

Cage Match Tournament - who is the best multi-category stud in fantasy hockey?

I'm excited to bring you my first ever Cage Match tournament! For those of you unfamiliar with how this works, it's where you – loyal Cage Match readers – get to have your votes counted in settling a fantasy hockey debate. The tournament starts with four brackets of eight players per bracket that meet in individual face-offs until each bracket has one winner. The four bracket winners will be narrowed to two finalists, who'll then do battle in a championship match, from which a victor will be crowned.

I wrestled with what debate to tackle in my inaugural tournament, before deciding on something that's becoming increasingly important in more and more fantasy hockey leagues – multi-cat players. Yup - all of you will vote to determine the best multi-cat player in the NHL today!

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### How the Categories/Players were selected

Before I get to the brackets, I'll explain how I arrived upon the categories. In the end, I decided to focus on **Hits, Blocked Shots, PIMs, and Shots**, since every defenseman and forward can technically contribute in each of these four categories. I didn't count faceoffs or power play points, because clearly not every NHLer takes draws or plays with the man advantage. And I didn't include plus/minus, which all too often is highly team-dependent.

Each of the 32 players is a valuable contributor in at least two of these four categories, with better seeds (i.e., the #1 seeds) being those who I felt either had the best overall contribution across the board, or who do exceptionally well in several but not all four. I purposely didn't include guys who are outstanding in only one of these categories, since after all this is about MULTI-cat guys.

You'll also see that I didn't include any superstars (most notably, <u>Alex Ovechkin</u>) since I was worried their fame and name recognition would unfairly skew the voting. Plus, part of the idea of multi-cat players is to find hidden value beyond points. That being said, if two players were otherwise pretty even when considering their contributions in all four of the categories, then I did give better seeding to the player who scores more.

The good news is if you think I omitted someone who's more deserving of inclusion, I'm giving you a chance to fix my mistake (more on this below) before voting actually begins in connection with next week's column.

### Voting criteria

I want to leave voting up to you as much as possible, but I also want to point out and clarify a few things. You can allow past performance and/or future potential to influence your vote. In a

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similar vein, you can feel free to treat the voting as if it's for either a one year league or for a keeper league. In fact, part of the reason I arranged the brackets the way that I did was to get a good mix of players to cover all types of leagues.

But try to avoid letting your vote be guided by personal preference. In other words, if you happen to like or dislike one of these players for reasons that have nothing to with his performance in these four categories, then try not to have that determine how you vote.

### Your chance to influence the final brackets

Rather than start the tournament this week, I'm giving all of you a chance to make sure I got everything right. If you think I missed a player who belongs among the 32, then let me know. Similarly, if you think my bracket seeding is flawed, feel free to sound off. Use the comments below in both cases. The one thing I intend to keep are my bracket formats, even though that might mean the #7 seed in one bracket might be a #4 seed if he was in another bracket, or vice versa.

If you do make a comment along these lines, then I ask that you don't just point out a problem, but offer a solution as well. If you think someone should have a better seed, then tell me who you think should be moved down to allow him to move up. And if you believe that I omitted a more deserving player, tell me who I should remove to make room for the player I left out. Trust me – this is not an easy task.

### **Bonus "Real Life" Cage Match**

Be sure to read to the bottom of the column below the brackets, as this week (and hopefully

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each week during the tournament) I'll post a "real life" Cage Match where instead of comparing two hockey players I'll tackle a different side-by-side debate. Hopefully you'll enjoy this and it will satisfy your weekly fix for a Cage Match debate.

Without further ado, here are the proposed brackets! The final brackets will be released in next week's column, which is when you'll be able to start voting and make your voice heard.

# **Bracket #1 – The Young Guns**

This is the bracket and proposed first round matches for the emerging multi-cat players, who are all 25 or younger. No gray beards need apply here.

- #1 Evander Kane vs. #8 Brenden Dillon
- #2 Radko Gudas vs. #7 Matt Martin
- #3 P.K. Subban vs. #6 Luke Schenn
- #4 Drew Doughty vs. #5 Milan Lucic

### Bracket #2 - The Old Guard

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Of course since I gave a special bracket to the youngsters, it's only fair to have one for these grizzled NHL veterans, each of whom is 30 years or older.

- #1 Steve Ott vs. #8 Chris Neil
- #2 Zdeno Chara vs. #7 Shane Doan
- #3 Dennis Seidenberg vs. #6 Dennis Wideman
- #4 Brooks Orpik vs. #5 Stephane Robidas

## **Bracket #3 – Best of the Rest (Defensemen)**

This is what I see as the top eight multi-cat defenseman ages 26-29. Some pretty impressive names!

- #1 Dustin Byfuglien vs. #8 Nicklas Grossman n
- #2 Shea Weber vs. #7 Alex Edler
- #3 Brent Seabrook vs. #6 Cody Franson

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#4 Dan Girardi vs. #5 Dion Phaneuf

### **Bracket #4 – Best of the Rest (Forwards)**

As with defensemen, there are some stellar multi-cat forwards with fall within the 26-29 age range, including these guys, who I see as the top eight.

- #1 David Backes vs. #8 Ryan Reaves
- #2 Ryan Callahan vs. #7 Troy Brouwer
- #3 Dustin Brown vs. #6 David Clarkson
- #4 Martin Hanzal vs. #5 Brandon Dubinsky

Remember – voting starts after next week's column is posted. For now, use the comments to let me know if you think I left out someone more deserving of being on the list (toughest omissions were <u>Jeff Petry</u> and <u>Zac Rinaldo</u> in Bracket #1, <u>Jan Hejda</u> in #2, <u>Ladislav Smid</u> in #3, and Steve Downie

in #4) or if you think my seeding in one or more of the brackets is wrong. But if you do leave a comment, then be sure to explain your logic, since otherwise I might not be motivated to make a change.

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### **Recent Cage Matches:**

Kevin Shattenkirk vs. Ryan McDonagh Matt Duchene vs. Kyle Turris Kyle Okposo vs. Bryan Little Jeff Skinner vs. Nazem Kadri

#### **Bonus Real Life Cage Match**

This week's real life match-up is in the area of hockey concession food, and pits tried and true popcorn against the venerable soft pretzel.

Probably the biggest key with a soft pretzel is you can easily eat it with just one hand, leaving your other hand free to enjoy your beverage of choice. With popcorn, you need two hands to eat it (one to hold the container and the other to eat the popcorn) unless you either try tipping the container toward your mouth, which almost always leads to spillage or too much coming out at once, or if you hold it between your legs or tucked against your arm, which is very unwieldy.

What's also nice about the soft pretzel is you can see exactly how much salt is on it and where the salt is, while with popcorn you can't really get as good of a visual indication. And while soft pretzels can suffer from uneven salt distribution, popcorn has a similar issue with butter, plus

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has potential landmines in the form of unpopped kernels and/or accumulated salt lurking at the bottom of the container. Popcorn also can get stuck in between your teeth, which is no fun.

One nice thing about popcorn is it's arguably easier to share (and yes, that did make me think back to the famous scene in the 1982 movie Diner). And popcorn holds an advantage in terms of choice of toppings and flavors, since for the soft pretzel it pretty much begins and ends with mustard, whereas popcorn not only has butter, but also sometimes different flavors like cheese and caramel. But with that benefit comes a possible drawback, as flavored popcorn often leaves your hands sticky or with topping residue, necessitating a trip to the restroom.

In the end, it's pretty clear that the soft pretzel is the winner.