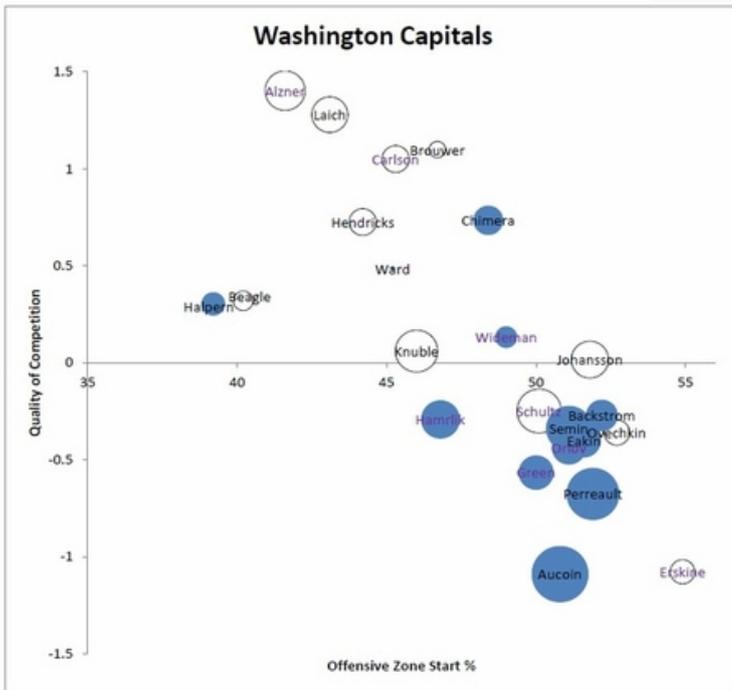


2011/12 Player Usage Charts – Fantasy Hockey Implications

Written by Jeff Angus

Wednesday, 13 June 2012 20:48 - Last Updated Friday, 15 June 2012 09:09



□ *The Player Usage Chart for the 2011-12 Washington Capitals*

This post was originally published over at [Angus Certified](#), my blog on hockey & fitness/nutrition.

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The standard statistics in hockey have significant limitations. Plus-minus, even if used in the right context, doesn't come close to telling us how well a player is performing defensively. Goals and assists are obviously important (goals win games), but there are underlying reasons that contribute to them. How much is a player shooting the puck? Where is he shooting the puck from? Is he playing against good players? Is he starting a lot of his shifts in the offensive zone?

Advanced statistics have been widely used by numerous NHL teams for the past few years, and thanks to the hard work of a few people, we as fans now have access to a wide variety of them.

I am not aware of any fantasy hockey pools using advanced statistics, but it is only a matter of time. [Behind the Net](#) is a fantastic resource for many of these statistics, as is [Hockey Abstract](#).

Rob Vollman, who runs Hockey Abstract, recently finished putting together one of the most useful tools I have come across –

[2011-12 Player Usage Charts for all 30 NHL clubs.](#)

I would highly recommend downloading the charts and absorbing the wealth of information they contain. Some FAQ's from the PDF guide:

What are Player Usage Charts?

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Player Usage Charts, formerly known as OZQoC charts, were first introduced on Arctic Ice Hockey by Rob Vollman in the 2011 off-season to study how players were being used in a simple graphical representation. The idea caught on quickly among both hockey analysts and front offices, sparking a number of improvements throughout the season. These particular player usage charts are all even-strength play only.

What are Offensive Zone Starts (Horizontal Axis)?

Offensive zone starts is the percentage of all non-neutral shifts started in the offensive zone. A common misconception is that it's the percentage of all shifts started in the offensive zone, but it ignores those in the neutral zone and is therefore perhaps poorly named (like most hockey statistics). Think of it more as a representation of whether a player is used primarily for his offensive talents, or defensive.

What is Quality of Competition (Vertical Axis)?

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Quality of Competition is the average plus/minus of one's opponents over 60 minutes, except that it is based on attempted-shots (Corsi) instead of goals. In this particular variation we are using Relative Corsi (explained below). Players who face top lines will have high QoC's while those with the easier task of facing mostly depth lines will have negative QoCs.

What is Relative Corsi (The Bubbles)?

Corsi, another poorly named statistic, is simply a player's plus/minus, except that it's measured in attempted shots instead of goals. In this case it's calculated over 60 minutes, and Relative Corsi is calculated relative to how the team did without him. As explained by Corsi bubble innovator Eric Tulsky, a big blue bubble represents someone whose team attempts a lot more shots than their opponents while he's on the ice, and a big white bubble is someone whose team is usually getting outshot badly. In Tom Awad's variation the bubble is sized according to a player's ice-time and shaded dark green or dark red based on their Relative Corsi.

Where do these stats come from?

Initially all the statistics come directly from the NHL's game files, which are processed by Vic Ferrari's time on ice site, and collected and presented at Behind the Net by Gabriel Desjardins. The idea for this graphical representation, and this package itself, comes from Rob Vollman, with the idea for the Corsi bubbles from Eric Tulsky of Broad Street Hockey, and other developments from several others including Corey Sznajder, Josh Lile, Derek Zona, John

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Fischer, Mike Rogers, Derek Jedamski, Aaron Nichols, and Gus Katsaros.

Essentially, these charts measure how well a player performs. They also highlight significant differences between teams. Some choose to deploy a zone start strategy (Vancouver), while other teams choose to match lines and play players based on quality of competition (Boston). This means that the Sedin twins and Alex Edler see a lot of offensive opportunities, while Zdeno Chara and Patrice Bergeron have to play tough minutes against top competition on a nightly basis.

For fantasy hockey pools, the implications are huge. Daniel and Henrik have emerged as two of the best forwards in the league due in large part to the amount of offensive opportunities they see each night. James Neal and Evgeni Malkin benefitted greatly from the hard work of Jordan Staal in 2011-12.

Here are some of my thoughts regarding the charts and fantasy hockey.

1. The lack of depth in Anaheim has forced Getzlaf and Perry into tougher roles. If the Ducks can bring in some defensive checking to lighten the load, I'd expect both (especially Getzlaf) to get back on track. The Ducks thrived with an elite checking line six years ago (Sammy Pahlsson centering Travis Moen and Rob Niedermayer), but right now they don't have the depth or defensive talent up front to take the pressure off of the big guns.

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2. Interesting to see the Bruins re-sign Chris Kelly, Dan Paille, and Gregory Campbell. All three are classified as checkers, but all three struggled defensively last season. Patrice Bergeron played brutally tough minutes and excelled. The Bruins would have been better off dressing a more offensively-oriented third or fourth line (Benoit Pouliot is beginning to look like a legitimate NHL player, too).

3. The Sabres don't really differentiate between offensive and defensive forwards. Lindy Ruff likes all of his forwards to play at both ends of the ice. With solid checkers like Nate Gerbe (yep, you read that right) and Patrick Kaleta, this strategy is questionable. If I own Thomas Vanek, Cody Hodgson, or Derek Roy in my pool, I'm hoping Ruff starts to see the benefit of deploying a zone-start oriented strategy in 2012-13.

4. Calgary, like Anaheim, had their top line play the toughest minutes because of a lack of depth on the roster. Olli Jokinen's season is a bit more impressive given how high his quality of competition was all season long (he didn't exactly excel in the role, but he played really tough minutes). He is a huge risk to sign this summer (Jokinen is the class of a very weak group of free agent centers), but could continue to thrive, especially if put in a more offensive role.

5. Mikael Backlund did very well considering the lack of offensive zone starts he saw (when healthy). The Flames need him to be ready to play top six minutes this season. His defensive play will translate into more ice time, which should translate into more scoring opportunities (a lot depends on if KHL signing Roman Cervenka can adjust successfully to the NHL).

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6. Justin Faulk wasn't sheltered at all, playing tough minutes all season long for the Hurricanes. The 19-year-old could be the next great offensive defenseman in the NHL. He played much tougher minutes than Jamie McBain, and did a better job at it.

7. Brandon Sutter appears to be getting the Jordan Staal treatment – he's talented offensively, but because of his defensive ability he is counted on to do the heavy lifting. He freed up Tuomo Ruutu, Jeff Skinner, and Jussi Jokinen for more offensive opportunities.

8. If Dave Bolland ever gets more offensive minutes, look out. He plays some of the toughest minutes in the entire league. The beneficiaries – Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews.

9. The Colorado chart shows exactly why David Jones was overpaid – he plays easy minutes and is still outplayed by opposing players at even strength.

10. Colorado received some truly impressive seasons from Ryan O'Reilly and Gabriel Landeskog – they played against the top opposing forwards and excelled. Not too shabby for a

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third-year player and a rookie.

11. Keep an eye on Cam Atkinson in Columbus – he did well in a pretty tough role, and has played some great hockey at the AHL level. I really like his upside.

12. I am excited to see what Jamie Benn and Loui Eriksson can do in Dallas if/when they get some better depth. They both played really tough minutes because the bottom six forwards in Dallas were eaten alive by competition (especially Verne Fiddler and Radek Dvorak).

13. Valteri Filppula had a breakout season production-wise, but the advanced stats don't paint such a pretty picture. The Wings were dominated more often than not when Filppula was on the ice.

14. Detroit does a great job giving easier minutes to their rookies – Brendan Smith and Gustav Nyqvist are great examples of this. I'd expect both to be regulars next season.

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15. Edmonton made sure to give their young talents up front easier minutes, and they all excelled. However, the depth forwards in Edmonton were torched by the opposition. I wouldn't worry about the production of Hall, Eberle, or Nugent-Hopkins, but some better depth around them could go a long way to giving the young stars even easier minutes.

16. Jason Garrison was very effective playing a top pairing role. His 16 goals won't be repeated, but any team that spends \$3-4 million on him will be getting a very solid two-way defenseman who can play on the top two pairings.

17. Marcel Goc may be the most underrated forward in the league – he saw incredibly tough minutes and still was a positive contributor on the ice.

18. PK Subban was very good for Montreal last season. Will 2012-13 be his big offensive break out?

19. Shea Weber and Ryan Suter unsurprisingly played really well even against tough competition. With Suter potentially leaving, who fills the void? Ryan Ellis and Roman Josi both saw sheltered minutes. Josi, in particular, struggled in terms of his possession numbers. When he was on the ice, the Predators gave up a lot more shots than they took. It will be interesting to see how he does next season with an even bigger role.

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20. Frans Nielsen excelled playing really difficult minutes. Michael Grabner scored 20 goals playing really tough minutes. Grabner is effective as a two-way player because of his speed, but his bread and butter is scoring goals. The Islanders had Nielsen on the second line, but down the road they'd love Ryan Strome or even Casey Cizakas to come in and center another scoring line so they can get Grabner away from defensive minutes.

21. Ryan McDonagh is really, really good. He was one of the best defensemen in the entire league last season.

22. Carl Hagelin had a really strong rookie season. His minutes weren't sheltered, and his shooting percentage wasn't abnormally high (10.7). He's an interesting name in the future. The Rangers have lots of talent up front, but Hagelin quickly forced his way onto the top line, and he found a way to stay there.

23. A huge reason for Erik Karlsson's breakout – he spent more time on the ice with Ottawa's best offensive players. Simple enough, right?

24. Nick Foligno was 20th in the league among NHL forwards (minimum 80GP) in scoring per 60 minutes. Impressive stuff for a forward many had labelled as a checker or energy player as recently as a year ago. He could be a long term top six solution for the second line with Kyle

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Turris.

25. Wayne Simmonds had an offensive breakout with the Flyers, due in large part to a change in roles. In Los Angeles he was used primarily as a checker (14 goals and 30 points), but with the Flyers he was out there to score (30 goals and 49 points). Simmonds is a talented young player and he took a big step forward, but his numbers could come back down if his role changes at all.

26. Thanks to the emergence of Ekman-Larsson (and the surprising play of Rusty Klesla), Keith Yandle saw easy minutes. Poolies rejoiced – a third consecutive 40+ point campaign.

27. The first person Evgeni Malkin thanks for his Art Ross has to be Jordan Staal. If Staal is in fact traded this summer or next season, I'm curious to see what happens to Malkin's production (and Crosby's, for that matter).

28. Pietrangelo and Shattenkirk had similar seasons if you look at the offensive production. However, Pietrangelo played much tougher minutes (and was carrying Carlo Colaiacovo around for much of the season).

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29. Joe Thornton was one of the best two-way forwards in the league last season. He used to see sheltered minutes under Ron Wilson (and his offensive production reflected this).

30. Don't expect huge offensive numbers from Victor Hedman any time soon. He's going to be the guy that Tampa Bay relies on in key defensive situations, especially with Mattias Ohlund potentially facing retirement.

31. Steven Stamkos received easy minutes, which helped him win the scoring race, but likely hurt the Lightning as their depth forwards all had brutal 2011-12 campaigns.

32. In limited duty, Marc-Andre Gragnani's possession numbers are pretty good. He played really easy minutes, but the Canucks could benefit from having him continue in this role in the future. He is very valuable and skilled offensively, but has many holes in his defensive game.

33. The Washington chart highlights how much they missed Backstrom. Marcus Johansson saw easy minutes but still had poor possession numbers. He's young and I wouldn't say this is a huge alarm (especially with all of the coaching and system changes the Caps have undergone).

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34. Zach Bogosian plays a really tough role for the Jets, and it has freed up Dustin Byfuglien to be a more productive offensive defenseman. Not exactly what Bogosian owners want to hear though, is it?