It is November 16 guys. Think on that for a moment. Not counting the days off, there are 144 days left in the season. We have yet to even reach the quarter mark so the fate of your fantasy team is far from sealed. If you are one of the lucky few to have come out of the gates flying, soak it up but do not get complacent. Likewise, if your team looks out of it now, chin up.

Take a real hard look at your squad. Is it bad or just underperforming? Is it strong or just incredibly lucky? A good tool to help you analyze this is one such as the “MVP’s” tool provided by Yahoo! It outlines which players are owned by the highest percentage of teams winning their pool, across all Yahoo! leagues. This is handy because it can help you read a little further into your success or failures. The third MVP across all Yahoo! H2H leagues is Daniel Sedin, meaning up until this point he has been the best value out of players selected in the first round. You normally see a great number of first round talents among the MVP’s but only D. Sedin sits among the top 10 (depending on how you feel about goalies).

If your high picks are not on the MVP's list then do not fret. Time is the greatest equalizer and these guys will be at or near the top by season's end. If, on the other hand, you find a great number of your late round picks and waiver wire snags on this list then maybe you should be plotting your next move. While some of these surprise players stick around all year (think Tim Thomas last year and probably Jamie Benn this year), most will not. The cream always seems to rise to the top and when it does, you best not be clinging to your scraps while they drown at the bottom.

In this week's Cage Match I've selected two MVP's that everyone and their mother knows won't keep it up. It's Joffrey Lupul vs. Kris Versteeg in a race to the bottom, or in this case, the waiver wire.

All kidding aside, Lupul and Versteeg do still have value. After all, they are on that MVP's list. You do not get there for doing nothing. The only way that would be true is if every league champion somehow had the same sick sense of humour and drafted one of Clayton Stoner, Jonathan Cheechoo or Ilya Kovalchuk to sit on their bench. So while you should be hocking them like a toaster oven on late night TV, you also don't want to throw either of them away. But here is the rub; if given the choice which one should you choose?

Obviously neither one is an 80-point player, as their respective paces currently suggest. A quick glance at their three-year averages gives us the picture of a depth scorer, not a first line stud.

GP

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PIM

PPP

SOG

Lupul

52

16.3

15.3

Minus-2.3

36.3

9.7

129.7

Versteeg

79

21

26.7

Plus-4.7

47.7

13.7

167.7

These two are streaky options, not to be relied upon for consistently. Based on the numbers though, Versteeg has been the better own that is because he has been healthy. On the flip side if you extrapolate Lupul's averages over a 79 game season you get a line that looks like this:

GP

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PIM

PPP

SOG

Lupul

79

24.8

23.2

Minus-3.5

55.1

14.7

197

Versteeg

79

21

26.7

Plus-4.7

47.7

13.7

167.7

That would give Lupul a slight edge. If we assume that these two are really only to be snagged or dressed during hot streaks then Lupul has been the better own because of his slight advantages in PIM and SOG. Of course, if these guys are starters for you then this point is moot. And really, you absolutely cannot discount the fact that Lupul has been somewhat injury prone over his career unless you aren't planning on keeping him around. So while it is helpful to know that Lupul, when healthy, has historically offered us a little bit more than Versteeg you must consider your personal situation.

The tough part is that it is those injuries that have really derailed Lupul's once promising career. If he had a start to a season like this three years ago, we'd all be trumpeting it as his breakout. Instead every time he has been on the verge, he has broken down. Now Lupul is 28 years old and we know he is nothing more than a stop gap. Versteeg, on the other hand, is but 25 years old, which is the perfect age for a late bloomer to bust out.

What's more, Versteeg finds himself in an optimal situation. He is on the top line of the Panthers who are playing inspired hockey, under a new coach with a slew of new veteran players, in a crappy division. If Versteeg was ever going to explode it was in this type of position. He was buried in Chicago, redundant in Toronto, and he was whatever the product of buried AND redundant is while playing in Philadelphia. He is like a flower that got sick and tired of having to share light and nutrients with the other bigger flowers so he ripped himself out of the ground and planted himself in the middle of the lawn. That's right. Versteeg is the dandelion you never wanted but now is the time to embrace him, because the only pesticide for mediocre players is a bad coach and that is not something one can say about Florida's Kevin Dineen.

Versteeg's opportunity could not be more perfect. Sure last season he was a top liner in Toronto but his shoot first style conflicted with Kessel. In Florida though, he is playing alongside two playmakers in Tomas Fleischmann and Stephen Weiss. This feeds his shoot first play perfectly. As Frozenpool will show us, that line has clearly clicked as they are skating together for over 90% of their shifts at both even strength and on the power play. What's more is that Panthers power play is one of the league's best (fourth overall). Versteeg is receiving over 19 minutes a night and just under four minutes of power play ice time per game.

Even Strength Line Combinations

Freq	Line Combination
92.1%	FLEISCHMANN.T - VERSTEEG.K - WEISS.S

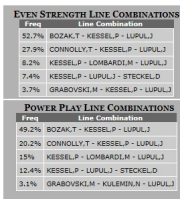
Power Play Line Combinations

Freq	Line Combination
92.6%	FLEISCHMANN.T - VERSTEEG.K - WEISS.S

Versteeg will not maintain his pace (20 points in 17 games). Simply put, there is no way Florida is that good. Nor is Versteeg that good. His 17.4% shooting is way too high and will come back down to earth. That said he could go for 60-plus points. That would be a career high. He's also certain to reach career highs in both PPP and SOG. He is already halfway to his career high 16 PPP and is on pace for his first 200+ SOG season.

Just as the Florida has proved to be the ideal destination for Versteeg, Toronto has been similarly suitable for Lupul. After all he is on a similar pace as Versteeg (19 points in 18 games). But, as we have come to expect from Lupul, this is most likely nothing more than a hot streak.

Strangely enough, Lupul was brought to Toronto to fill Versteeg's spot (at least in part) as winger opposite Phil Kessel on the top line and unlike Versteeg, Lupul's shoot first style has somehow fit. While the Leafs still have no permanent solution to their top line centerman conundrum, it is clear that the Kessel-Lupul wing combo is here to stay. As Frozenpool shows us, these two have been absolutely inseparable on the ice.



Even Strength Line Combinations

Freq	Line Combination
52.7%	BOZAK,T - KESSEL,P - LUPUL,J
27.9%	CONNOLLY,T - KESSEL,P - LUPUL,J
8.2%	KESSEL,P - LOMBARDI,M - LUPUL,J
7.4%	KESSEL,P - LUPUL,J - STECKEL,D
3.7%	GRABOVSKI,M - KESSEL,P - LUPUL,J

Power Play Line Combinations

Freq	Line Combination
49.2%	BOZAK,T - KESSEL,P - LUPUL,J
20.2%	CONNOLLY,T - KESSEL,P - LUPUL,J
15%	KESSEL,P - LOMBARDI,M - LUPUL,J
12.4%	KESSEL,P - LUPUL,J - STECKEL,D
3.1%	GRABOVSKI,M - KULEMIN,N - LUPUL,J

Lupul is receiving similar ice time as Versteeg, with 18 minutes a night, over three of which come on the power play. Where they differ however, is that while Versteeg and his linemates are the undisputed top line in Florida, the Lupul-Kessel-Shmuck line has to compete with the Kulemin-Grabovski-MacArthur line for power play time. As Frozenpool once again will demonstrate, the power play units have hardly been consistent for the Leafs this season.

Frequency	Strength	Line Combination
23.51%	PP	42 BOZAK,TYLER - 81 KESSEL,PHIL - 19 LUPUL,JOFFREY
17.33%	PP	84 GRABOVSKI,MIKHAIL - 41 KULEMIN,NIKOLAI - 16 MACARTHUR,CLARKE
9.65%	PP	12 CONNOLLY,TIM - 81 KESSEL,PHIL - 19 LUPUL,JOFFREY
9.16%	PP	39 FRATTIN,MATT - 84 GRABOVSKI,MIKHAIL - 41 KULEMIN,NIKOLAI
7.18%	PP	81 KESSEL,PHIL - 15 LOMBARDI,MATTHEW - 19 LUPUL,JOFFREY
5.94%	PP	81 KESSEL,PHIL - 19 LUPUL,JOFFREY - 20 STECKEL,DAVID

The Kulemin-Grabovski-MacArthur line was one of the best in the league last season and will be putting constant pressure on Lupul/Kessel to perform or risk losing minutes.

What's more, while it is reasonable to assume that the Leafs' slightly above average offense will continue to perform at this rate, the Lupul-Kessel duo is no doubt overachieving. Lupul's 18.4% shooting this season is much too high, but Kessel's 20.8% shooting is even less sustainable (twice his career average).That mojo is bound to fade. Still, this is no reason to count Lupul out just yet. His pros and cons are really no different than Versteeg's so let's dig deeper.

Take a look at the game logs for both Lupul and Versteeg . Versteeg's game log this season should have alarm bells going off. Nearly half of his points have come from his two four-point

games, and he already has six goose eggs this season. That screams of the sort of uneven, undependable play that will torment you as a fantasy owner. Lupul, on the other hand, has five goose eggs and while he has had his share of multipoint games has been slightly more consistent overall. Rather than be alarmed by Versteeg's overabundance of multipoint efforts and goose eggs, I am instead alarmed by Lupul's lack-thereof.

Over the past three seasons neither Lupul nor Versteeg has been consistent. In fact, they've been consistently inconsistent. Over the past three seasons Lupul has been held scoreless in 54.4%, 56.5% and 51.9% of games respectively. Versteeg has been similarly inconsistent with goose eggs in 51.3%, 57.0% and 57.5% of games. This season Versteeg has been scoreless in 35.3% of games, which should trend closer to 50% by seasons end, but it is nothing compared to Lupul's being scoreless in only 27.8% of games. If I have any concerns about consistency, I am concerned about Lupul's newfound consistency as it is inconsistent with his usually consistent inconsistency.

Confused?

The point is, Lupul does not normally produce at such a consistent rate. If he trends closer to his normal amount of scoreless games then his point production will drop considerably. Versteeg, while also due for a drop in consistency is much closer to his normal rate of scoreless games. In fact, I will take it one step further and argue that Versteeg's improved rate of production, in terms of both points per game and percentage of scoreless games is a result of his development as a player and the fact this is his first true top line opportunity. Lupul is older and has had more opportunities in the past and has blown them. Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice shame on me. Lupul does not warrant the same leeway as Versteeg.

To put another spin on it – would you rather own the perennial underachiever or the perennial overachiever if both are currently overachieving? It seems way more reasonable to go for the overachiever, especially when he is younger and has been historically healthier. If you own either one or both of them I'd be looking to sell high but if for some reason you have to pick one I will take Versteeg in both one-year and keeper leagues.