Think of the single most stressful moment you have ever experienced. I bet it involved the guilt of eating a chocolate bar, the anticipation of pain from a needle, the uncertainty of going in for a first kiss and the total fear of going skydiving all rolled into one. This moment is known as the Centerman Plunge and it happens at your fantasy draft every year.

Some thrive in this moment and others crumble at the sheer thought of it. You might plan for this moment days ahead of time. Others plan for weeks, and some even plan all year. Most will spend more time on this than they do planning their wedding. No matter how long you spend stewing about it though, everyone knows they will have to take the Plunge eventually, and I'll bet you are ever so pleased I reminded you.

The decision to make the Plunge is not an easy one. Centermen are truly the Sirens of the fantasy world. They are so talented and so seductive but if they lure you in entirely they can ultimately cripple you. Sometimes you are lucky enough you can draft a Crosby or Stamkos and be done with it. Otherwise you are left with a serious debate. Can you afford to miss all “the can’t” miss talent up the middle?

When you take the Plunge is not even the biggest hurdle. You also have to decide who to take. There is a commonly held belief that you cannot miss at the beginning of a fantasy draft. In general it is true, but the fact remains that whomever you decide to take the Plunge on, it will impact the way you draft the rest of your roster.

With that in mind consider this week’s edition of Cage Match before you take the Plunge at your next draft.

Out of the delectable menu items that the center position has to offer, I’ve selected Eric Staal and Ryan Getzlaf to battle this week in a classic East Coast/West Coast battle we may even see in a Cup Final one of these years. So without further adieu, let’s get it on!

I often see people making the mistake of rating Getzlaf way higher than Staal. This has merit in points only pools where Getzlaf’s per game production has been way greater than Staal’s but Cage Match really isn’t about points only pools. It’s about debating value in a standard Yahoo! 6x4 league.

In those leagues the game between Getzlaf and Staal, which was very close to begin with, gets even closer. As food for thought here are last year's numbers as well as a four year average for these two (since Getzlaf broke out four years ago).

Four Year Average

GP

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PPP

PIM

SOG

Staal

78.75

35

40.75

Minus-1.75

27.75

60

313.75

Getzlaf

72.75

21.75

57.75

Plus-13.75

30.5

82.25

169.5

2010-11

GP

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PPP

PIM

SOG

Staal

81

33

43

Minus-10

29

72

296

Getzlaf

67

19

57

Plus-14

27

35

117

The first thing you will note is that Staal is the more durable player, and that is something I love. Staal has only had one season where he has missed more than one game and has only missed 14 games in his entire career. Getzlaf missed more than that just last season. I am not saying

that Getzlaf is a band-aid boy, but I am saying that his having played in only 66 and 67 games in each of the last two seasons respectively is starting to concern me.

The next thing you probably noticed was that Staal was WAY better to own last season, winning the match up by a solid score of 3-2. The career averages are much closer but if anything Getzlaf has generally been the better own. This is where the averages deceive you though because the swing category is PIM and for Getzlaf the trend is downward. He responded to being named captain of the Ducks by putting in his lowest PIM total since his rookie season. We have seen many bruising players turned captain follow this same trend and I am inclined to conclude that Getzlaf is at best as good as Staal is in this category from now on.

It is worth noting that Staal, while also a captain, has been a steady but not outstanding producer of PIM. In only his rookie season did Staal produce less than 50 PIM in a season, which for what it's worth, Getzlaf has done twice.

PPP is another tough category to judge. Staal has narrowly out-produced Getzlaf in this category each of the past two seasons but on average Getzlaf has been the stronger producer in this category. This is mainly attributable to the fact that Anaheim's powerplay (3rd in the league at 23.5%) is way stronger than Carolina's (24th at 15.9%) and because Getzlaf has much stronger personnel to play with on said powerplay. The Ducks have Lubomir Visnovsky along with Corey Perry, Teemu Selanne and Bobby Ryan as weapons for Getzlaf to dish to. Staal does not have such a supporting cast but help is on the way. Both Jamie McBain and Jeff Skinner were mere rookies this season. Expect a better performance from the Carolina powerplay in the future. For all intents and purposes however, consider this category tied.

Beyond those two troublesome categories it is all very straight forward. Staal consistently takes Goals and SOG, while Getzlaf owns Assists and Plus/Minus. That leaves you with a tie score at 2-2 and a really troublesome decision to make. The simple answer is that you will ultimately take whichever one is available when you decide to take the Plunge, but what happens when both are available?

You must decide here and now what your preferred flavour of centerman is. I prefer goal scorers. They are much harder to come by. I also prefer to own house in SOG. It is just something I feel you can depend on much more than Plus/Minus, which is a more fickle category from game to game and season to season.

Ultimately though, I like Staal's durability here. Maybe Getzlaf is not a full blown band-aid boy but with Staal it is not even a question. Nor is it a question whether or not Staal will continue to put up reasonable PIM numbers. I am giving the match to Staal here while conceding that Getzlaf has the better chance of going off for an "upside season" because of his teammates.

In other words, I am taking the safe option but maybe you are a gambler. You'll never really know until you take the plunge. I look forward to hearing about it in the comments section.