Taking an in-depth look at Phoenix defenseman Derek Morris

Last week I talked about the importance of selling high and buying low in your fantasy hockey league, using Teddy Purcell as an example of a great sell-high candidate. Today I am digging a little deeper down the depth charts to illustrate a great buy low depth player: Derek Morris
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Before getting into the details of Morris I want to stress that this is my recommendation as a depth add; I know he isn't Zdeno Chara . Morris is only 23% owned across Yahoo! pools, he is 34 years old and hasn't eclipsed the 30 point plateau since the 2003-04 season. I have no delusions of Morris being a stud defenseman but I am here to show you value and that's what I intend to do. Defense is always a scarce position and Morris might be just the guy you are looking for to fill in and help out as your 5th or 6th defensemen.

The way I stumbled upon the value in Derek Morris was by doing something that I commonly do over the course of a season: I ran the year to date numbers through Fantasy Hockey Geek to see who is providing surprise value so far. One name jumped out at me:

(FHG value calculated for a Yahoo! standard 12 team league counting G, A, +/-, PIM, SOG, PPP)

Rank

Player

G

A

+/-

PIM

SOG

PPP

42

Derek Morris

0

5

2

12

21

2

Note: all FHG numbers are up to (and including) Wednesday Feb 6th.

I know that you always see anomalies this early into a season, but my jaw almost hit the floor when I saw Derek Morris ' name as the 42nd highest on the list. I thought "I can't possibly add Derek Morris
to my team, can I?"

Staying ahead of the curve is always key to making great adds or trades in your fantasy hockey league. You want to be the guy who first identifies the new high value contributor who helps lead you to the championship but you don't want to be the manager that adds a player after one good game only to see him throw up zeros for the next 3 weeks. So I dug a little deeper to attempt to understand where Morris' value is coming from and whether or not it is sustainable.

So where is his value coming from?

- Morris is a defenseman who has played at least seven games and is averaging 0.5 points per game, which is a 42 point pace. Defensemen who put up points are always extremely valuable in fantasy hockey.
- His 21 SOG is very good number for a defenseman, only Morris and 20 other defensemen in the league have averaged over two shots per game this season (amongst D who have played at least five games).
- His contributions in PIMs and on the powerplay also improve his value in this format. Other than his 0 goals, Morris contributes well to all categories from a scarce position. Considering his shot total and his career shooting % I would guess that Morris will start scoring at about a 5 goal 82 game pace soon.
- One last important thing to add is that Morris also has a whopping 29 hits this season! When I originally ran the FHG numbers on Morris I was actually doing it for the Dobber Pro League, which includes hits. His value in the Dobber league is even higher than it is in the Yahoo! standard

So, I think it's pretty easy to understand why Morris has been such a valuable player so far this season but the question remains: **can he keep it up?**

- Looking at his point total, the answer is probably no, Morris is not likely to maintain a 0.5ppg pace. He hasn't accomplished that feat since 2005-06 and he isn't the team's top option on D …not even close. I don't think he can keep up a 42 point pace, but I do think he may come close because of the following points:

- To determine whether or not his hit and shot totals were sustainable, I took a look at his ice time. This season, Phoenix is using him more. In 2011-12, Morris was 6th amongst Phoenix defensemen in average ice time (18:59) and he got 0:27 of PP time per contest. This season he is second on the team with a 22:16 avg. TOI and 2:00 per game on the powerplay! When I saw this it was my "aha" moment.

- One last check I always like to do to see how legitimate early season stats are is the gameOften times, one big game can skew a player's value. If a player has good averages

because of one big game, then maybe it was a fluke, but if a player has 10 solid games then I may be more inclined to believe in the change.

Date

Opponent

G

A

+/-

PIM

PPG

Hits

Bks

PPA

SOG

Feb 4

MIN

0

0

1

2

0

2

0

0

1

Feb 2

DAL

0

1

0

0

0

1

2

1

5

Feb 1

@ DAL

0

0

-1

0

0

2

3

0

0

Jan 30

EDM

0

0

0

4

0

4

2

0

2

Jan 28

NAS

0

1

2

0

0

3

0

0

2

Jan 26

LOS

0

0

1

2

0

5

0

0

1

Jan 24

@ SAN

0

1

-1

2

0

2

1

1

3

Jan 23

COB

0

1

1

0

0

1

2

0

3

Jan 20

CHI

0

1

-1

0

0

2

3

0

0

Jan 19

@ DAL

0

0

0

2

0

7

1

0

4

There are no stellar games on Morris' game log, but looking game by game he has only had one game so far where he was a non-contributor (Feb 1st). All other games I would gladly take from my sixth defenseman in most league formats.

So what do I make of all this? Is Derek Morris going to be the 42nd most valuable player in my

fantasy league this season? No, absolutely not. There is evidence to suggest however, that Morris' strong output is not merely a fluke; it is the result of a talented rearguard being given more of an opportunity to contribute to his team, and capitalizing. I would assume that Morris will continue as a 30-35 point defenseman (prorated to 82 games) and provide good to great peripheral stats depending on your league settings. That's a pretty valuable guy to have as your 5th or 6th D and certainly worthy of more than his current 23% ownership. We're only 10 games in so Morris may not be able to sustain it, but if you are low on options for a lower D position – give Morris a look!

Players like Morris who are producing well and widely available can be very important additions to your team. Incidentally, I did put in a claim for him in the Dobber Pro League and I was actually outbid by $1 (I mentioned last week the competition was steep!). I actually think that losing out on Morris is a pretty big blow to my team as the competition is closing the gap. I will have to get over the Morris loss though and look for my next gem. I'll run the values through FHG again, see who is producing good value, do a quick gut-check to make sure the numbers seem legit and then get them on my team!

To find some great early season adds of your own, sign up for Fantasy Hockey Geek today – and try not to get outbid by $1.

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