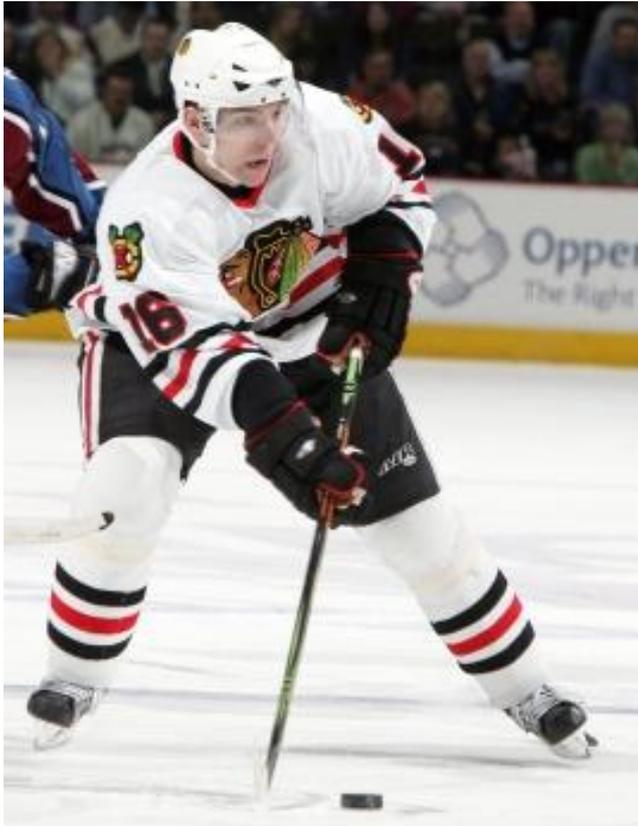


Vrbata's off to Phoenix

Written by Dobber

Saturday, 11 August 2007 10:12 - Last Updated Monday, 24 September 2007 09:22



The Phoenix Coyotes have acquired winger Radim Vrbata from the Chicago Blackhawks in exchange for center Kevin Adams.

Chicago gets: one of the better checking fourth-line pivots in the NHL. The 32-year-old Adams is also adept at putting the puck home when the team is down a man, scoring eight shorthanded goals in the last three seasons. The move gives the team some more grit and cuts back on their overabundance of skill guys up front, making the team better all around.

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Phoenix gets: a cheap winger with upside. In the midst of a rebuilding phase, the team is looking for some forwards with the potential to break out. The only sure bets on the team right now are Peter Mueller and Shane Doan - and the former has yet to play an NHL game. In Vrbata, they add another winger with a lot of skill, but little proven. He will join Bill Thomas, Tomas Surovy, Fredrik Sjostrom and Alexei Kaigorodov in that department.

Fantasy Players Impacted: It cleared a spot up the middle in Phoenix for Alexei Kaigorodov to claim. Increase his chances of being in the NHL this year. Vrbata, of course will go down. In Chicago he was slated to play with fellow Czech Robert Lang and perhaps even form an all-Czech line with Martin Havlat. But lets be realistic - let's not overrate him as a Blackhawk. Last season, he bounced up and down all over that team after Havlat sprained his ankle. He was first line winger, fourth line winger...and I don't see that changing this year. He is an inconsistent player and Savard would have bouncing all over that lineup like a superball. In Phoenix, what choice do they have? Same as what I said about Vrbata last year in Chicago - they don't have a choice. He is a complimentary winger who is only useful with a strong linemate. Last season, in the first eight games he had 11 points. Then Havlat went down and he tanked. This year, he should line up on the first or second line. In Chicago, he was headed for a 50-point season with an upside of 60. In Phoenix, you are probably looking at the same thing - but without the upside (unless Mueller has a Calder-like campaign and they really click).

Furthermore, in Chicago, Vrbata's absence makes Sergei Samsonov undisputed on the second line. Vrbata's presence put that into doubt. Another plus for Samsonov owners!