Fifteen signs that your team is not going to win your league this year

Don't look now, but the 2012-13 season is nearly half over. At this point some fantasy hockey teams are doing great and others terrible, but most probably are somewhere in the middle. But as painful as this might be to hear, many of those teams in the middle have little to no realistic chance to actually win their league. What makes that situation even worse is when those GMs finally wake up and realize their inevitable fate, it'll be too late to try to take steps (like trades) to help put their teams in a better position for next season or down the road.

With this in mind - and to help cheer up some of these doomed teams - here's a Letterman style list of the top 15 signs that your team is actually out of contention even if you might not realize it right now.

1) You've seriously considered adding one of your injured players to your active line-up because you figure "hey, at least he won't be minus…."

2) When every player that's been dropped by other teams over the past few weeks could legitimately be in your starting line-up

3) In response to another GM ragging on your team you say "well at least I'm not Doug – have you looked at his team!" Then the other GM reminds you that Doug's team passed you in the standings over a week ago

4) More and more you're watching spring training baseball instead of NHL Gamecenter

5) You keep finding yourself thinking "whew, at least that last one was an empty netter" when you notice that one of your goalies lost yet again by a score of 6-4, 7-5 or 5-3.

6) When you drop players from your roster, other teams honestly respond by saying "wow, I forgot he was still in the league"

7) You feel a strong motivation to track down inexpensive hockey cards of some of your players simply so you can rip them into tiny pieces, throw darts at them, or fashion them into makeshift voodoo dolls

8) When you watch NHL Tonight, you secretly wish Kevin Weekes or Jamie McLennan would come out of retirement so you could upgrade your goaltending

9) When someone points out how bad your squad is, you angrily respond by reminding them that you've got more PIMs than any other team, the only problem being that your league switched out PIMs for Hits two seasons ago

10) You spend more than an hour a day trolling the twitter accounts of your underperforming players

11) The other GMs are kind enough to pitch in to get you a midseason gift, except when you open it you see a Staples “Easy” button with the word “Panic” pasted over it

12) When you start talking trade with another team and the GM asks which of your players are untouchable, you literally can’t think of a single one

13) Other GMs in your league always start out conversations with “so, have you decided who you’re taking with the first pick next year?” and they’re being 100% serious

14) You show your roster to Elisha Cuthbert and she says “wow, even I wouldn’t have dated any of them” (sorry Dion; no offense……)

15) You catch yourself secretly wishing the lockout had wiped out the entire season

Final Verdict

All humor aside, it is important for every GM to take a long honest look at league standings this time of year and really see whether there is a possible path to victory for his/her team. I know it’s hard to consider waving the white flag after most players on your team have only suited up for just over 20 games and where you still might be seeing a lot of daily change in your league standings, but the key to remember is half a season means the same no matter how many total games there are -- 48 or 82. And while it’s true that 50% of the games this season have yet to be played, you need to also look at the fact that the other 50% are already in the books and it’s not like everyone will be starting from scratch for the second half.

If you’re not winning your league (or close to it) right now, then you have to ask yourself whether

you can realistically expect your team to not only get better, but also at the same time count on the teams ahead of you to come back to earth enough for you to catch them despite the locked in stats from the first half of the season. All too often people take too much of a “glass half full” mentality that is not grounded in reality and actual numbers. In other words, you never want to throw in the towel too early - especially in a shorter season - but you also must be capable of seeing that your team might be in too big of a statistical hole to emerge from in time.

So you’re probably wondering what types of "middle ground" fantasy teams should be optimistic about their chances. Some examples are ones where real difference makers (like Scott Hartnell or Joffrey Lupul) are coming back from long term injury or will be soon. In the same vein, if you lost more than your fair share of time from players who are point per game scorers or close (Evgeni Malkin, Max Pacioretty, Jeff Skinner, Taylor Hall, Rick Nash) or elite defensemen (Tobias Enstrom, P.K. Subban, Dustin Byfuglien) in the first half, then it would be reasonable to expect to make some significant gains from having them hopefully available for more games during the rest of the season.

Another reason for optimism would be if your team has players (such as Jordan Eberle , Dustin Brown, Brad Boyes) who are getting major top line ice time but somehow have been outshined thus far in terms of performance by their linemates, as in those cases they (and thus your team) may have indeed been the victim of statistical bad luck that you could count on to reverse itself or to at least somewhat improve. The same would be true for guys who are getting tons of power play time but so far have always seemed to be the ones who don’t end up on the power play score sheet.

Another key area is goalies. In most cases, leagues count anywhere from 20% to 40% of their overall standings from goalie statistics despite each team only starting two or three goalies (versus often up to ten times as many forwards + defensemen). What that means is there is a real chance for statistical gains if, for example, you've had worse than average luck with injuries (Kari Lehtonen , Jaroslav Halak , Craig Anderson , Cam Ward , Martin Brodeur) or if your goalies have performed more poorly than was expected and thus stand to do better in the second half (
Cory Schneider
,
Ryan Miller
,
Braden Holtby
). All this could lead to your team making a lot more sizeable gains than it would simply by having its slumping offensive players wake up, since unlike offensive categories where the overall standings reflect the combined stats of far more players (thus making it harder to make gains), goalie standings usually allow for a lot more actual movement, even at this point in the season and beyond.

Lastly, don't forget that if you're ever in the position of needing to take a long, hard look at your team for whatever reason, you can always seek advice in the DobberHockey Forum . There you'll always find people to give you well informed – and, if necessary, brutally honest – advice that can provide an excellent detached perspective. And there's also Ian Ferguson's monthly Expert's Audit feature; you can send an
email to see if he'll dissect your team and give you helpful hints on how to improve.