

## Go Ahead, Make My Day

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 23 April 2009 02:58 - Last Updated Friday, 24 April 2009 09:49

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I know what you're thinking: "did he fire six shots or only five?" Well, to tell you the truth, in all this excitement I've kinda lost track myself. But this being an Easton Synergy SE16, the most powerful hockey stick in the world, and would explode in my hands if I were to cross-check you in the head, you've got to ask yourself one question: "Do I feel lucky?" Well do ya, punk?

The name's Callahan, Ryan Callahan. Another Callahan, the infamous "Dirty Harry", earned his

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nickname by getting every dirty job that came along. While Dirty Harry patrolled the mean streets of San Francisco pursuing killers, the Rangers Callahan patrols the clean sheets of ice at Madison Square Garden, chasing the dream.

The 24-year-old from Rochester, New York has been as versatile as a Swiss Army knife for the Rangers this season. Need someone to play responsible third line minutes or kill a penalty, send out Callahan. Need a quick burst of energy, call on Callahan. Need a player to step up and skate on a scoring line, give the job to Callahan, he can do it. He always seems to be able to make things happen out there.

In his last year of junior hockey, Callahan recorded 52 goals and 84 points in only 62 games. In his first year of professional hockey, he had 35 goals, 55 points in 60 AHL games. He also played 14 NHL games that year, recording six points. Last year, Callahan scored 15 points in 11 AHL games, but only 13 points in 52 NHL games and missed 16 games with a sprained knee.

From the coaching change to the end of the season, Callahan had 17 points in 21 regular season games. In the final ten regular season games, Callahan averaged around 19 and a half minutes of ice time. Lately, he's been playing with Brandon Dubinsky and Markus Naslund. I think playing with Callahan has a lot to do with a reinvigorated Naslund. Over his four playoff games, Callahan has averaged nearly 21 minutes of ice time, a testament to how much his coach trusts him.

What's in store for Ryan Callahan next season? He has the talent for 60-65 points, but his versatility may also work against him as a fantasy player. Partly because he can easily be moved off a scoring line, there is always a risk that he may not spend enough time with one of the top two lines to generate much more than 40 points. Still, I like his energy and I think Coach Tortorella does as well. I see a safe 50-55 points next season.

### Free Face-Washes For All

If I see much more of the gloves to the face and guys trying to rip an opponent's head off from behind during these playoff scrums go unpenalized, I think I'm going to be sick. Did anyone else notice Matt Hunwick's eye after he received a courtesy "face-wash" by Mike Komisarek? It looked like he fell face first into a belt sander and required stitches to fix the damage.

Almost no penalties are being called during these scrums and if they are, they are almost always off-setting. If there was no threat of hurting your team with an instigator penalty, or now with the possibility of suspensions, then I suspect that these group face-washing/groping sessions that seemingly happen after every whistle, would go away.

The league has seen a rapid influx of the agitating, trash-talking type players over the last few seasons, who show a general lack of respect for the "old school" code or rules of engagement as I call them. Players in the mold of Claude Lemieux and Esa Tikkanen are now a dime a dozen and it seems like every team has at least one.

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Some agitators fight willingly, some won't unless forced and others will only fight on their terms or when they think it benefits their team. If there was no instigator penalty, the pretenders would quickly be pounded into submission and kept in line by rule of the fist.

If the linesmen were to hold off jumping in right away when one of these agitator types is about to get schooled on the finer arts of taking a beating after breaking the code, then I'm certain we would have less of these cowards running around out of control.

The Donald Brashear's and Georges Laraque's are the nuclear deterrents of the league. If they are effectively legislated out of the league, then all these faux tough guys will run amok trying to agitate and intimidate the league's stars without fear of reprisal. Certainly the officials can't or won't consistently call the stuff that was previously dealt with by the team's enforcers on the ice.

While the officials aren't calling the instigator penalty nearly as often now, the threat of hurting the team by taking that penalty still exists. The official's attention is now squarely focused on obstruction fouls and this often seems to be at the expense of other infractions which can lead to frustrated players later in the game.

The powers that be have tried to "civilize" the game. Truly abhorrent acts such as deliberate attempts to injure and illegal/dirty plays that cause grievous injuries cross the line and should be looked at for supplemental discipline. NHL players assume a certain amount of risk that is inherent in playing professional ice hockey. The rule book says fighting is a five minute major penalty in the NHL, while fighting in the street might have you sitting in the sin bin for much longer than five minutes. Let's not blur the line between the two.