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 3 of the article series will name the **top defensive pairing** and **second forward line.**

The first pairing: Duncan Keith and **Mike Green**

There were three obvious choices for the Prime Cuts top pairing: Keith, Green, and Drew Doughty. I opted to go with the first two, but any combination of the three would have been more than sufficient.

Keith had an absolutely sensational season both offensively and defensively. He finished 2009-10 with 14 goals, 55 assists, a plus-21 rating, 213 shots on goal, over 26 minutes of ice time per game, and a shiny gold medal around his neck. He played nearly three minutes per game on both the penalty kill and power play for the Blackhawks. His production jumped up by 25 points from 2008-09, which is quite remarkable, considering his power play time increased by only 20 seconds per game, and his overall ice time by less than a minute per game. Chicago lost confidence in Cam Barker on the power play, and this enabled Keith to move up from the second power play unit, which he played on in 2008-09, to the top unit this past season. His 16 power play points in 2009-10 were only five more than he had in the previous season, though.

Keith simply improved his offensive game in all situations. He has always been comfortable rushing the puck, but he made smarter plays on a more consistent basis this season. His ability to transition from defence to offense (and vice versa) is remarkable, and played a huge part in Chicago winning its first Central division title since 1993 (back when it was still called the Norris division). His defensive partner, Brent Seabrook, finished the season with only 30 points, less than half of Keith's total. He'd be my pick for the Norris Trophy this season, although it is very close among the top three.

Even with his often-criticised defensive blunders, Mike Green's numbers are simply too hard to ignore. Back-to-back 70+ point seasons as a defenseman is an incredible feat. Washington's potent offensive system seems tailor-made for Green's game, but I have no doubts that he would produce very similar numbers even if he played elsewhere. Green led all NHL defensemen in goals, assists, points, power play goals, and was second in plus-minus (trailing only teammate and defensive partner Jeff Schultz) and game-winning goals.

Will Green continue to hover around the 70-80 point mark, or can he go higher? He has averaged 72 games over the past two seasons, and he often puts himself in dangerous situations with his high risk playing style. If he is able to play a full 82 game season, 90 points is not out of the question. Some poolies are worried that the emerging John Carlson will eat up some of Green's power play time, and they may have a case. However, as the saying goes, worry about crossing that bridge when you get to it.

Tuukka Rask - Mark Giordano