Left wing is arguably the most difficult position to fill in the game of fantasy hockey. I have experimented with all the different strategies to deal with the scarcity at the left wing position. Name a strategy, and I guarantee I have tried it. The conclusion I've come to is that no strategy is foolproof. The only way scratch out the best left wingers (and best team for that matter) is to make very smart decisions when stuck between two players. The position is too scarce to waste a pick. That brings me to this week's cage match.

Thomas Vanek vs. Michael Cammalleri

I hate both of these guys in fantasy. I just feel like I'm trying to grasp a phantom with these two. I am totally haunted by their past production. They've roped me in in years past by seducing me with some huge seasons but for the most part have been quite disappointing.

For both injuries have been the main reason for the disappointments but I think the bar was simply set too high. Both Vanek (27) and Cammalleri (28) are old enough that barring a Sedin-like eruption we've seen the best they are capable of so at least part of this cage match will be decided in the past. What each player has done in their respective top season represents to me their individual upside. Ironically, both players had their career season in 2006-07 so let's see who had the better season.

	Goals	Assists	Plus/Minus	PPP	PIM	SOG
Vanek 2006-07	43	41	+47	20	40	237
Cammalleri 2006-07	34	46	+5	37	48	299

Vanek has the higher upside in Goals for sure and Plus/Minus, probably. That Plus/Minus total is so outrageous I want to write it off. Yes, I suppose it's his upside but Vanek could play another 200 years and never be that high in the black. That said, he's definitely better in the Plus/Minus category, just not THAT much better.

Cammalleri on the other hand has a much higher upside in both PPP and SOG. Assists and PIM are close enough to call it a wash. So on pure upside this cage match is tied across the board and maybe you make your choice based on specific needs or maybe you look at something beyond upside.

We often fall victim to “what have you done for me lately?” type thinking but in this scenario it’s actually a very logical argument. Cammalleri’s stint in Montreal has not been kind to him. He’s averaged just 66 games played and 48.5 points over the last two seasons. Cammalleri has missed more games in the last two seasons (32) than Vanek has in his entire career (23).

Vanek has been the clear option for those asking “What have you done for me lately?” He struggled with injuries for a couple of years but bounced back this season. Over the last two seasons he has averaged 75.5 games and 63 points. Those averages are, in fact, not far off his career averages, so he is clearly the more dependable option.

Vanek is very secure in his place in Buffalo thanks to the hefty offer sheet the Sabres matched to retain him. So long as he remains in Buffalo I believe we can trust him to hang in and around his recent averages. Cammalleri on the other hand has yet to prove he can even stay healthy in Montreal.

Cammalleri too is fairly locked in to his NHL team thanks to a hefty deal. What he hasn't shown is the ability to produce at even a remotely consistent level. He's been both a Windex Wonder and a Band-Aid Boy rolled into one. I don't trust there's enough offense in Montreal for Cammalleri to return to his point per game ways.

It seems like I'm siding with "what have you done for me lately?" type thinking and I don't always do so but given that owning these two has been more arduous than hunting Mobey Dick I'll take whatever immediate results I can get. I mean, if you are going to chase a white whale you should probably go down the path that maybe lands you a few swordfish instead of just a handful of tuna. And let me be clear, Cammalleri has definitely been a handful of rancid tuna in Montreal.

Thomas Vanek takes this week's cage match in a knockout. It seems Cammalleri just didn't have the endurance to hang in the bout. While Vanek may never be that superstar left wing we were led to believe he could be, he is an excellent choice when considering Tier 2 left wingers. Whether playing in a points only or 6 x 4 rotisserie league, I would undoubtedly take Vanek over Cammalleri and I hope you do too.