My two favourite mantras in fantasy hockey are; buy low sell high and; proven over potential. As we saw last week in the Giroux vs. Kane *Cage Match* sometimes you just have to throw those out the window. Things do eventually change. Learning to tell the difference between a buy low stock and a sinking ship is tremendously valuable. Being able to tell the difference between a breakout player and a fast starter is similarly valuable. In this week's
Cage Match
we look at two different players in two very different situations – one in the latter situation and one in the former. It's Valterri Filppula vs. Mike Ribeiro. Are these two contenders or pretenders?

Because these two are facing tremendously different situations there is not much value in throwing up the patented Cage Match Three Year Averages Head-to-Head Rotisserie Chart because it would just obviously favour Ribeiro. He is the carton of milk in the fridge with the funky smell. We've drank from this carton before and it was mighty delicious but is it past the expiry date?

Filppula, on the other hand, he's that new carton of eggnog you picked up for the holidays. You know the hype but when you tried it a few years ago it just didn't sit right. You ralphed all over the in-laws. You've given it a second shot this year and you are hopeful so far. Will it settle this time around or will you be taking aim at your least favourite nephew?

Ribeiro is only 30 years old, which is way too early for him to be washed up but with only two goals and 15 points through 24 games this season you have to wonder. He may not be washed up but it is clear he is being pushed into a reduced role. It seems counterintuitive but Brad Richards leaving Dallas and the Stars improving their blue line has been the worst thing that could happen to Ribeiro. He had his best seasons in Dallas when he was their number one center and taking Richards out of the picture was supposed to thrust him back into the prime time role. Unfortunately for Ribeiro, Jamie Benn has instead seized that opportunity as well as the top power play minutes. While Richards was around the Stars blue line was devoid of puck movers. Richards thus played the point on the power play freeing up the center position for Ribeiro. With new acquisitions like Sheldon Souray and Alex Goligoski manning the points and Benn up the middle Ribeiro has been relegated to second unit duties on the power play.

Ribeiro is down to just 2:56 PP minutes per game, the lowest average in all his time in Dallas. His overall ice time is 19:14 minutes per game, which is still strong but he is used to averaging at least a minute more per game and that minute is being cut directly from his power play time. For a guy who hasn't scored fewer than 23 power play points in a season since landing full time in the NHL this is a huge loss.

It is worth noting that as much as Goligoski's presence has perhaps stolen some power play

time from Ribeiro, he is also seemingly necessary for Ribeiro and the Stars to succeed. All of Ribeiro's four PPP came while Goligoski was in the lineup. The Stars have scored a mere 2.00 goals per game without Goligoski and their power play has only scored only once in 24 attempts. Before Goligoski went down the Stars were averaging 2.87 goals per game and had scored on 19.2% of their man advantages. Goligoski will boost Ribeiro's power play production back to a respectable level. Before Goligoski's departure Ribeiro was on pace for 23 PPP – right in his wheel house. If we split the difference it is safe to assume Ribeiro is good for 18 PPP this season.

Beyond the reduction in power play ice time, little has changed for Ribeiro. As Frozenpool will show us he is still joined at the hip to Brenden Morrow, skating with the Stars Captain on nearly every shift except for these recent games that Morrow has been out.

Even Strength Line Combinations

Time	Line Combination
45%	MORROW.B - RIBEIRO.M - RYDER.M
23%	BURISH.A - MORROW.B - RIBEIRO.M
17.1%	OTT.S - RIBEIRO.M - VINCOUR.T
10.4%	ERIKSSON.L - MORROW.B - RIBEIRO.M
4.4%	MORROW.B - RIBEIRO.M

Power Play Line Combinations

Time	Line Combination
76.1%	MORROW.B - RIBEIRO.M - RYDER.M
15.2%	MORROW.B - PETERSEN.T - RIBEIRO.M - RYDER.M
7.1%	OTT.S - PETERSEN.T - RIBEIRO.M - RYDER.M
5.6%	OTT.S - RIBEIRO.M - RYDER.M
2%	MORROW.B - RIBEIRO.M

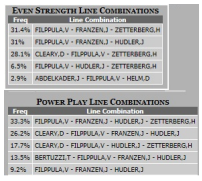
Also note he has been reunited with his Montreal running-mate Michael Ryder, who scored two 30-goal seasons while skating with Ribeiro. This is a pretty safe environment for Ribeiro. The problem is that Ryder is unlikely to actually lift Ribeiro's totals upward. It's more likely that Ribeiro will lift Ryder to heights he could never achieve on his own with little reciprocation. They have good chemistry but Ryder isn't boosting anyone's stats. It's just not gonna happen.

Similarly, Morrow likely doesn't have much to give back to Ribeiro. He too has two 30-goal seasons while skating alongside Ribeiro but both those seasons came in Morrow's only two 82-game seasons since the lockout. Morrow is on the wrong side of 30 and his rough and tumble style is wearing his body down. He is already out with a minor injury and he can be counted on to miss more than a few games this season.

All told, Ribeiro looks due for a decline this season. Filppula is a completely different story. He has 19 points through the first 22 games and is on pace to shatter his career high of 40. At 27 he is a bit old to be having a breakout season but since he's been on that list of breakout candidates for seemingly forever it is nice to see he is finally showing off his talents.

Filppula is averaging a career high 2:51 PP minutes per game; nearly identical to Ribeiro's average. Sure he is similarly stuck with second unit duties but that second unit is playing more than ever as the Red Wings have looked to spread out the offense. Filppula's total minutes have been limited to 16:54 per game but this has still been the best opportunity he has had in his career. Is it possible this is the Filppula we've all been waiting for?

As Frozenpool will show us, Filppula is playing with some top flight players.



Even Strength Line Combinations	
Freq	Line Combination
31.4%	FILPPULA,V - FRANZEN,J - ZETTERBERG,H
31%	FILPPULA,V - FRANZEN,J - HUDLER,J
28.1%	CLEARY,D - FILPPULA,V - ZETTERBERG,H
6.5%	FILPPULA,V - HUDLER,J - ZETTERBERG,H
2.9%	ABDELKADER,J - FILPPULA,V - HELM,D

Power Play Line Combinations	
Freq	Line Combination
33.3%	FILPPULA,V - FRANZEN,J - HUDLER,J - ZETTERBERG,H
26.2%	CLEARY,D - FILPPULA,V - FRANZEN,J - HUDLER,J
17.7%	CLEARY,D - FILPPULA,V - HUDLER,J - ZETTERBERG,H
13.5%	BERTUZZI,T - FILPPULA,V - FRANZEN,J - HUDLER,J
9.2%	FILPPULA,V - FRANZEN,J - HUDLER,J

Filppula is skating with at least one of, and often both, Johan Franzen and Henrik Zetterberg. This is in stark contrast to last season when Filppula could only catch whiffs of Zetterberg's excellence from across the dressing room.

Unfortunately, this may not stick for the full year. Red Wings head coach Mike Babcock is the L MFAO of head coaching
but it is heartening to see that he seems truly committed to keeping Pavel Datsyuk and Zetterberg separated creating two potent lines. Also working against Filppula is the fact his two star linemates make Brenden Morrow look like Cal Ripken Jr. While Zetterberg has stayed healthier in recent years he has never played a full 82 game season. Neither has Franzen and as both are now on the wrong side of 30 it stands to reason they'll each miss a few games. An extended injury would tear a hole in Filppula's meal ticket.

What's more, Filppula is no iron man either having missed over 38 games over the two previous

seasons. Ribeiro has a big advantage having a much cleaner track record.

Worse yet, Filppula is obviously overachieving. His shooting percentage is an abnormally high 17.9%. He is a solid shooter with a career average of 12.6% and he is shooting more than ever before – on pace for a career high 145 SOG – but he will not maintain his current goal scoring pace. That he's on pace for only 26 goals is somewhat disheartening. That isn't a huge total and he probably won't even reach it.

Filppula is taking full advantage of the added power play time he has received this season scoring seven PPP so far. His career high is eight PPP so he will surely surpass that total. This virtually guarantees Filppula of setting a career high in points. He has averaged around 30 even strength points over the past several seasons so if he, for instance, doubled his PPP career high to 16 – that means 9 PPP over the final 62 games – he would land himself a career high of at least 45 points. And if we assume he can ride the coattails of Zetterberg and Franzen to even greater even strength production then he should score over 50. Filppula is definitely talented enough to get to 55 with some help along the way and I'd say a maximum of 65 if he gets truly lucky.

Ribeiro should score no fewer than 55 this season. I mean, he'd have to get unlucky to sink even that low. He feels like a good bet to get to 60. That's 45 points over the final 58 games. His upside is 75 because he is definitely capable of rattling off 60 over that same span but he'll go no higher. This makes Ribeiro the smarter bet but just recognize – we are now approaching that weird crossover phase where the stars could align and Filppula could finish 10 points higher than Ribeiro. These things happen and that makes this Cage Match mighty closer than you may have perceived.

Breaking this down into individual categories, neither of the two holds an advantage in PIM and both have similar goal:assist ratios so it's really just a matter of total points. Ribeiro holds a very slim advantage in PPP and a mild advantage in SOG. Filppula has an ace in the hole in plus/minus because he skates for the powerful Red Wings. On the whole I have to score this one in favour of Ribeiro – you would have to get way too lucky to come out ahead with Filppula.

One closing thought for you. Look at the home and away splits for Filppula and Ribeiro. They have both been abnormally dominant on home ice this season with Filppula scoring 15 points in 12 games at home and just 4 points in 10 games on the road while Ribeiro has scored 11 points in 12 home games and just 4 points in 12 road games. If for you this *Cage Match* is about deciding which of these two to play on any given night, always take the guy on home ice.