

Maybe this is the Oil fan in me, but I believe the sixth overall pick is cursed. Ever since the Oilers drafted in that spot three straight years back in the mid 90's (and more specifically, inexplicably passed on Shane Doan in favour of Steve Kelly at the '95 draft) the sixth overall pick has been cursed. I don't really know how to explain it. That draft position just keeps churning out flops. Oh you may get a reasonably good NHL player but if your dream is a star, you can kiss that dream goodbye. Since the curse came into effect only Minnesota's 2001 selection of Mikko Koivu at #6 has yielded a star calibre player. Teams expect much more from such high picks so the hype is big. The return, however, has been consistently disappointing.

With that said, I'm more than willing to admit that this may just be coincidental. After all, my Oilers and the perennially inept Blue Jackets have each picked in that spot three times since (and including) the Steve Kelly debacle. It is somewhat faulty to doom every sixth overall draft pick to fail to meet expectations because the teams picking in that spot the most are among the worst in the NHL over that span of time. That sentiment is little consolation for this week's Cage

Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21

Match contestants as both were selected by those "sixquisitely" doomed franchises. Sam Gagner and Derrick Brassard may both be lucky to find themselves featured on Cage Match but they are both destined for mediocrity (as if you didn't already know that).

If you had not already accepted unexceptional returns from Brassard or Gagner then consider the following. Both Brassard and Gagner made their NHL debuts in the 2007-08 season, which makes this past season their "magical fourth year" and as I'm sure you are well aware that year came to pass without even the slightest bit of magic. Owning either one these past few years has been like going for a long walk down the yellow brick road, making this past season the unveiling of the Wizard Oz.

Granted they are both still young and still boast some upside it's time we once and for all tempered our expectations. Simply clicking your heels while whispering, "There's no place like home," won't rid you of the Tin Man or the Cowardly Lion (I'll let you decide who is who as it is not essential to the metaphor) as they won't be handed a heart or a brain any time soon. It isn't all bad for those of you who own them though. While the trade returns for either one is surely diminishing by the day, they still have value as a decent second line center and as it stands they also remain the top dog on their respective teams, so you cannot rule out a Stephen Weiss-esque awakening.

In the end the upside for both these guys is still an assist heavy 75 points but with Nugent-Hopkins likely on the way for Edmonton and Ryan Johansen coming to Columbus both guys are screwed long term. With that in mind let us do battle with the numbers.

Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21

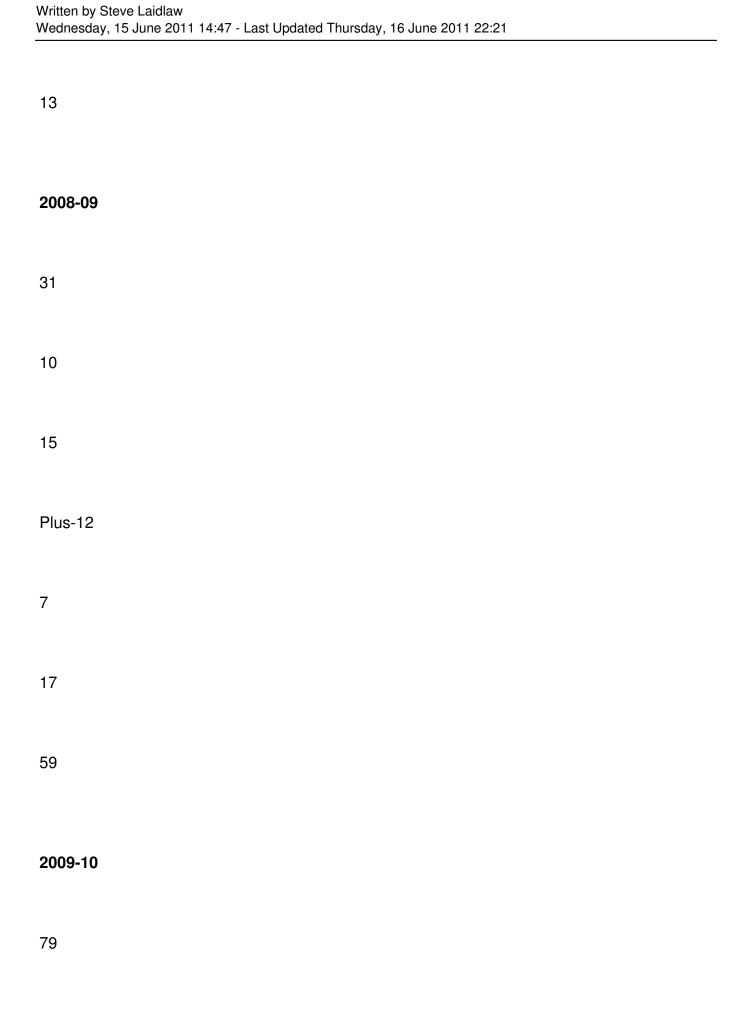
Brassard

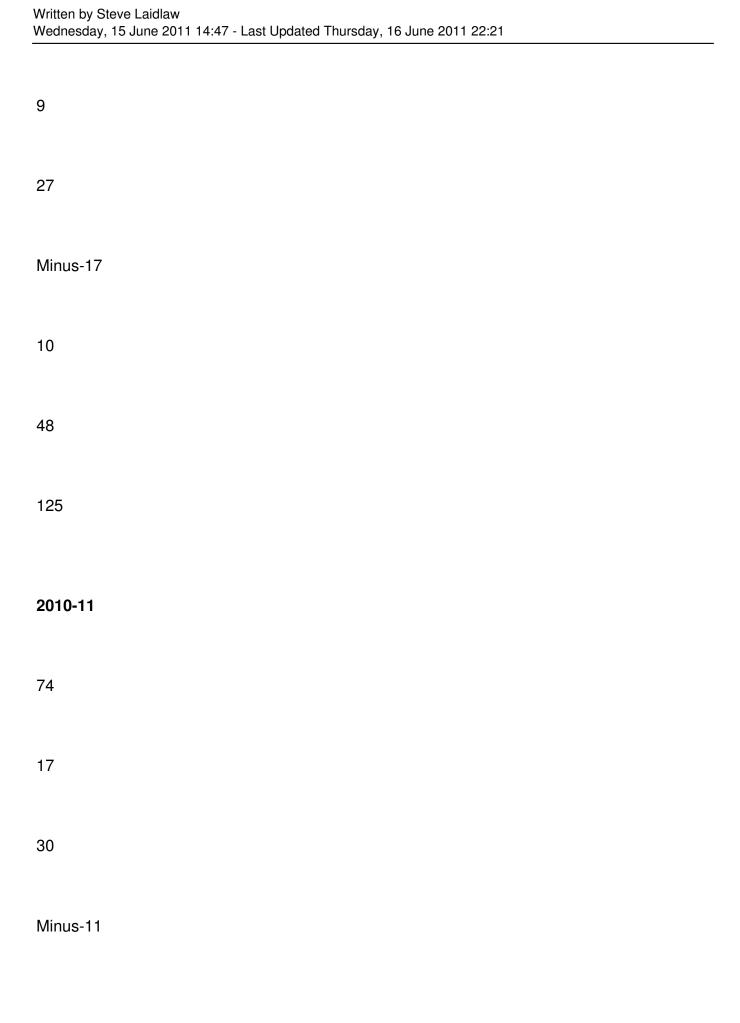
GP

Goals

Written by Steve Laidlaw

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21 **Assists** Plus/Minus **PPP** PIM SOG 2007-08 17 1 1 Minus-4 0 6





Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21

16

55

183

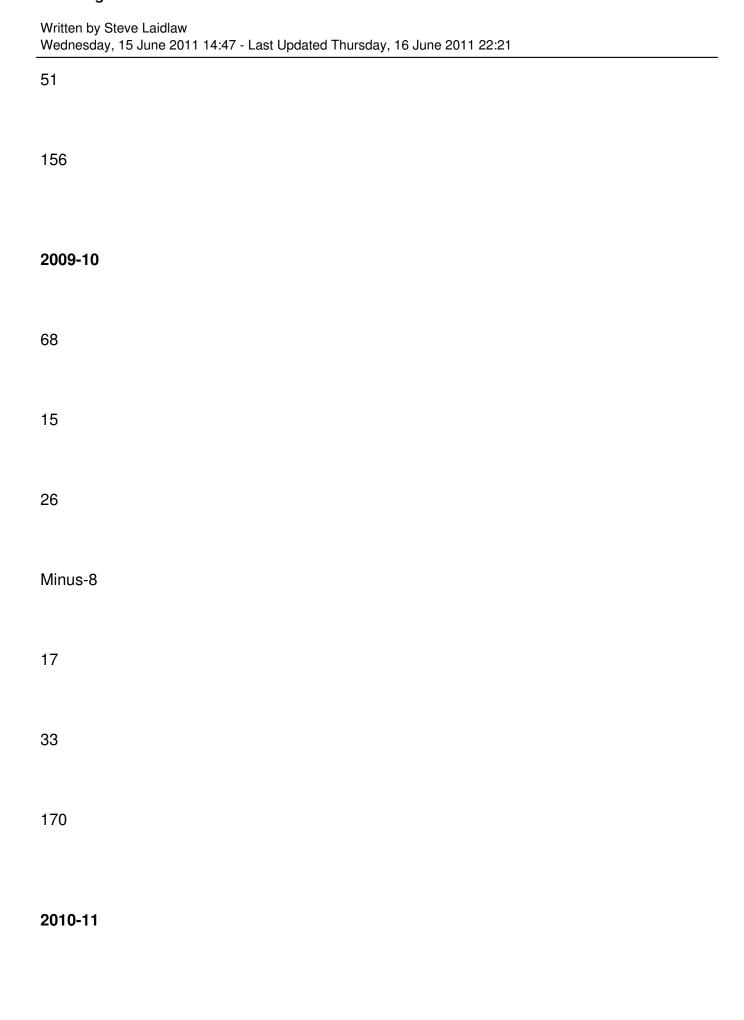
Gagner

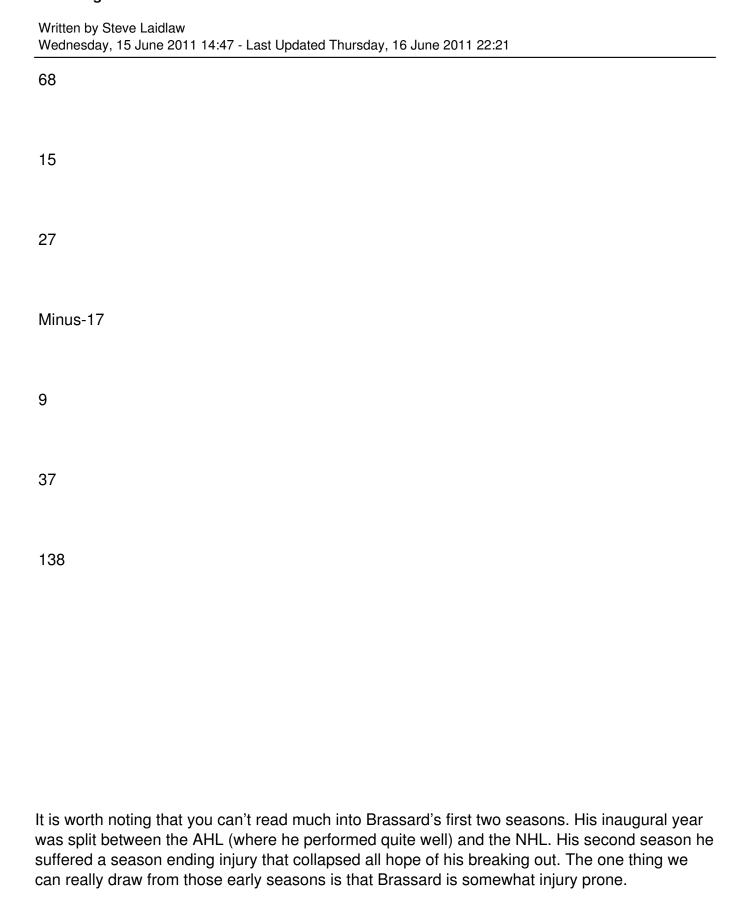
Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21					
GP					
Goals					
Assists					
Plus/Minus					
PPP					
PIM					
200					
SOG					
2007-08					
79					
13					

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21

Written by Steve Laidlaw

36		
Minus-21		
16		
23		
135		
2008-09		
76		
16		
25		
Minus-1		
11		





Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21

On the whole the numbers do not show you much of anything. The Goal and Assist totals are quite similar, so are PPP and SOG. You cannot read much into the Plus/Minus stat because they both have played for crappy teams. That Brassard was able to be a plus player on Columbus' one and only playoff team is promising though. It shows he was responsible enough to earn minutes under the greatest stickler of them all, Ken Hitchcock, so let's concede Brassard is a slightly safer bet here.

The same can be said for PIM. Gagner has never been a big PIM producer. He did have one mildly big season of 60 PIM in 56 games back in 2005-06 in the USHL but if we are going that far back then Brassard can trump him having put up 92 PIM in 58 games, that same season, in the QMJHL. Brassard has a career average of reasonably well over half a PIM per game, while Gagner's career average is just under half a PIM per game. It is a marginal difference but it exists.

Ultimately there's not enough within the numbers themselves to make a decision one way or another. Yes Brassard seems to have a slight edge in a couple of categories but it is not conclusive.

The point of showing the numbers though is to demonstrate that while Gagner is clearly developing sideways like a low interest savings account, Brassard is actually improving his numbers each and every season. His development may have stagnated as a result of his injury but progress is still being made and this cannot be ignored.

Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21

When watching Gagner you don't get the sense of a player who is on the cusp of emerging. His skill is evident but I question his drive. It seems as though his will to put the time and effort in has been crushed by all the losing in Edmonton. He's like a pot of coffee, only someone forgot to turn the element on. A change of scenery would do him good because he needs a fire lit under his ass before it's too late. He's only 23 years old but with four years under his belt it's getting a little late to start learning things like the importance of faceoffs and conditioning.

Brassard's outlook is more optimistic. I don't watch as much Columbus as I do Edmonton so I'm no doubt harder on Gagner but I felt I saw more out of Brassard. He consistently shows a sincere passion for the game and he tends to battle a lot harder than Gagner does. Now that may be because Brassard is a lot bigger and thus more inclined to get involved physically but I don't think Gagner gets a pass because of his stature. Brassard is also a much better skater so while he doesn't have Gagner's hands he can get more done with his effort and skating.

Brassard has also (ever so briefly) experienced a winning environment. I do not feel his development has been quite as sullied as Gagner's. Both players have a long way to go, as do their teams but Columbus is more ready to compete now and so is Brassard. As it stands the Blue Jackets are really only missing a puck mover or two on defence and they may have a couple who are on the cusp in John Moore and David Savard. The Oilers need puck movers too but they also need experience in general.

You cannot talk Oilers without mentioning the development of Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and Magnus Paajarvi. Those players will undoubtedly be improved next season but to what degree remains a mystery. Brassard on the other hand has at least one teammate we know is a star in Rick Nash and they've shown some chemistry in the past. Gagner on the other hand showed little to know chemistry with Edmonton's trio of rookies so even if they improve there is no telling

Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 15 June 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 June 2011 22:21

if it will help his numbers. Gagner does have chemistry with Hemsky but that only last as long as Hemsky does, which is about as long as a virgin with a supermodel.

My firm belief is that Gagner needs a fresh start out of Edmonton while Brassard can nestle into a solid second line role (with potential for first line) right where he is. Ultimately I would prefer not to own either one of these two but Brassard is trending upward. If he can give me a bigger impact right away I will take it so I can trade him down the road. I am willing to take a chance on Brassard's injuries while optimistically predicting a 60 point season for him next year. It is true that Johansen should join the team next season and eventually take the top line center spot away from Brassard but his mere presence will open things up for everyone next season. Gagner on the other hand will toil with(out) the youngsters once again. I think he hits a career high 50 points next season but it won't be enough to win this Cage Match or keep him in Edmonton.

Oh and since it's probably nagging at you, Scarecrow is Gilbert Brule (who has ironically played for both teams). You definitely don't want to own him.