

The Detroit Red Wings are geniuses. We know this because they managed to steal guys like Datsyuk and Zetterberg (sixth and seventh round respectively) in back-to-back drafts. Their true genius lies in what we don't even recognize. What we don't recognize is them as individuals and that is because they completely avoid internal controversy. Does anyone ever ask who the best player on that team is? Does anyone even care? I know I haven't heard such questions asked. Detroit has created this universe separate from the rest of the NHL where winning is the only thing that matters. They are boring and they like it that way. There is a reason they have not changed their logo in what feels like forever. It is a conscious decision to maintain their environment. I mean, when the lone controversy regarding your team involves octopi you are probably on the right track, because who gives a crap about octopi?

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My issue is that no one ever asks which one of Datsyuk and Zetterberg is better. I kinda need to know this stuff for my freaking fantasy teams. We do know they were both draft steals and that they have helped Detroit win multiple Cups but that is pretty much the end of the story. When Zetterberg won the Conn Smythe in '08 no one questioned if this made him better than Datsyuk, no one even questioned if this meant he was the best player on the team. We just said that he and the rest of the team had a fine playoff run and then went about our business of simultaneously loathing and lauding the Red Wings franchise. We never hate a single player though; it is always the organization as a whole.

Compare that to the following season when Malkin won the Conn Smythe and suddenly we questioned if Malkin was better than Crosby. I swear this happens on every team but Detroit. We've definitely pondered if there is a better Sedin twin and there have even been arguments that Semin is better than Ovechkin (though not lately). Detroit is living in a red and white bubble. Until now Datsyuk and Zetterberg have been untouchable but I need answers. So I apologize Detroit, I am about to burst your bubble (you're welcome, rest of the League). This week's Cage Match is Datsyuk vs. Zetterberg... Bring on the controversy.

First off, I may have misspoken when I said Datsyuk and Zetterberg have been devoid of controversy. In the world of fantasy hockey there has been a longstanding problem regarding their positional eligibility. The going convention was that when Datsyuk and Zetterberg played together Datsyuk was the centerman and Zetterberg was the winger. This was in fact false. Zetterberg was the one that played predominantly center in those situations. The truth of the matter, however, is that Detroit head coach Mike Babcock changes his lines too much for any solid conclusions. Yahoo! finally resolved the issue this season by giving both Datsyuk and Zetterberg the coveted C/LW distinction. This made them both invaluable and also put both on even ground for fantasy comparison for perhaps the first time ever and for the purposes of this article I will assume that they will continue to share positional eligibility in future seasons.

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The first logical step in any Cage Match is to compare opportunity but in this situation there is very little discrepancy. Datsyuk and Zetterberg spent as much time playing on a line together this season as they did playing apart from one another and they almost exclusively played together on the powerplay. As such, both Datsyuk and Zetterberg saw very similar ice time at even strength and on the powerplay.

I suppose you could ask which one of these two benefits more from playing with the other but the likely answer is that it is equal. This is because on overall talent alone I actually see very little discrepancy. It's like actually trying to quantify the differences between an apple and an orange. They are both sweet and they both dangle, which is good enough for me. You can fixate on the superficial differences but I think that's splitting hairs. Call Datsyuk the orange because he's flashier but in the end a fruit is a fruit and it's bloody delicious. Let's move on.

I do not consider age a factor either. At 32 years old Datsyuk is the elder of the two but Zetterberg is only two years younger. Ultimately they are both still in the tail end of their respective primes and should have plenty of years left in the tank. Thirty years old is not a death sentence in fantasy hockey, even though that seems to be a widely held belief. Contrary to what Barney Stinson says, newer is not always better.

I also do not believe injuries are a huge factor. I think that both are gamers but ultimately I look at their "advanced age" along with the fact they go on long playoff runs every season and I conclude they are both bound to miss a few games each season. They are both gamers so

Pavel Datsyuk vs. Henrik Zetterberg Written by Steve Laidlaw Wednesday, 22 June 2011 06:25 - Last Updated Wednesday, 22 June 2011 13:34 barring a major injury I would count on 70+ games a season. Typically Zetterberg has been considered the more injury prone but he is far removed from those early seasons where he missed a lot of games and achieved Band-Aid Boy status. He will never give you a full season but I'm confident endorsing him as a 70+ game player. It seems the only way we will decide this Cage Match is to look at the numbers. That might make me an accountant but since I'm wearing my Mickey Mouse in Fantasia hat let's go with mathemagician. Typically I like to compare this past season's numbers but in this case that will not do. Datsyuk played only 56 games which would make for a weak comparison. Instead I will compare their averages from the past four seasons. Those constitute prime years for both Datsyuk and Zetterberg and it worked out guite nicely that over that span they averaged a very similar number of games played.

GP

Goals

Assists

4/11

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18.75

Wednesday, 22 June 2011 06:25 - Last Updated Wednesday, 22 June 2011 13:34 Plus/Minus PPP PIM SOG Datsyuk 74.75 28.25 52.5 Plus-25.75 29.75



seasons. This is certainly a trend worth watching. It is likely that some of this drop is a result of

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Datsyuk's missing big time this past season. It is likely that a spike in Zetterberg's goals would result in a spike in Datsyuk's assists or vice versa. The best solution is that they are simply slowing down as their supporting cast continues to weaken.

Powerplay points are also even, as you would expect given the closeness of Goals and Assists. Plus/Minus on the other hand is widely different. Datsyuk is clearly the better option here and he has the hardware (his numerous Selke's) to prove it. He is the best defensive forward in the league. Further evidence of Datsyuk's dominance of this category is that Zetterberg finished this season with a minus rating for the first time in his career. This is the same season that Datsyuk missed 26 games. Surely there is a connection here.

PIM and SOG have to go to Zetterberg. While Zetterberg is not a big PIM producer, Datsyuk has his name etched onto the Lady Byng for the foreseeable future so he would have conceded this category to anyone we threw him into the cage with. SOG is a landslide victory for Zetterberg. He is one of the top shooters in the league having pumped over 300 SOG each of the past four seasons.

Based on these numbers I give Zetterberg a 2-1 victory but I do feel it is also pertinent to compare their best career season so we get a glimpse of their respective upsides. Predictably, their respective career seasons coincided as both put up monster numbers in 2007-08.

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GP		
Goals		
Assists		
Plus/Minus		
PPP		
PIM		
SOG		
Datsyuk		
82		
31		
66		

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Wednesday, 22 June 2011 06:25 - Last Updated Wednesday, 22 June 2011 13:34 Plus-41 40 20 264 Zetterberg 75 43 49 Plus-30 36 34 358

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Here we see more conventional results with Zetterberg as the bigger shooter/scorer. He has an edge in goals while Datsyuk has an even bigger edge in assists. All the other categories hold up to the previous comparison of numbers although Datsyuk does carry a slight edge in PPP. You could certainly make the argument that Datsyuk having a greater advantage in Assists than Zetterberg does in Goals coupled with the slight advantage in PPP makes the match a tie. I would however look at Zetterberg's sheer dominance in SOG and still side with him but it is damn close.

Ultimately though, I do not see either Datsyuk or Zetterberg returning to their respective upsides. They need help and Jiri Hudler is not the answer. Youngsters like Tomas Tatar will likely not be ready to contribute until Datsyuk and Zetterberg are in their twilight years. Those youngsters will help extend the primes of these two stars but they will not help them back to greatness.

As mentioned previously I suspect we won't see full seasons from either Datsyuk or Zetterberg from here on out but both should be good for 70+ games. I like them both to hit around but above the point per game mark, which is where both have been the last few seasons. Watch Zetterberg's goal scoring numbers climb back into the 30 goal range giving him a slight advantage while Datsyuk should gain an advantage in assists. This still means a victory for Zetterberg though.

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I don't expect my decision to be without controversy but then again maybe that is my goal. Detroit could use some controversy for the rest our sakes.