

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28



As each new hockey season progresses, fantasy hockey poolies are eager to dominate their pool. While the season is still young, everyone wants all of their star players and their sleepers to absolutely dominate. Despite hearing from the masses to be patient and against their better judgment, some folks pull the trigger far too early on the slower starters. Conversely, if a mediocre guy has a couple good games, their fantasy owner wants a king's ransom. Let's take a look at some of the slower or hotter performing Eastern Conference players thus far and what we can take from the good and the bad.

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

Alex Ovechkin, LW, WAS – After only two points in four games, it could be quite tempting to think AO isn't the dominating force he once was. Just remember that back in 08-09, Ovechkin also tallied two points in four games, while being held off the scoresheet in three of those four. Ovechkin would end up scoring only five points in October that year, but still scored 110 points on the season. Take a deep breath and make sure not to sell him low. There's a reason you took him number one overall.

Dennis Wideman, D, WAS – Wideman is off to a great start, scoring a point in each of the first four Caps games. Still, he has Mike Green taking the lion's share of the power-play time and Green is in a bit of a slow start himself (two points). As the season progresses, Wideman should still have a pretty good year, but Green will certainly be top dog in Washington. If someone is willing to overpay for Wideman, don't be afraid to pull the trigger.

Evgeni Malkin, C/RW, PIT – Malkin has only played in three of the six Pittsburgh games, but has scored four points in those games and won 22 out of 54 faceoffs. Malkin is a dangerous scoring threat, with or without Crosby in the lineup, but there is an injury risk. The reason Malkin has missed half of his team's games thus far has reportedly been due to soreness in his surgically repaired knee. Proceed with caution.

James Neal, LW, PIT – Neal is a very solid player who has a league-leading five goals early on (tied with Kessel and Tavares – both of which have played fewer games). Neal's best season came in his sophomore campaign where he posted a stat line of 27-28-55 with 200 shots in 78

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

games. James certainly has the opportunity for a career year in Pittsburgh as he will almost certainly be skating with one of Malkin, Crosby, or Staal. His 24 shots are on track for a 328-shot season and if he can shoot 250-275, he should have a very good chance to at least break his career-high goals number. Hang tight.

Phil Kessel, RW, TOR – Three games in and Kessel already has an impressive eight points. He and Lupul (five points) have really ignited Toronto, who has won all three of their matchups. Kessel, a guy who had 325 shots a year ago, has a 45.5% shooting percentage early on. That is extremely impressive, but unrealistic to assume it will continue. Kessel's output will have to slow down, but as long as he continues to average over 20 minutes per game and keep firing the puck, you might as well hold on to him and see how long the former Bruin can keep it up.

James Reimer, G, TOR – Perhaps the biggest key to Toronto's success is not their offense, but their goaltending. Reimer is one of my favorite goalies in the league and he is quickly proving that last season's success was no fluke. If you drafted him, you already have a shutout, three wins, a .927 save percentage, and a 2.34 GAA from Reimer. Not bad for a guy you probably drafted as your third-string goalie. Keep him.

Chris Pronger, D, PHI – Through four games, Pronger leads the Flyers with five points. Pronger is one of the guys I have been telling you guys to grab since the guide released in August. In most leagues, he went far later than he should have, thanks to a 25-point performance last season. Pronger's best year was a 62-point effort in 99-00 with STL, but his second-best was a 59-point year in his first year in Anaheim. That was 59 points in only 66 games while skating for one of the strongest teams in the league. With locker room problems gone and a captain's "C" on his chest, Pronger could very well turn in a career year. Four of his five points have come on the man advantage too. Keep him.

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

Jaromir Jagr, RW, PHI – Jagr has a respectable three assists (all on the power play) in four games thus far and is playing good hockey on a line with Giroux and van Riemsdyk. The problem so far though is that Jagr just doesn't have the same speed he had when he was younger. His linemates have a combined age of 45, while Jagr is 39. The bright side is that Jagr looks excellent on the power-play and of all the line combinations in Philly, the JVR-Giroux-Jagr line has been the only one to remain untouched. Jagr should still be a lock for 60 points, but it's too early to tell if he can break the 70-point barrier. If the right offer comes along, pull the trigger.

Luke Adam, C, BUF – Adam is having a tremendous season thus far, with his six points trailing only Thomas Vanek for the lead in Buffalo. The scary part? Adam is averaging only 13:41 of ice time. He's doing all the right things by staying out of the box (0 PIM), playing well defensively (plus-two rating), and burying his chances (30% shooting percentage), but it's not very easy to continue producing with under 14 minutes of ice time. Eventually he's going to need more shifts to keep his production up. One other positive to take though is that Adam leads Buffalo in takeaways, as shown in the [Frozen Pool](#) report below. He's doing great, but until Lindy Ruff gives Adam a longer leash, I would still be slightly concerned that this hot streak might not last.

The screenshot shows the NHL.com website interface for Buffalo Sabres statistics. It includes a navigation menu with 'Skaters' and 'Goalies' tabs. Below is a 'Report Controls' section with filters for '# Skaters', 'Forwards', 'Defencemen', and 'BUFFALO SABRES'. The 'Main Offensive Statistics' table lists various metrics for the team. Below that, the 'Top 50 Takeaways' table lists individual players and their statistics.

By Board	Projected	Leaders	Top Line	Top PP Line	Goals
Assists	Points	Most Consistent	Point Pace	Plus / Minus	Shots
PP	Penalties	Overages	Blocked Shots	Penalty Kill	Minor Penalties
Jagr Penalties	Fights	Drawn Penalties	Face Offs	Time on Ice	PP Time
Shifts	Capit / Goal	Salary / Goal	0-1 Million	1-2 Million	2-3 Million
2.4 Million	4.2 Million	5.8 Million	0-1 Million	1.8 Million	1.8 Million

Top 50 Takeaways	
Player	Team
1. ADAM, LUKE	L. BUF 4 3
2. GREESE, NATHAN	C. BUF 4 2
2. SEKERA, ANDREJ	D. BUF 4 2
2. LEMO, VILJE	L. BUF 4 2
3. WYSE, TYLER	D. BUF 4 1
3. STAFFORD, DREW	R. BUF 4 1
3. LEOPOLD, JORDAN	D. BUF 4 1
3. KALETA, PATRICK	R. BUF 4 1
3. GRADONAL, MARC-ANDRE	D. BUF 4 1
3. ROY, DEREK	C. BUF 4 1
3. PORNIVILLE, JASON	R. BUF 4 1
4. BISHOPP, CHESTER	D. BUF 4 0

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

Thomas Vanek, LW, BUF – Vanek is looking like the Vanek of 2006-07 recently with seven points in four games. Vanek was at his best when Buffalo as a team was well balanced. He struggled when Drury and Briere left town, but this team is very strong once again. Vanek could potentially outperform last season's tally of 73 points, but he has been known to be a rather streaky player. If you can't handle that, look to move him while he's on fire.

John Tavares, C, NYI – The Islanders are a much stronger team this year than last and Tavares is going to lead the way. He might not break out the way Stamkos did, but he is certainly going to be a player to keep on your roster.

Kyle Okposo, RW, NYI – In most water cooler discussions, Okposo is considered the most talented Islanders right-wing on the roster right now. He should be on a line with Tavares, but P.A. Parenteau just won't go away. Parenteau has seven points in the first four games and is proving to be a great setup man for Tavares. While it's somewhat disappointing that Okposo is skating with Grabner and Nielsen instead of Tavares and Moulson, Okposo and Grabner displayed some great chemistry last season. Although Grabner and Okposo have only one point each early on, they are still both solid options worth hanging on to.

Adam Larsson, D, NJ – Larsson is still looking for his first NHL point, but is only minus-one thus far, and is still getting time on the top power play. The 18-year-old Swede has been averaging over 24 minutes of ice time and has 7 shots thus far. The regular season is proving to be a bit more challenging than the preseason, but Larsson is still a rock solid defenseman that is being treated as one of New Jersey's top defensemen.

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

Martin Brodeur, G, NJ – Brodeur has played in only two of New Jersey's games thus far, leaving one early due to wear and tear. It doesn't sound too serious, but as long as Johan Hedberg continues to play well in Brodeur's absence (3-0 record, .945 save percentage, 1.41 GAA), we might see even fewer games out of Brodeur than expected. If the right deal comes along, pull the trigger on old man Marty.

Eric Staal, C, CAR – Staal has had a hard time getting going early on, scoring three points in five games and having a team-worst minus-eight rating. Carolina is trying to split up Staal and Skinner at even strength, but the coaching staff might finally be realizing that there aren't that many talented forwards in Carolina. The great thing about Staal is that he can score with just about everyone he's paired with, so don't get too worried. Historically, they've waited until the second half of the season to bring in a talented winger. If the trend continues, we could see a stronger second-half performance out of Staal.

Kris Versteeg, LW, FLA – Offense has been hard to find in Florida thus far, but Versteeg is tied with Brian Campbell for the team lead with three points. Versteeg seems to have found a strong role with the Panthers, averaging 20:02 per game, which is only two seconds fewer than Stephen Weiss, the forward with the most ice time thus far in Florida. Whether or not Versteeg can score 50 points again is yet to be seen (FLA's top scorer last year had 49 points), but the 5'10" forward is definitely getting opportunities. For now, he is worth holding on to as a depth forward.

Jose Theodore, G, FLA – For a goalie that everyone was saying to stay away from, Theodore has had a pretty good start to the year. Thus far, Theodore has two wins (one being a shutout), a 1.97 GAA, a .930 save percentage, and most importantly, has been one of Florida's strongest players. While I feel Theodore is going to have a strong season, the GM's in your league might

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

not share that view. Florida's first back-to-back is this Monday and Tuesday, but after that, they don't have another back-to-back until November 25th, meaning they can give Theodore plenty of time. If you don't want to hold on to Theodore the whole season, at least hang on to him for another month and if he is still playing just as strong, start to dangle him in trade negotiations.

Tyler Seguin, C, BOS – With a center overload in Boston, Seguin was being experimented on the right wing. Similar to the Jeff Carter experiment, it was evident that Seguin was better suited at center. As fate would have it, David Krejci was injured and Seguin has been filling in with Lucic and Horton on the top line. The result? Seguin leads the team with five points. Seguin's production will almost certainly reduce when Krejci returns. The Bruins are being very vague with the extent of Krejci's injury, so we don't really know how long it will be before he returns to action. Krejci is an RFA in a contract year, and the Bruins already have Peverley, Bergeron, and Seguin all under contract for next season, so something will likely have to budge. As long as Seguin's getting top-six minutes, he is definitely worth holding on to.

Marc-Andre Bergeron, D, TB – For those who didn't notice, Bergeron leads the Lightning with five points in five games. Although he has little competition on the blue line, it's not likely that Bergeron posts fantasy-relevant numbers for most of the season. If any of the guys in your league are willing to take a gamble on Bergeron, sell away.

Vincent Lecavalier, C, TB – Lecavalier (two points in five games) isn't the superstar he once was, but he still managed to score 54 points in 65 games last season after getting settled on a line with Simon Gagne and Teddy Purcell. Lecavalier and Purcell are now skating with a different #12, Ryan Malone, but should have positive things in store for them in 2011-12. Don't give up on Lecavalier yet.

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

Scott Gomez, C, MTL – For those rolling the dice hoping Gomez would turn it around this year, things are looking bleak thus far. Gomez, who is coming off of a career-worst 38-point season, has only one assist through four games. While the Alaskan native will almost certainly score more than he did a year ago, he holds little (if any) trade value. It's probably best to move on if you haven't already.

P.K. Subban, D, MTL – Subban is a talented player and one point early on is not an accurate indicator of how he will perform. Despite being one of the youngest players on this team (22), Subban is averaging almost 25 minutes of ice time per game, by far the most on his team. Subban also leads the team in penalty minutes with six, and I think it's safe to say that his points and PIM will both be on the rise. Yes he is young and is in a sophomore year, but Subban should be in store for a good year.

Brandon Dubinsky, LW, NYR – Dubinsky has only one assist through three games, but did manage 20 PIM in that span. Dubinsky is a guy who has improved his point totals each year he's been in the league and fans were looking for big returns after hearing that he was going to start the year with Richards and Gaborik. Alas, Dubinsky is now skating with Anisimov and Callahan, but is still getting just under 20 minutes of ice time per game, which is a strong sign that he will have the opportunities to put points on the board.

The New York Rangers – If you add up the total points from each player on the New York Rangers through three games, you would get 12. That is pathetic. To put it into perspective, Buffalo's Adam, Vanek, and Pominville had a combined 13 points through *two* games. If you own just about any of the Rangers, you're probably experiencing some frustration. Sometimes it takes time adjusting to the addition of a star player like Brad Richards

Early Season Panic or Praise

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 17 October 2011 11:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 October 2011 13:28

though, and the Rangers have certainly been tweaking their lines a few times, still looking for the right fit. Eventually they'll find it and things will start to balance itself out.

Milan Michalek, LW, OTT – Who knew Milan Michalek could still score? Michalek is firing at a point-per-game pace thus far and looks great on the left side of Daniel Alfredsson. Michalek has only averaged 33.5 points per year in Ottawa, so it's a long shot that his strong production continues. Play it safe and look to trade him if anyone expresses interest.

Alex Burmistrov, C, WPG – Burmistrov is a very skilled center who is now skating with Antropov and the newly claimed Brett MacLean. Burmistrov has one point in three games (which actually ties him for third in team-scoring) and is seeing 17:06 per game, with time on the penalty kill and the power play. There isn't likely to be much offense going around in Winnipeg, but Burmistrov's line could turn the corner and start finding the back of the net. He's certainly worth keeping an eye on.

There are certainly others to look at as well, but my list was already getting pretty long. If you have questions on any Eastern Conference players, feel free to fire them over to me on twitter @tlucarelli.