

The Case Against the Small Guys

Written by Stu McDonald

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Small prospects need not apply.

Picking fantasy prospects is risky enough without drafting undersized players. Undersized means any player 5'10 and under, who doesn't have the frame to reach at least 190 pounds. These criteria would still encourage you to draft stocky players like Derek Roy, Marc Savard, Kimmo Timmonen, Mark Recchi and Brian Rafalski who all reached at least 190 pounds in the NHL.

These criteria would not however, encourage drafting exceptional small players including Pat Kane, Martin St. Louis, Daniel Briere and Tobias Enstrom. These are the few exceptions to the rule. The important thing to note is how rare these players are and how many picks you would have to waste on other small players before drafting gems like Kane or St. Louis?

Why not draft undersized prospects? First, small prospects take forever to make the NHL. Most are late round draft picks that have to prove themselves at every level. Just ask the guy who drafted Kris Russell (me) in his keeper league how long it takes for a return on his investment.

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He's still waiting. So is the guy who drafted Ryan Ellis who won't put up any fantasy worthy points for at least two seasons. As for the undersized players drafted in the first round, where is Thomas Hickey? Where is Zach Boychuk (me again)? Where is Mattias Tedenby? Where is Jordan Schroeder?

Boychuk and Tedenby may still be viable fantasy options, but they took longer than their peers to reach the NHL and will likely take longer to play consistently in part because of their small frames. This is particularly pertinent to poolies with small farm teams.

Second, and most importantly, smaller players tend to be inconsistent from year to year. Why? Because undersized players tend to get injured more than average-sized NHL'ers. One look at Dobber's list of Band-Aid Boys makes the risks of drafting smaller players abundantly clear. Marek Svatos, Pierre-Marc Bouchard and Kyle Wellwood are all Certified Band-Aid Boys. Band-Aid trainees include Steve Sullivan, Sergei Samsonov, Andy McDonald, Daymond Langkow, Saku Koivu, Brian Gionta, Mike Cammalleri, Mike Comrie and the aforementioned Daniel Briere.

Briere and Sullivan are two perfect examples of why you don't want your star players to be undersized. Pools are lost when top players suffer season ending injuries. If you're want to win your pool, make sure your players don't have a history of injuries and you can make this easy on yourself by staying away from smaller prospects altogether. Does this mean not to draft any smaller prospects? No, but like drafting Russians, strictly limit their numbers on your roster. It's just not worth it.

Dobber has 270 skaters in his prospects report. After considerable research here is a list of potential undersized hazards – some you have heard of and some you haven't but could run into.

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Andy Miele is the 2011 Hobey Baker Award winner and signed with Phoenix. At 5'8, he can do it in college but the NHL is a long way from college. Colorado's mid rounder in 2008, Mark Olver's limited upside is not worth waiting for given his small frame. Columbus' Cam Atkinson was a Hobey Baker finalist and is the same height as Miele. Steve Thomas' son Christian is in the Ranger's system. If Steve Thomas was stumpy (5'11, 185), his son Christian is stumpier at 5'9, 165. Minnesota defenseman Chay Genoway is 5'8, 165. I hope he enjoys his AHL career. Vancouver's first rounder Jordan Schroeder will likely join him in the minors. Washington's Mathieu Perreault should see some time in the NHL but not consistently. He will likely be a perennial AHL all-star. I have seen Buffalo's Paul Byron in person. He's the same size and has a similar frame as my six-year old daughter, although Byron's a better skater.

Now for four players who will really tempt you. Mats Zuccarello has already seen time with the Rangers but at 5'7 and already showing some inconsistency, will likely be nothing more than a 40 point producer. Columbus' Matt Calvert and Detroit's Gustav Nyquist should both be NHL'ers but Calvert's aggressive style and Nyquist's flimsy frame will inevitably lead to lots of injuries for them both.

At 5'10, 170, Ryan Ellis just has too big an upside to be ignored. He is my one exception in this group although he is probably already taken in most keeper leagues. Ellis won't pay dividends for two years and he's always going to be a major injury risk. He's the exception though because his huge upside overrides any potential risks.

This advice does not apply to rotisserie league players only to standard fantasy pools.