

## Top Shelf Eastern Talent – Part 1 of 3

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 16 July 2009 09:28 - Last Updated Saturday, 18 July 2009 21:46

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Following the lead of my western counterpart, I'll give you the Eastern Conference slant on each team's top six forwards and four defensemen and guys that might challenge them for a spot in the coming season.

Without doing a comprehensive statistical analysis, I'll go out on a limb here and say that the vast majority of points come from a team's top six forwards and four defensemen!

With that role comes ice time and often power play opportunities, two things that are the key to fantasy success. Now I'm the first guy to admit that I have trouble figuring out who plays on which line, so go easy on me when critiquing these line combinations.

### Atlanta

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Kovalchuk – T.White - Little  
S.Kozlov – Peverley – Antropov

The Thrashers top six seems set. Colby Armstrong is well suited to third line duties. Brett “Pound” Sterling has the talent, but the 25-year-old comes up a little short in other areas. Evander Kane will challenge for a spot in a year or two.

Hainsey - Enstrom  
Kubina - Bogosian

It’s possible that Anssi “Pansy” Salmela could end up stealing away some second unit power play time, but I wouldn’t count on it in this crowd.

### **Boston**

Lucic – Savard – Kessel (RFA)  
Sturm - Krejci - Ryder

Kessel is set to possibly miss the first month of the season, so look for Mark Recchi to sub in on the right side. Blake “Wagon” Wheeler could surprise with a great camp, but realistically, he needs more experience before playing a more significant role. Patrice Bergeron hasn’t been the same since coming back from that serious concussion, but he does spend a decent amount of time during man advantage opportunities.

Chara – A.Ference  
Wideman – M.Stuart

The spoiler could be Matt Hunwick (RFA), who will almost certainly get second unit power play time.

### **Buffalo**

Vanek – Roy – D.Stafford (RFA)  
MacArthur (RFA) – Connolly - Pominville

With perennial Band-Aid Boy Connolly around, Jochen Hecht is certain to get a decent amount of time playing in the top six. Nate “Napoleon” Gerbe might surprise, but only if he has a great camp.

Lydman - Rivet  
Tallinder – Sekera (RFA)

Marc-Andre Gragnani could provide some offense if he can make the leap to the NHL this season. He will be on the power play if he makes this squad.

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### Carolina

Whitney – Staal - Cole

Samsonov – Cullen – T.Ruutu (RFA)

Rod Brind'Amour could supplant Matt Cullen, but Rod the Bod was looking like a mere mortal in the playoffs and that could signal the start of his inevitable decline. Jussi Jokinen had a very good playoff and if someone stumbles out of the gate (cough cough, Samsonov), the Juice might get the call.

Gleason - Corvo

Pitkanen – Babchuk (RFA)

If Dennis Seidenberg (UFA) re-signs with Carolina, that would push Babchuk out of the top four. No worries though, Babchuk will still get significant power play time in order for him to showcase that big point shot.

### Florida

Booth – Weiss - Horton

Stillman – Reinprecht - Frolik

Rusty Olesz could push for a top six role with a good camp. Shawn Matthias will also get a long look at camp, but may need another year in the A after recording only 20 points in 61 games with Rochester last season.

Ballard - Allen

McCabe – Eminger (UFA)

I am assuming Steve Eminger re-signs with the Panthers. Ville Koistinen could jump up if Eminger doesn't come back, but he will likely see power play time regardless. Jordan Leopold will not factor in the Panthers top four.

Next week will feature the Canadiens, Devils, Islanders, Rangers and Senators