

Early Returns

Written by Dobber

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'The Reporters' shouldn't join a fantasy league any time soon.

It's no secret that more often than not, when a player with any semblance of offensive ability gets traded he makes a quick impact on the scoresheet. Usually, this impact fizzles out within a matter of a few games, although in many cases the numbers that he continues to produce is still an improvement on what he was doing in his former city.

We are seeing that now more than any time I can remember, with Alexei Ponikarovsky, Denis Grebeshkov, Teddy Purcell, Peter Mueller, Wojtek Wolski, Scott Walker, Lee Stempniak and Luca Caputi all posting points in their first games with their new team. But two of those cases in particular have caught my attention as they have :

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a) a ton of potential and

b) are likely available in most rotisserie leagues and even some keeper leagues.

I remember on Wednesday hearing the news that Jeff Halpern had been traded to Los Angeles and thinking that was a pretty nice depth pickup for the Kings. The talking heads on the various networks spent the next 20 minutes talking about the merits of having Mr. Halpern in the lineup before it was finally disclosed – as an afterthought – that Teddy Purcell went the other way in the deal.

When you're picking out dark horses in this business, you tend to get very excited over news that gives a six-point player a slim chance at becoming a 75-point player. So even though the odds are small that Purcell pans out, I became quite excited about this deal more than any other. I remember Dave Hodge on TSN going around the table with the other journalists having an informal fantasy hockey discussion about the traded players and which one would get the most points going forward that people would least expect. All I'm thinking is "Teddy Purcell. Teddy Purcell", but I'm also thinking – he won't even get a mention.

Sure enough, as Damian Cox, Steve Simmons and Michael Farber bounced around obvious names like Joe Corvo and Wojtek Wolski, I am reminded once again about why the hockey experts would get pummeled pretty badly in a fantasy league.

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Here are the facts. Vincent Lecavalier has had a plethora of wingers this season. Often Alex Tanguay is there, and so is Steve Downie. However, nothing has worked consistently the way Martin St. Louis has clicked with Steven Stamkos. It goes without saying that a skilled winger that joins the team will be plunked on Lecavalier's line for a tryout. There are two possible results from this. One, the player fails and ends up with four or five points in 15 games to go with some healthy scratches. Two, the player succeeds, in which case you see 15 to 17 points in 20 games.

There is probably no grey area, it's going to be one or the other. If Purcell fails, it should not surprise given the more established names that have tried and fallen short. If he succeeds, however, he is the dark horse that leads all deadline-deal players in scoring. So far he has three points in two games and has indeed been playing with Lecavalier and Ryan Malone. Looking at that, the odds of success just inched upwards from "slim" to "not too bad"...

The other case that made my ears perk up was Peter Mueller to Colorado. Here is a player who I have been notoriously high on in terms of his upside, and yet he has regressed since his concussion during the 2008-09 campaign. It's a recipe for doom – you take one slumping player, throw in a new coach who wasn't around for the concussion that caused the slump, add several visits to the press box and stir thoroughly for 60 games. Voila! You have waiver fodder.

Now in Colorado, Mueller has left his post-concussion woes behind him and is flourishing under a coach who seems to take young players and make them NHL stars three years before their time. How Joe Sacco does it, I'll never know. But he's saved some of that pixie dust that he sprinkled on Chris Stewart, T.J. Galiardi, Matt Duchene, Ryan O'Reilly, Brandon Yip and Ryan Wilson and he dropped it over Mueller's head. Mueller has four points in three games with his new team and is clicking nicely with Duchene.

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The outlook for [Mr. Mueller](#) has gone from dismal to very promising in an awful hurry and I think he'll be a 60-point player next campaign. Pretty bold, considering we've only seen three games. But if the Avs can do next season what they did this one, and not regress as a team, than Mueller will absolutely be a big part of that.