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Tuesday, February 27 is the NHL trade deadline and in many hockey pools the deadline is close to, if not exactly, the same time. Those of you in one-year pools may not have as many big decisions to make as keeper-league poolies, but the pressure is still great and the need for swift action is equally strong.

The key element you are looking for, as far as the rest of the season goes, is finding out which players are going to pop over the final six or seven weeks. With players getting moved from one team to another, you need to know if those players will increase or decrease their production. Keith Tkachuk heading to Atlanta, for example, means an obvious pop in his production. His

season was pretty poor in St. Louis, as his 43 points in 61 games was on pace to put him below 60 points. While he loses three games in the deal (Atlanta has played three more games than St. Louis), he was brought in to line up with Ilya Kovalchuk, which will see to it that he puts up a point per game going forward.

What is not as obvious is the fact that the aforementioned Kovalchuk is having a miserable season, putting up less than a point per game while suffering through a weak merry-go-round of pivots such as Steve Rucchin, Glen Metropolit and Niko Kapanen. Tkachuk up the middle on his line will push Kovalchuk back into his old superstar self (although the term “old” seems silly to slap on a 23-year-old, but you get the picture).

What is also not as obvious is the fact that Slava Kozlov gets the majority of his points on the power play and although he will remain on a line with Marian Hossa when the team is at even strength, Tkachuk will siphon away his power-play time like an SUV at the gas pump. These are the types of subtleties that the one-year fantasy owner must act on.

In keeper leagues, the strategy is completely different. In a typical 12-team league, you will probably have four teams that are definitely going for it, four teams that are definitely not, and four teams that are making that tough decision – push for the trophy or rebuild for next season. If your pool includes the playoffs, then the value of certain players is impacted that much more if they are moved to a new team: that Columbus player you owned (i.e. Anson Carter) is now on the defending Stanley Cup champions. Suddenly, a team that is built for some playoff damage in your pool is calling you and inquiring about him.

As an aside, if the above example actually happens, see to it that you do move Carter. As soon as Erik Cole returns to the lineup, Carter’s production will plummet so get a return on him while you can.

For teams that are rebuilding in their keeper leagues, the best advice that I can offer is this – if you have a player with points, unless it is a top 10 fantasy player (see my rankings), shop him around. Get a player of equal or great value in return for giving away his points (again, see my rankings), <I>plus</I> a draft pick or a prospect. All to often I see rebuilding teams give away a player with points straight up for a player of equal value without as many points. In essence, these teams are giving away points without compensation. *You* are in the driver’s seat. *You* have the points, so
you
should be rewarded for them.

For keeper-league teams that are going for the gusto – if you truly have a chance at top spot, don’t let a high asking price stop you. Get the deal done. I know a lot of owners who balk at high asking prices and wind up being second or third for five or six years in a row, never winning the title. What is the point of that? Would you not rather be first once or twice and last the other four years?

First place gets remembered. Second place; let me put it this way – who was second place in your pool last year? That’s what I thought. The only way you know the answer to that is if you

were the one who was second…

Farm Report: The Phoenix Coyotes have recalled Yanick Lehoux from San Antonio of the American League. With Mike Comrie and Ladislav Nagy out of the picture (as a result of trades), the Coyotes have room for him on a scoring line. I have always liked Lehoux's talent; I just had questions about his health. However, he has been injury free this season and leaves the AHL with 62 points in 59 games, good for sixth in league scoring. Still just 24 years of age, Lehoux needs to be more consistent at the NHL level. Keep an eye on him, as early production will mean continued production.