

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 04 January 2011 14:55 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 January 2011 15:05



Pending release of the [MidSeason Guide](#) later this week, I thought it would be a great idea to take a look back at the Pre-Season guide and see where I stand in comparison to four months ago. It's always good to take a look back at past mistakes to help us prepare for the future. Plus it will give an insight to those who haven't seen the content of the DobberHockey guides first hand.

Joffrey Lupul – RW, Anaheim – Lupul disappointed many fantasy owners with an injury plagued season last campaign, but there were definitely some positives. In the 23 contests that he did suit up for, he spent 36.25 percent of his shifts with Ryan Getzlaf and 29.78 percent with

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Corey Perry. If you pro-rated his stats to a full 82-games, he would have had 50 points, 64 PIMs and 235 SOG, which wouldn't have been a bad investment as a bench third winger. Look for a bounce back season from Loops if he can overcome his back issue.

Lupul returned in early December from his back issues and has since recorded seven points in 14 contests. So far he's spent only 13.16 percent of his overall shifts with Ryan Getzlaf and 9.25 percent with Corey Perry, while toiling on the third line of Anaheim by averaging 13:36 per contest. I'd temporarily give myself a **MISS** (based on overall stats) on this one, but things could certainly change for the better in the second-half.

Mark Giordano – D, Calgary – *Giordano really took a big step forward in his offensive development as he cracked the 30-point plateau for the first time in his NHL career. Jay Bouwmeester and Robyn Regehr are more stay-at-home blue-liners than offensive threats, which should open the door for Giordano to be more offensively focused in 2010-11. I'd look for a 35-point, 100 PIM campaign from 26-year-old.*

Gio was one of the big **HITS** for me from the pre-season guide. He's currently on pace for 43 points as well as 82 PIMs. The fact that he's also gained a large role in the Flames PP unit (3:22 per contest) should see him maintain this pace the rest of the way.

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Viktor Stalberg – LW, Chicago – *The Hawks had their “fire sale” this off-season and out the door went a lot of their offensive depth, but the return that came back could certainly surprise. The 6-3, 210 Swede certainly opened plenty of eyes in his debut with the Leafs and certainly has the opportunity to gain a valued top-six role with the reigning Stanley Cup champions. Chicago lost Buffy the goalie slayer, but Stalberg could be a more talented replacement.*

Well you can shoot me for thinking that Stalberg could have been a “more talented replacement over Buffy”. At the end of the day, he just didn’t garner the opportunity that I thought he would have received after the “fire sale”. The production has instead gone to players like Bryan Bickell, Troy Brouwer and Tomas Kopecky. Chalk another one up on the **MISS** column.

Kris Russell – D, Columbus – *It usually takes a few years for junior defensemen to get used to the NHL level, and it appears that Russell is taking the typical development path as planned. In his junior career with the Medicine Hat Tigers, he registered 235 points in 307 career contests, which is almost unheard of from a young developing blue liner. Russell will certainly have the opportunity to become a 30-point defenseman in 2010-11.*

It has been a slow development curve for Russell, but “typical” young offensive defenseman tend to take a lot longer to develop than their forward counterparts. In the last 10 contests, Russell is starting to wrestle away the top PP QB role away from Anton Stralman and Fedor Tyutin, as he garnered a 2:49 PP TOI average compared to 2:03 (Stralman) and 2:00 (Tyutin) during the same span. I’ll give myself a **MISS** (because he’s only on a 20-point pace) but things are definitely looking up.

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Peter Mueller – RW, Colorado – With 17 points in 54 contests, many poolies left Mueller for dead last year. Then boom, 20 points in 15 contests in Colorado turns his career from disappointment to elation. Many pool/league providers base their pre-season draft rankings on the previous year's production. With only 37 points next to his name, Mueller's draft value is going to be lower than expected. Definitely don't forget his name come draft day.

Things were set to go off in Colorado, but the pre-season rolled around and, boom, Mueller suffered his second concussion in less than six months. There isn't a lot of updates regarding his situation, so it's anyone's guess as to what's going to happen with that situation. Give it a **PUSH**

Andrew Raycroft – G, Dallas – Heading into the 2010-11 season with Kari Lehtonen as the number one could be a dangerous situation for the Stars. Prior to last season, Lehtonen averaged just 48 starts in the last four seasons, so the Band-Aid Boy moniker still remains and is certainly well deserved. Raycroft had a solid bounce back season by backing up Roberto Luongo with respectable numbers of a 2.42 GAA along with a .911 SP. If Lehtonen is injured once again, Raycroft could see his fantasy value skyrocket.

Well Lehtonen hasn't been injured, but Raycroft has certainly put up some solid numbers in a backup role. His GAA of 2.24 ranks sixth amongst all NHL goaltenders, while his .929 save percentage is third overall. If Lehtonen were to get bit by the injury bug once again, Raycroft should fill in admirably. **HIT** in my books.

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Tuesday, 04 January 2011 14:55 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 January 2011 15:05

Jiri Hudler – RW, Detroit – As mentioned above, most pool/league providers base their pre-season rankings on the previous year's production. So what value do you think a player with a goose egg next to his name will receive on draft day? Hudler spent a year in the KHL after tallying 57 points with the Red Wings in 2008-09. Hudler should have a guaranteed top-six role for this upcoming season, which should equate to a very productive season. His name will be largely forgotten by unsuspecting poolies.

Hudler was largely picked up at the draft table, but a mind-numbingly slow start to the season has seen his Yahoo! ownership levels plummet to the sub-10 percent mark. The loss of Dan Cleary, and Pavel Datsyuk brought some life back into Hudler as he now has four points in the last three contests, but it still doesn't make up for the 10 in 33. Swing and a **MISS!**

Sam Gagner – C, Edmonton – Last season was a wash for the Oilers, but it did give them an opportunity to re-tool the shed. One positive note was the development of Gagner in the latter half of the campaign. The former sixth overall pick started the season with 22 points in the first 40 contests, but tallied 19 points in the next 28 contests before being shut down with a hip injury. Another positive note is that Ales Hemsky spent 31.92 percent of his overall ice-time alongside Gagner and the two did show some solid chemistry at the beginning of the season. If the duo gets paired up with Taylor Hall, it could be fantasy jackpot for Gagner.

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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If you look at the overall stats from Gagner, they don't look all that spectacular but then again his current 0.65 point-per-game pace is the highest first-half total of his young NHL career (0.41, 0.36 and 0.55). Where you get your initial investment back is during the second-half, where he has career 0.83, 0.67 and 0.68 numbers. **PUSH** for now, but that could turn the corner fairly quickly.

Oscar Moller – RW, Los Angeles – *I wish I was an Oscar Moller owner, that is what I truly want to be, cause if I were an Oscar Moller owner, everyone would be in love, oh everyone would be in love, everyone would be in love with me! Ok, maybe not at the present moment, but perhaps by the end of the season owners could certainly be singing that song. The Kings have a gaping hole to fill in their top-six and if Moller can managed to secure that spot, he will be in for a great season that we can all sing about.*

Well Moller does have 25 points in 24 contests, but too bad that it's with the Manchester Monarchs and not the Kings. Los Angeles had a hole up front, but it's since been filled by newly acquired Marco Sturm, that means that Moller will continue play in the AHL for another season.

MISS

for me again...

Andrew Brunette – LW, Minnesota – *It never ceases to amaze me how Brunette always seems to fly under-the-radar. In the past five seasons, he has posted numbers of 81.6 appearances, 16:25 TOI/game average, 63.2 points and 134.8 SOG per campaign. The great thing about the 37-year old is his consistency. If you don't expect anything more than the above numbers, you will be happy with the yield that you'll receive from Brunette in a top-six role in Minny.*

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Once again, Brunette is on pace to put up his usually consistent numbers (82 GP, 16:47, 45 (bit low) and 107 SOG (once again bit low). But much like the situation with Gagner, Brunette is a better second-half player than first half. His best month from the last five seasons has been March where he averaged 0.88 points along with 1.73 SOG per contest. At just 10 percent Yahoo! owned, there's not an immediate need to snatch him up for your roster, but be sure to keep him in the back of your mind once March rolls around. **PUSH** for now.

Martin Erat – RW, Nashville – *Speaking of consistency, Erat is probably another one of the poster boys for consistency. For the past four seasons, he has averaged 72.3 appearances, 18:33 TOI/game average, 53.3 points, and 153 SOG. Erat has a guaranteed top-six role in the Music City, so if you can handle the odd scratches due to injury, he may be a worthwhile investment.*

Well Erat has missed his typical share of games in the first-half, which means that he should be ready to go for the second-half. In 27 appearances this season, he's averaged 17:26, while picking up 17 points and 44 SOG (pro-rated to 51 points and 133 SOG). The first half could be considered a **PUSH**, but like a few of the cases above, things should change for the better in the second-half.

Scottie Upshall – RW, Phoenix – *Last season, I mentioned Upshall as "sleeper" candidate, which proved to be true as Upshall was on pace for a breakout season (32 points in 49 contests) prior to tearing his ACL in January. As discussed last year, Upshall was once a sixth overall pick as well as a recipient of a CHL rookie of the year award, which demonstrates that he was highly-touted back in the day. The Coyotes aren't going to blow their opposition out of the water with offense, but Upshall should be sufficient enough as a depth winger.*

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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If you look at the overall numbers displayed by Upshall, you probably aren't going to be all that impressed, but it's the six points in the last three contests that's really starting to make a statement. The main difference, during that span, is that he's actually seeing ample ice-time alongside Coyotes star Shane Doan (84.14 percent of his overall TOI), which has translated into the extra boost in production. Once again, it's a **PUSH** for now, but things can certainly change.

Marc-Edouard Vlasic – D, San Jose – *With Rob Blake retiring this offseason, it has opened the door on the blue line for the Sharks. My candidate to be the first to walk through that door would be the 23-year-old Vlasic. In the final year of his junior career he tallied 102 points in 89 contests (including playoffs), which does show that he has plenty of offensive upside. In the past, he has always been hurt by the Sharks' depth on the blue line (Matt Carle, Christian Ehrhoff, Craig Rivet, Brian Campbell, Dan Boyle, and Rob Blake), but this year it seems that he has the all-clear for the number two gig behind Boyle.*

Vlasic had the gig pretty much handed to him on a silver platter, but he's given it away to Jason Demers and Justin Braun. Vlasic started the season with a goose egg in his first 23 contests, but has since recorded eight points in the last 17 contests. It's the lack of PP ice-time that's really killing his offensive production. I had to double check the numbers that I wrote for the pre-season guide, and I'm still wondering where he pulled the 102 points in 89 contests from? Because I'm not seeing any of it at the NHL level. **MISS!**

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Alex Steen – C, St. Louis – Steen posted a very productive 47 points in 68 contests for 2009-10. He also ranked third amongst the Blues' forwards for power play ice-time per contest, which is definitely a big positive. The problem for him might be the depth chart as he sits in third place behind both Andy McDonald and T.J. Oshie. Steen's a perfect high-risk/high-reward candidate for 2010-11.

Well with McDonald and Oshie on the shelf with injuries it really opened up the door for Steen to step up the offensive production. He's currently second, behind only David Backes, in terms of team scoring and is on pace to establish a new career high in points as well as SOG. Finally a

HIT

to end the run of negatives ...

Mikael Samuelsson – RW, Vancouver – Samuelsson spent 52.8 percent of his overall ice time during the playoffs with both of the Sedin twins, which to me shows that the Canucks have plenty of faith in a Swedish trio. His 15 points and 42 SOG in 12 post-season contests certainly provide plenty of evidence for his fantasy worth this campaign. Alex Burrows does provide some competition for Samuelsson, but the upside is certainly worth the gamble on the 33-year-old.

Well it appears that I was wrong about the Canucks having faith in a Swedish trio as they've elected to go with Burrows and the twins (14.77 percent) much more often in even-strength situations than Samuelsson (6.68 percent). The saving grace for me is that he's still operating at a 0.65 point-per-game pace, which ranks him tied for 25th amongst all RW in the NHL and very much fantasy worthy (59 percent Yahoo! own rate). I don't know if you can expect anything more from a late-round sleeper candidate.

HIT

! Almost to a battleship...

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Matt Stajan – C, Calgary – *The Olli Jokinen signing might take some wind out of Stajan's sails, but he remains a solid fantasy option. Jokinen carries the "big name" but Stajan certainly appears to have more chemistry with Jarome Iginla than the unpredictable Finn. You won't see Stajan share 79.81 percent of shifts with Iggy again, but even if it's roughly 50 percent, he'll see a productive campaign.*

It's been a bit of a mess in Calgary this season, which has caused the offensive production to be all over the place. Stajan has been pretty consistent (0.53 points-per-game) compared to last season (0.59 points-per-game) when he joined the Flames in February. At the end of the day he won't put mind-blowing numbers, and you shouldn't really expect him to. He's on course for a 45-50 point season, which is a productive campaign in my books. **HIT!**

Keith Yandle – D, Phoenix – *Yandle really took a big step forward last season by tallying 41 points in a full 82-game schedule. The fact that he averaged 3:05 of power play ice-time per contest shows that he has plenty of offensive upside, especially when his 16 PPP ranked him tied for 30th in the league amongst blue liners. He's buried a bit behind Ed Jovanovski and Adrian Aucoin, but his offensive skills should shine through for a repeat performance in 2010-11.*

Yandle currently leads his team in offensive production, which isn't a bad statement for a

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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forward to be associated with, but for a blue-liner to be doing it, that's extraordinary. He's completely blown Jovanovski and Aucoin out of the water, and has proclaimed the title of number one d-man in Phoenix all to himself, which also continues the string of **HITS** for me.

Sergei Kostitsyn – LW, Nashville – *Kostitsyn has been criticized for many things as part of the Montreal organization and rightfully so, which is probably why he was sent packing from Hab country. One thing that you can't criticize is his offensive potential (209 points in 122 contests with the London Knights and 35 in 38 with the Hamilton Bulldogs). Nashville might be the perfect place for the reclamation project, as they have plenty of opportunity for him to flourish in a top-six role if he decides to grab the bull by the horns. He's another example of a highrisk/high-reward candidate.*

Well grabbing the bull by the horns is exactly what SK74 is doing in Nashville, as he's found himself an integral role as part of the Predators organization. His ice-time is still a bit low, but at 16:36 since December, that's still enough for him to put up productive fantasy numbers. He's now had 14 points in 15 contests, since getting into coach Barry Trotz good books in December. Chalk up another **HIT** for me!

Nikolai Khabibulin – G, Edmonton – *There's no doubt that Tom Renney is a defense-first type of coach. From 2005-2009 he had the Rangers ranked eighth, sixth, third, and fifteenth overall in terms of shots on goal allowed to the opposition. If he can instill that type of philosophy to the Oilers' lineup this campaign, the Bulin wall should enjoy a solid bounce back season (if he avoids jail time). Last season, his .909 SP actually would have stood alongside Semyon Varlamov, Dan Ellis, Brian Elliott and Antero Niittymaki.*

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Well it appears that Tom Renney doesn't have the horses to instill that defensive philosophy in Edmonton, as they're ranked 27th in terms of giving up shots to the opposition. The inconsistent play of Khabibulin doesn't help as well. The Bulin wall has been feast or famine this season, as he's maintains 1.73 and .950 numbers in victories, compared to 4.12 and .872 in losses. Probably not much of a sleeper candidate in your fantasy squad. A

MISS

ends the streak of hits!

***Tom Gilbert – D, Edmonton** – Gilbert's season could have easily been considered a wash as he was on pace to finish the season with just 13 points. Suddenly a switch flipped and he went on a 20-point tear for the final 21 contests to finish the year with a respectable 31 points. One reason for the turnaround might have been the increase in ice-time. Prior to the break he was averaging just 21:48 but upped that to 24:15 post-Olympic break. It appears that Sheldon Souray is out the door, and if that happens, Gilbert could have unconditional number one status in Edmonton, which should produce a nice yield for the upcoming season.*

Well I was wrong about one thing, which was Gilbert acquiring the number one status in Edmonton heading into this season. The job went to Ryan Whitney who was off to a brilliant start before injuring his ankle last week. Now that the number one gig is completely Gilbert's, he should see a production much like the late season tear he had last campaign. **PUSH** for now, but looking better by the minute.

***Dave Bolland – C, Chicago** – Bolland's production was limited to just 16 points due to a herniated disc, which sidelined him for nearly three months of last campaign. He found his stride in the postseason as he tallied 16 points in 22 contests, as the Hawks' second-line center*

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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during their Stanley Cup run. With Marian Hossa healthy for a full season, it might not be too much to ask for Bolland to surpass the 55-point plateau.

It hasn't been as scripted as I assumed with Bolland spending just 17.86 percent of his overall ice-time alongside Hossa. But after a very slow start to the campaign (five points in 21 contests), Bolland now has 10 points in the last 13 contests. He's still seeing too much ice-time as a third-line center rather than a top-sixer, which throws my initial prediction of 55 points out the window. Oops, whiffed on that one. **MISS.**

Ty Conklin – G, St. Louis – *Conklin is starting to build himself quite a name as a career backup. He's never seen a season where he's started more than 40 contests, and he doesn't seem to be poised to break that streak this campaign. The Blues awarded Jaroslav Halak with a large contract based on half a season's worth of brilliance and roughly 100 starts, which isn't exactly a large bank of evidence to draw from. If Halak busts, Conks could surprise himself with a number one gig this season.*

You kind of need to swing for the fences with sleeper pick goalies, which is what I've done with Raycroft and Conklin. Pinning your hopes on the number one busting or an injury to happen in order to identify a sleeper is never a good idea. Conks' numbers (3.02 and .890) aren't going to jeopardize Halak's firm grip on the number one gig in St. Louis. Conks will have no fantasy value for 2010-11. You win some and you lose some, **MISS.**

A Look Back to the Pre-Season Guide (2011)

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Shawn Horcoff – C, Edmonton – Ales Hemsky has been bitten by the injury bug for the last three seasons, but has still managed to tally quite a few points, 159 to be exact, and 105 of which involved being on a line with Horcoff. I seriously doubt Horcoff's offensive potential on his own, but one thing that you can't deny is his chemistry with Hemmer. If Tom Renney decides to keep the duo together instead of using Gagner, Horcoff could certainly make last season's minus 29 rating or his \$5.5 mil price tag all but forgotten.

Well it was Horcoff who was bitten by the injury bug this season, as he's out of the line up with a knee injury. Prior to the injury he was on a 51-point and more importantly plus 13 pace which is a huge improvement upon his 36-point and minus 29 debacle of last campaign. With him being on the shelf for the next two months, I guess we won't be able to tell whether he's a hit or miss till season's end. **PUSH.**

So overall not too shabby, as it stands right now I have a 7-9-7 record, which is slightly less than the 9-7-7 record I posted at the mid-way point of last season. Hey you can't win them all right? There are still a few players (Lupul, Russell, Hudler and Vlasic) who can turn the corner. Plus the jury's still out on a few of my pushes (Gagner, Brunette, Erat, Upshall and Gilbert), but I'm confident that they'll rebound. Either way, the Mid-Season Guide's out Friday, it'll have plenty of projections/trends (by yours truly) for the second-half of this campaign. So if you want the most up-to-date player information as well as the possible reasons for success/failure, definitely buy the guide if you haven't already done so.

Questions or comments? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below. I hope to see you guys back here again next week to discuss more from the Western Conference.

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