

Looking Back at the Pre-Season Guide

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 05 January 2010 08:15 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42



Since we rolled the calendar over to a new decade along with the pending release of the Mid-Season 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 Dobber guides first hand.

As always, before the good stuff, let's take a look at a few:

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Maaasquito Buzzings...

Players in the last seven days with the highest production in each category who are less than 50% owned in Yahoo leagues.

Goals

Assists

+/-

PPP

SOG

Brouwer (3)

Byfuglien (5)

Stuart (4)

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Byfuglien (2)

Wisniewski (13)

Helm (3)

Langkow (4)

Handzus (4)

Tucker (2)

Byfuglien (13)

McDonald (3)

Ward (3)

O'Donnell (4)

Brouwer (2)

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Arnott (12)

Handzus (3)

Wisniewski (3)

Wisniewski (4)

O'Sullivan (2)

Moller (12)

Glencross (3)

Artyukin (3)

Sopel (4)

Langkow (2)

Miettinen (12)

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Maaaasquito Bite of the week: Andy McDonald

The Blues made a dramatic move this past week by letting go their former coach Andy Murray. He wasn't by any means a terrible coach as identified by his 333-278-58-71 record coaching the Kings and the Blues. He's gotten young, under-achieving teams into the playoffs, but hasn't gotten them any much further beyond the first round. Murray was also a strong preacher of the "defense first" mentality. He's had his teams rank seventh, seventh, 12th, 14th, 13th, sixth, fourth, eighth, and 14

th

in terms of SOG allowed per game during his tenure as a head coach. But with his strong focus on defense it really put a dampener on the offense as they have ranked, eighth, 13

th

, 25

th

, 21

st

, 13

th

, 20

th

, 28

th

, 29

th

, 29

th

, and most recently 22

nd

in SOG for. To sum it up: Andy Murray, great for fantasy goalies, bad for offensive players. There wasn't much information available on new coach Davis Payne. All I can dig up was that he was the 2006-07 ECHL coach of the year and from various news sources that he liked to play an uptempo game, which really should open up the offense for the talented Blue forwards. So what does it all mean for Andy Mc? Well let's delve a little bit deeper, he was a 0.89 point-per-game player for the last four seasons, but this year he's just on a 0.66 point-per-game pace. You really can't blame the SOG (he has 101) or the ice-time (18:34) or even the power-play time (team-high 3:30), so I don't know what really is the problem? All the signs are there for him to be producing as expected but he's not. Maybe a new coach is just what he needs to get back into the point-per-game range. McDonald is currently riding a three-game

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point scoring streak, and has tallied 12 points in his last 13 contests, definitely not the type of dual-eligible player to be only 25 percent owned in Yahoo! leagues. Scoop him up now!

Now onto the good stuff.

Nick Boynton – D, Anaheim – *The Ducks are extremely deep in defensemen with Scott Niedermayer, Ryan Whitney and*

James Wisniewski occupying the top-three spots in Anaheim. Boynton will battle it out with Luca Sbisa for that fourth defensive spot on the Ducks' blue-line. The edge should belong to Boynton due to his knack for physical play, as he has amassed 751 penalty minutes in 505 career NHL contests. Look for him to amass an eighth consecutive 90-plus penalty minute season.

Pretty much on par with what I forecasted for Boynton at the beginning of the season. He's still buried behind Niedermayer, Whitney and Wisniewski, and did end up beating out Sbisa for the fourth d-man spot on the Ducks' roster. The points (seven) haven't been there but the PIMs (on pace for 97) have. Pretty good call from the beginning of the season. **HIT** for this one.

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David Moss – LW, Calgary – *There are a few Flames who could be due for a big upgrade this season. My early season favorite is Moss. He finished with a team-high three goals during the playoffs despite averaging just below 13 minutes of ice-time per contest. With Michael Cammalleri departing via free agency look for Moss to gain more responsibility up front for the Flames this season.*

Moss has spent just a smidge over 23 percent of his overall ice-time total alongside Jarome Iginla, which wasn't as much as I projected earlier during the pre-season. He's still averaging just 13:58 per contest and has been relegated to a third line checking role alongside Craig Conroy and Eric Nystrom. The extra boost in ice-time has gone to players like Nigel Dawes and Curtis Glencross instead of Moss. I'd have to give myself a **MISS** for this one.

Andrew Ladd – LW, Chicago – *Ladd might have earned himself a reprieve this season due to Marian Hossa's shoulder injury. He had a terrible post-season while posting only four points in 17 playoff games. However, Hossa is scheduled to be out of the Hawks lineup until mid-November, so look for Ladd to be given every opportunity to establish himself as a top-six player in the NHL.*

Ladd picked up 10 points in 22 contests with Marian Hossa out of the line up, but just six in 20 with. Although he was given a decent shot, it wasn't the entirety of the top-six variety(roughly averaging 14 minutes a contest and pretty much zero PP time). I'd have to give myself a **PUSH** for this one.

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R.J. Umberger – C, Columbus – *Umberger fired a career-high 234 shots on goal, while connecting at a rate of 11.1 percent. During the post-season, he bumped that up to 33.3 percent while connecting for three goals in four playoff contests. The only roadblock for him is that he faces some stiff competition from some of his Columbus teammates. If he manages to secure a role alongside superstar Rick Nash permanently, look for his numbers to skyrocket.*

Umberger hasn't exactly cemented himself alongside Rick Nash but he did manage to join Nash in 40.6 percent of his shifts while maintaining an 11.1 percent shooting efficiency. His overall SOG is a tad lower than last year, but his 51 point pace is a solid return for a sleeper candidate. Consider this a **HIT**.

T.J. Hensick – C, Colorado – *The Avs are severely depleted up front. That, plus the fact that they are in full rebuild mode, means that the youngsters in Colorado will have the full green light to fire away. I have Hensick slated for early season third-line duties, but look for him to work his way alongside young phenom Matt Duchene towards the end of the campaign.*

Big **MISS** on this one. I didn't plan on the emergence of Chris Stewart and Ryan O'Reilly to have really affected the development of Hensick this much. He registered 21 points in 61

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contests in his sophomore year and didn't really conjecture any major signs of him being demoted back to the AHL full time. It's definitely interesting to see that the Avs recalled Brandon Yip, who had two points in six contests, and Chris Durno, who had 18 points in 17 contests, over Hensick, who was just named the December player of the month in the AHL while tallying 25 points in 17 contests.

Fabian Brunnstrom – RW/LW, Dallas – *Brunnstrom finished with a dismal 29 points last season, which probably would have left many fantasy owners with a sour taste in their mouth at the end of the season. Daniel Alfredsson also had a first-year adjustment period, before tallying 71 points in 76 games in his second season with the Sens. Look for Brunnstrom to etch towards a similar type of production as a sophomore with the Stars.*

Once again another fairly major **MISS** on my part. The young kids, Jamie Benn and James Neal, continued to produce at the NHL level which has really pushed Brunnstrom to the back burner. He just hasn't been given the opportunity to showcase any of his talent in a quality role. He's appeared in only 23 of the Stars' 41 contests, and in those contests he's been given chump change (10:51) in terms of ice-time. I wonder if he's feeling any regret of not signing with the 10 other teams who were after his services when he first landed in North America?

Daniel Cleary – LW, Detroit – *Cleary never ceases to amaze me. I am constantly waiting for*

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his bubble to burst but it just never seems to happen. Cleary doesn't do a lot of the fancy stuff, but always manages to end up with a 40-point season. What's also intriguing is that when Marian Hossa faltered this past post-season, Cleary clearly stepped up his game playing alongside Pavel Datsyuk. Now with Hossa out the door, look for Cleary to get a more permanent role alongside Datsyuk, which should see him surpass the 45 point plateau for the first time in his career.

Cleary had a great shot at claiming a quality role with the Red Wings who were absolutely being ravaged by injury problems. The problem is he also joined the list of the wounded wings and didn't have a chance to capitalize. It definitely leaves me as well as his owners to ponder what could have been... Consider this a **PUSH** in my pre-season projection.

Patrick O'Sullivan – LW, Edmonton – *O'Sullivan was a recipient of both the OHL and CHL rookie of the year awards in 2001-02, in which he followed it up as a recipient of the Dudley Garrett Memorial Award in 2005-06 as the AHL rookie of the year. It's certainly a mystery as to why he's been bounced around so much early in his young NHL career. An offensive-minded Pat Quinn should get him motivated this year in an Oiler uniform. In 19 contests with the Oilers last season, O'Sully fired 59 shots. If he can manage to land on the wing of Shawn Horcoff and Ales Hemsky while continuing to firing those bombs, look for him to have a huge "magical fourth" season.*

O'Sullivan would be the **MISS** that hurts the most in my books. I heavily leaned on him in all three of the major pools that I currently play in, and all three I've grudgingly cut the bait. I just don't get it, the pedigree is there, all those offensive ROY awards, "magical fourth" year, and

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team with pretty shallow offensive depth. All those signs are positive!!! Additional thoughts on O'Sully in the mid-season guide if you have purchased it.

Jon Quick – G, Los Angeles – *Quick was a pleasant surprise for many fantasy owners while posting a very respectable line of 21 wins, a 2.48 goals against average, a .914 save percentage along with four shut outs. The Kings have a revamped defense and offense, which includes plenty of depth, and should equate to better numbers for Quick this season. The added bonus is that Quick probably won't even be considered a second-tiered goalie entering this season, which means that many fantasy owners will probably enjoy a nice mid-late round steal when selecting Quick at the draft table.*

23 wins, 2.56 goals against average, and a .907 save percentage. Those are the current numbers of Mr. Quick as they pretty much mirror pretty closely to the numbers of last season. The lack of shut outs are a bit frustrating, but I'm sure owners are pretty content considering he was the 37th ranked goalie according to Yahoo! draft lists prior to the start of the season. The fact that he's also been named the starter in 90 percent of the Kings' contests is also a big bonus. **HIT** according to my books.

Pierre Marc Bouchard – LW/RW, Minnesota – *It could be a long and frustrating season for Wild fans this season, as the Wild are in a transition phase for their future. PMB was earmarked for success following five consecutive years of positive increases in his point totals, but managed to pot only 46 points last year. This season should be much better as the lack of Wild depth upfront will pretty much guarantee PMB to garner plenty of top-line ice-time alongside Mikko Koivu and Martin Havlat.*

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With Mikko Koivu and Andrew Brunette really clicking this season, PMB would have made a very nice complement to complete the trio. Unfortunately injury robbed him of that chance much like it did for Cleary. He's still experiencing setbacks in his rehab from post-concussion symptoms and will likely not return this season. Consider this a **PUSH** in my prediction.

***Joel Ward – RW, Nashville** – Ward has certainly taken the tough road to earning his way onto a full-time role with Nashville. The Predators don't have too much depth on their roster for this season, so look for Ward to be given every opportunity to improve upon his 39-point performance.*

Ward has certainly seen his responsibilities increase this season in Nashville. Last season he was mostly utilized in a checking/third line role, but this campaign has experienced a two and a half minute increase in ice-time, which has him projected to be on a 42 point pace. I'd classify this as another **HIT**.

***Matthew Lombardi – C, Phoenix** – Pretty much a gimme pick here. Lombardi averaged closed to 21 minutes of ice-time and picked up 16 points in 19 contests while donning a Coyotes uniform last season. He should once again see plenty of success on even strength as well as*

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the Coyotes' power play as he's near the top of Wayne Gretzky's favorites list.

A couple of things threw a wrench to my earlier projections, Gretzky re-signed, Dave Tippett, a largely defensive coach, was hired instead, and they also brought in some competition at the center position with Robert Lang. Despite all of those negative factors affecting Lombardi's fantasy production, he still maintains a 0.64 point-per-game average while averaging 3:23 on the power-play each contest. He's also beginning to show plenty of signs of chemistry playing on the Coyotes' top-line with Shane Doan and Scottie Upshall. Lombardi didn't have a spectacular first half but is beginning to turning things around so I'd give it a **PUSH** for the moment.

Jonathan Cheechoo – RW, San Jose – *I know many poolies have been waiting for the Cheechoo train to pull into the station for quite some time, but this season it just might happen. With the numerous rumors floating around regarding Patrick Marleau being stripped of his captaincy, there could be big changes about to happen in San Jose. Cheechoo finished off with seven points in the last 10 games, and guess what? That was when Marleau was out of the lineup. Can you say CHOO-CHOO!*

Well the Sharks didn't end up moving Marleau, but managed to move Cheechoo instead. With a change of environment, Cheechoo is averaging less ice-time (12:19) than he did with the Sharks (15:19), which just shows how much he has dropped since his 56-goal season. It's pretty much time to declare him six feet under. **MISS!**

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Carlo Colaiacovo – D, St. Louis – *Colo had a solid year last year as he picked up 29 points in 63 contests while mainly quarterbacking the Blues power play. He ended up being tied with Brad Boyes for the team-high of 19 assists on the power play at season's end. This season Colo should get a bit more help especially in the plus/minus column with the return of both Alex Pietrangelo and Erik Johnson, look for him to have a very productive fantasy season.*

I initially thought that having EJ would help Colo rather than hinder him, but that just wasn't the case. Last season he averaged 3:47 on the Blue's top PP unit, but this campaign he has seen it drop to 3:09 splitting sometime between the first and second units. He also registered 19 PP assists all of last season, but has a grand total of one this year. Give me another **MISS** on the projections.

Ryan Kesler – C, Vancouver – *Kesler took a big leap forward in his development last season as he potted 59 points during the regular season and complemented that with four points in the post-season. Many poolies may think that his production was related to Mats Sundin (see Maltais' column below), however, only 25 of his 59 points tallied last season were recorded playing with the superstar Swede, which means that he generated most of his points on his own. Look for him to have another solid productive season with Pavol Demitra and the newly acquired Mikael Samuelsson.*

Kesler really has cemented his production this year, and proved that last season was just not a fluke. With 36 points in 42 contests, he's well on his way to a 70 point campaign. The addition of Demitra back to the line up should only help. A well deserved **HIT** on my part.

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Scottie Upshall – LW/RW, Phoenix – *Upshall went through the arbitration process to try to justify the offensive surge that he experienced at the end up last season after being acquired from the Flyers at the trade deadline. 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. This year will be his make-or-break season. If you're looking for a sleeper definitely look no further than Upshall.*

It still remains to be the make-or-break season for Upshall. He started off slowly with 12 points in his first 25 contests, but demonstrated plenty of upside with 12 points in the month of December. He's essentially unseated Peter Mueller as the top-line right wing in Phoenix, and should have plenty of upside in the second-half. I'd give myself a tentative **HIT**.

Patric Hornqvist – RW, Nashville – *Hornqvist was a seventh round steal of the Predators in the 2005 NHL entry draft. He tallied 71 points and 132 penalty minutes in 149 career SEL contests before transitioning to the AHL/NHL last season. Hornqvist is in a similar situation as Ward, as the depth of the Predators up front is almost non-existent, which means that he'll get every opportunity to prove himself as a full-time NHLer this season.*

Hornqvist is leading the team in SOG, which is a positive sign that he's placing a bigger onus on offensive production this season. He's been shifted between the top-line and second-line for the Preds, which hasn't really provided him with the stability to refine his game. His 14:10 ice-time average is a tad low, but if he can manage to get into the 17's or 18's he could bust out big time. I'd give it a **PUSH**. With that said, he wasn't on the radar at all in the beginning of the season, compared to the position that he is in now which probably should be more deserving of a **HIT**

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David Backes – RW, St. Louis – *If you're looking for an across-the-board sleeper, look no further than Backes. He finished last season with a line of 54 points, a minus three rating, and 165 penalty minutes along with 208 shots on goal. You could have attributed those numbers due to the numerous injuries sustained by the Blues' forwards last season, but don't count Backes out for continuing to play with an edge this season. If Kariya/Tkachuk were to succumb to an injury look for Backes' fantasy value to skyrocket.*

If you've been following my columns this year, I really had mixed reviews about Backes entering and during the season. I was reserved in the fact that last season Backes really benefitted from all the injuries that befell the Blues, and with all of the veterans returning, he would slide further down the depth charts. With that said, I didn't think the peripheral stats would be taking the hit, but it was the points and so far it has proven to be true. He's on a 42-point, 114 PIM, and 182 SOG pace, which is probably the best across-the-board option as you can get without paying a huge price for it. Consider that a **HIT**.

Nigel Dawes – LW, Calgary – *Dawes has experienced success at every level of his hockey career as he's tallied 272 points in 245 contests in the WHL, 161 points in 166 contests at the AHL level, but just 51 points in 133 contests at the NHL level. His main deficiency could be his size as he's only listed at 5'8. Last year the Flames resurrected a diminutive winger's career in Michael Cammalleri. Could they do they same for Dawes?*

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You can now change Dawes' NHL totals to 71 points in 174 contests, which still isn't exactly mind-boggling, but at least it's steadily rising. What's also interesting is that his 0.49 point-per-game pace is a result of spending only 21 percent of his shifts alongside superstar Iginla. Dawes' has mostly been attached to the hip of Daymond Langkow, as he has spent more than 65 percent of his overall ice-time alongside the 15-year veteran. I certainly don't expect Cammalleri-like numbers from Dawes, but another 20-25 points in the remainder of the season should earn me another **HIT** in my early season projections.

Benoit Pouliot – LW, Minnesota – *Pouliot is my reach-pick this year. Similar to O'Sullivan and Upshall, Pouliot was a recipient of the CHL rookie of the year award (in 2004-05). His development was really hampered because he was never really given a "fair shake of the sauce bottle" under Jacque Lemaire's reign in Minnesota. Now that Lemaire has moved on to greener pastures in addition to the fact that Minnesota has a lack of depth upfront, Pouliot should get every opportunity to succeed this season.*

What an interesting situation the whole Pouliot situation as become. I initially thought with all of his previous acclamations and Lemaire out of the picture, it really was the green light for Pouliot to really make an impact in the NHL. Instead he gets traded to Montreal and now we're left with an entirely different scenario. He recently joined the Habs second-line alongside Scott Gomez and Brian Gionta which could form a pretty formidable line moving forward. We don't really have a large bank of data to draw from, but two goals in six contests probably should draw me a **PUSH** for Pouliot.

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Cam Barker – D, Chicago – *If you're looking for a power-play quarterback, look no further than Barker. The Chicago power play connected at a rate of 19.3 percent last season, and with the recent addition of Hossa, along with the full-time inclusion of Barker, look for that percentage to rise significantly. Barker finished last year tied with Mark Streit for sixth overall in terms of power-play point production from a defenseman despite averaging almost two fewer minutes in power-play ice-time. Look for him to be amongst the leaders in PP points from a blue-liner.*

Hawks power-play is operating at 20.6 percent efficiency, so I deserve a tick for that one. The problem is the PP production has come from Brian Campbell and Duncan Keith rather than Barker. He's also taken a hit on his power-play ice-time as it dropped from 3:24 last season to just 2:25 this campaign. The Hawks just aren't confident in the ability of Barker to green light him, so expect the limited offensive production to continue until he gets dealt at the trade deadline. Chalk another one up for the **MISS** column.

Thomas Hickey – D, Los Angeles – *The Kings' defensive corps are pretty set heading into training camp, which will make Hickey's life a bit more difficult to begin this season. Hickey is an offensive talent as he amassed, 142 points in 188 contests in the final three years of his junior career with Seattle of the WHL. If any members of the Kings' blue-line succumb to an injury during the season, look for Hickey to get an immediate call-up.*

As stated before the Kings had plenty of depth on the blue-line to begin the season and it would have taken a long-termed injury in order to give Hickey as shot at the bigs. The Kings also acquired Randy Jones on re-entry waivers from the Flyers, which pretty much put the final nail in the coffin of the thought of Hickey playing with the Kings this season. He has five points in 15 contests with the Manchester Monarchs but probably was a year or two too early to make the "sleeper" list. I did mention the stipulation of an injury in order for him to crack the NHL, which

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didn't really happen, so I think I deserve a **PUSH** for this one.

Cody Franson – D, Nashville – *Similar to Hickey's situation, Franson's offensive game speaks volumes for itself. In 152 AHL games, Franson has amassed 88 points, which is nearly unheard of from such a young blue-liner. Look for the talented rearguard to impress in training camp and challenge Ryan Suter and Shea Weber for some power-play time during the season.*

With the Preds experimenting with Alex Sulzer and Teemu Laakso at the beginning of the season, I was a bit worried that Franson would be handcuffed this season in the AHL. 11 contests in, they decided to give Franson a shot and he hasn't disappointed. He has 11 points in the first 31 contests of his young NHL career while garnering 2:11 each contest and sharing some time on the power-play with Weber and Suter. Franson has the pedigree to become a great defenseman one day, but will need to have Suter or Weber give way. For all intensive purposes, he met all the requirements I asked of him which should help me finish off with another **HIT** under my belt.

So overall not too shabby, you could say that I have an overall record of 9-7-7, which would give me a better than 50 percent hit ratio on my projections. Hey you can't win them all right? What also hurt the most were the "surefire" hits that became misses, like O'Sully and Barker, which would have given me 11 hits instead of nine, but I guess that leaves me some room for improvement doesn't it? Either way the Mid-Season Guide is out Friday/Saturday, and it'll have more projections for the second-half of this fantasy season. 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 done so.

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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.