

Patrick Kane vs. Claude Giroux

Written by Steve Laidlaw

Wednesday, 23 November 2011 16:02 - Last Updated Wednesday, 23 November 2011 22:14



I cannot lie to you guys, I have been afraid to write this Cage Match article for quite some time. I mean, it is easy to compare Patrick Kane and Claude Giroux but how do you discern a difference beyond the logo on the front, and the name on the back of their sweaters? They are pretty much the same guy, as far as fantasy hockey is concerned.

In the fantasy universe Kane and Giroux are just chess pieces that you can move about the chess board that is your roster. It just so happens that Kane and Giroux are about as productive as they can be putting up large numbers across the board. What's more, their (C/RW) dual eligibility means you can move them about your board as you see fit. And trades? Oh please, if you are willing to sacrifice Kane or Giroux you can capture just about any piece your opponent has on the board except the King. You might have to give up a little more for the King. There aren't too many chess pieces like these two and the truth is you are damn lucky if you own one. Where the chess analogy falls apart is in the fact that not everyone is lucky enough to start with one on their team so I ask again – how can you decide between two players who are so damn good and yet so damn similar? I cannot promise you a decisive conclusion but maybe it is better

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that way. We have Patrick Kane vs. Claude Giroux.

The first thing to point out is the fact that Kane is more proven than Giroux. Proven over potential is one of my biggest mantras in fantasy hockey – but there are exceptions to every rule so you have to be malleable. I mean, if you come across a tiger in your bathroom aren't going to spend too much time pondering the fact you have never seen a tiger in the bathroom before. You will probably [yelp like a little girl and run away](#) .

Giroux is that tiger. He is so clearly a star that you can throw the Proven > Potential rule right out the window. If Proven > Potential no longer applies, how then can we discern a winner between Giroux and Kane?

I rarely do this but a comparison of Giroux and Kane's junior numbers might tell us something about what to expect in the future. There is a theory out there that a player's draft year numbers are the most telling stat with regards to what you can expect from them when they reach their peak at the NHL. Kane scored 145 points in the OHL in his draft year. Giroux scored *only* 103 points when he was drafted the season before out of the QMJHL. This would indicate that Kane has a much higher upside. I do not put too much stock in this because as I said, Giroux is obviously a star but perhaps Kane can reach just a wee bit higher. This is not enough to tip the *Cage Match* very far so let's look deeper.

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A looking at which categories Kane and Giroux perform best in would normally be a good place to start, but as I mentioned in the opening, they are pretty much the same guy. Not only do they play the same positions but they also produce similar numbers across the board.

Neither one shoots in abundance or takes too many penalties. Both are strong on the power play and play for great teams so their plus/minus numbers are rock solid. Both Giroux and Kane are wizards with the puck, equally capable of scoring and dishing the puck but they are best suited to dishing. This makes them assist-heavy star players likely capping their goal production in the low thirties.

It is their playmaking style that can perhaps elicit one difference: the quality of their linemates. When your major source of point production comes from assists you become somewhat dependent on your teammates' ability to score. It does not matter so much how they get it done, be it a big shot, clever deke, smart play, hard work or just a lucky bounce, all that matters is that they put the puck in. Hell, the best playmakers can literally bank it off their teammates but this is hardly reliable. So no matter how skilled the playmaker, a dependency does exist. Therefore it is valuable to consider just who Giroux and Kane are consistently lining up with and for that we turn to Frozenpool.

EVEN STRENGTH LINE COMBINATIONS	
Line	Percentage
1	31.3%
2	28.5%
3	24.7%
4	8.8%
5	6.7%

POWER PLAY LINE COMBINATIONS	
Line	Percentage
1	47.4%
2	34.8%
3	10%
4	4.3%
5	3.5%

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At even strength Kane spends most of his time lined up at least one of Hossa and Sharp and plenty of time with the both of them. It does suck that Carcillo is a frequent linemate but he almost always has a buffer of a strong linemate to play alongside "The Carcillo." What's more, Kane spends just about all his power play time on the top unit with the Blackhawks' big guns.

The Blackhawks' power play is only 14th in the league but this is a team that finished fourth a year ago and is largely unchanged. The Blackhawks remain one of the NHL's elite scoring teams as they rank third in goals per game. So Kane is really never lacking for quality linemates.

EVEN STRENGTH LINE COMBINATIONS	
Line	Line Combination
17.7%	GIROUX,C - HARTNELL,S - JAGR,J
26.2%	GIROUX,C - JAGR,J - VAN RIEMSDYK,J
6.6%	GIROUX,C - HARTNELL,S - VORACEK,J
4.3%	GIROUX,C - JAGR,J
3.2%	GIROUX,C - HARTNELL,S - TALBOT,H

POWER PLAY LINE COMBINATIONS	
Line	Line Combination
30.1%	GIROUX,C - JAGR,J - SIMMONDS,W - VAN RIEMSDYK,J
28.2%	GIROUX,C - JAGR,J - SIMMONDS,W - VAN RIEMSDYK,J
21.5%	GIROUX,C - JAGR,J - READ,M - SIMMONDS,W
11%	BRISER,E - GIROUX,C - HARTNELL,S - VAN RIEMSDYK,J
9.1%	GIROUX,C - TALBOT,H

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Giroux does not have quite the same quality of linemates. He skates most often with Jagr but Jagr is on the wrong side of 40. Expecting even 75 games out of Jagr this season might be folly. His other frequent linemates (Hartnell and JVR) are talented but not at the level of Hossa and Sharp. Both of those guys are proven top flight scorers. JVR is completely unproven and Hartnell, while a hard worker, is a proven non-elite.

It is a similar story on the power play. Giroux again spends most of his time with Jagr, which is not a bad thing but they throw a hulking guy like Simmonds on the line and it makes things a little more challenging. Only 11% of Giroux's power play minutes are spent with his dynamo roommate Danny Briere. When I predicted Giroux to win the Art Ross it was in the anticipation of seeing Briere and Giroux together on the power play making magic. The Flyers' power play is clicking at 18.4% good for 12th in the league, which is a solid improvement on their performance last season when they finished 19th in power play efficiency but I still think they can do better. That said the Flyers are the highest scoring team in the league and Giroux is leading that charge so maybe the power play isn't a big deal.

What about playing time in general? Well Giroux definitely plays more receiving 21:10 per game overall ice time vs. Kane's 19:17 per game. However the major difference is that Giroux plays two and a half minutes per game on the penalty kill. Otherwise, their minutes stack up quite similarly with both skating around 15 minutes at even strength with four minutes on the power play per game.

Giroux's bonus time on the penalty kill may actually be more of a detriment to his value than a bonus. While the extra ice time is nice, especially because Giroux is a serious shorthanded threat (seven shorthanded points last season) it also puts him in the line of fire and could potential burn him out. This is not a huge threat because Giroux has yet to miss a game in his

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NHL career despite all the tough minutes he has played. It is also worth noting that Giroux doesn't just play the tough minutes. He puts his body on the line. He had over 100 hits last season and blocked nearly 50 shots. He has proven exceptionally durable so far and I do not expect injuries to be a serious issue but you have to think eventually some ticky-tac type injuries will mount for him. Kane on the other hand doesn't have these responsibilities and thus can focus solely on doing what he is best at; scoring. This is not something to be concerned about in the short term but keep it on the back burner.

Looking further into the situational minutes that Giroux and Kane play we can look at offensive zone starts. The Blackhawks are notoriously strong offensive zone starters. They really push to finish (and thus start) plays in the offensive end. Kane is a huge beneficiary of this. He starts 62.3% of his five-on-five shifts in the offensive zone. This is a huge advantage for him. Giroux, on the other hand, starts only 50% of his shifts in the offensive zone. This is again because he is relied upon more for his defensive duties.

Zone starts tell only half the story though. It is one thing to start in the offensive zone. It is another to actually start with the puck too. Kane only wins 47.9% of his draws but he does have the added advantage of lining up alongside Sharp on most shifts. Sharp can take many of those draws and is winning 57.0% of his draws this season. He gives Kane an added weapon on his line. What's more, on the power play Kane has not only Sharp but also Jonathan Toews, the league's top faceoff man, to take draws.

Giroux, meanwhile, is the top faceoff man for the Flyers at 49.0%. He is responsible for all the draws when he is on the ice so he doesn't have that buffer that Kane has. Zone starts, with face off percentage factored in gives Kane a serious edge. His team puts him in better situations to score more frequently.

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Both Giroux and Kane are fantastic players and at 23 years old, they are both still so young that they can not only improve but be excellent investments no matter what your league setup. In your standard 6x4 Yahoo! Head-to-Head league they will put up shockingly similar numbers. What little separation there is all seems to favor Kane.

Kane may have the higher upside. His linemates are much better than Giroux's. More importantly, Kane's teammates do more to put him into offensive situations, helping him by winning draws and pushing the play into the offensive zone more frequently. Finally, while this is only a small concern with little tangible proof of being true Giroux may wind up more of an injury risk over the long term. While Kane is the only one of the two to miss time with injury, the fact that Giroux spends much more time in perilous situations is somewhat alarming.

This is far from decisive but I'm giving this *Cage Match* to Patrick Kane. Checkmate?