

Pre-Christmas Potpourri

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 17 December 2009 12:09 - Last Updated Friday, 18 December 2009 19:02



Only Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin average more ice time amongst Pens forwards than Jordan Staal, who averages over 19 minutes of playing time each night. No one on the Pens logs more short-handed minutes than Staal. Unfortunately for his fantasy hockey owners, he only receives the eighth most average power play time. That makes Staal more valuable to the Pens than on your fantasy squad.

In his last 15 games, Staal has scored 14 points. He's only 21-years-old and is in his fourth NHL season. He is also proving to be very durable, missing only one game so far in his entire NHL career. While on the surface he seems to be on pace for about the same number of points as last season, the truth is that he is very likely in the midst of having the best season of his career to date and could finish with as many as 60 points.

In his last seven games, Jordan's big brother Eric has 11 points, including a goal and two helpers last night against Dallas. He is too good to continue being as bad as he was playing. I can't see him finishing with any less than 70 points, even though Carolina is a complete write-off this season. To do that, he'll have to score at around a point-per-game pace for the rest of the season, something he should easily be able to do.

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So far this month, the Caps Tomas Fleischmann has six goals and nine points in seven games. The 25-year-old Czech has 21 points in 23 games this year and is on pace for 40 goals and 64 points. That would shatter last season's career high of 37 points. In his last two AHL seasons combined, he had 114 points in 102 games. That said, I don't think he can sustain this pace and will end up with around 30 goals and 50-plus points.

I did a double take after seeing Dan Carcillo score a power play goal and log 16:57 minutes of ice time against Pittsburgh last Tuesday night. He's not totally devoid of offensive ability. Two seasons ago, Carcillo recorded 24 points in only 57 NHL games. Over his major junior hockey career, he amassed 152 points (and 420 penalty minutes) in 161 OHL games. A coaching change can be all it takes for a player to blossom.

Rangers rookie Michael Del Zotto's is getting a chance to play top four minutes at the NHL level. Over his last 13 games played, he has received less than 20 minutes of ice time only twice. Seven of those games, he logged over 22 minutes. Of course, he's also minus-10 over that period. Still, the coach keeps sending him out there, especially when the team needs some offense.

After opening up the season with only four wins in their first 22 games (4-11-7), the Maple Leafs are 8-4-0 in their last dozen games. The Toronto Maple Leafs have turned their season around and are now only four points away from a playoff spot. That said, in this era of parity (Thank you Mr. Bettman), pretty much every team is within striking distance of a playoff spot until March. It is very difficult to put any distance between the truly good teams and the rest of the pack.

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The Toronto trio of Jason Blake, Niklas Hagman and Mikhail Grabovski each have seven points in their last eight games.

Phil Kessel is on pace to record 41 goals, 66 points and 321 shots on goal, not too bad considering he's missed 12 games so far this season.

Over the last 18 games, Matt Stajan has been held off the scoresheet (points I mean!) only four times. The 25-year-old is on pace for a career high 68 points. Okay, so that's not elite territory, but did I mention he's only 25? In his last two seasons of major junior hockey, Stajan recorded 179 points in 125 games. Does he have the requisite skills to become an elite NHL player? Probably not, but he would make a nice second line player.

Patrice Bergeron on pace for 61 points and more importantly, 82 games played. That would be the most points since suffering the serious concussion in October 2007. He has ten points in his last ten games, although six of those games he went pointless. That's frustrating for owner's making daily line-up changes. You don't want to miss the next multi-point game, but hate taking those goose eggs.

Yesterday morning, there was some discussion on an Ottawa radio station that in the wake of Spezza's knee injury, the Canadian Olympic team might want to look at Mike Fisher as a

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replacement candidate. In the evening, I watched Bob McKenzie speak about the same thing. I was flabbergasted that HE would say that. Uh guys, it's not the NHL All-Star Game and they don't have to replace an injured player with a guy from the same team. I really like what Fisher brings to the table as an NHL player and he is having a great year, but come on; who does he replace on Team Canada? It's not like Spezza was a lock for the team anyway! They are also completely different types of players, so why, when Spezza suffers an injury, would you now look to Fisher? Not a chance I say.

The fact that Antero Niittymaki has allowed four goals against in each of his last two outings is more an indictment of how the team is playing and not necessarily a reflection on his game. Tampa's "number one" goalie, Mike Smith isn't faring any better, allowing three goals against in each of his last three appearances. Niittymaki's numbers are too good to ignore, especially when you compare them to Smith's.