

Post Deadline Fallout

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 03 March 2011 11:37 - Last Updated Friday, 04 March 2011 01:03



This week I was going to take a look at Eastern Conference teams player acquisitions and losses via the trade route and analyze some of the fantasy fallout, but that's been done to death. Instead I'll present my ramblings on a six pack of teams and a shot.

Bruins Loaded For Bear

Boston were big winners in acquiring a much needed offensive-minded defenseman in Tomas Kaberle, as well as adding two quality veteran players in Chris Kelly and Rich Peverley to bring them close if not equal to Philadelphia's depth. Another smart move was to get big, bad Boris Valabik as insurance. You can never have enough defenseman in the playoffs. I've read that Valabik idolizes fellow Slovak Zdeno Chara. Smart move.

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What did they lose from their roster? Blake Wheeler, a lanky 24-year-old forward who had a 45 point rookie campaign in 2008-09, but has only shown glimpses of consistent offensive prowess since. He was set to become a restricted free agent at the end of the year. Mark Stuart is a 26-year-old defenseman who was only averaging third pairing ice time (16:15 minutes per game) and has 40 points in 287 career NHL games.

The Bruins had only one win in five games (four of them at home) before rattling off six straight road victories. They are on a roll and no doubt eager for the post season to begin.

ReNewed Jersey

In the last 23 games, the Devils are 18-3-2 with 15 of those 23 games being decided by one goal (I've included one game with an empty net goal). Is it simply a coincidence that they have turned it on since dealing their team captain? After recording only one win in Jacques Lemaire's first seven games as Head Coach, this team has been playing more like the one that finished second in the Eastern Conference only last season.

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Ilya Kovalchuk has been on quite a tear of late. Since the beginning of February, he has had a hand (16 points) in over 48 per cent of New Jersey's 33 goals. He has an incredible five Game Winning Goals in his last 11 games. The doubters have been quiet. Owners who stayed the course are being rewarded for their loyalty now.

During the last 10 games, Kovalchuk has played the majority of his even strength shifts with Travis Zajac and Nick Palmieri. Zajac has five points and Palmieri four points, while Kovalchuk has 11 points. Hang on a second you say, surely Kovalchuk got many of those 11 points via the man advantage? Nope, he only recorded two power play assists over those 10 games.

Imagine what might have been if they had a healthy Zach Parise? On that subject, Parise was cleared by doctors to skate on Wednesday and there is still a slim chance that the pending restricted free agent may play again this season.

So can the Devils still make the playoffs? Let's see, they would need to make up nine points and leap frog four teams with only 19 games remaining. Nah, no way, but here's hoping they take it right down to the bitter end and give it one hell of a ride.

Capital Losses?

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Mister Anderson has shown Ottawa what stellar goaltending looks like. I wish I was a fly on the wall in Colorado and knew the reasons WHY he sucked in his second season with the Avs, forcing them to give him away for next to nothing (sorry Sens fans, Brian Elliott is just that).

In keeping players like Daniel Alfredsson, Chris Neil and Chris Phillips, the team signaled that it's likely not going to be a full blown rebuild. The truth is now they HAVE to re-sign Anderson or lose face with the fan base, unless they go out and get a guy like a Vokoun. All the other parts they dealt away can be replaced without too much trouble, save for Fisher.

Thanks to the plethora of traded and injured players, the extra ice time has given Bobby Butler, Erik Condra and to a lesser extent Colin Greening and Zack Smith a chance to show what they can do.

Playoff Philly

Over his last two playoff campaigns, Kris Versteeg has 26 points in 39 games. Nice acquisition for a team that expects to return to the Stanley Cup Final again this year. Keep that in the back of your mind when your playoff pool rolls around.

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Life is the Pitts Without Sid or Geno

Okay take away any team's top two players for an extended period and see how well they do. (steps up on soapbox) The real problem is that thanks to the NHL and its evil salary cap, no one can carry very many top end players, nor can they afford to keep more than three or four well paid players for long. I equate parity with the word par, which as we know from golf is just average. I hate average hockey. Sure more teams are in the playoff hunt right up until the end of the season and that sells tickets, but it saddens me that there will be no more dynasties (great teams) unless the rules change. (steps down from soapbox)

Acquiring James Neal and Matt Niskanen was a fine move by the Pens. With Kris Letang's offensive abilities, along with a little help from Paul Martin, the team shouldn't miss Goligoski's power play contributions all that much. Pittsburgh desperately needed an NHL calibre winger or two, although without Crosby or Malkin in the line-up, they aren't going anywhere in the playoffs. Alex Kovalev reeks of talent, but the 38-year-old temp can't shake the stink of apathy after two sub-par seasons with the Sens.

Not Bi-Polar, Bi-Winning

A win here, a win there, it's been a bit of a roller-coaster ride for Toronto this season. They shot

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out of the gates with four straight victories, then followed that up by going 1-8-3. From there it was up and down until recently. Over their last 15 games (9-2-4), they have garnered points in 13 of those games. After last night's action, Toronto is a mere four points from a playoff spot. Crazy, huh?

Dealing away two of your top four defensemen and a top nine forward is no way to signal that you are serious about making a run at the playoffs. Just qualifying for the post season would be considered a huge victory for this motley collection of cast-offs and home grown.

The team is giving defenseman Keith Aulie a serious look and the 21-year-old is making the most of this opportunity. Over the last 10 contests, Aulie has played less than 20 minutes only twice and averaged nearly 22 minutes of ice time per game.

Many Leaf fans are beside themselves that Brett "Minus-3" Lebda is even on the team, let alone on the third pairing. Lebda has pretty decent numbers over his last nine games played; he was a minus player only once while recording a healthy plus-7.

As for the offense, Phil Kessel has been ripping it up over the last five games by recording 10 points.

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Capitol Gains?

Last season, Washington won the Presidents Trophy going away with 121 points. This season, they are on pace for 100 points and sit fifth in the Conference. They've already lost five more games than they did all of last season and they still have 18 games remaining.

I'm baffled by what Washington is trying to accomplish. The team has cut down Shots Against and have a much improved Penalty Kill compared to last season. Unfortunately, they are also the polar opposite on the offensive side of the house. They are nowhere near the offensive juggernaut they were only one season ago, even with nearly an identical roster.

They sit seventh in goals-against-average, yet no one is going to mistake these guys for a solid defensive squad. It will be very interesting to see what happens come playoff time.

Adding veterans Dennis Wideman and Jason Arnott were good moves, especially if Mike Green can't get completely healthy for the playoffs. Arnott is a big body who can battle and has been there before. He spent his first game with Alexander Semin and Brooks Laich.

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Marco Sturm could be the fantasy wildcard here. In his first game for the Caps, he played 80 per cent of his even strength shifts with Ovechkin and Backstrom. If he finds some chemistry with those two, this long shot could pay off big time over the final part of the season.

One Minute to Play in the Third Period

I've heard half a dozen broadcasts this week where they mentioned that the game had the atmosphere of a playoff match. We are entering the best time of the year for watching hockey. Teams are making all out efforts to position themselves for the post season dance. Games that mean something on every night of the week for the next three months. What a great time of year.