

The Glendale Gong Show

Written by Dobber

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There is a lot going on in the hockey world down in, er, the desert. With all of these off-ice distractions, how can these promising young players continue to blossom into fantasy studs? Let's take a look at some of the key components.

It's a difficult thing to measure or properly gauge – the balance between a player's natural tendency to let outside influences get to him, with a player's ability improving with added strength and experience. For the youngsters who haven't been in the league long enough to really know any different, is the attention off the ice any different then playing in say Toronto or Montreal? For the veterans who are used to relative anonymity, will this new spotlight that has nothing to do with their play affect their numbers?

The Vets

Shane Doan – The captain is a born leader and is coming off of the two most productive

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seasons of his career. You have to think that distraction will have little impact on his numbers so expect a number between his last two seasons (73 and 78).

Matt Lombardi – He produced at a 68-point pace upon arriving in Phoenix, but that was before the nasty stuff hit the fan. Still, prior to the lockout Calgary wasn't exactly entrenched as an NHL certainty and he was around for that, albeit briefly. I still think that improving on his Calgary production is in the cards.

Radim Vrbata – Is the Glendale Gong Show any worse than the Laughable Lightning of a year ago? I submit that his environment has actually improved. Although his role with the 'Yotes won't be as important as his last tour of duty, he should still produce in that 40-50 range.

Ed Jovanovski – When it comes to microphones in front of his face, he's been there and done that. Coming off of his lowest points-per-game since before the lockout, there is nowhere to go but up for this guy.

Adrian Aucoin – For the 36-year-old I would be predicting a drop in production regardless, so it's hard to say whether the bankruptcy situation will have any impact.

Ilya Bryzgalov – Of all the 'Yotes, the goaltender coming off of a sluggish season is the most worrisome. It will be difficult for him to hide in shell. Although I like Bryzgalov for a comeback season due to his age and talent, I can't help but be worried. There could be trouble here.

The Kids

Peter Mueller, Kyle Turris, Mikkel Boedker, Martin Hanzal, Viktor Tikhonov, Keith Yandle – All six youngsters have similar experience and have loads of untapped potential. Mueller, Boedker and Turris are being bred for top six roles and ideally would take the next step this season. Mueller has had his sophomore slump and Turris couldn't possibly have one, given his dreadful rookie campaign. Hanzal is being brought along as a skilled third-line checker, one who uses his size much like Michal Handzus did in his prime while, also like Handzus, also putting up 45 to 55 points. Tikhonov is in a similar situation as Hanzal, although he may not adapt to the checking role as readily. Yandle is hoping to be the quarterback of the future, but of the four I get the feeling – a gut one – that Yandle is the most susceptible to a small step back.

Scott Upshall and Petr Prucha – Two points in 17 playoff games should give you an idea of how well Prucha handles pressure. I don't like his chances of thriving at all, especially with his hold on a top-six spot so tenuous. Upshall is a competitor, so although he is a tad fragile, I like him for picking up where he left off. He had a 0.68 points-per-game average after joining Phoenix.

Al Montoya, Kevin Porter and Sami Lepisto – It's hard to quantify these youngsters given their limited NHL experience. Porter will be hard-pressed to make the team this year and he certainly deserves better than "reserve player" status. The AHL would be best for him, at least until a top-six injury strikes. As for Lepisto and Montoya – give them the boom or bust label. They would have that label regardless of the Gong Show, but now it becomes even more so.

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