

Versteeg to the Leafs

Written by Jeff Angus

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Fantasy Impact: The Toronto Maple Leafs have acquired winger Kris Versteeg along with the rights to prospect Billy Sweatt from the Chicago Blackhawks in exchange for a trio of forwards – Viktor Stalberg, Chris DiDomenico and Philippe Paradis.

The Leafs get: A highly skilled winger who fills a huge hole on the second line behind Phil Kessel. Versteeg has had two consecutive 20 goal campaigns for Chicago, and should break the 25 goal more with increased ice time and power play time in Toronto. Sweatt is a speedy depth forward who hadn't been able to come to terms on a contract with the Blackhawks. Versteeg's cap hit is a shade over \$3 million for the next two seasons.

The Blackhawks get: Three solid young forwards. Stalberg is ready to play a top nine role in the NHL now, and he is the key to this deal for Chicago. He is big, possesses a great shot, and is extremely fast. However, he is brutal in the defensive zone and doesn't boast a high level of hockey sense. His cap hit is only \$850,000 as well, and he can play on either wing.

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Paradis, Carolina's 1st round pick in 2009, was acquired this past season by the Leafs. The best part of his game is his shot - one of the hardest I have ever seen in junior hockey. He had two assists in four games with the Marlies last season after completing his junior career with Shawinigan.

DiDomenico is a huge wild card – he has battled some serious injuries (broken femur the most significant) over the past few seasons, but rebounded very nicely in the QMJHL playoffs this past season, scoring seven goals and adding 14 assists in 14 games. He is a very smart offensive player and projects as a second line winger at the NHL level. His skating has never been the best part of his game, and it will be interesting to see if he can improve on it at all after such a devastating injury. He's basically the exact opposite kind of player as Stalberg.

Fantasy Players Impacted: This trade has significant fantasy ramifications. Versteeg will see more minutes both on the power play and at even strength, but his linemate quality will diminish (unless the Leafs are able to add a few centers this summer). Both Paradis and DiDomenico are at least a year away from NHL action, but they now have more depth to compete with in Chicago compared to Toronto.

Versteeg injects skill into a lineup that needs it in a bad way. Leaf fans may be disappointed in giving up Stalberg, a player who they have watched blossom over the past two seasons. However, Versteeg makes the Leafs a better team than they were yesterday. Additionally, Versteeg is actually younger than Stalberg (by a few months). He will see second line minutes and could see some time with the top power play unit – he is a good playmaker and loves to have the puck on his stick and make plays. This trade will benefit Tyler Bozak, as even if he slides down to the second line center spot, he will now have a legitimate winger to play with.

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Stalberg could slide in on the second line with Patrick Sharp and Marian Hossa, which would boost his fantasy value tremendously.

I imagine Toronto's top six will consist of Phil Kessel, a new center, Bozak, Nikolai Kulemin, Versteeg, and another forward. I don't think Nazem Kadri for a top six spot just yet. Mikael Grabovski is in the mix as well as he is signed through next season, but I don't see him lasting the summer in Toronto.

Remember one of the golden rules of fantasy hockey - the team getting the best player usually wins the trade. In this case, I consider the trade to be a win-win, as Chicago clears cap space and adds some solid depth up front.

Fantasy Players this helps, in order:

1. Versteeg

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2. Stalberg

3. Brouwer

4. Bozak

Fantasy Players this hurts, in order:

1. Nazem Kadri

2. Luca Caputi

3. Jeremy Morin