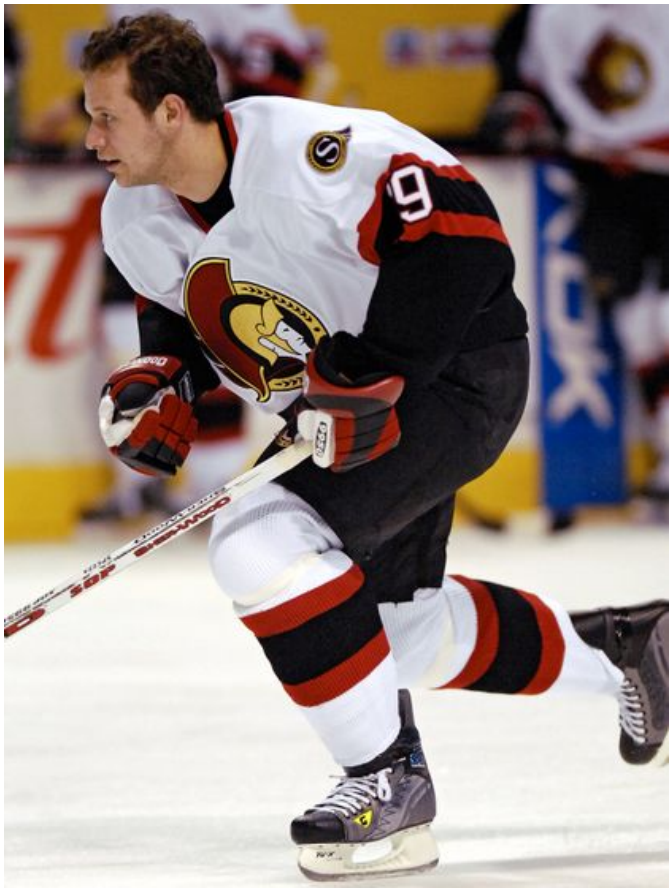

Regardless of what type of fantasy league you are in. Whether you are preparing for the initial draft, an expansion draft, a supplemental draft or midseason trades and roster adds/drops, these three concepts will give you an added edge towards fantasy pool supremacy among your peers.

Identifying Talent

Watching a lot of hockey is a great means of identifying talent. Granted, it is much less time consuming to buy a newsstand magazine such as McKeens or the Forecaster, or get an online ranking from a website like dobberhockey.com - and they will certainly help. But seeing a player with your own eyes is a genuinely reliable means of finding talent. Watching lots of NHL hockey is the most important way to understand how a player will perform in the NHL. There have been countless players who dominated other leagues but failed to translate that success into the NHL. Watching players allows you to see how well certain players compare against others in regards to different skill sets such as skating ability, shooting, passing, and hitting. Get as much information that you can from online and print media to help your talent analysis, but watch the games yourself.

Not a pro scout, you say? Not sure what to look for? Perhaps this will help.

Scouting

Gus Katsaros who scouts and writes for Mckeens once told me "when scouting a player look for the four S's: Skating, Speed, Skill, and Smarts. Players who posses all four are elite superstars (like Sidney Crosby). A player who has three is a star (like Jason Spezza). Players who demonstrate only two are valuable better-than-average players (such as David Backes). If a player only has one, no matter how good he is at it, he is not likely to pan out into a top-tier

player. Therefore not worthy of serious consideration. A good example of this is Rob Schremp. Loads of talent, but little else to go with it. Lets take a closer look at the four S's.

What to look for in terms of skating:

Foot speed and agility or balance. There is a difference between quickness and speed. Don't be fooled by a player who is quick down low or in the corners to thinking he is fast. As for agility, is he smooth skating backwards and laterally?

Smarts or hockey sense

Does he make good plays consistently? Or does he turn the puck over by making blind drop passes at the blue line (Jason Spezza). Does he get position on defenders, find open ice, create picks making room for teammates or just stand around waiting for something to happen. Is he leading the play or following it?

Skill

Skill is easier to notice. Goal and assist stats are a clear indication that players like Steven Stamkos have skill. But look for more subtle details. Can he make and receive hard, smooth passes consistently? Does he take, and win key faceoffs? Can he stickhandle and deke past defenders and on shootouts? Can he handle the puck while skating at top speed?

Speed

Speed is perhaps the most obvious to notice. Does he have elite level speed that allows him to separate himself from or catch up to other players?

Opportunity

Knowing a player's talent level is important, but the opportunity he currently has to work with is

a significant influence on his value. Tyler Seguin is supremely talented but a little buried on a deep Boston depth chart, for example. Look at the team's depth chart (thn.com) and understand what opportunities he will have. Top six forward or top four defender? Starting goalie or backup? Will he see any time on the power play? Is the team he plays on any good or will his plus/minus bring down his value? Is he an overpriced, declining veteran fighting off younger, more talented prospects?

Talent, scouting and opportunity are three key factors you need to constantly be analyzing from your initial draft and onward to be best prepared to make the most informed decisions in managing your fantasy roster. It is not easy. It is time consuming. It is also fun, but most of all, it works! And the reward of being champion at the end of the season is more rewarding than any prize money you will win.