

Trade Deadline Investments

Written by Tim "Duballstar" Lucarelli

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With the 2011 NHL trade deadline approaching quickly, many fantasy GMs run into their own dilemmas at their deadline, especially if it's a deep keeper league. Is it time to sell the veterans for some youth? Is it better to move a few young pieces and bring in that proven veteran with a few years left in hopes of winning a league title? What type of player should I be investing in? While these might sound like relatively easy decisions, most will concur they are not.

In the "new" NHL, there's been a huge increase of valuation in young players, both in the NHL and fantasy hockey. We've all been victim of the game. We see a kid tear up every league as he makes his way to the show, only to display flurries of dominance, instead of the pure dominance we expected and hoped for. This feeling will more often than not prevent us from trading that player and we often times expect the same out of the NHL GM who owns the rights to this kid. Many times, that's actually not the case though.

Just for fun, I decided to analyze rookie scoring since 2006-07. I wanted to look at all seasons

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since the lockout, but had trouble locating this data for the 05-06 season. In most seasons, I looked at the top 10 scorers, though in three seasons, I took the top 11. Of the 53 players who met this criteria, 14 (26%) have been "traded." Just to clear up my data, I broadened the definition of "trade" to include leaving current contract and going to Europe (Alexander Radulov) and I only counted one trade per player.

In the rookie season, success is tricky to gauge. Many times there is a combination of adrenaline and surprise (for opposing players) that leads to successful campaigns. The sophomore slump is often attributed to the rest of the league becoming acclimated to the player and learning how to defend, in addition to key minutes and opportunities becoming scarcer for the sophomore. As the player continues to develop, he'll either cement himself into a specific role on the team, struggle to do so constantly until he's finally moved, or allow another player to bring the same attributes he is to the table. Essentially, he turns into a huge part of the team (i.e. Travis Zajac, Anze Kopitar) or he meets one of the latter two criteria listed above.

Take Wojtek Wolski for example. Wolski burst on to the scene in Colorado with extremely high hopes and finished fourth in rookie scoring in 2006-07 (50 in 76 games). He struggled the next two seasons to take the next step with Stastny, Hejduk, Sakic, Smyth, and others cutting into key minutes. By year four, the Avs were ready to move on, trading Wolski to Phoenix. After a total of 54 games, Wolski was shipped to the NY Rangers. This is a guy who will turn 25 years old on Thursday, was selected #21 overall in his draft year, and is skating for his third NHL team already.

If you had read between the lines, the fact Wolski had been traded a couple times shouldn't have been a shock. Wolski wasn't moving along as quickly as the Avs had hoped and there were plenty of people in the pipeline who brought the same attributes. In Phoenix, Wolski was skating with Eric Belanger primarily, instead of say, Kyle Turris. In NY, Wolski is paired with Derek Stepan and Marian Gaborik when healthy. Wolski went from skating with a career third line center to an up-and-coming first or second-line center. From a fantasy GM standpoint, now is the time to own.

So Wolski seems a bit obvious now, but who else has fit the criteria and moved? Versteeg,

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Mueller, Bergfors, Penner, Frolik, Wheeler, Carle, Radulov (see note above), Erik Johnson, Shattenkirk, Neal, Grabner, and Grabovski, the last two of which were actually traded before their rookie "pop." Here's more to chew on - since 06-07, every fourth-placed rookie scorer (including 10-11's Grabner) has been traded, *except* for Patrik Berglund. Those are, in order, Wolski, Mueller, Bergfors, Grabner.

Applying this logic to the remainder of players should allow us to predict who could be on the move next. **Andrew Cogliano** is a great example. Edmonton is young enough that they can afford to move Cogliano and a new home could do him wonders.

Sam Gagner

is another possibility, but he is doing a better job of cementing himself into a top-six role in EDM. Other players who could be on the move would include

TJ Oshie, Jakub Voracek, Artem Anisimov, Tom Gilbert, Michael del Zotto

, and

TJ Galiardi

On the flip side, players who've solidified roles in their organization include Kane, Malkin, Ryan, Duchene, Tavares, Backstrom, Stastny (though still rumored to be on the move), Hall, Toews, Kopitar, Myers, Berglund (IMO), Stamkos, Stepan, Zajac, Dubinsky, Okposo, Enstrom, and Clowe with a couple on the fence like Hanzal and Benn. Benn is likely safe after the Neal trade though.

Around this time next year we could be looking at players who would fit this criteria in **James van Riemsdyk, Jordan Staal, Logan Couture, Brad Marchand,**

and

Peter Regin

All of these players could likely do well in a top-six role, but for one reason or another can't stick there in their current homes. If a team does end up acquiring one of these players, it

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should be encouraging because the new organization will want to provide the opportunities for the player to succeed and the player is young enough to pick up the pieces and start over, freshly motivated.

We've become borderline obsessed with prospects these days, but we tend to give up quickly once they enter the NHL and don't turn out to be a Sidney Crosby clone. These are all players who warrant a closer look as you make your deadline decisions as they're all very solid players to invest in during a rebuild or even stash in the cupboard en route to a title.