Geek of the Week: Chris Kunitz

It sure is great to have hockey back and finally have the ability to write about things that are actually happening on the ice **this** year and get some live examples of great value players in fantasy hockey. I had forgotten who I had on some of my rosters in one-year leagues that drafted back in the fall, such as Dobber's Pro league. I was pleased with my draft at the time; the competition was certainly steep, the managers were shrewd and value was very tough to find but I felt like I executed my strategy well. I managed to pick-up two top goalies (Ilya Bryzgalov and Jonathan Quick) in the first four rounds, and I targeted elite D and then focused

on good value forwards later on in the draft. As of Friday morning (25th) those two “stud” goalies have combined for one win and 20 goals against in seven games. Needless to say, I am not pleased so far with my goalies but here’s the really strange part: I am in first place despite this terrible goaltending. Thankfully, the two of them came around over the weekend with decent outings.

You never want to place too much weight on such a small sample size this early (just ask the 2011-12 Maple Leafs) and I am not claiming victory in any league just yet. My players could easily slow down, I could sustain some injuries or other teams’ players could step up their performances and pass me. All I want to show today is how I used some prior year data to find some good value in my draft and how that value is paying off so far in 2013. One of the value picks who is helping me out is the latest Geek of the Week, Chris Kunitz.

Kunitz is the epitome of a player that I target on my team – he isn’t a superstar that you have to use a high pick on, but he is a solid contributor. His point total is low enough to drop him down draft boards but his contributions to all other categories provide value that is much higher than other managers give him credit for. Let’s take a look at some Key stats for Kunitz from last year:

GP

G

A

PTS

+/-

PIM

HITS

PPP

SOG

82

26

35

61

16

49

180

18

230

You can see from the above that regardless of which categories your league measures, Kunitz is a solid contributor in **all** of them. He literally has no “weakness” category. To help me out preparing for Dobber's Pro league draft, I ran last season’s output through Fantasy Hockey Geek. The below results show how valuable Kunitz was in this league last year:

Dobber Pro League (Yahoo! 12-team Roto league: G,A, +/-, PPP, SOG, Hits, GAA, Sv, W)

FHG Rank

Player

GP

G

A

+/-

SOG

PPP

Hits

27

Tyler Seguin

81

29

38

34

242

15

26

28

Chris Kunitz

82

26

35

16

230

18

180

Looking at the chart above, you can see that Kunitz was the 28th most valuable player in the league last season. I drafted him with the 145th overall pick. The value that Kunitz provided last season was only slightly less than Ilya Kovalchuk in this league. Kovy was the 25th most valuable last season and was drafted 16th overall this season.

What makes Kunitz so valuable?

As I alluded to earlier, he contributes at a level that is good to great in all categories. Kunitz' 61 points last season was a very solid number that had him tied for 49th in the league and amongst some great company (within five points or less of Ovechkin, P Kane, B Richards, Marleau – though admittedly those guys underperformed compared to expectations). Furthermore, Kunitz was 39th in the league in SOG and he contributed well on the man advantage. The Hits category addition helps Kunitz out tremendously as he had the fifth highest Hit total amongst players who also scored 60-plus points.

How did Kunitz help me?

Waiting to draft guys like Kunitz in the later rounds allowed me to not lose too much value relative to a Kovalchuk and use my higher picks on harder to find players like G and D. I mentioned my goalies above and I am confident that they will start to perform for me. More importantly, my D boasts the names Karlsson, Letang, Boyle, Green, Del Zotto and Robidas. Clearly my D and (theoretically) my G are my strengths in this pool. Using FHG, I was able to identify great value for my forward positions and ensure that my focus on D and G did not create a weakness at forward. The great value of a guy like Kunitz isn't just his contribution to all categories, but also the fact that taking guys like Kunitz in the 12th, allows you to take guys like Karlsson in the second.

Fast forward to the early parts of this season and Kunitz is already contributing to my team. He has two points in three games, both on the powerplay, and he has eight hits to go along with that. He continues to play on the top powerplay and he spends most of his even strength time with either Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin – not too shabby. I am a little bit concerned with his low shot total so far (two through three games) but all other signs point to Kunitz continuing to contribute great value in this league for me in 2013. Given that I only used the 145th overall pick on him, I am very confident that he will continue to return great value to my team.

The point of this article isn't to pat myself on the back for my early lead in this league (well, maybe it is). I have far from clinched the title though and it's going to be tough to hold onto top spot; as I mentioned there are some really great managers and strong teams. I will need my guys to stay healthy and I will definitely need better production from my goalies but - with help from FHG- I think I have put myself in a great position to succeed. What I wanted to show in this article, is a real life example how you can identify great value players using FHG and use that information to create a solid draft strategy or identify trade targets. For my personal example, you can see that my value forwards such as Kunitz are contributing while my stud D are putting up the big numbers that you would expect and the result is an early season rise up the standings. If my goalies do indeed turn it around, I am going to be hard to beat. So far, the strategy is working as planned!

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