

## Spezza and Heatley

Written by Dobber

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It figures. Spezza owners finally get an 82-game season out of him and he posts his worst points-per-game numbers since his first full NHL season. That means that there has never been a better time to acquire the Ottawa pivot than right now and ditto for his superstar linemate Dany Heatley.

After three consecutive campaigns of producing at least 1.21 points per game, Spezza slipped to 0.89. His 73 points was 14 points lower than his 2006-07 season in which he missed 15 games. At the young age of 25 (he turns 26 this coming Saturday), the Mississauga, Ontario native has his best years ahead of him. He is still short of his prime. So while his owner thinks of him as a 75- or 80-point player with a lot of upside, you can capitalize on that. The fact of the

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matter is, he is a 90-point player with upside and you've just witnessed his downside.

All players have a year or two like it and the real stars bounce back nicely. Joe Sakic had a bad run of two years. In 1996-97 and 1997-98, he had injury-plagued seasons of 74 and 63 points with the latter number even falling short of his games played that year (64). It was hard to believe that Sakic would peak at the age of around 28, but some poolies did that very thing. The expectations were lowered to that of a 70- or 75-point player, but in 1998-99 he had 96 points. He also cleared 100 on two occasions after that.

Spezza will be the same way. When you follow a player's statistics closely, like die-hard poolies do, you are following them day-to-day and week-to-week. To see a player have an entire season go bad, it's only natural to have your expectations dip. This is where the more casual fantasy owner has an advantage. That owner sees the year-to-year numbers and still sees a player who will get 90 points with potential for more. Sometimes you have to take a step back and look at the big picture. Pretend you didn't live through Spezza's ups (he had a couple) and downs (he had a lot) from last campaign and take 2008-09 as the exception and not the rule. If it helps, just think of how he had 33 points in 34 games under the new coach. Still sub-par for him, but much better.

Dany Heatley is in the same boat. The 28-year-old had three straight campaigns with a 1.15 points-per-game average or better before slipping to 0.71. As Spezza goes, so goes Heatley and you need to after him with the same eagerness that you would go after a 100-point player. Don't overpay, because now is the time to get him at a discount, but put in the effort – give his owner a call and try and make something happen.

That means that if you can get Spezza or Heatley by giving up a player who beat them in scoring this year, then do so. I'm talking about Rick Nash, Alexander Semin, Mike Richards, Martin St.Louis, Marc Savard or even Jeff Carter – Spezza and Heater will top all of them in scoring in three of the next four seasons. The only exceptions would be any player in the Top 9 scoring this season, or Joe Thornton. As far as I'm concerned, any other player in the Top 30 (Spezza finished 31st) should be swapped for one of these guys in keeper leagues that count strictly points, not taking into account positions. It may seem crazy now, but you won't regret it.