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High-Flyers

Written by Dobber Sunday, 21 December 2008 12:07 - Last Updated Sunday, 21 December 2008 18:07

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When Jeff Carter was drafted 11th overall in 2003, I figured that Philadelphia nabbed a potential 40-goal and 90-point man. When Scott Hartnell was selected sixth overall in 200, I felt that Nashville had a potential 30-goal, 70-point leader who brings energy to the game. When Joffrey Lupul was picked seventh overall in 2002, my initial assessment was that the Ducks acquired a kid with the potential to score 30 and see 80 or 85 points.

All three of them are now Flyers, they play on the same line and they are now playing up to their potential.

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When Simon Gagne or Mike Richards aren't scoring, this line is. And lately – this line has been as hot as any in the league. Hartnell has 11 points, Carter has 13 and Lupul has 10 in their last seven contests. Their pace to finish the season is 61, 94 and 53 points respectively. I think come April you will see Hartnell in that 60- to 65-point range assuming good health, while Carter cools slightly to the mid-80s.

Injuries are the only wild card here. Lupul can be somewhat fragile, not to mention streaky. The 25-year-old could finish anywhere from 45 to 70. With 49 games left in their season, if he stays healthy, I can see him notching about 43 points going forward, which would sit him at 66. He was healthy for two of his last four seasons, so the odds are even money that he plays at least 45 of the final 49. This means that going forward, Lupul will be one of the better second-line wingers you could own on your rotisserie squad.

Hartnell has also only been healthy for two of his last four seasons. So he too, is even money to play at least 45 of the final 49 contests. He'll shatter his career high of 48 points though, and at the age of 26 it is happening at about the expected time.

As for Carter – what more can be said? He was drafted ahead of Mike Richards and he was expected to be the bigger offensive force. He has given some indication that it was coming, increasing his points-per-game every NHL season (0.52 in 05-06, 0.60 in 06-07, 0.65 in 07-08 and over a point per game this campaign). He is in his fourth year – the traditional breakout year for elite talent – and has finally surpassed Richards in the scoring race.

Carter has arrived and has now become one of those players with whom you hope that the winger you own in your fantasy league lines up. Right now, those wingers are Hartnell and Lupul – and it looks to stay that way for a while...

Meanwhile...

Washington's Viktor Kozlov has quietly put up 18 points in his last 19 contests. I think he'll flirt with 60 this year, which is above his current pace. That makes him a "buy low" candidate...

Some cracks in Devin Setoguchi's armor finally? The Sharks' winger has "just" four points in his last six games. He is on pace to finish with 84 points. I think it will be closer to 70, making him a "sell high" candidate...

Pittsburgh winger Ruslan Fedotenko has seven points in his last six games. He also has 13 PIMs in his last five games. He will probably finish with 45 points and 60 penalty minutes. The former would top his career high of 41 points and the latter would be the second highest total of his career...

Teemu Selanne owners – don't panic. The veteran sniper wasn't doing anything anyway, and his freak injury just gives you an excuse to replace him. He was pointless and a minus-1 in four games, so he was hurting more than he was helping for the last week or two...