

Dread Like Rasta

Written by Matt Bugg

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Behind the eight-ball in your pool already? Maybe you're looking for some strategies to help catch up? Get these helpful tips before you get salted, bwoy.

If you are in a rotisserie league and have unlimited moves, your best bet may ironically be those that are also struggling. That is, look for teams that are good on paper- or were predicted to be really good at the start of the season- but so far have yet to meet expectations. When a team is struggling, what does it do? Simple: It looks for a spark to jump start it. While its coach may try to shift lines around, a spark usually comes from a big hit and/or a good fight.

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The New York Rangers are a perfect example. Big guns Jaromir Jagr, Chris Drury, and Brendan Shanahan are just not putting up the numbers they are capable of. In comes Sean Avery. While Avery is most likely already drafted in your league, a guy like Colton Orr may not be. Orr is a fighter. And contrary to popular belief, the goon is *not* dead in the new NHL. However, don't just consider adding a guy like Orr all season. Think about adding him a day or two ahead of a game with a hated local rival such as the Devils or Islanders. He's bound to get in a few fights. When you consider that each team will play their division opponents eight times, one can assume the hatred will only build as the season goes on. After the fireworks are over, drop him and pick up another player on another team that will be in a similar situation. There are points out there to be earned; you just have to put effort into finding them.

On the other hand, it can also pay to go with a team that's hot. The Ottawa Senators have been playing so well that even their stickboy has a league-leading plus/minus. While some of their less known defensemen and wingers may not put up great scoring numbers, the strong plus/minus stat can make a difference. This is also true for the Carolina Hurricanes. They are again looking like a Stanley Cup contender, with multiple lines capable of scoring and their relentless speed and effort wearing down opponents. Matt Cullen is a totally different player than last season and is being utilized much better. The same goes for Jeff Hamilton. Kudos to Coach Laviolette for using five forwards on the powerplay; it *is* working. This team is leading the league in goals, assists, and shots on goal. Guys like Cory Stillman are healthy again and it shows. Anyone and everyone on Carolina may be worth a second look.

Moving on, what is going on with goaltending this season? Last season's stud goalies (Luongo and Brodeur) are doing nothing. So much for drafting them early... Guys like Pascal Leclaire, Marty Biron, and Tim Thomas are all of a sudden fantasy studs putting up big numbers. While that is a shocker, the thing that surprises me the most is the number of shutouts that have

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already occurred this season. Last season Kiprusoff was third in the NHL with seven shutouts in 74 games. In 13 games this season, Leclaire already has five shutouts and Lundqvist four. Last Monday night there were 8 NHL games played. Five of them ended with a shutout. I thought this was the new NHL, and I thought scoring was supposed to go up? It seems like it's going down. Are refs calling fewer penalties or are teams playing more defensive to counter act the speed? If you need shutouts you're likely to get them... but so are many of your fantasy opponents. This may not be the stat category were you're likely to stand out, and thusly isn't the best one to use if you're looking to rally.

When Buffalo unveiled its new hockey jersey last season, it received some heavy criticism. While it *did* make a close return to their traditional blue and yellow jersey colors, the Buffalo head- AKA the "slug" - was not very popular. However, when the Sabres started off the 2006-07 season with a very strong 11-1-1 record, people all of a sudden seemed to like it and it became a top seller. The jersey suddenly became a symbol for a rejuvenated franchise that had been hurting for so many seasons. The city of Buffalo and its people rallied behind it and hockey was thriving. If they unveiled the jersey this season, things may be a different story.

While the Sabres do still have talent, it seems as though the team just does not have it together. They are missing key *Buffalo soldiers*. No, not the ones "Dread like Rasta"- more like the ones dread like Drury and Briere. The team is not clicking. A highly explosive offense with three lines each having a 40+ goal scorer is a thing of the past. Will anyone on the squad even reach 40 goals this season? As a whole last season, the Sabres were an amazing plus

+299

. Thirteen games into this season, and they are already a dismal minus-39. Tim Connolly is bound to get hurt soon. The stats for Vanek and Afinogenov are obviously worse than they were last season, but they are also worse than they were two seasons ago when they had yet to

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break out of their shells. Poor defensive play has landed the Maxim "Minus-6" Afinogenov on the third line. This poor defense is even trickling down to goalie Ryan Miller's stats; after 13 games, he has only four wins. In terms of fantasy scoring, you might want to stay away from Buffalo until they turn things around.