

## The Thin Blue Line

Written by Vincent Iacono

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 11:24 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47

---



The clock begins its countdown. Your buddies stare at you with a look of anticipation on their faces as you clumsily shuffle your papers around, trying to judge which remaining player on the board represents the highest value for your pick. You finally identify Mike Green and Rick Nash as potential candidates for the respected and esteemed spot on your roster. However, the counter on your internet browser turns red and you only have 10 seconds left! Its become a question of positional value now as your cursor hovers over and ultimately clicks, with one second to spare, the...

Venerable goal-scorer from the Columbus Blue Jackets of course! Over the course of last

## The Thin Blue Line

Written by Vincent Iacono

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 11:24 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47

---

season, many fantasy hockey general managers realized that the defense position, while home to some of the league's most consistent performers, is very conducive to volatile situations as players often over or under perform. It becomes almost nauseating to keep up with the multitude of players to either add or drop during the regular season. Mike Green, Drew Doughty, Duncan Keith and Jay Bouwmeester are a couple of players who disappointed and frustrated fantasy owners this season. While luck can have a propensity to be wildly distributed between players, there are always certain signs to look out for that can ultimately win, or lose, your hockey pool. That is why many fantasy enthusiasts have developed a strategy to draft offense first, and then turn to lower round defense-men as a source of points and PIMs. The classic candidate for the break-out is the defenseman (who is 25-years-old or younger) with 25-30 points accrued in the previous season, and who has seen his spot on the depth-chart move up a bit due to trade or free-agency.

At the beginning of the season, it is important to analyze different teams' depth charts, and watch their preseason games in an effort to ascertain how they plan to use their defensemen. This method can be particularly applied to the ascension of Kris Letang from the rank of relative fantasy unknown to steal. With the departure of Sergei Gonchar, the former captain of Team Canada's junior squad took the Penguins power play in his own hands, and developed an amazing chemistry with Sidney Crosby, which led to a 50-point season. The list goes on with Dustin Byfuglien, and to a lesser extent, Keith Yandle, Lubomir Visnovsky and James Wisniewski who all greatly exceeded expectations and are considered to be great picks or steals.

Without further deliberation, here is a list of potential fantasy break-out candidates who patrol the blue line and could stand in between order and chaos for your mid-to-deep fantasy roster:

**Dmitri Kulikov**

## The Thin Blue Line

Written by Vincent Iacono

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 11:24 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47

---

With the departure of teammate Bryan McCabe, the 20-year-old Russian is in line to see an increase in both power-play and total ice-time. While he is still learning to play more effectively on both sides of the ice, the former winner of the Raymond Lagacé Trophy played with more visible confidence in the second half last year, and was a popular add in the dying weeks of the 2010-2011 fantasy season. While 26 points is nothing to sneeze at, Kulikov will almost certainly never hit as low of a point total as that for the rest of his NHL career (unless the injury bug bites). While his fortunes may live and die with the success of a weak Florida Panthers hockey team, there certainly is the potential for a 45 point season next year if David Booth and Stephen Weiss play better than they have the past two years. A more reasonable projection though is 35-40 points with 60 PIMs and 110 shots, which would be about equal to Ryan Suter's performance last year, so draft accordingly.

### Jamie McBain

McBain was in fact drafted late in many leagues this year, and while he did not truly impress, the outlook on him for the 2011-12 season is still quite high. This is because his teammate, Joni Pitkanen, (25 minutes of ice-time per game) is set to become an unrestricted free agent. While the 30 point scorer will not immediately step into his (perhaps) former teammates shoes in terms of ice-time, he will absorb his power-play time. With Joe Corvo visibly losing a step, this puts Jamie McBain in the enviable position of potentially quarterbacking a power-play unit with Eric Staal and Jeff Skinner. This all but guarantees an increase in points total, and the 23-year-old should have little trouble posting a 40 point season with double-digit goals and 120 shots.

### Erik Johnson

Anyone would be hard-pressed not to admit that the Colorado Avalanche have a hard season ahead of them next year, but there are a couple of bright spots, including Erik Johnson. A former first overall draft pick, Johnson should already be a superstar in his own right. While the stars have not aligned, and the defenseman will probably never be the game-breaking player he was drafted to be, there is still hope for a fantasy relevant season from the 23-year-old. He will go into training camp with a tight grasp on the top pairing and power-play duties, and will certainly not be relinquishing it. At such a relatively young age, Johnson still has lots of time to improve. He will take a big step next season and, if everyone stays healthy, should enjoy a career year in Denver with his teammates Paul Stastny, Matt Duchene and Milan Hejduk, with a strong possibility to hit 45 points, and get 12 or 13 goals.

### Dan Girardi

A defensive mastermind and team player, Dan Girardi took a large step offensively last year, putting up 31 points, up from the 18 he had posted in the three previous seasons. While he will always be a defense-first player, and will certainly be a Godsend to those in pools that count hits and blocked shots, the undrafted Ranger is tops on the depth chart and will have plenty of opportunities to accrue both primary secondary assists on goals by his teammates Marian Gaborik, Ryan Callahan, Brandon Dubinsky and potentially (I don't want to jinx it!) Brad Richards next year. With his workhorse attitude, (over 24 minutes of ice per game) Girardi's point total should only increase next year as he works on his offensive game. Expect 35 points with a 30% chance of hitting 40 and tons of blocked shots.

## The Thin Blue Line

Written by Vincent Iacono

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 11:24 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47

---

*This was an article contributed through our Black Aces project. If you are interested in having a column published on DobberHockey, post one in the [Black Aces section](#) of the forum. If we like it and we need some content (it happens, from time to time), then we'll use it!*