What's Up With Drew Doughty ?

With the NHL Lockout delaying the start of the season until mid January, the Los Angeles Kings would have had to have been confident that they could avoid a Stanley Cup hangover. Playing well into June as the Kings did last summer meant plenty of bumps and bruises, as well as some significant injuries. Los Angeles started a little slow out of the gates, but they seem to have turned things around and their top scorers are all rounding into form nicely. All except Dre

w Doughty
that is.

Doughty has actually been on a steady decline since his 2009-10 sophomore season when he exploded for 16 goals and 59 points, with a plus-20 rating. The Kings thought they had a perennial Norris Trophy candidate, and many fantasy hockey participants thought they had the backbone of their squad for years to come.

Now Doughty hasn't been horrible since 2009-10, but he has definitely fallen below expectations. He followed up his excellent 2009-10 campaign with a 40 point year in 2010-11, which was a 19 point drop off. Then last year he was only able to hit 36 points. However, there was reason for optimism during the Kings' lengthy playoff run. Doughty posted 16 points in 20 post-season games that culminated with a Stanley Cup.

So I'm sure many poolies felt that Doughty would bounce back strongly in 2013. So far though, much to the chagrin of many, the strong skating Kings blueliner is off to a rocky start. Doughty has yet to score a goal and has just eight assists, while sitting at a minus-8 rating. In fact, Slav a Voynov
has overtaken him for the Kings lead in scoring by a defenseman.

So what has happened to Doughty over the last few seasons? Well typically in situations like this where a player's statistics have dropped, there is more than just one factor. The first thing to look at would be who Doughty has been playing with and has that changed. The answer would be yes and no. Doughty has been playing with Rob Scuderi the majority of the time in even strength situations since 2009-10. During Doughty's 59 point campaign he saw time with Scuderi 40.51% of the time and this season the two are playing together at a similar rate of 34.75%. So you can pretty much rule out his defensive partner being a factor in Doughty's decline in scoring.

However, the situation above relates to even strength and Doughty's time on the power play has been changed drastically. When Jack Johnson was traded to the Columbus Blue Jackets

late in 2011-12, Doughty's numbers took a big hit. The two were Los Angeles' main point men on the power play and connected for 31 points together in that area since 2009-10. Last year Doughty had 11 points with Johnson in power play situations, but when Johnson left for Columbus, Doughty was only able to get one point in his final 21 games with the man advantage.

Something else to consider when it comes to Doughty is how the Kings have played as a group over the last few years. In 2009-10, when Doughty had 59 points, Los Angeles was ninth overall in the National Hockey League when it came to goals for. Since then, however, they have finished 25th, 29th, and sit 19th currently in that category. Team scoring can obviously directly help a player's production in the way of secondary assists, especially for a defenseman like Doughty who can often start a rush with a pass. Have a look at his secondary assist numbers for the 2009-10 year.

Rank

Name

Pos

Age

Yrs

Team

GR

GP

1st

2nd

EV 1st

PP 1st

SH 1st

EV 2nd

PP 2nd

SH 2nd

Total

KOPITAR,ANZE

C

25

6

L.A

30

82

22

25

9

13

0

14

11

0

47

DOUGHTY,DREW

D

23

4

L.A

30

82

23

20

13

10

0

8

12

0

43

JOHNSON,JACK

D

26

6

L.A

27

80

12

16

9

3

0

9

7

0

28

SMYTH,RYAN

L

37

17

L.A

28

67

15

16

9

6

0

9

7

0

31

FROLOV,ALEXANDER

L

30

8

L.A

81

20

12

16

4

0

8

4

0

32

You can see Doughty ranked second on the Kings with 20 secondary helpers, behind only Anze Kopitar. Last year when Los Angeles was second last in the NHL when it came to goals for, Doughty's secondary assists dropped all the way down to 11.

Rank

Name

Pos

Age

Yrs

Team

GR

GP

1st

2nd

EV 1st

PP 1st

SH 1st

EV 2nd

PP 2nd

SH 2nd

Total

1

KOPITAR,ANZE

C

25

6

L.A

30

82

24

27

18

4

2

13

14

0

51

2

WILLIAMS,JUSTIN

R

31

11

L.A

30

82

21

16

15

6

0

12

4

0

37

3

BROWN,DUSTIN

L

28

8

L.A

30

82

18

14

13

3

2

10

4

0

32

6

MITCHELL,WILLIE

D

35

12

L.A

30

76

6

13

2

1

3

9

4

0

19

4

DOUGHTY,DREW

D

23

4

L.A

30

77

16

11

9

7

0

8

3

0

27

A nine point swing for a defenseman in that area is really crucial for fantasy hockey. It's the difference between a solid season and an average one.

It's one thing for a player's points to drop, but depending on the league you are in, a freefall in plus/minus can take its toll as well. Doughty has gone from a plus-20 player in 2009-10 to a minus-8 rating right now, which is worst on the Kings. One explanation for that would simply be that his points are down, but it seems to be much more than that. Over the last three seasons

he has led the team in giveaways, but his ability to find the score sheet and Scuderi's decent defensive play have usually made up for it. In 2013 though, the normally reliable Scuderi leads the squad in the giveaway department and Doughty sits tied for second, making them a less than friendly plus/minus pairing. Doughty's rating hasn't been this bad since his rookie season when he posted a minus-17 mark and only collected a career low 27 points.

Let's also not discount the arrival of head coach Darryl Sutter and how that has changed Doughty's game. Sutter took over the team midway through last season and made the move to play Doughty as more of a shut down defenseman against the opponent's top lines. That shift may be a sign that the organization has confidence in Doughty, but that isn't an easy role to play and it doesn't necessarily help his production and plus/minus.

The other thing to keep in mind is that perhaps the rest of the NHL has just adjusted to Doughty's game and are better prepared to play against him now. It will be his job to evolve and become a major threat once again. His skill set is such that he shouldn't be affected this greatly by the circumstances around him. Instead, Doughty's abilities should benefit all his team-mates in a positive fashion.

Many in the fantasy hockey world want to give Doughty the benefit of the doubt, but there is still a realistic possibility he may never reach the heights of 2009-10 again. And for the Kings, poolies, and Doughty himself, that would be a real shame.

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