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Part 1

Part 2

To make the team, a player must show something beyond the stat sheet. Similar to TSN broadcaster Pierre McGuire's annual “Monsters Team,” the Prime Cuts squad is chalk-full of intangibles such as heart, determination, hockey IQ, two-way play, grit, and clutch scoring ability. Most of the players on this squad are also under appreciated (in both fantasy and real hockey circles). There are obviously some big stars on this team – the usual suspects – but there are also some under-the-radar players who you may not have noticed this season.

The Top Pairing: Mike Green and Zdeno Chara

Mike Green makes his second annual appearance on the Prime Cuts roster, after making the club on the second pairing in 2007-2008. This season, Green has picked up right where he left off, and is going to finish the season over a point-per-game, absolutely unheard of for a defenseman. He is on pace to hit 30 goals as well, which would make him the first defenseman since Kevin Hatcher netted 34 goals in 1992-1993 (also with the Capitals). Green skates like Paul Coffey and shoots the puck like Ray Bourque (although he doesn't defend like Bourque). I don't buy the argument that he wouldn't produce this well on another team. Green is an extremely dynamic skater who scores goals and creates plays out of nothing. He obviously benefits from playing with the likes of Alex Ovechkin, but that benefit is mutual. Green takes chances, plays an aggressive style, fitting Bruce Boudreau's system like a glove. It will be interesting to see if Green can hit 40 goals at some point in his career – he certaintly gets enough chances to approach that mark at least once. Ever since Boudreau was appointed head coach last season in late December, Green has an astounding 106 points in 102 games.

Green's partner on the top pairing is the highly-paid, highly-standing, highly-underrated Zdeno Chara. Chara scores goals (currently has 16), puts up points (on pace for close to 50), eats up minutes (over 26 per night), and shuts down the opposition with regularity. The Ottawa Senators made a major blunder when they decided to keep Wade Redden over Chara – a move from which they still have not recovered. Chara combines physical play, surprising agility, an ability to move the puck, and an overall on-ice presence matched by few players. Unlike Green, he is able to eat heavy minutes in any situation. He also possesses one of the highest work ethics in professional sports (he had Bruins trainers give him a copy of the arena keys so he could come in early and workout). Chara is the backbone of the very surprising Boston Bruins, a team that features a wealth of offensive talent up front. His play has fallen off a bit in March (like the rest of the Bruins), but being the integral part of arguably the best team in the NHL for most of the season earns Chara a spot on the top pairing on the Prime Cuts defense.

The Second Line: Scott Hartnell, Travis Zajac, and Martin Havlat

The second line, like any good depth offensive line, has an interesting blend of scoring, grit, and two-way play. Scott Hartnell has had my attention all season, due in no small part to him being a member of a few of my fantasy teams. His production across the board has been fantastic, and on the ice he has been a perfect fit for the Flyers on their most productive line (along with Jeff Carter and Joffrey Lupul). Hartnell has scored over 22 goals each of the past four seasons, and he has posted career numbers this season in both goals (28 and counting) and points (57 and counting). Even with his fantastic offensive production, Hartnell's claim to fame this season will undoubtedly be the Jaromir Jagr-like retro mullet he has been growing for the past 18 months. He has endeared himself to Flyer fans by playing on the edge (sometimes crossing it),

and being a thorn in the side of opposing stars.

Centering the second line is the best defensive forward on New Jersey, often thought of as the best defensive club in the league. Travis Zajac has taken the next step this season, after looking very average for the greater part of 2007-2008. He has formed a fantastic top line with Zach Parise and captain Jamie Langenbrunner, and each players brings a different dynamic to the line. Zajac leads the NHL in plus-minus at plus-36, although that number may be skewed a bit because of the team he plays in (Mike Mottau is plus-27 to put it into perspective). That being said, Zajac is a phenomenal defensive player who has been able to put up terrific offensive numbers while consistently playing deep in the defensive zone (especially when Martin Brodeur was out), and shadowing the opposing stars. Zajac was a scoring sensation in the BCHL (he put up 112 points with Salmon Arm before jettisoning to the NCAA), and this season he has showed that he is able to translate these talents to the NHL level.

The second line right-wing position was probably the toughest one for me to fill. I had a few candidates, but the right side is so thin this season compared to the left, I debated with the idea of playing someone out of position. I decided against that, as I want to make the Prime Cuts roster as genuine as possible. This may come as a surprise to many at DobberHockey, but my choice for this position is Martin Havlat. He leads the upstart Hawks in scoring and even strength goals, and is second in plus-minus. Havlat is a dynamic forward, but his inability to stay healthy in the past has been essentially inexplainable. He is a free agent this summer, but there is talk that Chicago wants to bring him back (and not on a 12-year deal like Al Strachan's source told him...). Havlat is just as big a part of Chicago's return to contention as anyone, be it Pat Kane, Jonathan Toews, Duncan Keith, or even Joel Quenneville (although Rocky Wirtz may have him licked).