

Rookie Scoring - What to Expect from First Year Players

Written by Stuart McDonald
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So you need more points from your forwards this season? You have some rookies on the farm or intend to draft one or two in your upcoming keeper draft. What should you expect from them?

First, it's important to realize the average age of the Calder trophy winner entering the NHL season is 20.6 over the last 10 campaigns. Only in a few exceptional cases - Patrick Kane and Sergei Samsonov - have players won the Calder the year after they were drafted. That said, both Kane and Samsonov were in the same position as John Tavares heading into this season. They were both playing for relatively weak teams who were willing to give them lots of ice time.

Second, don't expect miracles. The NHL's leading rookie scorer over the last 10 seasons averaged 67 points. Bobby Ryan won last season's rookie scoring race with 57 points. If you're in a plus minus league don't expect more than even.

Third, you had better hope you pick one of the top three rookie scorers if you want to contend in most pools. The NHL's second leading rookie scorer averaged 58 points and the third leading scorer averaged 50 points. Unless you're in a really deep pool I don't encourage anyone to ice a forward that won't score 50 points. In most cases you'll be doing that if you don't have one of

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the top three rookie forwards.

Predicting the Calder winner and the leading rookie scorers is tough. TSN's Darren Dreger didn't have Ryan, Steve Mason or Kris Versteeg (the three Calder finalists) on his list of top 20 rookies heading into the 2008-09 season. Who would have put Mason in their top 20 before last season? Or Versteeg? The truth is there have been tonnes of surprises over the years. Paul Stastny in 2006-07, Alex Ovechkin beating Sidney Crosby in 2005-06, Michael Ryder in 2003-04 and Henrik Zetterberg in 2002-03 were all surprises.

If you really need rookie points this season, you're safer going with a more mature rookies such as Ville Leino, Colin Wilson or Nathan Gerbe than you are with most 2009 draftees. Remember Steve Stamkos (46 points, -13), Rick Nash (39 points, -27) and Vincent Lecavalier (28 points, -19) are all great players who had mediocre NHL seasons right after being taken No. 1.

Tavares is probably the favourite to take the Calder but he's no lock. Not by a long shot. Except for Kane, the last five rookie scoring leaders all played at least one season of pro hockey before entering the NHL. Malkin and Zetterberg played two while Ryder played three.

Finally, don't use a rookie who isn't physically robust or physically mature. Derick Brassard looked like he would walk away with the Calder at one point last season but his thin frame couldn't survive the NHL wear and tear. There are a few "Brassards" among this year's rookie eligibles so be wary.

Someone like Colin Wilson hasn't played pro but he played an extra year of college after his draft year and is 6'1, 215 pounds. He's a nice dark horse to go after if you want production this year and in the future. Even if he doesn't make the Predators out of camp, David Legwand and Steve Sullivan are injury prone. If one goes down early expect Wilson to get a long audition.