

Fantasy Champs Eye Big Picture

Written by Chris Nichols

Sunday, 05 February 2012 16:03 - Last Updated Monday, 06 February 2012 08:41



Sam Gagner's eight-point night can serve as a good learning tool for poolies.

Hyperbole is defined as obvious and intentional exaggeration. An extravagant statement or figure of speech NOT intended to be taken literally.

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In the world of sports, with both many fans and too large a percentage of the media, hyperbole has melded into a form of taking a snapshot of a player's career and then making what can often be wildly exaggerated defining statements based off what's really just a snippet of the larger picture. Which, in their minds, they mean to be taken quite literally.

In other words, people tend to make too much of anything and everything.

In fantasy sports, if you make a habit of overinflating either positive or negative performances (or both), that tendency will generally spell death for your team.

Take Sam Gagner and keep in mind this is not only coming from the perspective of an Oilers fan, but also one who has been steadfastly behind the idea of NOT dealing Gagner in recent seasons despite his so-so stats. I can't tell you how many "we're the Oilers' brain trust" discussions I've had with friends in the past few years and in every single one of them where Gagner's name has been bandied about, I said we should keep him because he just needed a better surrounding cast and time to develop.

Anyway, No. 89 – as you well know – had that spectacular eight-point explosion against the Hawks.

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Thanks to the world of Twitter, we're now instantly able to see the thoughts of anyone and media member after media member tweeted things along the lines of Gagner – who has been heavily rumoured to be on the move this season especially with the emergence of rookie talent Ryan Nugent-Hopkins - now officially being off the trade market and having locked up a top six slot with the Oil. Gagner had arrived.

Really? Again, don't get me wrong. I love Gagner's skills. I want him as an Oiler. But while he now has 11 points in his two February starts and all he has to do is LOOK at the puck and it goes in the net these days, what about the fact that he only had 22 points over his other 43 games? What about the inevitability that it'll be RNH who will be back between Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle before too long when this hot streak invariably runs dry, as they all do?

Greatness is delivered over time and while people may not have confused Gagner for being on the same plateau as Wayne Gretzky or Paul Coffey, with whom the youngster is now tied in the Edmonton record books for points in a single game, there was still much too much made of the importance of that feat.

The fact that Gagner followed up the eight-pointer with three more last night, plus a nifty shootout goal, was tremendous. Enjoy the moment, to be sure. That game against Chicago was a rare accomplishment. But where will he be statistically next month? By season's end? By Christmas next year?

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Consistency is the hallmark of a good performer and when you're devising your team's strategy as a fantasy owner, you really need to try to keep that big picture in mind at all times. Single season owners want to chart their course over the entire six-month regular season, while keeper league owners have an even larger canvas with which to work. Don't get too caught up with any given game or week's output and put your team's fate in the hands of what might not be as grand a plan as you think at the time.

A quick digression, while we're on the subject of Gagner and the Oilers: So many people have jumped onto the "trade Ales Hemsky" bandwagon this season. His stats are miserable. His play, on the whole, hasn't been up to his normal standards. He'll be a UFA this summer. He's also making \$5M in '11-12 and some say he doesn't fit in with the team's youth movement, especially when the Oilers could use help on D.

However... He's only what, 27? His cap hit is \$4.1M and while he might get more this summer as a UFA, his market value is down now. Injury issues aside, how many players in the league with his skill-set actually compete as hard and are willing to get their noses dirty in the corners on a nightly basis? Coming back after last night's devastating hit by Niklas Kronwall, which Hemsky admitted was completely his fault for exposing himself to in the first place? Awesome. Plus, let's not forget that Hemsky is actually someone who LIKES PLAYING IN EDMONTON! While the tide may be changing league-wide given the young talent on the Oilers, free agents still generally shudder at the thought of playing in that locale.

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And finally, as much as the salary cap will come into play down the line with big ticket assets like Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and RNH on board, the Oilers are not at that point where Hemsky would have to be jettisoned right now. He will, once he's back on track, provide much-needed offensive support in that top six so that the big three don't have to do it all every night.

Put Gagner and the 11 points in two games aside for the moment though.

If you saw the recent NHL 36 about Nicklas Lidstrom, you may have caught this quote from Wings coach Mike Babcock: "I believe in sports there are tons of stars. To be a superstar you have to have soul. You have to have something that makes people around you better.

Absolutely. Lidstrom is beyond reproach in terms of being a superstar in this league and if you disagree with that statement, perhaps you should duck while one of his seven Norris Trophies is thrown your way.

But Babcock alludes to something I've long thought and which goes to the point of literal hyperbole in this article: the term "superstar" gets thrown around WAY too often in all walks of entertainment... from music to any sport, including hockey. Whichever of the legitimate stars of the industry happen to be the media darling of the week will often be coined a "superstar" and in a lot of ways, it has rendered the term perhaps not meaningless, but certainly less effective.

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This goes beyond Gagner though because nobody seriously called him a superstar after his eight-point effort.

The Babcock quote, for this purpose, just speaks to how quickly and easily conflation of what is actually happening is made with an exaggerated sense of that same occurrence.

If you look around the league, there is no shortage of examples of people perhaps displaying a bit too much exuberance in their praise or criticism of players. Instead of having a fairly measured response, we sometimes get too caught up in making declarative statements.

Strong months are overblown into what will 'surely' become stellar campaigns. Single season heroics become 'automatic' harbingers of things to come.

Veteran poolies who have been in the trenches of hard-fought championship battles time and time again know the real deal though. Sports battlefields are littered with players who just weren't able to consistently match their shining moment or moments, which is why the value of those who can deliver game after game, month after month and season after season is so high.

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Steadiness counts for a lot.

Not allowing yourself to get too caught up in the moment and thus losing sight of the big picture is a lesson too often lost on too many.

It's frequently the main difference between annual championship runs and the occasional fluke mixed in with a steady diet of heartbreak.

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