

Fantasy Island

Written by Russ Miller

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Last season, only one NHL team (Columbus) scored fewer goals than the New York Islanders. So why you ask, should you even consider selecting someone who plays in Long Island when some consider it to be a fantasy wasteland? Now I can hear some of you snickering, but there are some decent selections on the Isles if you happen to be in a deeper draft.

There are two reasons why you shouldn't completely write off the Islanders heading into this season. One is a new coach, Scott Gordon. Who is Scott Gordon you say? He played a total of 23 NHL games as a goalie and although he wasn't a very good NHL goalie, it's where he first met his new boss, Garth Snow.

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It is important to know a little about the Isles new bench boss and how his coaching style might affect your drafting of certain Islanders players. Over the last five seasons with the AHL's Providence Bruins, Gordon won 221 games against 141 losses and copped the league's Coach of the Year award last season after going 55-18-3. Interestingly, Providence was second in goals scored and seventh in goals against.

He likes his players to use their speed to apply pressure. Gordon was hired on the premise of playing the young guys. So who benefits from this? The Isles new coach is on record as saying guys like Jeff Tambellini and Kyle Okposo will be key players.

Everyone in your pool likely knows about Kyle Okposo by now, after scoring five points in nine NHL games at the end of last season. He should be good for 45 to 50 points this season and would be a nice pick in a keeper pool.

Last year, Jeff Tambellini scored 76 points in only 57 AHL games, but only four points in 31 games with the Islanders. Chalk the NHL numbers up to Ted Nolan, who never really gave the former first round pick the ice time to prove himself. The 24-year-old Left Winger will be given every opportunity to succeed this year under Gordon. Pencil him in for 40-45 points.

I also see Sean Bergenheim using his speed to garner more ice time and if all goes right, perhaps 40 points. Blake Comeau will also be in the mix, but his offensive upside is limited, so 35 points is about all I would expect.

Mike Comrie is only 28-years-old and still in his prime. The seven year NHL veteran has scored 311 points in 462 NHL games. That equals 55 points for every 82 games. Comrie has hit 60 points twice in his NHL career. The new style of play should reinvigorate his offence and 60 to 65 points is not out of reach.

The other reason for optimism is the addition of Mark Streit. Now obviously Streit can't do it all by himself, but he should breathe some life into last year's second worst power play in the league.

In terms of value, Streit is going to take a serious hit in points. He is leaving the top scoring power play team in the league and will line up only as a defenseman this season. A drop of 20 points from 62 to 42 is very possible. Consider that there were only 19 defensemen to record 40 points or more last year.

Once again, Rick DiPietro says he wants to play in all 82 games. This after successive years of hip surgery (both left and right sides), as well as arthroscopic knee surgery this off-season, DiPietro is hardly ready to play every night. In his last three seasons, DiPietro has played 63, 62 and 63 games. DiPietro is definitely not going to play in more than 65 games this season.

So there you have it, you don't need to completely avoid taking any fish sticks in your hockey pool, just be careful not to include more than one or two of them.