(Part One)

(Part Two)

Going stride for stride with my Western Conference counterpart, I am providing an Eastern Conference version of Ryan Ma's *Earmarked for Success*. As Ryan has cautioned, please do not fret over the line combinations. We are merely separating the top-six players from the bottom-six on each team, which can be applied to potential fantasy success for the upcoming season. Top-six players obviously get the lion's share of ice time, both at even strength and on the power play.

I decided not to use the same terminology Ryan uses, so here's a quick breakdown of mine if you couldn't figure it out. Keep in mind that this terminology should be applied for fantasy hockey purposes in the coming season only.

- **Golden Boys** – Each team's top six. The top-six role is theirs to lose.
- **Challengers** – These guys want to crack their way into the top six and depending on the situation, they just may.
- **Checkers** – these players are essentially fourth line players. Some may have very bright futures, but the path of the current team doesn't seem to have top-nine minutes in store for them.

I'll look at three or four teams each week, going in alphabetical order. Here's Part Three.

New York Islanders – top six penciled in, with spots to lose

Golden Boys
Matt Moulson – John Tavares – P.A. Parenteau
Michael Grabner – Frans Nielsen – Kyle Okposo
Challengers
Josh Bailey*, Blake Comeau*, Nino Niederreiter*, and Marty Reasoner
Checkers
Jesse Joensuu, Trent Hunter, Matt Martin, and Trevor Gillies

Kyle Okposo's injury in last year's training camp opened the door for P.A. Parenteau and he seized it with full authority. Parenteau finished second on the Isles in points last year and continued to skate on the top line even after Okposo returned. With that chemistry, the Moulson-Tavares-Parenteau line will undoubtedly begin the season together. Grabner and Okposo are two of the brighter stars currently in the Islanders lineup and both should be top-six locks. Nielsen is extremely underrated and has established himself as a capable second line center as well. These Golden Boys should begin the year in a top role, but they will have very strong pressure from the challengers.

Nino Niederreiter will be given an opportunity to make the team out of camp, but assuming Marty Reasoner is slated to center the third line, Niederreiter will have to really turn some heads to knock someone off. **Josh Bailey** and **Blake Comeau** are both RFA's, but it's likely both will remain in Long Island, at least to start the season. Comeau has filed for arbitration and Bailey, who was rushed into the NHL, has had trouble with consistency. He was even demoted to Bridgeport last season, where he dominated, scoring 17 points in 11 games. If Bailey comes into camp strong, he could look to bump someone in the top-six (the talent is there), but if he continues to show signs of inconsistency, he may waste away on the third line and even find himself traded.

Trent Hunter and Jesse Joensuu (also an RFA) are both capable fill-ins, but don't expect either to stick in the top-nine all season unless this team is unable to retain Bailey, Comeau, and Joensuu.

New York Rangers – top six fairly secure, should take injury or trade for a challenger to

rise

Golden Boys
Artem Anisimov – Brad Richards – Marian Gaborik
Brandon Dubinsky – Derek Stepan – Ryan Callahan
Challengers
Ruslan Fedotenko – Brian Boyle – **Mats Zuccarello**
Checkers
Mike Rupp, Erik Christensen, Sean Avery, Brandon Prust, and Wojtek Wolski*

These lines run under the assumption that Wojtek Wolski has been bought out and Chris Drury is still unable to play, which has been rumored to be true all summer. I'm not sure what Tortorella has against Wolski, but in the limited post-season action for the Rangers, Wolski's three points actually led this team. If they manage to keep him, expect him to slot in as a challenger, bumping Zuccarello.

Brandon Dubinsky is definitely a Golden Boy and will be tried out on the Richards/Gaborik line. I believe this spot will eventually land with Anisimov though, as Derek Stepan is being groomed as the number-two center, and if he needs someone to step in and take a draw, Dubinsky would be the perfect fit. If Dubinsky, Stepan, and the newly-signed Ryan Callahan can find chemistry, the Rangers will be an exciting team to watch with a lethal attack. If anyone will get bumped from the top-six by healthy competition, it will likely be Anisimov as the Rangers search for the perfect wing on their top line.

Fedotenko, Boyle, and Prust were the Rangers third line almost the entire season and Boyle has solid chemistry with Prust, but the energetic Zuccarello would perform better in this spot.

Sean Avery and Brandon Prust can prove to provide valuable fantasy contributions in PIMs and hits if they make it on to the third line, while Erik Christensen will need to crack the top-six to provide fantasy-relevant statistics. Avery and Prust both have an equal chance of winning Zuccarello's spot as a challenger, but I have my money on the pint-sized Zuccarello.

Ottawa Senators – a few locks and a war for the remaining spots

Golden Boys
Nikita Filatov – Jason Spezza – Bobby Butler
Milan Michalek – **Nick Foligno** – Daniel Alfredsson
Challengers
Peter Regin, Colin Greening, Erik Condra, and Stephane Da Costa*
Checkers
Zack Smith, **Zenon Konopka, Chris Neil**, and Jesse Winchester

It's unlikely that the Senators acquired Filatov to have him skate in a third-line role, so he should

be pegged for at least one of the top two lines. Over the last 10 games of the season, Jason Spezza and Bobby Butler were on the ice together for 51% of the Senators goals (29/57) and the two will most likely begin the year together again. Milan Michalek will likely be handed the second-line role to start, but he could easily be demoted to the third line or even waived/buried in the AHL. Nick Foligno and Daniel Alfredsson are likely to round out the top-six to begin the year.

With the Senators season over fairly early last year, the team had the luxury of experimenting with a number of players from their farm club. **Colin Greening** and **Erik Condra** performed quite well in their limited time. Although they averaged 25 games between the two of them, they also each saw over 15 minutes of ice time, during which time they were used in scoring roles. Peter Regin will look to recover from his disappointing season, but after scoring only three goals in 55 games, he might not be the first one called upon for a top-six role.
Stephane Da Costa
would fill in great as a third-line challenger, but he carries a two-way contract, which often times translates to a season split between Binghamton and Ottawa.

Zenon Konopka and Chris Neil are fully capable of third-line duties, but the coaching staff will likely save those minutes for the more offensively talented up-and-coming players.