

Enstrom turning heads

Written by Dobber

Monday, 10 December 2007 03:40 - Last Updated Wednesday, 12 December 2007 00:22



Only a handful of NHL teams can boast two elite offensive players who are in the same class as Atlanta's dynamic duo of Marian Hossa and Ilya Kovalchuk. So you can imagine the potential production of a skilled rearguard if he can stick on that top power play unit.

Clearly, the team has found one in rookie Tobias Enstrom, a diminutive blueliner who came over from Sweden.

He started the season slowly with just one point in the first six games. Game No. 7 brought in a new coach as GM Don Waddell took the reins from Bob Hartley and immediately proceeded to give Enstrom all the ice time and power play time he needed. It didn't seem to matter to Waddell if Enstrom failed to produce dividends with 23 minutes of ice time and six-plus minutes of power play time. He knew the youngster would come around. He was absolutely right.

Under Waddell, Enstrom has 15 points in 20 games – including nine points in his past nine contests.

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He has tremendous hockey sense, reading the play five steps ahead of everyone else. Generously listed at 5-foot-10, the 23-year-old makes up for the lack of physicality by finding the open man and making the smart play.

On a team with this much firepower with the man advantage, it's reasonable to believe Enstrom could become one of the rare defensemen to reach the 70-point mark frequently in his career. That (Nicklas Lidstrom) should remind you (Nicklas Lidstrom) of another prolific scoring blueliner (Nicklas Lidstrom) from Sweden. But I won't put the pressure on anyone by naming any names.

This season, it would be reasonable to see Enstrom reach 55 points – but the best is yet to come.

Injuries, from a fantasy league perspective: Several injuries are giving some talented youngsters ample ice time to show what they can do. In Dallas, Jere Lehtinen will be out until the end of January after undergoing sports hernia surgery. This opens the door for Loui Eriksson and/or Chris Conner. Eriksson has just one point in the six games Lehtinen has missed so far. The talented 22-year-old may have blown his chance. Now Conner is getting the chance... Joe Sakic is battling a groin injury and rookie T.J. Hensick is seeing quality ice time as a result. Hensick has a goal in two games since his recall Friday and I have a feeling there is more where that came from.

Farm Report: Nashville's second-round pick this past summer, Nick Spaling, is having a breakout campaign for the Kitchener Rangers of the Ontario League. After posting 59 points in 61 games last season, the 19-year-old has 45 points in just 28 games this time around. He is also learning a very structured system under head coach Peter DeBoer – the same coach who honed the likes of Mike Richards and Derek Roy into players who adapted very quickly to NHL coaching systems. Nashville is not a team to rush prospects, so expect Spaling to get a long look by the Preds in about four years.

Originally posted in [The Hockey News](#) December 3.

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