

Top Shelf Eastern Talent – Part 3 of 3

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 30 July 2009 09:27 - Last Updated Sunday, 02 August 2009 16:10



In this final installment, I'll take a look at the last five Eastern Conference team's top six talent and guys that might challenge for a spot this season.

With a top six forward or top four defence role comes ice time and often power play minutes, two things that are the crucial to fantasy success. Instead of trying to play coach and guess at who is playing on which line, something that can change from period to period, I will list each team's top six forwards and four defensemen.

Philadelphia

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M.Richards
J.Carter
Gagne
Briere
Hartnell
C.Giroux

The top six are pretty set here and I don't really see any other player having a realistic shot at one of these roster spots.

Pronger
K.Timonen
Coburn
Carle

Randy Jones and Ryan Parent are not likely to crack the Flyers excellent top four.

Pittsburgh

Kunitz – Crosby - Guerin
Fedotenko - Malkin – F.Hydrant

You may not have heard of Fred Hydrant, but playing with Malkin, he is guaranteed to pot at least 20 goals this year. With a great camp, one of Luca Caputi, Eric Tangradi or even Tyler Kennedy could supplant Hydrant in the top six.. Jordan Staal gets top six ice time, but the team seems to prefer to play the defensively responsible Staal as the third line Centre behind Crosby and Malkin on a regular basis. I don't see a break out season for Staal until either he or Malkin leaves town.

Gonchar
Letang
Orpik
Eaton

As is customary for Stanley Cup winning teams, the Pens have lost a couple of key components (Gill and Scuderi) to free agency. The cupboard isn't exactly bare, but it would take a heck of a camp for someone to displace the four listed above. Expect Alex Goligoski to stick around for the entire season and get a decent amount of power play time.

Tampa Bay

Lecavalier
St.Louis
Prospal (edit: bought out)
Stamkos

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Malone
Downie

Maybe I'm being a tad optimistic in thinking that Steve Downie can keep it together long enough to try and improve on the chemistry he seemed to have for a short time last year playing with Stamkos? Or is he a case of major league talent, minor league brain? It's probably not wise to count on Downie, but I don't know if there is another player on the Lightning roster that can legitimately step up and play in the Lightning's top six. One of Evgeny Artyukhin, Martins Karsums, Jeff Halpern or Lauri Tukonen could surprise.

Ohlund
Hedman
Meszaros
Ranger

Matt Lashoff and Kurtis Foster are more offensive types and will not likely challenge for top four ice time, but may see some time with the man advantage.

Toronto

Grabovski
J.Blake
Hagman
Ponikarovsky
Stajan
Stempniak

Jiri Tlusty may surprise here, as could Nikolai Kulemin, depending on what they do in camp. Rickard Wallin has the talent to challenge for a top six spot, but I wouldn't bet the house on it.

T.Kaberle
Beauchemin
Schenn
Komisarek

The Maple Leafs have an enviable bevy of NHL defensemen over and above the four I have listed. Mike Van Ryn, Jeff Finger and Ian White are all in contention for a spot in the top six. Something has to give and I expect at least one of them to be traded before the regular season gets under way.

Washington

Ovechkin
Backstrom

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Semin
Knuble
B.Morrison
Fleischmann

Washington is pretty set for top six talent. Brooks Laich and Eric Fehr could push for a top six role, but I don't see that happening.

Green
Poti
Schultz
Alzner

Shaone Morrisonn and Brian Pothier are the only other candidates who are likely to push for top four ice time.