

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---



Following the lead of my western counterpart this week, I'll take a look at some players heading into their fourth NHL season and try to look into the near future to see if there might be some magic in their fourth NHL season.

For a player to breakout, they need to take a regular shift on one of the top two lines AND play a prominent role on the power play. Opportunity is the key word here, especially for those players who are on the cusp of breaking through to the league's elite and semi-elite.

Since there had to be a cut-off, if a player played more than nine games, I counted it as a season. Here are some players that are on the cusp of their prime scoring years:

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

### Poised for a huge breakout:

**David Clarkson** - If he hadn't missed 36 games with a leg injury, Clarkson very likely would have had his breakout season last year. He scored 24 points in 46 games, which pro-rates to 43 points. With the Devils addition of a quality veteran centre in Jason Arnott, Clarkson may threaten the 50 point mark. Clarkson is also a valuable player in leagues that value penalty minutes, he will almost certainly attain 150 penalty minutes.

**Brandon Dubinsky** - He's had consecutive seasons of 40, 41 and 44 points. Last season he scored those 44 points in 69 games (a 52 point pace). Dubinsky finished second in World Championship scoring, only two points behind Ilya Kovalchuk and his 12 points. In his final year of major junior, he recorded 67 points in 51 games. Dubinsky is a top six talent waiting to breakout and will be a restricted free agent at the end of the season.

**Kris Letang** - If Sergei Gonchar is not re-signed and the Pens show confidence in their two young offensive defensemen (Goligoski being the other), then Letang is going to shine this year. His offensive abilities are seriously good as evidenced by his last two seasons of major junior hockey where he recorded 120 points in only 100 games.

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

### Poised for a marginal breakout:

**Nicklas Backstrom** - It started with a 69 point rookie season, then Backstrom posted a 19 point increase and followed that up with a 13 point spike. After back-to-back breakout seasons, look for Backstrom to post back-to-back 100 point seasons. He is that good.

**Nick Foligno** - For a guy who spent the majority of his ice time with Mike Fisher and Alexei Kovalev, he sure didn't put up many points. If we pro-rate his 26 points in 61 games, he would have had 35 points. In his final junior season, Foligno recorded 88 points in 66 games, so he can score. Pencil him in for 40-45 points.

**Mikhail Grabovski** - It might seem as though Grabovski regressed last year, but if we look at his pro-rated points, he would have had 49 points and surpassed his previous season's mark of 48 points. This guy has proven he can score by racking up 74 points in 78 AHL games. Grabovski should get the opportunity to improve on his totals.

**Matt Hunwick** - Last year's playoffs might have given us a glimpse into what the future holds for Hunwick. He was second only to Big Z in power play ice time, logged top four minutes and recorded a respectable six points. Yes there's competition for man advantage time, but with Wideman out of the picture, things just got a little easier. The year before last, Hunwick had 27

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

points in only 53 games (a 42 point pace). Yes, 40 points is possible for this season, but it will require things to fall just right.

**Tyler Kennedy** - Scored a paltry 25 points last season after recording 35 points in 67 games the year before (43 point pro-rated). Kennedy has 46 points in 50 career AHL games and scored 70 points in 64 games in his last year of junior hockey. Forty points could be in the cards, provided they fall the right way.

**David Krejci** - His 52 points were a huge disappointment after recording 73 points the previous season. Injuries helped derail the Bruins offense and didn't do Krejci any favours; he spent the off-season recovering from surgery instead of working out. He's too good not to rebound and could hit 80 points if the team can stave off the injury bug.

**Milan Lucic** - Heading into last season, it looked like Lucic was all set to breakout. He had increased his point totals from 27 to 42 and seemed like he was on his way. Then a broken finger and an ankle injury sidelined the budding power forward for 32 matches. He ended the year on a positive note, recording nine points in 13 playoff games. No matter where he lines up, it will be with a very good player. Boston is blessed with a plethora of talented pivots. Fifty points is a distinct possibility this campaign.

**Treading water:**

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

**Blake Comeau** - At first blush, Comeau may seem better suited to third line duties, but that may be due more to his sturdy frame than a lack of offensive potential. He scored 74 points in just 60 games during his last junior season and has 81 points in 111 career AHL games. Comeau has increased his point totals every season he has played in the NHL. He spent over forty per cent of his ice time on a line with John Tavares, but unfortunately for Comeau, he doesn't receive any power play time to speak of. He could record between 45-50 points this season.

**Steve Downie** - Arguably one the most valuable fantasy roto forwards to own. Downie recorded a nice 46 points and an insane 208 penalty minutes. The problem is the unknown. Former head coach Rick Tocchet was widely credited with keeping Downie in check. What effect will a new coach and general manager have on the player? The jury is out, but this is a guy who scored 50 points in 49 AHL games and still found the time to sit in the sin bin for 244 penalty minutes. He also has two gold medals from the World Juniors and contributed with 12 points in 12 games. Hope for stability.

**Bryan Little** - Regressed from 51 points to 34 points last season. He definitely has offensive ability as indicated by registering a combined 216 points in 121 games over his final two seasons of junior hockey. From a fantasy hockey perspective, I've never been a fan, but anyone who scores that many points in major junior can't be blindly written off.

**Marc Staal** - In his last junior season, the second eldest Staal brother recorded 49 points in 57

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

games (a 70 point pace). Last season, Staal was encouraged to get more involved in the offense. He did that and nearly doubled his previous season's point total (15 to 27) and that's without the benefit of a single power play point. Don't look for Staal's point totals to suddenly jump either, he averaged a paltry 0:39 a game on the power play. His 27 even strength points placed him ninth amongst defensemen, tied with Chara, Streit, Pitkanen and Kubina. To help put this into perspective, Doughty and Pronger had 28 even strength points and Kaberle and Weber each finished with 23. It just goes to show you the importance of power play time for blueliners.

### Most likely to decline:

**Tobias Enstrom** - The loss of elite goal scorer Ilya Kovalchuk has to hurt Atlanta's offense, certainly on the power play. Last season, Enstrom enjoyed a career high 50 points, 18 points more than the year before and 12 more than his previous high. The odds of Enstrom surpassing last season's totals are about the same as Gary Bettman not being booed at an NHL game or event.

### Harder to read than the bible:

**Benoit Pouliot** - The trade bringing Pouliot to Montreal sparked the former fourth overall selection (2005), where he recorded 15 goals and 24 points in 39 games. He faded horribly down the stretch, scoring two points over his final ten regular season games and had another

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

two points in 18 playoff contests. Pouliot recently re-signed for one year, so motivation shouldn't be a problem.

**Teddy Purcell** - He managed nine points in 19 games with Tampa last season, but that was under former head coach Tocchet. Purcell has proven all he can in the AHL, scoring 121 points in 105 career games. Can the 24-year-old bring it at the NHL level though?

**Jiri Tlustý** - The 22-year-old has scored at every level he's played. Tlustý recorded 34 points in 37 OHL games and over 125 career AHL games, he's scored 118 points. All that's left to conquer is the NHL. He won't be handed the ice time, he'll have to earn it with a good showing at camp, but the offensive pedigree is there.

**A single crease monkey:**

**Carey Price** - Here we have what most people consider to be a very large question mark heading into this year. Sure he was outplayed down the stretch last season and through the playoffs by a sensational Jaroslav Halak, but where is Halak now? I can only speculate that the Montreal brain trust deemed the upside of Price to be higher than that of Halak.

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

For those of you who don't agree, take a step back and look at the bigger picture here. I can't think of a more decorated young goaltender to come into the league than Price. He was Canadian Major Junior Goaltender of the year, a World Junior Gold medalist and Top Goalie and AHL Playoff MVP and Calder Cup winner. I know that was a long time ago (2006-07) for some of us, but Price is about to enter his fourth season and he is only 22-years-old. His formative years are over. Book it.

### A trio of third year breakout candidates:

**Claude Giroux** - He really turned it on in the playoffs with 21 points in 23 contests. Those 47 points he garnered last season should soar to new heights this year. Giroux recorded 34 points in 33 AHL contests and in his last three years of junior hockey, he scored an incredible 321 points in only 187 games. He's just starting to realize his vast potential.

**Alex Goligoski** - The offensive-minded defenseman recorded 37 points in 69 games (44 points pro-rated). He followed that with nine points in 13 playoff matches. Goligoski had back-to-back 39 point seasons for Minnesota of the WCHA, an incredible total for a defenseman. He has a real shot at 50 points this season.

## Do You Believe in Magic? (East 2010)

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 01 July 2010 10:01 - Last Updated Friday, 02 July 2010 19:41

---

**Kyle Okposo** - A nice jump in points from 39 points to 52. Consider that he spent most of his time beside John Tavares and if Tavares can catch that second wind like some guy named Stamkos did in his sophomore season...I'm just saying.

Here's hoping the free agent frenzy has more action than the recent entry draft!