wins out over his injury risks in many people's minds.

Should *you* be tempted this year?

Gaborik's Numbers

Information is power, so let's get educated on the skating Slovak.

He owns some impressive numbers, and he owns some scary numbers. What can we expect from him in the future? See the chart below for a summary of his time in the NHL so far (all statistics taken from TSN.ca).

Year

Games Missed

Due to Injury

GP

G

A

Pts

Pts/Game

2000-01

10

71

18

18

36

0.51

2001-02

4

78

30

37

67

0.86

2002-03

0

81

30

35

65

0.8

2003-04

5

65

18

22

40

0.62

2005-06

17

65

38

28

66

1.02

2006-07

34

48

30

27

57

1.19

2007-08

5

77

42

41

83

1.08

2008-09

65

17

13

10

23

1.35

NHL Career

Average

30.25

51.75

30.75

26.5

57.25

1.11

Two interesting big-picture trends emerge from the table.

1. Gaborik's point/game production is increasing.
2. Gaborik's number of games missed due to injury is also increasing.

Neither trend is perfectly described, and there are only eight NHL years to look at, but the general tendencies are clear: two opposing trends. Maybe in the future we can expect Gaborik to show up for only one game a year, but pot seven goals and add four assists.

So What Are You Going to Get from Gaborik this Year?

A simplistic way to answer this question would be to consider his average numbers as a reasonable way to establish your expectations. From that point of view, he'll miss just over 30 games due to one injury or another, and net you 57 points for your trouble.

The problem is that career averages are not a reliable way to predict a volatile player like Gaborik's single-year success. Look at the last two years: one's brilliant, one's dreadful.

That's the allure (and horror) of Gaborik. You just never know what you're going to get, and so you can't responsibly make plans that include him. That why many experts, including our very own Dobber, wisely tell you not to draft him.

But this uncertainty is also likely why so many poolies can't resist him…and if you put any stock in end-of-season-play as an indication of the next season's success, consider this: Gaborik finished the year with a seven game point streak, netting 13 points in that span. Not bad at all.

If You Remember Nothing Else, Remember This

Drafting Gaborik is risky business.

Anyone who suggests that this year is somehow different from past years is either uninformed or dishonest. But it still might make sense to draft or pick him up early under certain circumstances.

1. You are in a keeper-league and aren't close to challenging for the number one position this year: if this is the case, then maybe it makes sense to grab Gaborik early. If it doesn't work out, then you haven't given up a top-tier finish. But if he plays well, you can trade him to a contender who is desperate for any edge. You get to potentially play king-maker, and more importantly, you could pick up some nice players coming back your way.

1. You like risk: hey, no one dies in fantasy hockey, and you feel confidant that you know what you're getting into (because you've read this article), and you're prepared to roll the dice. Intermittent reinforcement is hard to resist, and glory is forever, right?

As poolies we love Gaborik more for his potential than his actual performance. Many of us want nothing to do with him, but for whatever reason, as a group we still love the talented and frustrating skater born on St. Valentine's day. So consider using that to your advantage this year.

All's fair in love and war after all.