

Non-Playoff Teams Summer Outlook

Written by Dobber

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Part one in a seven-part review takes a look at the teams that failed to reach the postseason and what kind of impact each of them will have on your keeper-league squad. This week, we take a look at Atlanta and Buffalo.

Atlanta Thrashers

Possibly on the way out...

Bobby Holik is certainly gone (UFA) and Mark Recchi is a possibility as well, although he would

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like to stay for another year. The Thrashers will finally be free of Steve Rucchin's salary and they may also lose their AHL stars Darren Haydar and Jason Krog – all unrestricted free agents. Johan Hedberg is also a UFA and their other goaltender Kari Lehtonen is in need of a contract. Brett Sterling is a restricted free agent and if a team were smart they would pitch him an offer sheet. Mark Popovic is one of the rare Group VI free agents – he is unrestricted because he is over the age of 25, has completed three professional (AHL or NHL) seasons, but has fewer than 80 NHL contests under his belt. The offensive rearguard could find a home in a place like Columbus, if the Jackets lose Ron Hainsey.

The team will be looking to add...

Atlanta needs a backup goaltender and they need to beef up their scoring. Ondrej Pavelec will probably become Kari Lehtonen's backup and is a solid fantasy dark horse given Lehtonen's injury history. Bryan Little is not yet ready to center the top line, so the team will look at filling that void via free agency. The top free agents are already signed, so there are no quick fixes. Look for some "Plan B" guys to get signed, such as Brendan Morrison and Miroslav Satan to fill out the top line.

General fantasy outlook...

Atlanta brass would love to build through their youth with the likes of Little, Brett Sterling, Riley Holzapfel, Tobias Enstrom, and whomever they select at this summer's draft. However, Ilya Kovalchuk will not re-sign with them next year if he is not impressed with the direction. That virtually assures us that the team will at least make a couple of signings for big names like the above – but names don't win hockey games. Atlanta will miss the playoffs again and Kovalchuk will struggle to get to 90 points. Whoever they bring in as his pivot will see a nice jump, but be prepared to shop him in December because when Kovalchuk leaves, the new pivot will see his numbers drop immensely in 2009-10.

Buffalo Sabres

Possibly on the way out...

Maxim Afinogenov is still under contract, but he has probably played his last game for the Sabres. Dimitri Kalinin and Jocelyn Thibault are also gone. Paul Gaustad and Dan Paille could see offer sheets as restricted free agents.

The team will be looking to add...

With Kalinin and Brian Campbell gone, a lot of ice time opens up for future quarterback Andrej Sekera. However, the Sabres will still be on the lookout for one. Darcy Regier is not the type to make a big splash, so look for another Jaroslav Spacek-type signing, such as a Ron Hainsey. A backup goaltender is also in the cards, but they may just re-sign Thibault.

General fantasy outlook...

The Sabres are not this bad. Why they fell apart so much from the loss of two great players (last summer) is not a mystery to anyone – except myself. I seem to be the only one who feels that the Sabres should have still made the playoffs in 2007-08. The team is deep in talent all the way down the pipeline and Vanek and Afinogenov are much better than what we saw. Just from using the players in their own system, the Sabres should be a playoff team next campaign. Look

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for more goals out of Buffalo next season.

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