

Written by Russell Miller

Monday, 25 June 2007 03:36 - Last Updated Monday, 24 September 2007 09:04



Several of the players listed below are no-brainers for a points increase. That said, if their current owners in your keeper pool are down on them even a little bit, now would be a good time to try and pry them away while their value is low.

Atlanta – Let's get the obvious out of the way. Ilya Kovalchuk can score 75 points in his sleep. It would help if the Thrashers get a No.1 centre. On the bright side, Kovalchuk is the only NHL player to score 40 goals in each of the last three seasons. It would not be a surprise to see him win the Rocket Richard trophy and score over 100 points next year.

Alexei Zhitnik scored 14 points in only 18 contests for the Thrashers. Eight of those points came on the power play. Last season he went 79-7-31-38 with the Isles, Flyers and Thrashers combined. He will be the Thrashers power play quarterback by default. While Zhitnik won't score at a 60 point pace, like he was during his 18 games with the Thrashers, but he should put up at least 45-50 points.

Written by Russell Miller

Monday, 25 June 2007 03:36 - Last Updated Monday, 24 September 2007 09:04

Carolina – Another no-brainer pick to click would be Eric Staal. The 22 year old centre disappointed many by scoring only 70 points after hitting the century mark the previous year. The points reduction is likely attributed to playing four rounds of playoff hockey into June, while winning the Stanley Cup. He had a great World Championship's this year, scoring 9-5-5-10 on the Gold medal winning Team Canada. Expect an increase of at least 15-20 points next season.

Don't think Cory Stillman is washed up just yet. Coming off last summer's shoulder surgery, Stillman scored a paltry 27 points in 43 games – a 51 point pace. That's far off his previous two seasons of 76 and 80 points respectively. Now that the injury has had time to heal and the fact that he'll probably end up back on a line with Staal and Cole, 60-65 points is attainable.

Florida – Cory Murphy reminds me a lot of Brian Rafalski. Both are undersized (5'10") defencemen who chose the college hockey route, followed by several years in Europe. After college, Rafalski spent two seasons in Sweden followed by three years in Finland, scoring 53 points in 53 games in his final season. Murphy spent one year in Switzerland and five years in Finland, scoring 50 points in 45 games last season. Murphy acquitted himself very well on a Canadian World Championship team loaded with NHL talent, scoring 9-1-6-7 with a plus 7 rating. It looks like the Kanata native will get a chance to man the Panther's power play alongside...

Jay Bouwmeester has put together two 40 plus seasons in a row. The 23 year old should finally eclipse the 50 point barrier. Many people believe he could score much more than that. Considering he only had 11 power play points last season, it is a possibility.

Tampa Bay – Provided Tampa Bay can find someone with a shred of offensive ability to play on Brad Richards line, he should bounce back to near the 90 point range. It won't be for a lack of ice time, Richards' average ice time per game was 24:06, third on the team behind only Dan Boyle and Marty St.Louis. If the rumoured trade does end up happening, Richards production shouldn't suffer as he would likely end up with better line-mates.

Washington –Nicklas Backstrom will likely start his NHL career alongside Semin on the Caps second line and be given some power play time with Ovechkin. Who knows, if he clicks with Ovechkin, he might even move up to the first line sooner than expected. But playing on the top line is a stretch for an NHL rookie, even one as talented as Backstrom. He scored 40 points in 45 Swedish Elite League games. Backstrom was disappointing in the World Junior Hockey Championships where his home team Swedes finished in a disappointing fourth place. Backstrom scored 7 assists in 7 games, but he was expected to dominate the tournament. In this year's World Championships he was 9-1-5-6. There has been so much written on this kid waiting for him to come to the NHL. If you're in a one season non-keeper pool, be cautious, he won't be worth the hype, at least for next season. I know that may sound sacrilegious, while he may be great in a couple of years, he will likely experience some growing pains. He could get anywhere from 45 to 75 in his rookie year.