

Predators Back on Track

Written by Dobber

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Eight games into the season and panicked fantasy owners had a lot of questions regarding Nashville. Alexander Radulov had one goal and four points. Is this the dreaded sophomore slump? Is he a bust?

Chris Mason, after two stellar contests to start the year, suddenly couldn't win to save his life. Were the Preds wrong in putting their faith in him? Would Dan Ellis become the new goalie?

Everyone's calm now - Nashville has gone 8-2-1 since then. Radulov has 11 points in 11 games, while Mason has started six straight contests and has not lost in regulation in that span. But wasn't it funny how crazy fantasy owners were for a couple of weeks?

The best fantasy owners track hockey happenings daily, but one side effect that this has is a loss of perspective. Two weeks seem like two months when you research hockey several times in a day. All teams go through their dry spells, and the Preds have gotten theirs over with early.

Radulov has been lining up with Vern Fiddler and David Legwand lately. The trio has combined for 23 points in the last eight contests. Fiddler is looking as if he could be a 50-point player this

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season, while Legwand has picked up where he left off last season. If he can stay healthy, his ascension into stardom is certain. He has the ability to put up 75 or even 80 points. Radulov is the jewel of the line. In just his second season, he looks like a man on a mission to easily surpass 70 points this season. He'll reach the century mark before his 25th birthday; mark my words (he's 21 now).

The good news for the Predators is that when opponents hold that line off the scoresheet, the line of Jason Arnott, Martin Erat and J.P. Dumont shines. That trio has 27 points in eight games.

Throw in an improved defense, the return of their rock on the blueline Shea Weber, and a (once again) confident Chris Mason and this team will, as I predicted before the season started, easily make the playoffs. Now who wouldn't want to buy a team like that?

Meanwhile...

Chicago's Patrick Sharp has averaged nearly 18 minutes per game in ice time this season, including over three minutes per game on the power play. In fact, he has played more than 18 minutes in each of his last four contests, so his ice time is increasing as the season wears on. Sharp has 15 points in his last 15 contests and is on a 65-point pace. The 25-year-old had a scoring touch in college, but his AHL numbers wouldn't indicate to me that he can tally 70 points in the NHL. That being said, he is looking more and more like a 60-point player and he deserves a long look. Certainly he should be picked up for now, given that he is in the middle of such a hot streak...

Randy Robitaille, after starting out strong for Ottawa with three points in four contests, is pointless in his last seven. He is also a minus-4 in that span...

Despite nearly six shots per game in that span, Toronto's Jason Blake has been pointless in his last seven. He is still playing with Mats Sundin and Alexei Ponikarovsky so his drought shouldn't last too long, but it is clear that last season's 69 points was a very inflated total. In Toronto, consider him a 60-point player at the very best, but 55 would be more accurate.

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