Looking at some intriguing fantasy hockey newcomers in the Eastern Conference

Finally, we have something to actually write about! It's hard to beat real NHL game action. This week I wanted to take a look at some of the Eastern Conference's newbies who have made an early splash. Are they likely to continue, fade away or will they crash hard the day after you pick them up in your fantasy league? Let's find out who caught my eye this week:

The Maple Leafs Michael Kostka has been playing on the top defense pairing with Dion Phaneuf
and hasn't looked out of place. Kostka received the second most even-strength minutes on the Leafs (Phaneuf was tops) and he's killing it in power play ice time, receiving the most on Toronto, tied with
Joffrey Lupul

. Kostka had 34 points in 34 games with the Marlies when the lockout ended and was second only behind Justin Schultz in AHL defense scoring. Two seasons ago he recorded 54 points in 80 AHL games. The fact that the 27-year-old is listed at six foot two inches and 210 pounds doesn't hurt either. Will Gardiner's return cut into Kostka's man advantage time? Maybe, but in the meantime, if you have a slot to burn and like living dangerously, then Kostka is your guy.

VERDICT: Strangely Optimistic

Another guy who has taken the scenic route to the NHL is the Hurricanes Bobby Sanguinetti . The 24-year-old has beaten out
Jamie McBain
for the number six slot on Carolina's back end and has received some decent second unit power play ice time. A former New York Rangers first round pick from 2006 (21st overall) has spent more than a few years fine-tuning his defensive game, but his offensive output has been high octane at every level so far. In his last year of junior hockey, he recorded an eye-popping 29 goals and 70 points in 61 games. Last season, he scored 50 points in only 60 AHL games. That said, Carolina's blueline is a crowded affair, so if someone other than Pitkanen (he's the only lock) goes into a minor slump, they will find themselves replaced on the man advantage unit in short order.

VERDICT: Dicey, but if he starts producing on the power play, jump all over this one.

Through two games, Tampa Bay's Cory Conacher has logged just under 15 minutes of ice time per game, but more importantly he has averaged the eighth most power play time for the Lightning. Last year, the 23-year-old was the AHL's leading scorer with 80 points in 75 games, Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player. This year, he has four points in two games and is being given a chance to showcase his abilities with players who can capitalize when the opportunity arises (Stamkos and St. Louis!). There is nothing worse than putting an offensive player on the fourth line with guys who have hands of steel, giving him less than ten minutes of ice time per game and then expecting him to produce.

VERDICT: Promising...Definitely a Buy Now if he's available in your league, although it's likely a day late and a dollar short.

With three points in his NHL debut, Jonathan Huberdeau looks like he is going to live up to his stud status. The hype was there because he recorded back to back years with nine points at the World Junior Hockey Championship for Canada and over his last two seasons of major junior, he scored a combined 73 goals and 177 points in 104 games. Not only that, but in 2011-12, he won the QMJHL Paul Dumont Trophy for Personality of the Year, which ranks just behind Scholastic Player of the Year awards. Oh yeah, the previous year he was the Memorial Cup Most Valuable Player, which is slightly more prestigious than those other two awards. It's kind of cool that he has started the season along side uber-talented NHL veteran "Weird" Al Kovalev and former WHL Top Draft Prospect Award winner Pete "Ferris" Mueller.

VERDICT: This ship has likely sailed in your league, but if can pry him loose during some rough waters, do not hesitate.

Although he has no points in two games and is averaging only 11:13 of ice time per contest, Scott Laughton has become one of my favourite players. Just watch him play and you'll see why I'm a fan; nothing but hard work and he makes things happen nearly every time he is on the ice. In his last year of junior hockey, Laughton had 53 points in 64 games, so he doesn't project to be a big scorer in the NHL, but he will be an integral part of a winning team and potential Team Captain material.

VERDICT: A poor man's Mike Richards ...in another year or two.

Parting Shots

Dougie Hamilton 's ice time increased from 13:40 in his first game to 23:27 in his second contest, signifying that he is going to be given the opportunity to play some big minutes, including power play time.

The Thomas Vanek - Cody Hodgson - Jason Pominville line is off to a fantastic start to the season with 13 points between them after only two games.

I know it's only been one game and it was a 5-1 blowout loss at that, but Justin Faulk logged the most total ice time and fifth most power play time amongst Hurricanes.

Missing Lube? Not Isles defenseman Andrew MacDonald , who has averaged the fifth most time on ice in the NHL and has logged second unit power play minutes.

After only two games, Dustin Byfuglien has played more than 13 minutes with the man advantage.

If Ottawa can keep their defense from springing too many leaks, they might actually make some noise in the East. Anderson can be dominant in goal and their top three lines look very good to me: Michalek-Spezza-Silfverberg, Alfredsson-Turris-Latendresse and Neil-Z.Smith-Greening...or it could just be that they were playing against the Jets and Panthers.

Until next week!

Also by Miller:

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