

## M\*A\*S\*H\* Players

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 02 October 2008 03:09 -

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In this case, M\*A\*S\*H stands for Miller's Avoidance of Seriously Hurt players from the Eastern Conference. There seems to be a rash of serious injuries going around the NHL these days. Maybe it's just being over-reported and us, being the fantasy hockey junkies we are, start to get worried when we are constantly being bombarded with injury information.

Let's look at some players who missed almost all or large portions of last season as well as players dealing with serious injuries from an Eastern Conference perspective:

### Players I'd Completely Ignore

Tim Connolly missed the last dozen regular season games at the end of the year after having

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hip surgery to remove bone chips. He's skating and said he was "doing okay". Coach Lindy Ruff stated that Connolly is not at 100%. Bottom Line: Avoid like the plague. Remember, this guy is a member of Dobber's Band-Aid Boy Executive Committee.

Brian Pothier sustained a concussion last January and as of September he still has vision and balance issues. With the emergence of Mike Green among other options on the blue line, Pothier is a poor fantasy choice. Stay far away from this guy; he'll be lucky if he's able to continue his career.

Paul Ranger's shoulder doesn't look like it will be ready for Tampa's season opener. He may be all set by the end of October. Ranger was already a borderline pick in deep pools. Just take him off your draft list unless you can use a 25 point defenseman.

Jeff Halpern wrecked his knee at the World Championships for Team USA last spring. He scored 18 points in only 19 games with the Lightning after coming over last year in a trade. Coming off major knee surgery, coupled with a new coach and more competition, he won't even come close to that pace. He's not worth a pick.

Manny Fernandez only played in four games last year before having season ending knee surgery.

Now Manny has a thumb injury and both Thomas and Rask have outplayed the rusty Fernandez in the exhibition games. We're still looking at a platoon situation here.

Rick DiPietro had hip surgery last March. He has had previous hip surgery, but on the other side. He is reportedly skating, but is not yet cleared to take shots. DiPietro is still scheduled to start in the team's first game. That being said, I wouldn't hang my one-year fantasy hopes on those two rickety hips.

### **Cautiously Optimistic**

Vincent Lecavalier is still on schedule to play in the season opener on Oct. 4, but hasn't yet played in any pre-season games. He's eager, but the team wants to be certain the shoulder is 100% before battle testing their new captain.

Patrice Bergeron looked very good in his first action since missing 72 games with a severe concussion. Physically, everything seems in order. Look for Bergeron to get back to his 70-point ways.

Simon Gagne worked hard in the off-season on his conditioning and weight training and is back to his old playing weight. He has admitted that he will have to get back to game shape, but there are reportedly no problems relating to his concussion. Some people at your draft might forget that prior to last season; he recorded back to back 40 goal seasons (41 & 47). Count on at least 30-35 goals

Zdeno Chara had shoulder surgery last April and has recently been seen working on his shot after practices. He should be ready to go for game one. Expect around 45 points and just under

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100 penalty minutes for the first time since 2000-01.

Newly signed Thrasher, Jason Williams played in only 43 games for Chicago thanks to a sports hernia/groin injury. He managed to record 36 points (a 69 point pace) with Chicago. He will be given all the ice time he can handle including major power play minutes with Ilya Kovalchuk. If all goes well, Williams could surpass his career high of 58 points.

### **Ow Carolina**

Rod Brind'Amour had minor knee surgery mid-September, but is expected back for the season opener. He's already back skating. Don't worry about this guy, he is a warrior.

Matt Cullen Carolina is feeling no lingering affects from the concussions (yes that's plural) he suffered last year. Cullen won't score at the 68 point pace (49 points in 59 games) he was on last year, but he could surpass the 50 point barrier for the first time in his career. There are safer 50 point players out there.

Justin Williams is out four to six months with a torn Achilles tendon. Theoretically, he could be back in February, but that is likely wishful thinking on the 'Canes part. I'd avoid entirely.

### **Well isn't that the Pitts**

Sergei Gonchar's shoulder injury couldn't have come at a worse time. With Ryan Whitney already out three to five months following foot surgery, it was a tough pill for the Pens to swallow, losing two top offensive defenseman for extended periods.

If all goes well for Whitney, a December return is possible. The prognosis for Gonchar is a little worse now that he is going to have shoulder surgery. Instead of trying to play with the pain and then possibly shutting it down and miss the playoffs, Gonchar decided to have the surgery now and will likely be back for the start of the playoffs. Kris Letang is the biggest benefactor.

I never like to draft players that start the season injured. This is especially important for one-year pools. There is a difference between a nagging minor injury and the potentially game missing kind. Unless a player has a history of a certain type of injury, I tend to ignore those nagging injuries that are reported. It's no fun having a player start the season with a nagging injury, but don't over-react to every bit and byte of injury reporting.