

# The Worst Team in Fantasy Hockey?

Written by Dobber

Sunday, 24 August 2008 17:12 - Last Updated Monday, 25 August 2008 08:51

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I often encourage fantasy owners to build their rosters with several players from the same team – especially those in leagues that also have a postseason element. In 2005 and 2006 I pushed the Penguins on you, believing that not only will this team compete deep into the playoffs year in and year out, but they have several great young players who will post big numbers and subsequently boost the numbers of their teammates.

In 2007 I pushed the Los Angeles Kings and this year I have been pretty vocal about the Coyotes and the Blackhawks. These are great young teams that will easily have 10 players who will be highly coveted in fantasy leagues and if you wait too long to acquire them, you will be paying out the yin-yang. But which team is so weak that poolies are going out of their way to not acquire their players? Which team carries such a stigma that the mere mention of a player in that organization immediately shuts down trade talks?

There are several candidates and strangely enough all of them come from the Eastern Conference. You could suggest the New York Islanders, for one. However, led by Kyle Okposo, there are five or six real promising offensive prospects – and offense is what much of fantasy hockey is all about, no? So while the Islanders deserve the notorious recognition of little immediate help (nobody will get 60 points this season on that team), they have a shred of hope for the future.

Atlanta is another good candidate, but with the young goaltending in the pipeline and the likes of Brian Little, Tobias Enstrom, Jonas Enlund and Angelo Esposito, they too have some hope. Granted, most teams have a better pipeline than the Thrashers do...but there is still one team worse. Besides, as long as Ilya Kovalchuk is in the organization there is always hope, however slim.

One could also bring up the Florida Panthers. After all – they traded away Olli Jokinen, so what does that leave them? Well, Nathan Horton should have an 80-point season any time now, and Stephen Weiss and Rostislav Olesz both have the potential to reach 70 points within three years. Jay Bouwmeester is going to be a superstar some day (patience!), and Shawn Matthias and goaltender Jacob Markstrom are both very promising.

So we're down to the Leafs.

First, the positives. Vesa Toskala is a great goaltender and is probably in the Top 10 in his position. Justin Pogge also has promise between the pipes, but is some years away. Tomas Kaberle is one of the five best playmaking rearguards in the business and Anton Stralman looks as though he is five years away from making the same claim. Nik Antropov has now proven himself capable of becoming a 65-point player. Mikhail Grabovski was an astute pickup and if given a chance he could be a top three scorer on this team. Rookie Nikolai Kulemin will be a 30- or 35-goal, 60- or 65-point player someday soon.

Now the negatives. Luke Schenn will be a great defenseman...but from a fantasy standpoint

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he'll be lucky to ever hit 40 points. On the current roster, other than Grabovski (who is a bit of a long shot) and perhaps Jiri Tlustý, no player has 80-point ability. In the system, no player has 80-point potential. There are no Bryan Littles and no Kyle Okposos. The Leafs will be hard pressed to have a player reach 70 points this season and looking at the pipeline one would wonder if it will happen at all before 2011.

They also won't be making the playoffs this season. Barring a Philadelphia-like transition over the next 365 days, they won't be making the playoffs next season either. And judging by their offseason decisions of late – signing Jason Blake in 2007 and Niklas Hagman in 2008, both players coming off overachieving contract years – Philadelphia didn't teach them anything.

Yes, that's definitely a quick way to get a dial tone – call up a fellow GM in your league and ask him or her if they are interested in Alexei Ponikarovsky.