(Part One)

(Part Two)

(Part Three)

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 Four.

Philadelphia Flyers – top-six clearer than it's been in years

Golden Boys
Scott Hartnell – Daniel Briere – **Jaromir Jagr**
James van Riemsdyk – Claude Giroux – Jakub Voracek
Challengers
Maxime Talbot, **Brayden Schenn, Wayne Simmonds**, and Andreas Nodl
Checkers
Jody Shelley, Blair Betts, **Matt Read**

The Philadelphia Flyers have had nothing short of a massive overhaul that caught nearly everyone by surprise. If two months ago anyone (outside of Adam Shemansky) said the Flyers' 2011-12 roster would include Jagr and exclude Carter and Richards, they'd be burned at the stake. But that's exactly what happened.

Briere typically has strong chemistry with veterans rather than emerging youngsters, which makes Jagr a likely candidate to replace Ville Leino. Scott Hartnell will stick with Briere and James van Riemsdyk will stick with Claude Giroux, leaving two new faces, Jagr and Voracek, to find homes in the top-six. No matter what the line combinations, these should be the ones eating up ice time.

Jagr cited the Flyers' top centermen (both right-handed) as being a perfect complement on the power-play and he should receive plenty of ice time to prove it was the right move. Despite being somewhat criticized for his age and "fading ability," consider this. In Jagr's last NHL season, he scored 71 points. That was with talent like Gomez, Drury, and an aging pair of Shanahan and Straka around him. In Jagr's last season in the KHL, he scored over a point-per-game, something that only nine other players were able to do (for players who played at least 3 games). He also tied for eighth in scoring. Yes, he's older, but he will have Briere, Hartnell, Giroux, JVR, Schenn, or Simmonds to skate with. Not Gomez or Drury.

Schenn should have no problem taking the third-line center duties, but will certainly need an injury to Briere or Giroux to see top-six time. Simmonds is likely destined for the third-line role as well, but he will have the opportunity to unseat Voracek for a top-six role if he can earn it. Nodl and Talbot are less likely to show fantasy relevance this year.

Matt Read is a darkhorse candidate to make the team and turn some heads, but there are not really any holes for him to break through. The talent might be there, but the opportunity is not.

**Fact – Jagr's 50 points tied him for eighth in KHL scoring last year…with Matt Ellison, the player who Philadelphia acquired for Patrick Sharp years ago. I'll bet you didn't think you'd see Ellison's name ever again…at least Flyers fans hoped they wouldn't.*

Pittsburgh Penguins – top-six mostly secure with a couple jobs available to win

Golden Boys
Chris Kunitz – Sidney Crosby – **James Neal**
Evgeni Malkin – Jordan Staal – Steve Sullivan
Challengers
Pascal Dupuis, **Mark Letestu**, and Tyler Kennedy
Checkers
Matt Cooke, Craig Adams, Arron Asham, **Eric Tangradi*, and Dustin Jeffrey***

Sidney Crosby has resumed skating and looks to be on pace to begin the year with the Penguins, but any time a player misses 40+ games due to a concussion, fantasy owners should be *at least* slightly concerned. If he is fully recovered, Crosby will likely line up with his usual LW, Chris Kunitz. The RW slot will be fair game, but expect **James Neal** to get the first crack. When Neal was acquired last season, Crosby and Malkin were both injured.

As a result, Neal's primary linemate was Jordan Staal. This year he'll have an opportunity to play with Malkin or Crosby. Speaking of Geno, despite playing in 43 games last season, Evgeni Malkin took less than five faceoffs per game. Expect him to line up on the wing and Jordan Staal to emerge as Pittsburgh's number-two center. The newly-signed Steve Sullivan should be penciled in for a top-six role and could produce well this year. If you read my portion of the Guide, you'd see him as one of my sleeper picks, but it should also be stated that Sully has only a one year, $1.5 million contract with no clauses, making him easily expendable if the experiment does not work out.

Pascal Dupuis has spent most of his days in Pittsburgh in a top-six role, but he's had a lot less competition in years past and he's going to have to step up his game to earn it this year. **Mark Letestu**
has proven he's a capable center, taking the fourth-most draws on the team and winning 55.4%, only 0.3% lower than Crosby. Tyler Kennedy should be a lock for this line as well, providing occasional offense, but with the additions of Sullivan and Neal, and a healthy Malkin and Crosby, Kennedy won't see as much ice time as he saw last spring.

Cooke, Adams, and Asham will be a menace to opposing lines and should provide decent PIM contributions. Cooke and Asham will produce more offense to go with the PIMs than Adams though. Tangradi and Jeffrey have an outside chance of making the team, but their two-way contracts almost certainly have them destined to start the year in Wilkes-Barre. Look for a few cups of coffee as the year progresses, but don't select them on draft day. Monitor their call-ups

as the season progresses and use a waiver claim rather than a draft pick.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Golden Boys
Steve Downie – Steven Stamkos – Martin St. Louis
Ryan Malone– Vincent Lecavalier – Teddy Purcell
Challengers
Mattias Ritola, Dominic Moore, Ryan Shannon, and **Carter Ashton***
Checkers
Dana Tyrell, Nate Thompson, Adam Hall, and Brett Connolly

Tampa is basically the same team as last year, with the addition of Ryan Shannon and the subtraction of Simon Gagne. Stamkos and St. Louis are still an elite tandem and one of Malone or Downie should get the privilege of skating on with the top duo. Lecavalier and Purcell developed very good chemistry as the season came to a close, but the third cog of that line was Gagne. I have my money on the other of Downie or Malone filling into this slot, but I have seen others give the nod to Shannon.

Dominic Moore is a very effective third-line center. He can fill in on a temporary basis in an increased role, but he is best suited in third-line duties. That leaves Ritola and Shannon being

the two strongest challengers. If anyone were to break into the top-six, expect it to be Shannon. Shannon's had a hard time living up to expectations, but the same could have been said (albeit to a lesser degree) about Purcell last year. Perhaps if the two line up together, we'll see a surge in Shannon's career as well. When Ritola arrived in Norfolk last year, he absolutely dominated, scoring 27 points in 17 games, then adding eight in 31 NHL games. He'll have to beat out Tyrell, but Ritola's offensive ability should win a third-line role, rather than a fourth.

Carter Ashton is certainly not a lock to make the team, but he has clearly expressed his desire to play in the NHL this year. So much so, that he is willing to play in a checking role rather than a scoring role. "Whatever it takes" is basically the attitude that Ashton is taking. While that may not lead to fantasy relevant statistics this season, the attitude could earn him key opportunities during another player's cold spell. How he performs in those opportunities may lead to a more permanently increased role. Ashton will be entering his first pro season after a 71-point, 106-PIM season in 62 games in the WHL.

If Ashton were to make the team, it would be one of Ritola or Tyrell who got bumped. Thompson and Hall are well liked by the coaching staff and are effective checking players. Neither will likely challenge for top minutes, but are effective team players.

Brett Connolly is listed as a checker in this article, but that is mostly because I expect him to spend the year in the AHL. Brett is also coming off a strong season in the WHL, but is less likely to take a checking role if he were able to make the team. This would more likely translate to one more year in the WHL. Although Connolly has signed his ELC, he is still only 19 years old and ineligible for the AHL.

Up next week are the Maple Leafs, Capitals, and Jets.