How quickly things can change. McBain was everyone's (myself included) preseason darling. A rookie defenseman who could defy the odds and put up big points. Why? He had some nice pedigree as a second rounder back in '06 and a two-time member of Team USA at the WJC. He was also the 08/09 WCHA player of the year after recording 37 points in 40 games at the University of Wisconsin. So yeah, he was a great prospect, but it was his cameo at the end of last season (10 points in 14 games) that had us buzzing. So what went wrong? It was simply two oversights:

1) Joe Corvo was actually good enough to steal his powerplay time despite being a collossal failure for Carolina in his previous stint with the team.

2) McBain is a rookie, you can't really expect consistency from even the best of rookies. (Right Taylor Hall, Steven Stamkos, John Tavares?) In retrospect 14 games was simply too small a sample size to base predictions on. Keep that in mind for this year's crop of late season call-ups.

So he stumbled out of the gate with just five points in the first two months. Then all of a sudden he pops when the calendar turns to 2011. He's got seven points through eight games in the New Year. It can't be as simple as him adjusting his watch, so what has changed to allow him to pop?

It's no secret that a defenseman's production is directly linked to powerplay time. McBain was on the second unit with Corvo-Pitkanen manning the first unit. So what happens? Pitkanen goes down in their December 28 game against Toronto and misses the next five games. McBain's production takes off from there.

Oddly enough Pitkanen and McBain form a pairing at even strength, but Pitkanen is a minutes eater and he was gobbling up all of Carolina's top powerplay minutes. So when Pitkanen went down McBain stepped up huge, receiving big minutes and teaming up with Corvo on the top powerplay unit. McBain played over 18 minutes in half of Carolina's first 35 games, but in the five games Pitkanen was out he did that every game.

Since Pitkanen's return the minutes have been down but the powerplay time has remained. He continues to play on the top unit and I suspect he'll stay there until he stumbles for a prolonged period. The powerplay is clicking at over 34% since Pitkanen went down and McBain took over. That success speaks for itself even if it is a small sample size.

Now I do have my concerns that as Pitkanen gets healthier we'll see him take some of the minutes back. Pitkanen led the league in ice time last season and averages over 24 minutes a game on the season but only has one game for over 24 since he's been back. He's clearly still getting back into the flow. With that considered, I don't think they'll mess with things as long as McBain has them clicking.

The important thing here is to keep a watch on McBain's powerplay time. Sure half of the points in his recent surge didn't come on the powerplay but that's a confidence thing. You get the offensive minutes and you get into the flow and things start going in for you. As long as McBain is on the top unit we should see him producing. The minute he gets taken off it's time to jump ship.

I like him for a big second half because Carolina is one of the better offensive teams in the league and he is improving their middle of the pack powerplay. I also think that not having to log so many powerplay minutes will be good for Pitkanen because he's a notoriously injury prone player and this will reduce the load while freeing him up to log all the dirty minutes. Give McBain a shot if you haven't already. Last season's cameo proved one thing, if nothing else that he can get hot for extended period's. I'll hop on this hot streak even if it's all it amounts to.

This also serves notice that last season was no fluke. He's got the talent and is ready to produce now. He's an obvious person of interest for all keeper leagues.

As always this was originally posted: http://stevelaidlawsports.blogspot.com/ as well as in the PG Advised Forum on DobberHockey