The Waiver Wire: Western Conference Style

The National Hockey League season is almost a month old, and in this shortened campaign that means over 25% of the games are in the books. This now gives us a decent sample size to look at players and what to expect from them going forward. Right now may be the perfect time to scour the waiver wire to see what you can find.

Adding and dropping players is essential for fantasy hockey success. You are rarely going to select a team where every individual pans out and reaches expectations. This year the waiver wire becomes even more crucial because there are only 48 games. Had this been an 82-game season, you would be more likely to hold on to someone who got off to a slow start because there is more recovery time. In 2013 that luxury doesn't exist, which could make for some tough decisions about letting players go.

There are different ways to evaluate players on the waiver wire. You have to consider whether or not someone is going to be a short or long-term pickup. Meaning, is this a player you think can contribute to your team for the rest of the season? Or are they just on a crazy point streak that will probably fizzle out in the next 5-10 games? There is nothing wrong with short-term options as some owners allocate a roster spot or two for this purpose every year. When a player is hot you scoop them up, and when they go cold you drop them for someone else who is in the midst of a streak.

It's also key to think outside box when it comes to making additions for your team. You don't always have to look at an individual strictly based on points. Categories like face-offs, shots, hits, blocks, and PIM can be just as important depending on your league settings.

Here are a few good candidates to look at from the West. All ownership percentages are from Yahoo.

Saku Koivu - Anaheim Ducks - 43% owned

Koivu is not what he once was, but is enjoying a rejuvenated season of sorts. In 2011-12 he only posted 38 points in 74 games, but so far in 2013 he has already notched 14. Koivu has only taken 14 shots on goal so far on the campaign, but his shooting percentage of 28.6% shows just how efficient he has been. He also sits third on the Ducks with a plus-12 rating, and has won 128 draws so far on the year at a rate of just under 50%.

Lee Stempniak - Calgary Flames - 16% owned

It pains me to recommend Stempniak after remembering his less than stellar play with the Toronto Maple Leafs a few years back, but holding grudges in fantasy hockey is foolhardy. Stempniak has five points in his last six games and is now up to 10 for the year. Of those 10,

five have been goals and three have come on the power play. He is averaging just under three shots a game and sits with a plus-4 rating. Stempniak is also both left and right wing eligible, which makes him a versatile pickup.

Fedor Tyutin - Columbus Blue Jackets - 20% owned

Tyutin is a nice reliable defenseman that can add some depth to your roster. He has 18 blocks, 25 hits, and 21 shots so far this season, but it's his points that have been a pleasant surprise. Last year Tyutin had just 26 on the campaign, and in 2013 he has already tallied 10 to lead the Blue Jackets. Don't expect him to keep up that pace the rest of the way, but Tyutin is still valuable because he is averaging over 23 minutes of ice-time a game, with almost three of those minutes coming with the man advantage.

Chris Stewart - St. Louis Blues - 35% owned

Stewart regressed quite a bit last year and was only able to post 15 goals after scoring 28 in his previous two seasons. So far in 2013 he has seemed to regain his scoring touch and has already found the back of the net six times. He has seven points in his last five contests and already has three multi-point games on the campaign. Stewart can also help you out in the PIM category as he has 14 on the season, including two fighting majors.

Jannik Hansen - Vancouver Canucks - 5% owned

The return of Ryan Kesler may hurt Hansen's ice-time a bit, but with four points in his last six games he is certainly worth a look. Hansen has done an excellent job in the shots on goal department this year with 33, which averages out to over two per game. In fact, he has posted 17 shots in his last six contests alone, and on four occasions in 2013 he has had at least four shots in a game. Only twice this year has Hansen been held without a shot.

Joey MacDonald - Calgary Flames - 4% owned

MacDonald won't be a long-term fix, but if you are desperate for goalie help he may be an interesting short-term option. Calgary's schedule over the next two weeks is very favourable, especially for a goalie. They play the Los Angeles Kings and both the Phoenix Coyotes and Minnesota Wild twice over that stretch. Each team sits in the bottom half of the NHL in goals for, and of the three, only the Coyotes currently occupy a playoff position. With Miikka Kiprusoff out with a knee injury for at least another week to 10 days and Leland Irving having just been returned to the AHL, this could be a small window to squeeze a little something out of MacDonald.

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