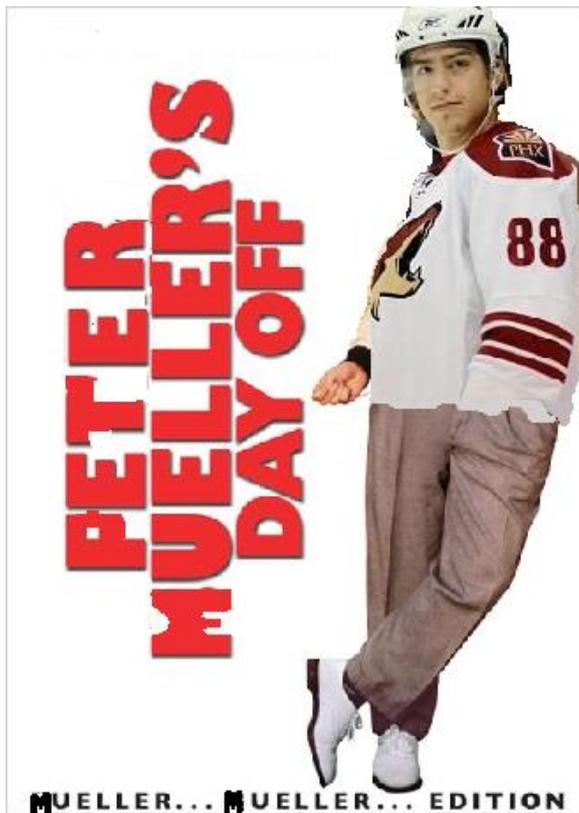


Peter Mueller's Day Off

Written by Dobber

Sunday, 22 November 2009 14:53 - Last Updated Monday, 23 November 2009 14:42



It started out so promising. So how did things go south for Peter Mueller so quickly?

After averaging a point-and-a-half per game in the Western League and putting on WJC show overshadowed only by Jonathan Toews. He made the NHL as a 19 year old and potted 54 points, with the bulk of those coming in the second half. Then the bottom dropped out.

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Let's attribute his slip in Year 2 (2008-09) to a sophomore slump and a concussion problem. So how do you explain four in 21 to start his third year? Let's take a stab at it.

My first instinct is to check back to last season and see how he did after the concussion versus before. He returned February 14 and finished the season with just six points in 24 games (0.25 points per game). He had 30 in 48 before that (0.625). So in all, 10 points in 45 games since being out with a concussion. He's playing scared. He's changed his game. Can he come out of it? With the right coach teaching the right lessons – definitely. And therein lies another possible answer – a new coach. Dave Tippett isn't quite as lenient or reliant on Mueller as Wayne Gretzky was.

I think he'll bounce back next season. There are legions of poolies who feel otherwise, but those are the same chumps who figured Jeff Carter would never break out playing behind Daniel Briere and Mike Richards. Young players need at least four seasons before you should consider writing them off for good, and sometimes five or even six. Granted, the signs are weak in the case of Mueller, but give it time.

So what to do with him in the meantime? Definitely write him off for this season. It doesn't look as though it will change any time soon. But watch carefully for healthy scratches (he's already had two of them), a trade, or a couple of injuries to key players like Shane Doan and Robert Lang. Any turnaround in 2009-10 will require a catalyst and the ones listed above are the best ones.

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To make this season a promising one, he will need 40 points in the next 60 games. That will give him something to build on for next year and in that case you can hope for (expect?) a big break out. If Mueller can't give us that kind of promise over the next three-quarters of 2009-10, then next year he'll show that promise – and save the break out for 2011-12.

Meanwhile...

Maybe Sidney Crosby is taking the season off as well, but don't count on it. His current 0.96 points-per-game average is lower than it has been at any level in any league dating back to his pre-teen years. He'll turn it around – soon. At least 105 points this year...

Philly's Matt Carle's blazing start has settled down. He has just six points in his last 15 games after starting off with eight in five. Meanwhile, another young rearguard has caught up to him (almost) in the scoring race – Anton Stralman of the Columbus Blue Jackets. Right now, give me Stralman in a straight-up points league. I think Carle will finish in that 42- to 48-point range, whereas for Stralman I would guess 44 to 57 points. A slightly wider range since we haven't seen as much of him as we have of Carle...

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David Perron is 15th on the Blues in ice time and second on the team in scoring. Andy Murray will eventually catch onto that. I still think the Blues' leading scorer this season will have 65 points and that player will be Brad Boyes. But I also believe that there will be a cluster of youth in that 50- to 60-point range. Andy McDonald will be there, but he'll be joined by Perron, Erik Johnson, T.J. Oshie and even the slumping David Backes. Paul Kariya should be in that neighborhood as well, but there is so much competition for a scoring role on this team that he is being shouldered out by youth. There is still gas in Kariya's tank, but you probably won't see it being used in St. Louis. Youth has been served and Perron is leading the way.