

2009-10 Prime Cuts (Part 1 of 5)

Written by Jeff Angus

Thursday, 08 April 2010 16:08 - Last Updated Saturday, 10 April 2010 00:09



The third annual Prime Cuts roster is here! Check out the Prime Cuts rosters [from 2007-08](#) and [2008-09](#)

. The thinking process that goes in to selecting the team is similar to Pierre McGuire's "Monsters" for TSN (I promise that is the first and only time I will compare my thinking process to Pierre's). Since this is a fantasy hockey site, the selection process favours players that have had strong seasons on the score sheet, obviously. However, not just goals and assists are weighted – perhaps a player has started to shoot the puck more, or play better defensively. Intangibles like heart, grit, and determination factor in to the selection process as well. It is far and away my favourite article to write each year, and I hope you will all enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing it!

Part 1 of the series will name the backup goaltender, the bottom defensive pairing, and the fourth line.



The Backup: Tuukka Rask

The backup goalie in the NHL is a position that requires one to possess a combination of door-opening and gum-chewing abilities. It also requires a very unique mental makeup, as backups must sit and watch, but always be mentally and physically ready to step in to any situation (when the reigning Vezina Trophy winner struggles mightily, for example). The Bruins shelled out big bucks to extend Tim Thomas last summer, even with prized prospect Tuukka Rask waiting in the wings. It would have been hard for Boston to justify walking away from the reigning Vezina winner in favour of an unproven Rask, who had started only five games at the NHL level. As we have the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that Boston made a blunder committing that much money and term to Thomas, as he has been vastly outperformed by Rask in 2009-10.

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The Bruins have scored a measly 2.35 goals-per-game this season, which has them dead last in the entire league. Marc Savard, their offensive catalyst, has been in and out of the lineup all season. Boston hasn't been winning because of a stifling defensive game, either. That statement may sound funny considering they sit second overall in goals-against per game at 2.34, trailing only the Devils. However, to a man, most of Boston's defensemen are having below average seasons. Zdeno Chara struggled at times this season before the Bruins acquired Dennis Seidenberg, and Dennis Wideman is always an adventure in the defensive zone. Rask is the only reason that this offensively (and at times defensively) inept club is in playoff contention. He leads the league in goals-against-average, save percentage, and would be a lock for the Calder Trophy if he had been given the starting job for Boston earlier in the season.



The Bottom Pairing: Keith Yandle and Mark Giordano

The perfect depth defenseman has a few unique and necessary qualities. First and foremost, he possesses an ability to step up and play top-four minutes when called upon. Second, he isn't eating up a lot of cap space (yet). In the cap era, depth players must come cheap, or they bring little value to an organization. Neither of my selections for this pairing play on the bottom pairing for their respective clubs, but both are underrated top-four guys who fall just below the cusp of well-known defensemen.

Keith Yandle's offensive upside is sky high. He is already a 40-point defenseman at only 23 years old. He leads the Coyotes blue line in goals (12), assists (29), plus-minus (plus-17), shots on goal (144), but ranks fourth in ice time per game behind Ed Jovanovski, Adrian Aucoin, and Zbynek Michalek. Yandle hasn't seen a steady partner all season, bouncing between Sami Lepisto, David Schlemko, and the recently acquired Derek Morris. Yandle first displayed his dynamic offensive upside with the Moncton Wildcats of the QMJHL back in 2005-06, a season in which he scored 24 goals and added 59 assists. He has been a personal favourite of mine for a while (a common theme among members of the 2009-10 Prime Cuts), and I wouldn't at all be surprised to see him consistently hover around the 50 or 60-point mark as a defenseman in his prime.

Yandle's partner on the bottom pairing is a defenseman who plays a very similar game to him. Like Yandle, Mark Giordano is a strong skater, a flashy stick handler, and a big, physical presence in the defensive zone. He has been one of the only bright spots during Calgary's tumultuous season, outperforming Dion Phaneuf, Robyn Regehr, and Jay Bouwmeester for most of 2009-10. He has played in all situations for Calgary, averaging the fourth most ice time with the man advantage among Calgary defensemen, and third most on the penalty kill. He leads Calgary's defence in goals (11), plus-minus (plus-17, 10 more than any other Calgary blue liner), and penalty minutes (81). Giordano doesn't possess Yandle's elite upside, as he doesn't see the ice quite as well. However, he has the ability to log heavy minutes in all situations, and his strong play on a struggling club has earned him his first ever Prime Cuts roster spot.

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The Fourth Line: TJ Galiardi, Jay McClement, and Ian Laperriere

The fourth unit of any successful team must be able to consistently provide a spark to the team. A timely goal, a huge penalty kill, a big hit, or just a strong shift by a fourth line can often turn the tide in a game.

TJ Galiardi is already one of the best defensive wingers in the game, and he hasn't even turned 22 yet. His 15 goals and 39 points are very respectable offensive numbers, but it his diligent

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work on the penalty kill and in a checking role that has garnered him praise from around the league. He has been Colorado's most consistent forward all season long. Galiardi averages over three minutes per game on the penalty kill, first among all Colorado forwards, and second only to defenseman Scott Hannan on the team. Daniel Winnik of the Phoenix Coyotes is the only winger who averages more shorthanded minutes per game than Galiardi in the NHL. Any good fourth line needs to be able to bring energy, tenacity, and defensive awareness, and those three attributes are hallmarks of Galiardi's game, making him a perfect fit for the left wing spot on the checking unit.

Centering the fourth line is another player who logs heavy minutes while on the penalty kill. St. Louis center Jay McClement plays close to four minutes a night shorthanded (which represents about a quarter of his entire ice time) on the league's best penalty kill. He is a strong skater, makes smart decisions with and without the puck, but most of all competes very hard in the defensive zone. He is also extremely durable, having missed only two games over the past four seasons. McClement doesn't get a ton of praise around the league because he doesn't score much (10 goals, which contextually is very solid considering he usually lines up with the likes of BJ Crombeen and Cam Janssen), and the Blues have had a very inconsistent season. However, he is the integral part of the league's best penalty kill. He would be garnering some Selke consideration if he played on a higher profile club.

The third member of the checking line for the 2009-10 Prime Cuts defines the word 'warrior.' Ian Lapperiere, or Lappy, as he is affectionately referred to, has sustained about every injury you could imagine during his NHL career. He isn't fast, doesn't have a great shot, and isn't very big, but he simply brings it every single night. He has formed a very strong duo on the Flyers penalty kill up front with Blair Betts. My favourite Lappy moment came during the 2005-06 season when he was still a member of the Colorado Avalanche. He had just been tagged along the boards by Mattias Ohlund, and the camera caught his facial expression as he went to collect himself off of the ice. He had this huge, goofy grin, and looked like a kid in a candy store. This is after being on the *receiving* end of a crushing body check. He had a few hilarious off-ice moments this season, as well. He lost quite a few teeth earlier on in the season, and somehow his replacement teeth (dentures, if you will) were lost/stolen in the mail, so he was essentially toothless for a few weeks. This didn't stop him from trying to do a commercial for the Flyers, or interviews before and after games. He wears his heart on his sleeve, and has been a sparkplug and an elite energy player for almost 15 seasons now.

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