An in-depth look at Erik Karlsson, and the options of fantasy hockey owners...

Last Wednesday night, fantasy hockey leagues everywhere were turned on their heads when Erik Karlsson suffered an Achilles injury that will, in all likelihood, cost him the rest of the 2013 season. Earlier this week, Angus had a great piece breaking down the impact of the Karlsson injury. As a Karlsson owner myself, I wanted to take the opportunity to build on this and share the pain of the loss. It is a somewhat therapeutic geek of the week: Erik Karlsson

Karlsson's average draft position was 22 this season, which at the time I would have said is great second round value. I was quite pleased to get him in the second round of the Dobber pro league and he has been a key contributor to my early lead in that pool (a lead that will now surely vanish). Anytime you lose a top pick to a long-term injury, your chances of winning plummet, but with Karlsson the impact is especially huge. I ran the 2013 numbers through Fantasy Hockey Geek to show how big the impact is:

(Yahoo! standard 12 team roto league, G,A,+/-, PPP, SOG, Hits, GAA, Sv, W)

Rank

Player

Team

G

A

+/-

SOG

PPP

HITS

8

Henrik Zetterberg

DET

5

13

3

45

8

5

9

Patrick Kane

CHI

9

11

6

35

7

0

10

Erik Karlsson

OTT

6

4

6

63

3

10

As you can see from the above, as of Feb 14th, Karlsson has been the 10th most valuable player in this league format. His value is this high, despite the fact that he wasn't even producing at his 2011-12 levels. Last season, Karlsson provided top 5 value.

Looking at the numbers, it is easy to see why Karlsson is so valuable. He contributes to all categories from the D position and does so at an elite level. As of Thursday, only 16 players in the league had more goals than Karlsson and of course none of them were defensemen. Furthermore, Karlsson actually led the entire league in shots, averaging a whopping 4.5 per game! As a point of comparison, the league average in shots per game is 1.6 and the average for defensemen is 1.3. Karlsson also hits and contributes on the powerplay. He is the total package and he does it all with D eligibility – owning him is like having another slot on your roster for an elite forward.

The fact that Karlsson is a D is the factor that makes him one of the hardest guys in the league to replace (I would say THE hardest). Consider that in the Dobber league I mentioned above, the best available waiver defenseman is probably Francois Beauchemin . Let's compare their numbers from 2011-12 and see how much I am losing

Player

Team

G

A

+/-

SOG

PPP

HITS

Erik Karlsson

OTT

19

59

16

261

28

60

Francois Beauchemin

ANA

8

14

-14

139

5

154

Difference

-11

-45

-30

-122

-23

94

By swapping Karlsson for Beauchemin I am losing 56 points, +30 and 23 PPP! Essentially, the difference between Karlsson and Beachemin is the equivalent of another elite defenseman. This graphic depicts exactly how valuable Karlsson really is: he provides the output of two defensemen from one roster spot.

If you are a Karlsson owner (as I am) and you are reading this right now, it is probably all very depressing for you. I am sorry to say friends, but the news really is that grim. If you have any sort of strong competition in your league then your chances of a championship are probably out the window. None of us like to go down without a fight, though, so let's take a look at your best options as a Karlsson owner:

Option 1, Rebuild:

If you are in a keeper league, now might be the time to consider a one year rebuild. You would have to have an incredibly stacked team to be able to absorb the Karlsson loss and still win the pool. In my keeper league the owner of Karlsson (The Macedonian Mouth) is currently in first in the league although it is incredibly competitive at the top. Since the news on Wednesday, he has already sold off 7 of his non keepers for picks. This may seem like a bit of an overreaction on his part as he still had a solid squad, but I whole heartedly agree with the strategy. He probably could have made the playoffs, but he was going to be hard pressed to win without Karlsson. After the Mouth's sell-off he is a hands-down favorite to take the cup next season with great keepers and multiple high round picks. Being the first to "sell" in a keeper league can be a huge advantage as you are the only seller and you will have 4-6 buyers, so your returns will of course be greater. To top it all off the picks that he got were from some contending teams, so he effectively weakened his biggest competition in 2014.

Option 2, Find Karlsson Light:

If you are in a one year league or are hell-bent on going for it in your keeper, one option would be to try to replace Karlsson with a similar defenseman who has lesser output. No name I can give you will provide close to what Karlsson would have provided you, but here are some examples of widely available guys who may be able to help you out at least a little bit:

Cody Franson

Player	G	A	+/-	SOG

PPP

HITS

Cody Franson

1

7

7

17

1

26

Like Karlsson but to a much lesser degree, Cody Franson is contributing to all categories. FHG shows him as the 49th most valuable player in the aforementioned Dobber Pro league and he is only 16% owned across Yahoo! leagues.

Derek Morris

Player

G

A

+/-

SOG

PPP

HITS

Derek Morris

0

5

1

27

2

34

Last week, I profiled Derek Morris and how great of an impact he has been having this season with his expanded role in Phoenix. In the early going this season, Morris has proven to be a very solid multi-cat contributor. Be sure to check on the severity of his most recent injury before grabbing him though.

Marek Zidlicky

Player	G	A	+/-	SOG	PPP	HITS
Marek Zidlicky	0	6	0			

30

5

17

Since the beginning of last year's playoffs, Zidlicky's hits and shots have taken off, increasing his fantasy value greatly. The New Jersey powerplay is white-hot and Zidlicky is second on the team in PP time per game. He is currently the 65th most valuable player in the Dobber Pro league and is only 39% owned.

Fedor Tyutin

Player

G

A

+/-

SOG

PPP

HITS

Fedor Tyutin

1

9

-2

19

3

17

If you can absorb a hit to +/-, Tyutin is another decent multi-cat option who flies under the radar (19% owned). He puts up some shots and hits while spending almost 3:00 a game on the PP.

None of the above names will come close to the output of Karlsson. But if you are still strong in other positions, one of these four guys may help to soften the blow of the EK loss.

Option 3, Change focus:

When you lose a stud like Karlsson you know that most categories are going to take a big hit, especially shots, assists and PPP. One option would be to concede the hit to these two categories and bulk up in a couple of other categories in order to start winning your roto league or H2H match-ups in a different manner. Here are some options to help you do that:

Luke Schenn

Player

G

A

+/-

SOG

PPP

HITS

Luke Schenn

1

2

3

19

0

55

With his monster hit total and solid shot total, Schenn could help you climb in the peripheral categories to help make up for what you are losing in some scoring categories. FHG currently ranks Schenn as the 41st most valuable player in the Dobber Pro league and he is only 18% owned. His value stems from the hits, where he could single handedly move you from a mid-level hit team to one of the top in your league.

Brenden Dillion

Player

G

A

+/-

SOG

PPP

HITS

Brenden Dillon

2

1

1

26

0

41

Dillon is a lesser known (3% owned) player who has only played 3:22 on the powerplay all season, but he has shown an uncanny ability to put up peripherals. 1.9 shots per game and 2.9 hits per game are incredible outputs for the undrafted defenseman. If he can keep that up, he will make for a great under the radar pickup. He isn't likely to keep scoring crazy goals like this all season, but his value comes from the shots and hits. Anything he gets in terms of offence and powerplay time can be considered a bonus

If your league includes blocked shots, you may also want to check out a guy like Ladislav Smid , who will contribute at an elite level at blocks as well as hits.

If you lost Karlsson this season then you have my condolences. We all know he is impossible to replace and there is a very good chance that your team is toast in 2013. If you think you still have a sniff at a championship though, check out some of the above options and see if you can pull a rabbit out of a hat. Sign up for Fantasy Hockey Geek today and enter your league settings. You may be able to find some under the radar replacements of your own.

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