Gaborik vs. Semin: I am going to let you guys in on a little secret; I loathe Band-Aid Boys. What's the use in owning a player who could, at any moment, spontaneously combust? Sure, anyone could go out for an extended period in today's "Noggin Hurts League" but there is still something off-putting about knowing that there is a high probability a player will miss 20+ games. With Band-Aid Boys it is basically a coin flip. Heads you get Jekyll, tails you get Hyde.

My strategy to deal with Band-Aid Boys is to look for value. If a Band-Aid Boy falls too far in the draft or is getting sold for cheap then I like to treat them like a longshot bet. I invest on the cheap with say a mid or late pick knowing that if it pays off I have myself a golden ticket. If things go south, no harm done but if things go well then I start looking to hedge. Why? Because the difference between a gambler and an investor is that the investor consistently makes money. He makes the smart play. If there is value in a longshot then bet the longshot but the longshot can still fail. At a certain point it pays to hedge and guarantee a profit. You may not make yourself as much money (or in this case fantasy production) by hedging but you will

prevent yourself from losing it all if your longshot eventually loses (or in this case gets hurt). Why get greedy hanging on for the huge payday when you can instead reward yourself with guaranteed (or as close to guaranteed as you can get in fantasy hockey) profit.

So how do we hedge in fantasy hockey? You probably know this as selling high. When a player over-performs his projected pace, you want to sell high before the market corrects itself. Similarly with Band-Aid Boys, if one stays healthy for a while you'll want to sell him high and grab a more durable player or at the very least trade him for another long shot and then some.

Let us now look at two different Band-Aid Boys and evaluate how we should handle their situation. We've got Marian Gaborik vs. Alex Semin. I wouldn't be surprised if one or both of them are hurt by the time you finish reading this *Cage Match*.

Let us first take a look at which one of these guys is the stronger asset, and more over, which one is the least fragile. Let us look to the patented three-year average chart with the caveat that we know these totals will be drastically low. They are Band-Aid Boys so these averages will include both Jekyll and Hyde. Rather than totals, focus on per-game averages. Here is the tale of the tape:

GP

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PPP

PIM

SOG

Gaborik

51.7

25.7

26.7

Plus-8.7

16.3

19

177.3

Semin

66.7

34

38.3

Plus-27.6

25

71.3

232.3

It is really hard to argue for Gaborik here. We know that his Jekyll is among the best in the league but it is no better than Semin's. They are pretty well even in terms of goals per game production. Assists per game is close as well but favours Semin slightly. Plus/Minus definitely favours Semin. Recent trends may turn that around but more on that later. PPP is pretty even but also favours Semin. PIM goes to Semin by a landslide. SOG is pretty even as both guys have gone for about three and a half shots per game.

Where Semin really takes the cake however, is in games played. His Jekyll is every bit as good as Gaborik's but his Hyde is nowhere near as volatile. Gaborik offers the threat of missing an entire season with absolutely no upside over Semin if he does play the full season.

The reality is that Gaborik's wonky groin is a congenital issue that may never go away. Semin, on the other hand, is just soft. He will miss a game with a hangnail. I know which one I would prefer to have in my locker room but that has little to do with fantasy hockey. Semin's lack of toughness is a detriment but up against a guy with perpetual injury woes of his own, Semin rules.

There is more to this story however. Semin's numbers took a huge boost from the fact that the Capitals were the highest scoring team in the league over the 2008-09 and 2009-10 seasons. Last season the Capitals offense took a nosedive finishing 19th in scoring. Over that same period Gaborik's teams finished 22nd, 16th and 16th

respectively. This season the Capitals are ninth in scoring at 2.82 goals per game and trending upward. The Rangers are 10th at 2.80 goals per game and holding strong. Essentially, the playing field is even, which is important as we will now take a look at their scoring this season.

GP

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PPP

PIM

SOG

Gaborik

43

23

12

Plus-10

9

16

140

Semin

39

11

13

Minus-1

5

42

83

It is pretty clear that this season Semin spent the first half in Hyde-mode. On this new-look, low-scoring Capitals team Semin shoots less, scores less and pilfers his teammates for fewer contributions to assists, plus/minus and PPP production. The only thing holding strong is his PIM production.

This means that the *Cage Match* is not the landslide it first appeared to be. Semin is thoroughly beaten in goals, and SOG. Assists are even and he is leading PIM but he is losing in both PPP and plus/minus. The latter two categories are far from conclusive though.

Semin dominated plus/minus on the three-year average breakdown. His team is trending upward and he should be back into the positives soon. Gaborik may have him beat for this season because of how strong the Rangers are playing but Semin is not a lost cause. Gaborik, however, has not been a minus-player since his rookie season and there is something to be said for that consistency. Give a slight edge to Gaborik in plus/minus for the time being.

PPP deserves an even closer look. Currently, the Capitals power play is seventh in the league at 19.2% but is trending upward . The Rangers power play, on the other hand, is one of the worst in the league at 14.3% and showing few signs of improvement. Semin is only seeing 2:19 per game on the power play, compared to the 3:25 Gaborik sees per game but on a more prolific power play Semin has a good chance at evening PPP up. Call this category a wash.

What's even more astounding is the fact that if you look closer Gaborik is not exactly "Jekyll-ing" it up, despite his favourable health. In fact, things may actually be tumbling downward. It is true that Gaborik sits tied for fifth in the league in goal scoring at 23, and is scoring more than a goal every two games but the reality is he is still underperforming. The ultimate sell high moment for Gaborik was likely Boxing Day when he scored his seventh goal of a five game goal-scoring streak. Since that game, Gaborik has scored just one goal and two points in nine games.

It is not hard to see why either. Thanks to Frozenpool, we can see who Gaborik has been lining up with most frequently this season.

Even Strength Line Combinations	
Freq	Line Combination
71.1%	ANISIMOV,A - GABORIK,M - STEPAN,D
11%	GABORIK,M - RICHARDS,B - STEPAN,D
7.1%	GABORIK,M - MITCHELL,J - STEPAN,D
5.9%	FEDOTENKO,R - GABORIK,M - STEPAN,D
4.9%	DUBINSKY,B - GABORIK,M - RICHARDS,B

Power Play Line Combinations	
Freq	Line Combination
47.7%	CALLAHAN,R - GABORIK,M - RICHARDS,B - STEPAN,D
24.2%	CALLAHAN,R - DUBINSKY,B - GABORIK,M - RICHARDS,B
12.4%	ANISIMOV,A - GABORIK,M - STEPAN,D
9.6%	CALLAHAN,R - GABORIK,M - RICHARDS,B
6.1%	ANISIMOV,A - CALLAHAN,R - GABORIK,M - RICHARDS,B

Gaborik has spent most of the season on the “GAS” line with Stepan and Anisimov but this is far from ideal. Ideally Gaborik could find chemistry with Brad Richards. We know that rag tag lines can develop good chemistry and work well for a while but ultimately that stuff fizzles. Gaborik needs linemates that can also bury the puck if he is going to produce optimally. These guys are fine for getting Gaborik his goals but they give him little assistance (pun intended).

On the power play the linemate quality is much better for Gaborik but they simply cannot figure out how to score with the man advantage. As mentioned earlier the Rangers, despite their individual talents, have one of the worst power plays in the league.

Semin is trending upward. He has been on fire, scoring six goals and thirteen points in his last dozen games. With an improved power play under new head coach Dale Hunter, Semin is back to maximizing his situation. As Frozenpool will show us, Semin gets to skate alongside some of the finest linemates anyone could ask for.

EVEN STRENGTH LINE COMBINATIONS	
Freq	Line Combination
32.6%	BACKSTROM,N - OVECHKIN,A - SEMIN,A
22.9%	JOHANSSON,M - KNUBLE,M - SEMIN,A
20.3%	JOHANSSON,M - OVECHKIN,A - SEMIN,A
12.8%	CHIMERA,J - LAICH,B - SEMIN,A
11.3%	EAKIN,C - JOHANSSON,M - SEMIN,A

POWER PLAY LINE COMBINATIONS	
Freq	Line Combination
46.6%	BACKSTROM,N - LAICH,B - OVECHKIN,A - SEMIN,A
21.3%	BROUWER,T - JOHANSSON,M - OVECHKIN,A - SEMIN,A
14%	BACKSTROM,N - OVECHKIN,A - SEMIN,A
10%	JOHANSSON,M - KNUBLE,M - LAICH,B - SEMIN,A
8.1%	JOHANSSON,M - OVECHKIN,A - SEMIN,A

Ideally, Semin would line up alongside Backstrom a lot more frequently but his lack of shifts with the top centerman owes in part to the fact that Backstrom is currently out with the dreaded “UBI” that we all know is really a concussion. Backstrom’s absence puts a slight damper on Semin’s upward trend however he has continued to produce regardless.

This season’s mid-way stats are not enough to sway me against my original ruling that Semin is the much finer choice as a fantasy asset. Age is not much of an issue – Semin is 27 and Gaborik is 29 – but contract status might be. Gaborik is locked in with the Rangers long term so we know where his future lies. The Rangers are an average offensive team but they do have a fairly loaded prospect system. Gaborik has produced in defensive systems before so it is hard to knock him too much for his situation. Semin, on the other hand, is an upcoming UFA and it has been long speculated that he could be moved or even jump back to the KHL. I do not like to speculate too much about moves that are beyond your control but just keep a possible change of scenery in the back of your mind. Since the Capitals have essentially stunk for the past year and a half use Semin’s numbers over that same period as an example of how things could look if he is moved to a less favourable situation.

So I am still backing Semin as a locked in winner in this *Cage Match*. Unless you play in a league where production carries over in trades I would be looking at swapping Gaborik for Semin this instant. Whether it is a keeper league or a one-year Semin is on the rise and has proven himself a more reliable asset than Gaborik. Swapping the two is one way to buy low, sell high and hedge your Gaborik bet. Of course, exchanging one longshot bet in for a relatively-shorter-shot-but-still-a- longshot bet is not the ideal way to hedge. Go after Semin if you must but see if you can use Gaborik’s status as a top five goal scorer and Semin’s slow start to get something added to the punch. If you disagree, I am going to pull a tantrum
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