The St. Louis Blues are a team rich in offensive talent. They lack a high end superstar, but they have seven or eight quality top six forwards. As a poolie looking to draft or trade for a St. Louis forward, the depth is both a good and bad thing. The positive aspect is that the quality of linemates is high for the top three lines. The negative aspect is that there is only so much ice time to go around. If there are two or three equal offensive units, no player on the team is going to see the kind of minutes required to produce at an elite level in the NHL (19+ minutes with ample power play time). For those of you who either own Blues forwards or are looking to acquire one, figuring out how the lines and roles break down is the key.

How have the top seven forwards faired to date?

C/W – Andy McDonald

How has he looked so far?

Below average. McDonald is very quick but hasn't been able to generate many chances through nine games. He is averaging close to 20 minutes per contest (a stat that is slightly skewed because of a 24 minute game he played against Nashville back on October 14th). According to the Frozen Pool Line Combination Tool, he is playing most of his shifts with Brad Boyes and Patrik Berglund. On paper, Boyes and McDonald are a natural fit together. A sniper who shoots right paired with a quick, left-shooting playmaker.

McDonald has failed to come close to the 85 and 78-point seasons he put up with the Ducks a few years back, but he still has the talent to be a 65+ point player. He is a perfect buy-low candidate for many league formats. For some reason the Blues have bounced him between wing and center during the past two and a half seasons. McDonald is at his best when he can create transitionally (which centers are supposed to do), and he lacks the size and strength to consistently win battles for the puck down low and along the boards (typically winger

responsibilities).

Adjusted projection: 22 goals, 36 assists, 58 points

C/W – David Backes

How has he looked so far?

Not as bad as the statistics indicate. Backes is the type of player who can contribute positively in a multitude of ways aside from goal scoring, which is very good for the Blues considering he has only one tally through eight games. He has plenty of motivation to produce considering his impending unrestricted free agency status.

Backes played on the wing for his first few seasons in the NHL. He was moved to center last

season, and has moved between the two positions this season. I think he is more effective as a winger, for a few reasons:

1) He is brutal at faceoffs

2) He is big and he hits hard. As a winger, he can get in higher on the forecheck on a consistent basis.

3) The Blues already have a couple of natural centers who are better playmakers than Backes.

Count on a strong second half of the season for the notoriously slow-starting Backes as he heads into free agency.

Adjusted projection: 26 goals, 30 assists, 56 points

C/W – TJ Oshie

How has he looked so far?

Great. Aside from Jaroslav Halak, Oshie has been the best player for the Blues this season. His energy is infectous, and like Backes, he contributes positively in a multitude of ways. He simply ***gets it***
. You don't need to watch Oshie play more than once or twice to realize he was born to be a hockey player. He hits hard, he competes at both ends of the ice. He possesses phenomenal offensive talents, as well. Most importantly, he thinks the game at an elite level. He knows when he needs to throw a big hit, score a big goal, or do something else to change the tone of a game.

He is a player who will never be as valuable in fantasy hockey as he is in the real world, unless statisticians find some way to quantify energy.

Adjusted projection: 18 goals, 51 assists, 69 points

C – Patrik Berglund

How has he looked so far?

Good and bad. Berglund is still a bit of a project. He is big and very skilled, but like many young players, he struggles with consistency – both in terms of production and effort level. His upside is very high (80-90 points), but he is far from a sure thing. At times during his young NHL career, he looks like a Mats Sundin clone. At other times, he looks like a disinterested and overwhelmed young player. It remains to be seen what kind of player Berglund becomes, but I will be keeping a close eye on his development over the next few years.

Adjusted projection: 22 goals, 27 assists, 49 points

W – Alex Steen

How has he looked so far?

Good. Steen is currently playing on the third line with Jay McClement and Matt D'Agostini, and

the trio have combined to be one of the league's most effective checking units. Steen plays the point on the first PP unit, as the Blues love the options he gives them in that position. He sees the ice really well, and he has a great shot which keeps the opposition honest on the penalty kill.

Steen will peak as a very good two-way player who hovers between 55-65 points per season. Very valuable in both real life and many fantasy hockey league formats.

Adjusted projection: 19 goals, 31 assists, 49 points

W – David Perron

How has he looked so far?

Very good. Perron is arguably the most naturally gifted forward on the team. Type in his name on youtube and there is a long list of beautiful goals – toe drags, end-to-end rushes, snipes, and more – he has the full tool kit of offensive skills at his disposal. He has some jam to his game too – Perron loves to play in physical, close-checking games and he thrives under pressure. He

was very good two years ago against Vancouver in the playoffs.

Of the three young Blues forwards, he is the best one to own in standard fantasy leagues for the next couple of seasons.

Adjusted projection: 28 goals, 28 assists, 56 points

W – Brad Boyes

How has he looked so far?

Decent. Boyes hasn't been playing poorly, but as a goal scorer he needs to put the puck in the net to really bring value to St. Louis. I view him as trade bait at this point – he doesn't really fill a clear need on the team, and they could probably fetch a top-four defenseman for him. (Although with Halak between the pipes, do they need more defensive help?) I have long thought Boyes would be an ideal fit in Pittsburgh, but the Penguins would have to clear up some salary. I could see something involving Kunitz and a prospect (Simon Despres, for example) working.

Boyes is deadly on the PP with his heavy shot. He likes to set up much like Steven Stamkos – in from the side, a few feet above the faceoff dot. One goal in nine games isn't indicative of the kind of player he is, but it certainly doesn't quell the doubts that his 30+ goal days are behind him.

Adjusted projection: 20 goals, 27 assists, 47 points

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