

Columbus, Dallas off-season report

Written by Dobber

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

And don't forget, if you have an off-season hockey question, send it to the [Fantasy Mailbag](#) .

(Originally posted in [The Hockey News](#) on June 13 - **Dobber archives all his THN work here in case you missed it there!**)

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

Potential UFAs – Ron Hainsey, Derek MacKenzie, Michael Peca, Dick Tarnstrom, David Vyborny

Potential RFAs – Dan Fritsche, Pascal Leclaire, Joakim Lindstrom, Marc Methot, Alexandre Picard

Looking to Add – The Blue Jackets are right in the middle of trade rumors involving Patrick Marleau (San Jose) and Olli Jokinen (Florida). While a rumor that eventually becomes an actual trade is about as common as a Stanley Cup win in Toronto, it is obvious the Jackets need a No. 1 pivot. They also need a scoring winger to replace David Vyborny and could probably use a second scoring winger in case Fredrik Modin can't get back on track. Bottom line: Rick Nash needs some teammates.

Ready for full time – Derick Brassard is probably ready for full-time duty, although to ask him to immediately become the top center is probably not the best idea. He could center the second line and get 50 points or more with good linemates. Jakub Voracek will also make a strong case for himself in training camp and could step onto the second line and put up similar numbers as Brassard. A Brassard-Voracek combo has the potential to be explosive for years to come.

One player who is not ready for full time is Gilbert Brule. An energetic, hard-working and highly skilled centerman, Brule was brought into the NHL far too soon and it has stunted his development. His fantasy value has plummeted, but a great career can still be salvaged. Still only 21, the youngster could use a year in the American League to regain his confidence. A return to the NHL at 22 would be best. Sit on him for another year, keeper league owners.

Fantasy Outlook – A few high-end prospects are in the system, but there's not a whole lot of depth. Other than the three aforementioned youngsters, plus defenseman Kris Russell and forward Joakim Lindstrom (who should also make the team this season), the cupboard is bare. Toss in the fact their coach preaches defense first and Columbus is not as strong a team to build your fantasy roster around as you might think.

Fantasy Grade: C+ (last year was C)

DALLAS STARS

Potential UFAs – Stu Barnes, Niklas Hagman, Johan Holmqvist, Antti Miettinen, Brad Winchester.

Potential RFAs – Loui Eriksson

Looking to Add – All the pieces seem to be in place for the Stars. They'll need a backup goaltender who likes sitting on the bench, but other than that the team looks deep.

Ready for full time – Tobias Stephan – who has the talent to become a No. 1 goalie in a few years - will get a long look to take over the backup role. Dallas will also look at Vojtech Polak

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and James Neal. However, Neal could probably use one more year in the minors, while Polak always seems to get hurt just when he is on the cusp of making it big. Coach Dave Tippett is also a fan of Chris Conner, a small, skilled forward with an offensive upside who can play third-line minutes.

Fantasy Outlook - What a turnaround. Last summer, I dubbed this team the Siberia of fantasy hockey. Just to make me look bad, they found their offensive game in a big way thanks to the emergence of Mike Ribeiro as a legitimate star (and yes, folks, he is the real deal). Adding Brad Richards only makes the offense scarier. If promising offensive guns were in the pipeline, this would be the perfect franchise to build your keeper team around.

Fantasy Grade: B+ (last year was D+)