

Montreal Canadiens and Minnesota Wild

Written by Dobber

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As keeper league hockey pools increase in number each year, fantasy junkies become more active in the off-season as they prepare their team for the coming year. Rebuild? Retool? Tweak? Whatever your intentions, it helps to get all the information you can about your players.

Throughout the off-season, FPL will look at a pair of teams each week and give you the fantasy lowdown. Bucking the trend of past years, we will review alphabetically – in reverse. Just to be different.

(Originally posted by The Hockey News, ESPN.com and MSN.ca)

Montreal Canadiens

Gone – Sheldon Souray, Mike Johnson, Sergei Samsonov, Radek Bonk, Alexander Perezhogin, Janne Niinimaa and Aaron Downey.

Arriving – Bryan Smolinski, Roman Hamrlik, Janne Lahti and Tom Kostopolous.

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Looking to Add - The Habs are probably set until the season begins.

Ready for full-time - The Habs let five forwards go and they only brought in three. The statement that makes is that future star Andrei Kostitsyn will make this team full time. Expect a solid season from the youngster, with numbers in the 50s this year. Down the road, he could be an 80-point player. Lahti came over from the Finnish League and adds decent third-line depth.

Fantasy Outlook - Montreal improved things in the dressing room and I really like Kostitsyn's potential. However, Hamrik is certainly no Souray, which means that the NHL's No.1 power play will free fall. Everyone's offense will suffer a little as a result. The team's future (from a fantasy standpoint) is also uncertain. They have a lot of prospects with decent upside, but no blue-chippers other than goaltender Carey Price, who incidentally is a big one. It is starting to look like the Habs will be all about the goaltending for the foreseeable future. Not what poolies want to hear.

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

Minnesota Wild

Gone – Todd White, Manny Fernandez and Adam Hall

Arriving – Eric Belanger, Petr Kalus and Dominic Moore.

Looking to Add - The Wild still lack a power-play quarterback, but it is doubtful they will address the issue this summer.

Ready for full-time - Sniper Kalus impressed during a nine-game call up at the end of last season. Acquired from Boston in the Fernandez deal, it is likely he will find a spot on with the big club this year. With four goals and an assist in nine contests with Boston, he has already shown that he can score at this level and his performance in development camp solidified things. James Sheppard, 19 and arguably Minnesota's top prospect, also performed extremely well and given the team's lack of depth up the middle he could force his way onto this roster.

Fantasy Outlook - As long as Jacques Lemaire is the coach you can expect this team to produce far below expectations offensively. Sure, this is a good thing for owners of Nicklas Backstrom, but for the owners of some of the skaters it is sometimes painful to watch. This season should be better, however. The Wild have Marion Gaborik on a strength and conditioning plan that will hopefully avoid any training camp groin injuries. A full season out of Gaborik would mean lots of points for Pavol Demitra, Belanger and if he makes the team – Sheppard. There are plenty of solid offensive prospects in the system, too. All fantasy owners can do now is hope Lemaire resigns...

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