Part 1

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Part 3

Here is the Prime Cuts' Top Line, as well as the starting goaltender...

The Top Line: Zach Parise, Evgeni Malkin, and Martin St. Louis

The least surprising pick is the top line left wing, Zach Parise. I have been a fan of Parise's for a long time, and am glad that my extreme optimism was not unfounded (I even went so far as to compare Parise to Joe Sakic and Steve Yzerman in an article last summer). Parise's combination of will and skill is unmatched across the league. If he doesn't beat you with his skill, he will beat you with his work ethic. Parise has transitioned seamlessly from his college position of center ice to wing at the professional level. He has carried the Devils through some ups and downs this season, and was the main reason they didn't collapse when Marty Brodeur went down. He has many 90-100 point seasons in his future, and lots of hardware as well. But you can be sure that the only hardware he cares about is the Stanley Cup (and maybe a Conn Smythe or two to go along with it). Don't hesitate to take Parise in the first round of any format of fantasy hockey for the next decade – he is a legitimate superstar.

The top line center position came down to the wire, and I ultimately decided on Malkin over fellow Russian Pavel Datsyuk. Both players have been equally important to their respective clubs, but Malkin has posted fantastic numbers without as much help as Datsyuk. He controls games with his puck control, vision, and overall awesome array of talents. He may be the best player in the world, but unfortunately he is not as flashy as Alex Ovechkin (more on him later), or as Canadian as Sidney Crosby. The way Malkin skates is reminiscent of Jean Beliveau (from the brief clips I have seen), as well as another Penguin great, Mario Lemieux. Malkin is becoming more comfortable with his English and the North American lifestyle, and with that expect his off-ice star power to grow rapidly. Malkin also has a dirty edge to his game if provoked (similar to a former Russian great – Pavel Bure).

The top line right wing was slim pickings this year but I do feel I have selected a worthy candidate. I mulled over picking Ovechkin and putting him on the right side, but I ultimately decided against putting players out of position. The fact that Ovechkin may win the Hart and didn't make this team isn't lost on me, I just decided to take Parise as the top line left winger. But back to the final piece of my top line, Marty St. Louis. St. Louis has had a good season amongst many bad ones on a very underwhelming Tampa Bay squad. He boasts a team-best plus-six (Ryan Malone and Evgeni Artyukhin are the only other regulars above zero), and he leads the team in goals (29), and points (78). He is a contender for the Lady Byng as well with only 12 penalty minutes. Stepping aside from the numbers for a second, St. Louis is a phenomenal two-way talent who busts his rear end on every shift and is a pain to play against. His compete level is matched by few – if any – opposition players.

The Starting Goalie: Tim Thomas

It is almost impossible not to like Tim Thomas. The journeyman goalie works on his game in Europe, and eventually takes the NHL by storm. His technique is not one taught at the goalie camps, but quite simply is one that keeps the puck out of the net. True, he plays for a strong defensive club, but Thomas has earned the spot as the Prime Cut starting goalie due to consistent play, inconsistent behavior (including a few awesome attacks on opposing forwards Andrei Kostitsyn and Sean Avery), and a penchant for big saves at big times. As is often said, the name of the game is winning, and Thomas has that quality that all great goalies do – he makes the saves when he needs to make them. He may let in a weak goal early, but Thomas bears down when the win is on the line.