

Zach Bogosian: Has His Time Come?

Written by Brent Lemon

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With Steve Stamkos and Drew Doughty, two of the top-three picks from the NHL's 2008 entry draft, already lighting the fantasy world on fire, its natural to wonder what's happening with Zach Bogosian, the number three pick from 2008.

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After a tumultuous, but promising, rookie campaign, Bogosian took a significant step backwards last year, and his short career has already seen more than his fair share of injuries. The 20-year old native of Massena, New York smolders with potential, but unlike with Stamkos and Doughty, poolies are still waiting for ignition.

But is this Bogosian's year to breakout? There is at least one reason to think so.

Looking Back

After playing high school hockey in his homeland, Bogosian decided to leave the United States to play Canadian major-junior hockey in the OHL with the Peterborough Petes. In his two years with that storied franchise, Bogosian left an impression as a defencemen who could light the lamp often, but still be relied upon to neutralize his opponents' top skaters.

"He wants to shut those guys down", said Petes' head coach Vince Malette in 2008. "He's solid defensively, and at the same time he can skate with the puck. He doesn't lose any speed when

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he's handling the puck. He's good offensively and knows when to jump into the play. He's got a complete game."

The scouts agreed, and so did Atlanta, who selected Bogosian third overall that June in Ottawa, and gave him a spot on their blueline come fall. Unfortunately, Bogosian only had the opportunity to play in eight games before breaking his left leg and missing the next 28 games.

The rehabilitation of the leg was long and difficult and the then-18-year-old struggled with the often-solitary tasks. At the time, Bogosian described the process as "pretty boring." He explained, "you are used to junior when you are around 22 or 23 guys that pretty much all hang out together. So, it's a little different."

After a brief reconditioning assignment with Atlanta's AHL affiliate, the Chicago Wolves, Bogosian returned to the big club and almost immediately began to contribute on the scoresheet. When his first year was in the books, he had scored nine goals, earned 19 points, and finished with a plus-11 over the course of 47 games.

Especially considering the tempered expectations that are only fair for any teenaged defencemen in the NHL, many fantasy owners drooled over the possibilities for what might be possible over a full 82 games injury-free.

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His owners would be disappointed in 2009/10..

Bogosian played 81 games, but only put up 23 points and finished with a miserable minus-18. Sophomore slump? Maybe not.

As reported at by Matt Bennett at dailyfaceoff.com , then-head coach John Anderson stated that the depreciated stats were the result of a nagging wrist injury that Bogosian suffered in December. Bennett notes that "in September and October, Bogosian racked up a solid 8 goals (2 PP) and 4 assists in 24 games but only managed 11 more points for the rest of the season. In his last 27 games of the season, he only gave us 1 goal and 2 assists."

Looking Ahead...

Despite any injury problems, poolies continue to recognize the immense potential in the young blue-liner, and his ownership currently hovers around 70% across Yahoo leagues (and much higher in keeper leagues). But especially considering that Bogosian is once again injured, this time with a shoulder injury, one has to wonder what is in store for his owners this season.

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While the Thrashers brought in no fewer than 10 new players during the off-season, the biggest source of optimism for Bogosian owners may be Atlanta's latest head coach, Craig Ramsey.

Ramsey began his NHL career in 1971 and played all of his 15 seasons with the Buffalo Sabres before retiring in 1985. During his playing days, the big left-winger was known for two qualities: his ironman endurance, and his stellar defensive play. He capped his career by winning the Frank J. Selke trophy in 1985 as the best defensive forward that year.

Ramsey immediately rolled into an assistant coaching job with the Sabres for the 1985/86 season and has since worked for several NHL franchises, including as a head coach of the Philadelphia Flyers in 2001/01. Most recently, Ramsey spent three seasons with the Boston Bruins as an assistant coach, before moving south to Atlanta this past August.

His successes in Boston were instrumental in the decision by Atlanta's GM, Rick Dudley, to bring Ramsey to Atlanta. When speaking to Ken Campbell of the Hockey News, Dudley focused on Ramsey's ability to get the most out of young defencemen.

"He had miraculous success with a kid like Danny Boyle. Nobody remembers we (Dudley and Ramsey were in Tampa Bay at the time) got Dan Boyle for a fifth round pick because he couldn't play in Florida, which wasn't a real good team, and all of a sudden Dan Boyle is one of

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the top defensemen in the game. It isn't a fluke.

“Johnny Boychuk was mired in the minor leagues and he went to Boston and the guy who handled the defensemen was Craig Ramsey. And Johnny Boychuk is making almost \$2 million a year now as a 20-minute defensemen.”

And Dudley has made no secret of his hopes for Ramsey to help Bogosian reach his full potential. In the same interview, the Atlanta GM commented on Bogosian's immediate future, saying "my gut would tell me that by the end of the year, you'll see a very special defensemen...It'll probably take 20 games or so. I think it will happen this year and I think by the end of the year, people will be saying, 'He's one of the best defensemen we see'."

While it will be difficult to pry Bogosian away from his owners in keeper leagues, anybody in a one-year league might be having misgivings Bogosian readiness to take his game to the next level, especially considering the most recent injury.

But Ramsey has had dramatic success in the past with young defencemen and so if you're in the market for Bogosian, now might be the time to pull the trigger.

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If Dudley's interpretation of history is correct, Bogosian's value might be at an all-time low right now, and by Christmas his fantasy fires might finally be burning brightly.