

Written by Ryan Ma

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Continuing the series on the breakdown of each Western Conference team. This week we'll take a deeper look into the Red Wings, Oilers and Kings.

As many of the Dobber writers have alluded to, it all boils down to opportunity. A top-line player will receive every possible chance to succeed, while a top-six player will receive decent even strength/second unit power-play ice-time for production. A bottom feeder will most likely receive checking line time and definitely won't receive ample optimal scoring time. Their big break will only come if there are injuries or sudden collapses of young players from their team's top-six. We all like to be optimistic with our projections, but there really isn't a point in projection 80 points for a player who won't even crack a team's top-line, let alone top-six. If you haven't read my [projections](#) article, definitely go and take a gander. I know I had an eye-opening experience when digging up all the stats.

Note: Take the line combos with a grain of

salt. They are just arbitrary and are used primarily to separate a team’s top-six from the bottom-six . I really don’t want to get into arguments about player X had chemistry with player Y, therefore they’ll be on a line together during the season.

The following table was the same from last week’s column, with the addition of max and min instead of range.

Offensive Player’s scoring position on team

West

East

League

Median

Max

Min

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Top

74.6

74.1

74.3

70

112

51

2	nd
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62.8

64.5

63.7

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61

101

41

3rd

55.1

54.5

54.8

53

84

37

4th

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47.7

45.1

46.4

47

67

33

5

th

42.7

38.2

40.5

38.5

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53

32

6

th

36

34

35

34

53

22

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Enough of the stats, now onto the good stuff.

Detroit – Top-six fairly locked faces decent competition from bottom-six

Top Six

Tomas Holmstrom – Pavel Datsyuk – Johan Franzen

Valtteri Filppula – Henrik Zetterberg – Jiri Hudler

Cavalry

Todd Bertuzzi, Dan Cleary

Bottom Feeders

Kris Draper, Drew Miller, Patrick Eaves, Justin Abdelkader (RFA) and Darren Helm (RFA).

Detroit's offense slipped to 14th overall last campaign as they only averaged 2.72 goals per contest. Most of that could have been attributed to the decimation caused by injuries throughout the season. If they can stay healthy, I wouldn't be surprised to see them amongst the top the league in offense with a similar roster that they iced in 2008-09 (minus Hossa). The top-six is fairly set, but the pieces are certainly interchangeable. Datsyuk and Zetterberg were split for most of the 2008-09 season, as they spent only 8.91 percent of the entire season's ice-time together. It worked then, so I can envision them going back to the well once again. Just looking at the talent level of the top-six, Filppula could be another victim of depth in HockeyTown, as there just isn't a lot of teams (two) who can possess a 50-point scorer as their fifth or sixth depth forward. I listed Bertuzzi and Cleary as the cavalry but both could negatively impact the production of the top-six for the upcoming season. I wouldn't expect glittering numbers, but 35-40 seems reasonable for a seventh and eighth depth forward.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Zetterberg, Datsyuk, Holmstrom, Filppula. Franzen, and Hudler.

End of year finish:

Zetterberg

70

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Datsyuk

70

Holmstrom

45

Bertuzzi

44

Filppula

35

Cleary

34

Edmonton – Potential gong show.

Top Six

Dustin Penner – Shawn Horcoff – Ales Hemsky

Taylor Hall – Sam Gagner (RFA) – Jordan Eberle

Cavalry

Andrew Cogliano (RFA), Magnus Paajarvi-Svensson and Linus Omark

Bottom Feeders

Ryan O'Marra, Gilbert Brule (RFA), Colin Fraser, Ryan Jones, Zack Stortini, Steve MacIntyre and J.F. Jacques

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The revamped Oilers will be seeking revenge after last campaign. With only Penner, Horcoff, Hemsky and Gagner as the main veterans returning upfront, the Oilers will ice a very young team in 2010-11. On the positive side of the fence, you have plenty of sleeper potentials if you are willing to gamble, but on the flip side, you also could find yourself with plenty of frustrating busts as well. For those of you who have followed my columns intently or know me personally, you're probably well aware of the hate that I have for Horcoff, but there might just be a bright spot heading into October. Hemsky has tallied 159 points in an injury-plagued last three seasons, 105 of which involved being on a line with Horcoff (66 percent). The Oilers brass haven't shown they're willing to give up on Horcoff as they still allotted him 19:25 in ice-time last campaign despite his minus 29 rating. His fantasy value is directly related to the health of Hemsky, if Hemmer stays healthy, I wouldn't be surprised to see Edmontonians treat Horcoff as the next coming of Jesus come April.

Gagner is heading into his "magical fourth year", which could bear some watching. Hall and Eberle should make big impacts in their NHL debuts and be strong candidates for the Calder trophy come June. I'm not quite sure if the Oil would also introduce MPS and Omark to their line up, as carrying four rookies would make them very young and inexperienced. Placing them in third-line checking roles also isn't exactly going to be ideal for their development, so you might see MPS and Omark return back to their respective leagues (SEL and KHL) for another season.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Penner, Horcoff, Hemsky, O'Sullivan, Gagner, and Cogliano.

End of year finish:

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Penner

63

Gagner

41

Brule

37

Horcoff

36

O'Sullivan

34

Potulny

32

Los Angeles- Top-five set in stone, □ potential surprises in competition from bottom-six

Top Six

Ryan Smyth – Anze Kopitar – Justin Williams

Andrei Loktionov** – Jarrett Stoll – Dustin Brown

Cavalry

Michal Handzus, Oscar Moller and Brayden Schenn

Bottom Feeders

Wayne Simmonds, Brad Richardson, Rich Clune and Scott Parse

Now that the Kovalchuk/Gagne saga has concluded, the top-five in LA is pretty much set in stone. Kopitar is the “go-to” guy in LA and should lead the Kings in scoring once again. Smyth and Williams have been battling injury problems since the lockout, as the duo has missed a combined 174 contests since the 2005. If you are drafting/owning either player for this season, expect a few scratches along the way. Brown seems to consistently tease us with potential, but has never cracked anything more than the 60-point plateau. Makes me wonder if he really has that next gear as part of his arsenal, but if SOG is what you’re after, he’s averaged 220 SOG during the last three seasons. Stoll won’t wow you with dazzling fantasy numbers, but he has tallied 21, 22, and 21 points respectively on the power-play since 2007-08. After the top-five of the Kings, there’s very little veteran depth on the charts, but that doesn’t mean that there’s a lack of skill. Brayden Schenn has amassed 258 points in 195 contests in the WHL, but with one more year of eligibility remaining, he’ll most likely spend another year to finish off his junior career in Brandon.

Moller is continuing to develop and could definitely see some time in a top-six role if the Kings decide to remain status quo. Loktionov is my dark horse candidate and really could be the surprise of the bunch as his 24 points in 29 contests with the Monarchs last campaign certainly hasn’t gone unnoticed. I haven’t followed his career path at all, so maybe Alessandro Seren Rosso can provide more insight. Handzus continues to frustrate many fantasy poolies as his inconsistent play must be causing plenty of headaches. In 81 contests last season, 48 of them resulted in goose eggs, while seven resulted in multi-point games. He had two three-game, two four-game and two five-game pointless streaks, which certainly would have been maddening for a Handzus owner.

Last year’s pre-season top-six:

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Smyth, Kopitar, Brown, Frolov, Stoll, and Williams.

End of year finish:

Kopitar

81

Brown

56

Smyth

53

Frolov

51

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Stoll

47

Handzup

42

Next week: the Wild, Predators, and Coyotes.

Questions or comments? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them in the comments section below.