

Minnesota, Montreal off-season report

Written by Dobber

Friday, 25 July 2008 06:06 - Last Updated Sunday, 27 July 2008 18:03



As the number of keeper league hockey pools increase each year, fantasy junkies are becoming more active in the off-season as they prepare for the coming year. Rebuild? Retool? Tweak? Whatever your intentions, it helps to get all the information you can about your players. FPL will look at a pair of teams each week and give you the fantasy lowdown. This week, we'll look through our fantasy hockey goggles at the outlooks for Minnesota and Montreal

(Originally published by [The Hockey News](#) on **July 18, 2008** - Dobber archives some of his older THN articles here in case you missed them there!)

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Also – don't forget to send your off-season questions to the [THN Fantasy Mailbag](#) , which is posted the last Wednesday of each month during the summer.

MINNESOTA WILD

Gone – Pavol Demitra, Aaron Voros, Brian Rolston, Matt Foy and Todd Fedoruk.

Incoming – Owen Nolan, Marek Zidlicky, Marc-Andre Bergeron, Andrew Brunette, Craig Weller, Antti Miettinen and Corey Locke.

Ready for full time – Deserved or not, the Wild have already handed a roster spot to Benoit Pouliot, who had a decent second half for Houston in the American League and looked pretty good in his last cup of coffee with the big club. The fourth overall pick in 2005 was a late-bloomer in both the junior and pro ranks. Expect a rookie season similar to what James Sheppard had last year.

New acquisition Corey Locke deserves a look as well. He has dominated the AHL for long enough and all he has to show for it is 5:59 of career NHL ice time.

Fantasy Outlook – Losing big names such as Demitra and Rolston looks bad on the surface, but Brunette will outdo what either of them did offensively last season.

The key to this team now is the blueline. With Brent Burns already emerging as a force, the additions of Zidlicky and Bergeron will bring a whole new look to the power play – which is probably for the better. With more skill from the defensemen, that should really help Marian Gaborik take the next step.

I think you'll see more goals from the Wild this season. They're still weak in the pipeline, though.

Fantasy Grade: B- (last year was B-)

MONTREAL CANADIENS

Gone – Mikhail Grabovski, Michael Ryder, Mark Streit and Yann Danis.

Incoming - Georges Laraque, Shawn Belle, Alex Tanguay, Alex Henry and Marc Denis.

Ready for full time – Kyle Chipchura, Maxim Lapierre and Ryan O'Byrne will all be full-timers this season. Of the three, O'Byrne is the only one with big fantasy value as the rearguard could post 25 points and 120 penalty minutes.

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The Habs recently signed Max Pacioretty, but the power winger will need one year in the AHL. When he gets to the NHL in a year or so he'll probably need a few seasons to round into form. He has high upside, but most power forwards are usually in their mid-20s before you see a breakout.

Fantasy Outlook – It's amazing what one player can do to an entire team's offense. I'm not suggesting the Habs would have had trouble scoring last season. In fact, last year I correctly predicted the likes of Andrei Kostitsyn making an impact. However, for Alexei Kovalev to bounce from 47 points to 84 points...it had repercussions throughout the lineup.

The result of that explosion probably gave Mark Streit, Andrei Markov and Tomas Plekanec an extra five to 10 points. Had I known Kovalev still had that in him, I certainly would not have given this team a C+ fantasy grade last summer. Now that we know he is still a star and that the other youngsters have been brought along (not to mention goaltender Carey Price's ascent), it's hard not to like this team. A nice, young, deep club to build your fantasy squad around.

Fantasy Grade: A- (last year was C+)