

## Up With Downie?

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 05 February 2009 03:43 - Last Updated Friday, 06 February 2009 04:55

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Steve Downie - fantasy pariah or future fantasy savior? The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines pariah as one that is despised or rejected. Steve Downie has been both early in his NHL career. Despised by many hockey fans as a no talent goon; rejected by the Flyers and traded to hockey's sunny Siberia, Tampa Bay.

I don't recall any previous player starting his NHL career with a lengthy suspension (20 games) BEFORE playing even a single NHL regular season game. Obviously Colin Campbell and the league were sending a message to the shift disturbing winger. Suspensions of that length were previously reserved for only the most heinous of offences, not for something that made Wendel Clark a folk hero in Toronto.

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Many of you reading already know my stance on the Downie suspension; suffice to say that I strongly disagreed with the league's handling of the incident. Earlier this week, we saw repeat offender Denis Gauthier leave his feet, lead with his elbow and knock Gorgeous Gorges loopy. Gauthier sits five games for his fourth suspension in six years. Huh? Avery got six for talking and had never been suspended before!

But I digress; I'm here to discuss Steve Downie's fantasy future. The kid is averaging less than ten minutes of ice time per game, but recently had a four game point streak. He also was a plus-3 and had eight penalty minutes during that stretch. Downie has been playing on a line with another Steve, this one you might remember as the first overall pick in last year's entry draft. A little chemistry with Stamkos, who may be Tampa's future franchise player if they deal Lecavalier, can't be a bad thing for the 21-year-old Downie.

Don't forget that Steve Downie is a former first round pick of the Flyers, who took him 29th overall in the 2005 entry draft. He has skill far superior than Dan Carcillo or Sean Avery and could one day lead the league in penalty minutes, yet he's owned in only one percent of Yahoo fantasy leagues. Dobber has Downie with 70 point upside and I certainly won't disagree with that assessment. He has great strength on the puck, creates offensive chances and isn't afraid to mix it up with anyone.

We're talking about a player who in his last year of junior hockey scored 92 points in 45 games, was plus-23 and still found the time to rack up a whopping 124 minutes in penalties. Compare that against some other young players in their final junior seasons:

Player

GP

Points

+/-

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Pen Mins

Jeff Carter

55

74

+20

40

Dustin Brown

58

76

-9

89

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Steve Downie

45

92

+23

124

Eric Staal

66

98

+21

36

Bobby Ryan

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63

102

-9

63

One look at Downie's AHL numbers and you have to come away impressed. Last year, as a rookie in the AHL, he had 17 points and 114 penalty minutes in 21 games. This year, Downie logged 33 points in 23 games, was a healthy plus-12 and had 118 penalty minutes. That translates to 117 points and an insane 420 penalty minutes over 82 games!

In order for Downie to garner serious ice time in the NHL and be a fantasy contributor, he needs to gain the coach's confidence. He can do this by limiting defensive blunders and not taking undisciplined penalties that cost the team.

So is Downie the next Sean Avery? No, he has the potential to be much better and an absolute fantasy stud in pools that count penalty minutes.

### **Around the Eastern Conference:**

Thomas Vanek responded to the mini-benching he received in the third period of Monday's game by scoring a hat trick and added an assist in last night's game. After recording 25 goals and only seven assists in the first three months of the season, Vanek reversed that trend in January. He scored a mere four goals, but had 12 assists for a season best 16 point month.

Jay Bouwmeester will be the most sought after player if he chooses to become an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season. The 25-year-old defenseman is leading the league in average time on the ice and is more valuable to an NHL team than his 44 point pace is to fantasy teams.

Jamie Langenbrunner has eight points in his last four games and is on pace for a career best 68 points. New Jersey is 8-2 in their last ten games, thanks in large part to Captain Clutch.

After a quick start, Cory Murphy has slowed down. Murphy had four points in his first three games as a Bolt, but has only one point in his last four games.

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Speaking of Sean Avery, TSN ran an article yesterday saying the controversial forward is nearly ready to attempt a return to the NHL. I could really envision Avery back with the Rangers. He just fit in there so well and he will obviously be on HIS best behavior when, not if, he comes back. If you have room to stash him on your reserve list for next to nothing, it might just pay dividends come March and in to next season.