As you might have read about in Dobber's daily ramblings or on Burnsy’s Keepin’ it real blog, I organize an industry wide fantasy hockey experts' league. Scott Cullen from TSN.ca is the league's defending champion and there are 15 experts participating this season.

You can monitor the league throughout the season by accessing the following link:

http://hockey.fantasysports.yahoo.com/hockey/32847

It's a rotisserie style league using the following scoring categories; Goals, Assists, +/-, Penalty minutes and Power play points for forwards and defensemen and Wins, Goals against average

and Save percentage for goaltenders.

The rosters consist of the following: **C, C, C, LW, LW, LW, RW, RW, RW, D, D, D, D, G, G, BN, BN, BN, BN, IR, IR.**

The draft

I'll keep you updated on the league throughout the season in Croaks from the Fantasy Frog, and I'm sure Burnsy will do the same in his blog, but this is a special article covering the draft which took place last Thursday. Hopefully, it'll provide you with some insights for your upcoming draft. You can view the entire draft results on the following page:

http://hockey.fantasysports.yahoo.com/hockey/32847/draftresults?drafttab=round

Draft order

Order	Site	Expert
1	Rotoworld	Michael Finewax

2

TSN.ca

Scott Cullen

3

DobberHockey

Eric Maltais

4

Yahoo sports

Matt Romig

5

SportsGrumblings

Rob Aquino

6

Fanball

Jason Powell

7

Rotowire

Jan Levine

8

McKeen's

Gus Katsaros

9

Rotowire

John Topper

10

Sports Illustrated

Ray Flowers

11

Rototimes

Tom Carpenter

12

CBSSports.com

Daniel Dobish

13

Rotowire

Mark McLarney

14

DobberHockey

Chris Burns

15

Fanball

Christian Peterson

Round 1

This being such a deep league, it was expected that there would be a goalie rush very early on. However, never did I expect the top pick to be someone other than Sydney Crosby. Well, surprise, surprise, Roberto Luongo was the top overall pick in the draft. Luongo is undeniably the top goaltender this season, but goalies are way more susceptible to off years than studs like Crosby, who for all intents and purposes is a given to win the Art Ross trophy. I was hoping that TSN's Cullen would also go with a goalie and thus drop Crosby on my lap, but he had the good sense to take Syd the Kid. So I was left with the choice of Joe Thornton, Dany Heatley or a goaltender and I decided to go with Mikka Kiprusoff who could put up numbers similar to Luongo if he can avoid the bad start he suffered the past two seasons. The fourth pick was Heatley with Thornton going fifth and I can't really argue with those picks who are clearly the top two after Crosby. Ovechkin, Iginla, Jagr, Malkin, Hossa and Lecavalier were the other forwards drafted in the first round and none are surprise picks. Martin Brodeur went 8th overall, but the goalie run really started with 13th pick when Rotowire's MacLarney selected Evgeni Nabokov. I have to admit that I'm worried about Nabokov's ability to play 70 games this season without breaking down. He was followed by Henrik Lundqvist and Marc-Andre Fleury to end a first round that saw six goaltenders getting drafted.

Round 2

Six more goaltenders left the board in round 2, including Ray Emery who I drafted as my second goaltender. The first blueliners were drafted towards the end of the round with Chris Pronger at 27 and Sergei Gonchar picked in the 30th spot. It was interesting to see Martin St-Louis getting drafted ahead of Jason Spezza. If, and that is a big IF, Spezza can stay healthy for a full season, he'll have mid-first round value. Marian Gaborik was drafted with pick number 25 by Fanball's Powell and that's huge gamble considering he hasn't played more than 65 games in any of the last three seasons. TSN.ca is betting on a rebound season from Jonathan Cheechoo since he drafted Cheech with the 29th pick and I tend to agree with him.

Round 3

Five more goaltenders were drafted in the third round, to make it 17 total with the top 42 picks, meaning there wasn't much quality left after this round. TSN decided to forego goaltenders at the start of the draft and picked a third forward in Daniel Sedin who I had hoped would fall to me. Instead, I settled on Nicklas Lidstrom who's as a sure thing as any on defense. Sports Illustrated's Flowers and Rotowire's Levine imitated TSN by selecting three forwards with their first three picks, they were the only three teams to forego goalies in the top three rounds. Tomas Kaberle was a surprise as the fourth defensemen picked overall, particularly considering he doesn't help in the +/- and PIM categories. Of note, Vesa Toskala was drafted in this round despite the question marks surrounding his ability to be the undisputed number one goaltender in Toronto.

Rounds 4-5

Five more goaltenders went in round four, headed by Cristobal Huet who's no sure bet to keep

the starting gig all season in Montreal. When you see Manny Legace drafted in round five, you are clearly happy to have picked two solid goaltenders early on. Olli Jokinen is a bargain in the fourth round considering he contributes solidly across the board. According to the draft, Paul Stastny will surpass Joe Sakic this season, but just barely since they were drafted with successive picks. Martin Havlat is an interesting fourth round pick who has the potential to have second round value if he stays healthy. Sports Illustrated and TSN had to settle with Nikolai Khabibulin and Cam Ward respectively as their number one goalies, studs they are not and haven't been the last two seasons. Eric Staal will be a steal in the fifth round if he returns to his 2005-06 form, but nonetheless he's a good gamble here. I'm not convinced Kristian Huselius will be as good this season as last year so I wouldn't have touched him for a couple more rounds, but he went in round five. I drafted my first two forwards by taking Alexander Semin in round four and Mike Cammalleri in round five. I really like both players and think they still have room to improve, particularly if Semin can get Michael Nylander at center. I wanted goalscorers and believe both players will flirt with the 40-goal mark.

Rounds 6-7-8

Alex Tanguay dropped to the 85th slot which is way too low for a player guaranteed to put up 80 points, particularly when you see guys like Andy MacDonald, Derek Roy and Milan Michalek drafted ahead of him. I really like the Pavol Demitra pick in the 6th round, huge bargain if he and Gaborik finally stay healthy for an entire season. Despite having a much better season than Scott Gomez last year, Chris Drury was picked one and a half rounds after Gomez. We all believe Gomez will be Jagr's regular center all season. Rototimes' Carpenter took a chance on Scott Niedermayer in the seventh round. It's not a bad spot to pick him, considering he would have normally gone in the second round. A great pick if he comes back after the first month or so. Philippe Boucher is always underrated, including by the experts. He fell to the 8th round despite coming off two excellent seasons. Dwayne Roloson is also an excellent choice in round eight since he'll play close to 70 games on an Edmonton team that has to have improved from last season. It's a rare draft in which I don't get Sean Avery, but he went earlier than I expected when DobberHockey's Burnsy picked him up in the 7th round. Wade Redden's value really has fallen after a sub-par 2006-07 season. He went in the 8th round, but should bounce back and provide much better value than that, I think he's a steal. Alexander Radulov went in the 7th round and that's about the right spot to pick guy with his upside, but who still has to prove himself. I selected Andrei Markov, Rick Nash and Anze Kopitar with my picks during rounds six to eight. I'm particularly happy with my selections of Nash and Kopitar. I think Kopitar can reach the 80-point mark this season and has a chance to flirt with the 90s. And Nash is a mega-steal in the 7th if he bounces back to the 40-goal range. He has the talent to do it, but the surroundings, i.e. Columbus, might prevent him from doing so. Nevertheless, he was worth the risk in round 7.

Rounds 9-10-11

How the mighty have fallen! Markus Naslund fell to the middle of the 9th round, that's pick number 128 for a guy who was a first rounder just a couple of seasons ago. I really like the Tom Poti pick in round 9, I think he'll do great in Washington, particularly on the powerplay with Ovechkin, Semin and Nylander. Martin Gerber went in round 10, which bummed me out a bit

since I was hoping to get him later as insurance for Emery. Ladislav Nagy, whom I was getting ready to pick in round 11, went in the 10th round three picks before my turn. I think Nagy can have a 70-point season in LA alongside Cammaleri. DobberHockey's Brunsy selected Mike Knuble in the 10th round to complement his previous selections of Daniel Briere and Simon Gagne. Teemu Selanne went much earlier than I expected, going in the 11th round to CBS sports' Dobish. Everybody's sleeper pick Cory Murphy also went in round 11, but I strongly believe that there were better options on the blueline who were picked after him. Washington's Nicklas Backstrom was the first rookie drafted, he was selected in round 11 which isn't too bad of a gamble, but I don't think he'll do better than Jason Arnott who was selected shortly after him. As far as my picks are concerned, I was ecstatic to get Patrick Elias in the 9th round, I strongly believe he gets back to the 80-point level this season. I then picked up Scott Hartnell in the 10th for his ability to score 25 goals and amass 100 penalty minutes. I added Jaroslav Spacek in the 11th round with the hope that he'll bounce back from a disappointing season and put up 35 to 40 points to go along with strong +/- and penalty minute numbers.

Rounds 12-13-14

Jack Johnson was the second rookie drafted when he was selected by DobberHockey's Burnsy in the 12th round. I think it's too high for Johnson considering the depth on the Kings' blueline. At this stage in the draft a lot of people will start looking for risk-reward picks and that was evident when guys like Johan Franzen, Nikolai Zherdev, Tim Connolly, Ryan Clowe and Colby Armstrong were selected in those rounds. Several players picked from round twelve and on will wind up getting tossed to the free-agent pool after less than a month. Three rookies were selected within a span of thirteen picks when Carey Price and Jonathan Toews went in the 13th round and Erik Johnson got drafted at the start of the 14th. I don't expect any of the three to be difference makers this season and wouldn't have drafted them until the last three rounds. Raitis Ivanans was selected by SportsGrumblings in the 14th round as a pure penalty minutes guy, but he should have taken Daniel Carcillo instead. Carcillo could very well put up more penalty minutes than Ivanans and produce three times the number of points was selected by yours truly in the 17th round. Rotowire's Levine selected his first goaltender in the shape of Pascal Leclaire in the 14th round. He'll have a very hard time to compete in the goaltending categories. I selected Ales Hemsky, Roman Hamrlik and Peter Forsberg with my three picks in rounds 12 to 14. Hemsky is a typical risk-reward pick, he has the ability to put up an 80-point season, which he showed by scoring 77 points in 2005-06. Hamrlik averages half-a-point per game during his career and I expect nothing less from him this season. As for Forsberg, I figure that at this point in the draft I can gamble on a player who could give me 50 points in 40 games (particularly if he signs with Ottawa) instead of taking the typical 50 to 60 point guys that were left.

Rounds 15-16-17-18-19

If rounds 12 to 14 saw several risk-rewards pick go off the board, the last five rounds were full of ho-hum picks. Several boring picks consisting of players with limited upside, players like Michael Ryder, Sergei Samsonov, Robert Lang, Martin Gelinas, Alexei Kovalev and Kyle Calder. There were however several interesting picks. For example, Jaroslav Halak was the third Montreal Canadien's goaltender selected, surely based on the trade rumors surrounding him. Rookies Patrick Kane and Jonathan Bernier went in round 15, and why not, they are top

notch talents. Among the better picks were Sami Salo in the 15th round, Jordan Staal in the 16th and Tuomo Ruuttu and Mark Streit in round 17. The experts obviously think that Chris Clark's 30 goals in 2006-07 were an anomaly since he wasn't picked until the end of the 16th round. As far as my picks are concerned, Danius Zubrus in the 15th round is based on the fact that he should center Elias and Brian Gionta in New Jersey. I selected Chris Osgood who was the third Detroit goalie taken after Hasek and Jimmy Howard because I think that Osgood gets at least a share of the starts if Hasek goes down to injury. Carcillo in the 17th is a penalty minutes bonanza. I took Paul Martin in the 18th round and sincerely believe he can reach the 40-point mark with Brian Rafalski out of town. My last pick was Jiri Hudler who I'll only keep if he plays regularly with the Wings and becomes eligible on the wing since he won't be good enough to be used at center.

Summary

I'm very satisfied with my team from top to bottom except for my right wingers where Scott Hartnell, Ales Hemsky and Dainius Zubrus are average at best as a bunch. I have a nice mix of goalscorers and setup men with strong powerplay guys and enough penalty minutes to compete in that category. I am worried about my +/-, but if my goaltenders stay healthy, I'll be able to contend strongly in 7 of 8 categories.

Got something to say on this article? Comment HERE!