

15 Players out West That Will Make or Break Your Fantasy Season

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 05 October 2010 14:13 - Last Updated Thursday, 07 October 2010 10:36



Every year there seems to be a few players that come out of nowhere to magically to give you a surprising boost, (Henrik Sedin, Ilya Bryzgalov, Craig Anderson, Jimmy Howard, or Tom Gilbert last season), or one that you ranked so highly but ended up destroying your season because you invested so highly on them, (Steve Mason, Bobby Ryan, or Evgeni Malkin). With two days before the first puck drops in the 2010-11 season, hopefully I can provide you with a last-minute look of some players out West who will either make or break your fantasy season.

Jonas Hiller – G- Anaheim Ducks

Hiller will pretty much be the saviour of your fantasy season or the giant goat. Angus doesn't have much love for Hiller, but I'm slightly more optimistic, (probably because I own him in the Dobber Expert League). Hiller owns a NHL career 2.49 GAA along with a .920 save percentage, which is certainly nothing to scoff at. What also really impressed me was his Olympic display of

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2.47 GAA and .918 save percentage against pretty much the world's best in Vancouver. The Ducks defensive corps isn't all that flash but you have to think that Lubomir Visnovsky, Toni Lydman, Andy Sutton, Sheldon Brookbank, Paul Mara and Luca Sbisa, is at least better than Yannick Weber, Patrick Von Gunten, Philippe Furrer, Mathias Seger, Rafael Diaz, Severin Blidenbacher, Mark Streit and Sbisa, isn't it?

Olli Jokinen – C – Calgary Flames

I deliberated between selecting Jokinen or Alex Tanguay for this column. The problem with Tanguay is that he's essentially useless from a fantasy perspective if you take into account the peripheral stats of +/-, PIM and SOG. Even if he has a solid rebound season to post say 70+ points, he'll still be pretty useless for many poolies, which is why I went with the make or break in Jokinen instead. On a whole, he's being drafted, (or not at all), in the 160's. If he can make it back to "vintage" Jokinen numbers, owners who took the leap of faith could very well be laughing by season's end, especially when he posts Vinny Lecavalier-like numbers.

Patrick Kane – RW – Chicago Blackhawks

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It might be a shock to many of you to see Kane's name appear for such a list, but if you consider where he's being drafted in Yahoo! leagues at the moment, (on average 20.3, between Drew Doughty and Joe Thornton), along with the stats that he produces, (or the ones that he doesn't), he certainly could be considered over-rated at the moment. The expectations are sky-high for the fourth-year American, but I just don't know if he'll live up to standards. If you consider the depth that there is available in RW, as well the alternatives available in the next two-three rounds, (Marian Gaborik, Jarome Iginla, Martin St. Louis, Alex Semin, Rick Nash and Corey Perry), there could be a possibility that Kane leaves plenty of owners disappointed come April.

Paul Stastny – C – Colorado Avalanche

Does Stastny have that next gear? That's the main question that will be on many poolies' minds heading into 2010-11. Last season we were surprised by Henrik Sedin's outburst, and if you've been following my columns/forum posts throughout the summer, you'll know exactly where my thoughts lie with Stastny. On average he's been selected as the 21st center in Yahoo! drafts, and well worth a roster spot as a number two center. If he can smash out an Art Ross season a la Sedin, that would certainly result in quite a few happy owners,(and gloating rights for me), this season.

Steve Mason – G – Columbus Blue Jackets

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Will the real Steve Mason please stand up? In 2010-11, will we see the 2.29 and .916 Mason? Or will we see the 3.05 and .901 Mason? What's interesting is that when I broke the stats down a little further, he actually had home/away splits of: away: 6-14-4, 3.65 GAA, .886 sv% and home: 14-12-5, 2.60 GAA, .914 sv%. So there were definitely some positives that came out of last season. If you break it down even further to home starts after the Olympics, he actually posted mind-boggling numbers of: 6-3-2, 2.02 GAA, along with .937 sv% and 3 SO in the final 11 home contests. If you've snagged Mason as a number three goalie, and he returns back to this rookie form, that'll certainly light a fire under your fantasy squad.

Kari Lehtonen – G – Dallas Stars

Continuing along the same goalie lines, Lehtonen's health will certainly control the fate of many fantasy squads. If you take a look at his career numbers 2.84 GAA and .912 save percentage, they're actually quite respectable. The problem for him has always been the dreaded injury bug. If he can manage to avoid the IR list this campaign, Lehtonen could certainly be a huge boost for someone's fantasy roster. Definitely consider him as a major make or break candidate for 2010-11.

Jiri Hudler – RW - Detroit Red Wings

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After a year away from the NHL, it'll be interesting to see what this fantasy season holds for Hudler. I'll place him in the exact same boat as fellow NHL flee-er, Nikolai Zherdev. Both players are returning back to the NHL game, and have returned to fairly deep rosters. Last time Hudler donned an NHL jersey he did put up 57 point that season, which is definitely a positive sign. If you managed to snag him as a depth RWer, a 65-70 point outcome would certainly give a positive spin on your season.

Shawn Horcoff – C- Edmonton Oilers

There are probably three or four players that I could probably list as make or break candidates from the underachieving Oilers last campaign, but I thought I'd go after the big fish. From all of the ramblings coming out of Edmonton, Horcoff has been the best player for the Oil this pre-season and could be a huge rebound candidate, (Dobber should be happy). If he reaches back to his near point-per-game ways, he could be a massive steal.

Dustin Brown – RW – Los Angeles Kings

We've pretty much waited three seasons for Brown to finally reach the next level. The question that remains is whether or not 2010-11 is finally the season that we've been waiting for? Kings coach Terry Murray has stated that he liked the chemistry that the big three of Ryan Smyth, Anze Kopitar and Brown had together during the pre-season, and is strongly considering keeping the three together to start the season. The SOG, (career 2.68 SOG/game average),

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and the PIMs, (career 0.72 PIMs/game average), are plenty useful, but if Brown can find that next gear to chip in with 80 points, he could become the complete package.

Cam Barker – D – Minnesota Wild

Barker was buried by depth in his time in Chicago, which resulted in him being traded to Minnesota to give him a bit more opportunity last season. That is the same problem that he is going to face once again as he'll be buried behind Marek Zidlicky and Brent Burns. The positive is that he did managed to garner 22:01 and 2:32 on the PP last campaign, so if he can manage to repeat those numbers, his stats could be quite fantasy worthy come season's end. The 24-year old is getting into that range where d-men start to see their offensive production take off, so are you going to hop on the 2010-11 Barker express?

Matthew Lombardi – C – Nashville Predators

If you look at the numbers, (57 points, 19 PPP, 44 PIMs, and 212.5 SOG), that Jason Arnott tallied in his time as the number one C in Nashville, you would think that Lombardi is poised to have himself a pretty good season. If you also take into account the injury factor with Arnott, his numbers would have equated closer to 68 points, 23 PPP, 53 PIMs, and 253 SOG for a full 82-game season. I'm not saying Lombardi is in the same offensive league as Arnott, but I would at least say that they are within a comparable ballpark. If Lombardi is remotely close to those numbers that I projected above, I'd certainly be one happy owner.

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Ilya Bryzgalov – G – Phoenix Coyotes

Bryzgalov's line last season was definitely impressive. He finished third in wins, sixth in GAA, and eighth in save percentage amongst all number one goaltenders in the NHL. The question is was it for real or was it really an inceptive dream? If you delve a little deeper, Coyotes' coach Dave Tippett has had a history of playing strong defensive-minded hockey.

Year

GAA (ranking in the league)

Shots Allowed Per Game

2002-03

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Third

Fifth

2003-04

Second

First

2005-06

Sixth

Second

2006-07

Third

Second

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2007-08

Sixth

Fourth

2008-09

Twenty-Fifth*

Fifth

2009-10

Third

Twelfth

* Blame Turco for that one.

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Bryz is currently the fifth goalie taken overall in Yahoo! leagues, but I wouldn't be surprised if he ends up as the number one ranked goalie, (to the joy and delight of poolies), at season's end. If you're looking for a good comparison, I'd think Marty Turco in the early/mid-2000's with a better save percentage is a fair comparison.

Devin Setoguchi – RW - San Jose Sharks

This really is the make or break season for the Taber Alberta native. We've seen a few glimpses of brilliance, (65 points in 2008-09), and plenty of shadows of doubt, (36 points last campaign). Granted he was probably hindered all season long with a leg injury that he suffered in mid-November, so we can give him some leeway for an explanation to last season. But heading into a contract year, he'll need to have a strong start to earn the trust back from many fantasy poolies. If he manages to get back into the good books with another 65 point campaign, you can bet that there will be plenty of happy owners come April.

Jaroslav Halak – G - St. Louis Blues

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Was there a bigger off-season acquisition than Halak this summer? He went from being a split-time goalie to earning himself a four-year number one gig that will see him earn \$3.75 mil per season. With a hefty contract like that, plenty of people will expect him to succeed, (especially Blues fans). I'm a little less optimistic, but then again I doubted a goalie that came out of nowhere last season by the name of Craig Anderson, who really put me, (and many others), in our place. If Halak pulls an Anderson that would certainly swing the standings in a few fantasy leagues.

Alex Edler – D - Vancouver Canucks

Edler has had a strong start to his young NHL career with 105 points in 253 contests. Last season, he led all Canuck blue-liners in PP ice-time by averaging 3:01 per contest. If he can manage to maintain a large chunk of PP ice-time on the league's sixth best PP, he could be in for a very good season. Edler could pay off massive dividends to those who picked him up at relatively cheap price as the current 144th overall pick in Yahoo! fantasy leagues.

Other Notables:

C

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RW

LW

D

G

Matt Duchene

Justin Williams

Alex Tanguay

Lubomir Visnovsky

Jimmy Howard

Henrik Sedin

Martin Havlat

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Nikita Filatov

Jason Demers

Marty Turco

Dave Bolland

Scottie Upshall

James Neal

Drew Doughty

Nikolai Khaibulin

Mike Ribeiro

Rick Nash

Andy McDonald

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Nicklas Lidstrom

Pekka Rinne

Questions or comments? Or any make or break candidates of your own? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below.