

Anaheim, Atlanta off-season report

Written by Dobber

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As keeper league hockey pools increase in number each year, fantasy junkies are becoming more active in the off-season as they prepare their teams for the coming season. Rebuild? Retool? Tweak? Whatever your intentions, it helps to get all the information you can about your players. Each week, FPL will look at a pair of and give you the fantasy lowdown. This week we'll look through our fantasy hockey goggles at the outlooks for Anaheim and Atlanta.

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ANAHEIM DUCKS

Potential UFAs – Joe Dipenta, Teemu Selanne, Doug Weight.

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Potential RFAs – Ryan Carter, Jonas Hiller, Stephen Dixon, Andrew Ebbett, Drew Miller, Corey Perry, Brian Sutherby.

Looking to Add – An elite center for the second line to take some heat off Ryan Getzlaf. Weight didn't cut it last season. The Ducks will also look to replace Selanne if he chooses to retire and will consider pushing Bobby Ryan and Drew Miller into more prominent roles.

Ready for full-time - Ryan, Miller and Carter were all given sporadic opportunities and ice time this season and should develop into regulars. All three have offensive ability, although Ryan is probably the best shot to hit 55 points next season. Ebbett and/or Geoff Platt are facing make-or-break years.

If the Ducks didn't already have Chris Pronger, Mathieu Schneider and Francois Beauchemin, high-scoring AHLer Brian Salcido would be a lock to make the jump. The 23-year-old had 53 points in 71 games for Portland of the American League and could still be eased in if Scott Niedermayer retires.

Fantasy Outlook – Anaheim didn't really start scoring until Selanne arrived mid-season. If you want someone other than Ryan Getzlaf to get you points then you better hope the Ducks find a No. 2 pivot. Anaheim is also in danger of losing Perry, who should get offer sheets if they don't sign him by July 1. All in all, they are still a playoff team and it can't hurt to own a few of their players in your fantasy league.

Fantasy Grade: B+ (Last year: A-)

ATLANTA THRASHERS

Potential UFA's – Bobby Holik, Mark Recchi, Eric Boulton, Steve McCarthy, Mark Popovic, Johan Hedberg, Steve Rucchin.

Potential RFA's – Kari Lehtonen.

Looking to Add – An elite centerman to feed pucks to a hungry Ilya Kovalchuk. The Thrashers are also in need of an upgrade to their defense corps. They will probably look to Ondrej Pavelec to replace Hedberg as the backup goaltender, but they better sign Lehtonen before July 1 or they could lose him to an offer sheet.

Because of the lack of high-end unrestricted free agents this year, the team may look at trade avenues and/or offer sheets. Among the players who are allegedly available: Olli Jokinen (via trade), Mike Cammalleri (via trade), Jeff Carter (offer sheet) and Patrick Marleau (via trade).

Ready for full-time - Bryan Little will play a full season in Atlanta next season. Brett Sterling will get another long look to play on the wing of the second line. A strong start could boost either of them above 50 points. The team is also high on center Riley Holzapfel, so he could surprise and steal a roster spot.

Defensemen Boris Valabik and Nathan Oystriick are on the cusp of making it to the big leagues. While Valabik is almost a shoe-in, Oystriick will either make the team or be labeled a career

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minor leaguer.

Fantasy Outlook - On one hand you could say the Thrashers are rebuilding, yet on the other, they have a ton of cap space freed up after trading Marian Hossa at the deadline. They will add at least one more star and a middle-of-the-line defenseman.

However, even with strong seasons from both Little and Sterling, Atlanta is still at least a year away from contending for the post-season again. Does Kovalchuk have that much patience? If not, he could be dealt at the 2009 deadline like Hossa was in 2008.

Fantasy Grade: D+ (Last year: B-)