As the NHL season came to a close, fans were captivated yet again by Joe Pavelski. “Little Joe” or “The Big Pavelski” as he is sometimes referred to, has displayed an elite skillset to complement his clutch performances. It took him some time to get going, but once he did, Pavelski strung together a career-high 66 points, which was two more than superstar teammate Dany Heatley. And Pavelski did it in six fewer games.

If there’s anything we know about Joe Pavelski, it’s that he is a born winner. In 2001-02, Pavelski was wrapping up his senior year of high school and his Stevens Point High Panthers

won the Wisconsin state championship by a score of 2-0. Pavelski scored the game winner and added an assist.

Pavelski would go on to skate in the USHL for the Waterloo Blackhawks, where he would post an impressive 69 points in 60 games. It was at this time that the San Jose Sharks decided to roll the dice and selected Joe in the seventh round of the 2003 entry draft, number 205 overall. Pavelski would follow up that season with a Clark Cup championship. The following season, Pavelski joined the Wisconsin Badgers for two years, where he led the team in scoring each season and added an NCAA championship to his resume. This time, the championship game was decided 2-1 score and Pavelski made his way into the dressing room with two assists.

Moving forward, Pavelski joined the Worcester Sharks, but San Jose could not hold him back. Little Joe would score 26 points in only 16 games and it was clear he was ready to show what he could do. In his first NHL game, Pavelski scored a goal. I had the privilege of watching Pavelski's fifth NHL game, which was at Joe Louis Arena. Despite playing in a hostile road environment, the young Pavelski was not shaken. His team had trailed the majority of the game, but after tying it with 3:31 remaining, the teams were getting ready for OT. That is until Pavelski notched the winner with six seconds left on the clock, giving him four goals in five games. After watching him in college, many people already knew there was something special about this kid. Here was even more proof.

Pavelski would play the next year full time with the Sharks and never look back. For a team that brings their stars along somewhat slow, this speaks volumes. Joe fell one goal short of a 20-goal campaign, but electrified fans yet again in the postseason with nine points in 13 games. Although he scored only five goals that postseason, three of them were game winners. The following season, 2008-09, would be seen as a breakout season as he scored 25 goals and added 34 assists.

In 2009-10, Pavelski was limited to only 67 games, but he still scored 25 goals again and even managed 51 points, which put him on pace with his previous season's numbers. Joe would go on to lead the Sharks in postseason points with 17 in only 15 games played., adding three more game winners in the process. It was after this performance that Pavelski inked a four-year $16 million contract. Joe's 2010-11 performance is showing that he is worth every penny. Keeping with his strong postseason play, Pavelski added yet another game-winning-goal in Game One against Los Angeles. LA has since evened the series.

The strong postseason play from Pavelski on every level has a direct correlation with his work ethic. Pavelski is the type of player who will do whatever it takes when the game is on the line. He's the type of player that wants to be on the ice with the clock expiring in a tied hockey game. In contrast, some players might have more natural skill (i.e. Jeff Carter or Dany Heatley), but fail to adopt the same work ethic as Pavelski. The result can directly be seen in how Carter has historically struggled in postseason play.

Since many leagues don't count postseason play, we will shift back to his regular season performances to see what to expect going forward. Joe has shown he can produce at a point-per-game pace for an extended period of time, but whether he can keep that up for 75-82 games or not is yet to be seen.

His performance this past season could be seen as a frustrating but productive one for fantasy GMs as the stats were largely padded due to a 19-point stretch over a 10-game period.

However, that streak should not be ignored. Pavelski was the top scorer for the Sharks down the stretch on a team that featured Thornton, Marleau, Heatley, Clowe, and Couture, and the confidence he brings to the rink now is so contagious that the other Sharks often feed off of Pavelski's energy that game. If Pavelski has a good game, the Sharks in general tend to have a good game. If Pavelski has a poor game, the team struggles.

Two years ago, the general consensus on Ryan Kesler was that he would never be a fantasy relevant hockey player. He had just registered a 26-33-59 season. Kesler ended up following that up with 75 and 73 point seasons and even scoring 41 goals the most recent season. Two seasons ago Pavelski found himself finishing the year with a very similar pre-breakout Kesler season, scoring 25-34-59. Since then he has progressed, but not nearly as quickly as Kesler.

With Pavelski scoring 66 points this past year he should be drafted as such for next season, but it should be noted that a 75 or 73 point season is very attainable, especially with increased minutes due to his leadership and work ethic. With players like Marleau, Heatley, and Thornton getting older, a consistent Pavelski will continue to take ice time away from some of the stars in San Jose and reward fantasy owners in all formats.