

Calgary, Buffalo and Boston

Written by Dobber

Tuesday, 11 September 2007 12:07 - Last Updated Thursday, 20 September 2007 19:45



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.

(This column was originally published by The Hockey News and MSN.ca. ESPN no longer carries it due to their recent purchase of The Talented Mr. Roto. In this man's opinion, when the bigwigs get their claws into a fantasy site, the hockey section suffers. Yet another reason why DobberHockey is the best damn fantasy hockey source out there!)

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Calgary Flames

Gone – Roman Hamrlik, Tony Amonte, Brad Stuart, Mark Giordano, Byron Ritchie, Jeff Friesen and Andrei Zyuzin.

Arriving – Owen Nolan, Adrian Aucoin, Cory Sarich and Anders Eriksson.

Looking to Add - Calgary does not have a proven backup goaltender, but will be going with the winner of Brent Krahn and Curtis McElhinney – who will do battle in camp.

Ready for full-time - Dustin Boyd, 21, looked fantastic during several call ups last season, amassing four points in 13 NHL games. If he does not make the team, he will be the first player recalled. Either way, do not expect fantasy-worthy numbers just yet. In a year or two, however, he should round into a decent 70-point pivot who will anchor the second line.

Fantasy Outlook - The Flames will roll out two solid scoring lines and in Dion Phaneuf they have themselves a great quarterback for their power play. Goaltending is solid, as Miikka Kiprusoff not only puts up the numbers, but has also proven to be durable. They are a little thin in terms of offensive prospects, although besides Boyd there is still Daniel Ryder. Overall, they are one of the better teams in the NHL; it couldn't hurt to add a few of their players to your fantasy roster, because they don't look to be declining any time soon.

Fantasy Grade: B (last year was C)

Buffalo Sabres

Gone – Daniel Briere, Chris Drury and Dainius Zubrus.

Arriving – Jocelyn Thibault

Looking to Add - Much as they could use a quarterback on the power play (still), the Sabres are ready to go.

Ready for full-time - The Sabres have had some high-end, NHL-ready prospects knocking on the door for quite some time now and finally, with the departures of Briere and Drury, the prospects are able to answer. Drew Stafford becoming a regular on this team goes without saying, but now Dan Paille will see regular ice time as well. Stafford will log minutes on a scoring line and will also see time on the power play, giving him a solid shot at a 60-point season. Paille, more of a two-way player, will still be able to chip in 35 or 40 points himself.

Fantasy Outlook - No, poolies (and Buffalo fans), this team is not doomed. In fact, they will surprise in just how good they still are. The second line will now become the first line, while players such as Ales Kotalik, Stafford and Tim Connolly will start seeing some solid minutes. Last season, each of those three saw less than 15 minutes of ice time per game. The pipeline still looks solid, with Clarke MacArthur waiting patiently for his well-deserved shot. Sabres players will be far too cheap this summer in your keeper league – see if you can steal a few.

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

Boston Bruins

Gone – Shean Donovan, Stanislav Chistov, Hannu Toivonen and Petr Tenkrat.

Arriving – Manny Fernandez, Peter Schaefer and Shawn Thornton.

Looking to Add - The B's need a quarterback to compliment Zdeno Chara, but they may just go with Dennis Wideman. The team also needs a pair of top-six wingers, but if the likes of Carl Soderberg and/or David Krejci make the team, Patrice Bergeron and Phil Kessel will move to the wing.

Ready for full-time - Soderberg and Krejci both are ready. Krejci has done nothing but move steadily up the depth chart with his smart playmaking and solid work ethic. The logjam up the middle is a small hurdle, as is the presence of Soderberg – watch him in training camp to get a feel for his chances, because he should be a good one. Soderberg, who was acquired for Toivonen in the offseason, expects to make the team and the B's have him penciled in there. He was unhappy when the Blues cut him last season, so if the Bruins do it this year the possibility exists that Soderberg will flee back to Sweden. He is an offensive talent though.

Fantasy Outlook - The season ahead will depend a lot on the success of some of Boston's projects. They need two of Wideman, Brandon Bochenski and Chuck Kobasew to pan out in a big way before they can be considered a solid playoff contender. Goaltending should be solid, with Fernandez and Tim Thomas both capable of spotting each other. New coach Claude Julien preaches a defensive style, which doesn't bode well for poolies. It doesn't bode well for Wideman, Bochenski and Kobasew either. The pipeline is average – some promising prospects, but no more than most other teams.

Fantasy Grade: D+ (last year was D)