

The chains are off Rafalski

Written by Dobber

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Brian Rafalski has been one of the most consistent defensemen in the NHL. He has also been one of the more sought after rearguards in fantasy circles, essentially because he has produced at .51 points-per-game or higher since his sophomore year back in 2000-01.

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There aren't a lot of 50-point defensemen out there, so Rafalski is always in demand. That

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being said, for well over a decade the New Jersey Devils have employed a stifling defensive system that, while it wins hockey games, limits goals for. When the team scores fewer goals, the defensemen have less to assist on.

When Scott Niedermayer left the Devils and joined the Ducks in 2005, he proceeded to have seasons of 63 and 69 points, trouncing his career high in New Jersey (57 in 1997-98). His average in his final nine seasons in New Jersey was a shade over 41 points per season. In Anaheim it's been 66, which is a 60 percent increase.

You're seeing the same thing with Rafalski now that he is a member of the Red Wings. Over seven seasons, Rafalski averaged 44.4 points per year. With Detroit he has 34 points in just 41 games – a 68-point pace. Only teammate Nick Lidstrom and Dallas' Sergei Zubov can claim such a high total among rearguards.

He's 34 years old and will post these kinds of numbers for at least three more seasons after this one (he signed a five-year deal with Detroit)...

Montreal rearguard Mark Streit has nine points in his last 10 games. Only Andrei Markov is seeing more power play time for the Habs and Streit makes for an excellent pickup in roto-leagues. He is under the radar and frequently plays up on the wing, yet remains defenseman eligible...

Still with defensemen, Washington's Mike Green is getting hotter with every contest. His 21 points this season are impressive on their own, but consider that he has 12 points in his last 13 games and is getting more responsibility with every game.

He's just 22 years old, but on an up-and-coming team like Washington he looks like another rearguard who will be in demand in fantasy leagues for years to come...

Injuries, from a fantasy league perspective: It's looking as though Flyers winger Simon Gagne will return within the next few days from his concussion-like symptoms...Washington's Eric Fehr has missed this season with back and hip problems, but he is expected to join the Hershey Bears of the American League later this month. He could join the Caps by mid-February...

Farm Report: The biggest disappointment for keeper league owners in this year's World Under-20s has to be the play of Alexei Cherepanov. After being one of the best players in the same tourney just one year ago, Cherepanov has just two goals in four games heading into Friday's match against Sweden and the doubts about his NHL upside are growing stronger. The New York Rangers prospect's fantasy value has certainly taken a beating.

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