PA Parenteau vs. Matt Moulson - Draft position is one of the greatest deceivers in fantasy sports. It is a nice guideline (particularly in and around draft time) but the farther away you get from the NHL draft the less that draft position means. That is because the draft provides only a snap shot in time of the perceived value of all the drafted players. You think it matters any more that Datsyuk was a sixth round pick? That Zetterberg was a seventh? It most certainly does not.

There is no denying the fact that putting your faith in a player drafted in the high rounds is a smart decision early in that players' career. The higher a player is drafted the more likely he is to play in the NHL. There is also a strong correlation between draft position and games played. That is because the players who appear the most ready to make an impact are selected earlier but also because when teams invest a high pick they are much more likely to provide that player opportunities to succeed. That is the wrong attitude though. Every pick is essentially the same investment. You only get so many picks. Sure higher picks offer more possibility but every pick

offers the chance of an NHL player and quite possibly a superstar.

Where this gets even more prevalent is when a player makes it to the NHL. Once a player proves himself capable of playing professional hockey all bets are off. Once you make it the only thing that matters is production – goals and assists, wins and losses.

The trend of undrafted rookies making huge impacts after getting signed out of college is just the latest example of how draft position or lack thereof will deceive you.

In this week's Cage Match we take a trip to Long Island to see how the moribund Islanders franchise has plugged some serious holes by throwing caution to the wind and valuing players not by draft position but by production. I don't know, maybe it is just the years of constant failure that have driven them to this radical means of thinking but you have to commend them for this strategy because they have unearthed some gems with their radical thinking.

I know what you are thinking:

The Islanders? Radicals? Really?

Damn straight. This is a team that signed a guy with no groin ligaments to a lifetime contract. This is a team that has paid someone for the past five years not to play for their team and will continue to pay him for three more. This is a team that has traded away more future All-Stars than I care to count. You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. The Islanders may be pushing the chicken population to the brink of extinction but that's quite the omelet they have going now.

So we've got Matt Moulson vs. PA Parenteau in a battle of former ninth round picks (not that that matters any more). Winner gets to have his existence acknowledged, if only for the briefest of moments.

These two do not have much of a track record having only recently busted into the league but as 28-year-olds we can pretty much take their current production as canon. With that in mind, let's use their numbers over the last year and a half for comparison.

GP

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PPP

PIM

SOG

Parenteau

133

31

69

Minus-11

35

91

273

Moulson

134

54

45

Plus-1

31

30

382

Moulson shoots way more so it is no surprise that he also scores a lot more goals. He has also been a slightly stronger performer in plus/minus though that is hardly definitive. Parenteau is a playmaker so he offers you more assists and slightly more PPP. He is also, somewhat surprisingly, a much stronger PIM option. It is not so much that it is surprising that he performs better than Moulson in this category as Moulson is a very clean player but rather that for a player of Parenteau's stature and skillset you would not expect so many PIM. And yet

Parenteau has produced PIM at every single level so expect this trend to continue even if he only has the one major penalty in his NHL career.

The numbers seem to favour Moulson slightly, if only because I tend to value SOG more than PIM as this is a category more reflective of future production. I also like the fact that Matt Moulson is more proven, and is in fact working on his third straight 30-goal season, which by the way, is something only seven other players have a realistic shot of having accomplished over that same time period.

Line combinations also favour Moulson. As Frozenpool will show us Moulson has been glued to Tavares's hip, which is the best spot to be in the Islanders lineup.

EVEN STRENGTH LINE COMBINATIONS

Freq	Line Combination
49.5%	MOULSON,M - PARENTEAU,P - TAVARES,J
36%	MOULSON,M - OKPOSO,K - TAVARES,J
12.4%	GRABNER,M - MOULSON,M - TAVARES,J
1.1%	MOULSON,M - TAVARES,J
1%	MOULSON,M - NIELSEN,F - OKPOSO,K

POWER PLAY LINE COMBINATIONS

Freq	Line Combination
43.8%	MOULSON,M - NIELSEN,F - PARENTEAU,P - TAVARES,J
25.8%	MOULSON,M - PARENTEAU,P - ROLSTON,B - TAVARES,J
16.4%	MOULSON,M - PARENTEAU,P - TAVARES,J
12.2%	MOULSON,M - NIELSEN,F - ROLSTON,B - TAVARES,J
1.8%	MOULSON,M - OKPOSO,K - PARENTEAU,P - TAVARES,J

You will note that Parenteau has also seen a ton of time with Tavares. In fact, the trio of Moulson, Tavares and Parenteau were a line for much of the early part of this season. Recently, however, Parenteau has only seen ice time with Tavares on the power play. As Frozenpool will

show us, over the past 12 games Parenteau has spent much more time playing on the second line with Frans Nielsen.

Games between 2012-01-07 and 2012-02-21

Freq	Str	Line Combination
52.8%	EV	GRABNER,M - NIELSEN,F - PARENTEAU,P
22.7%	EV	NIELSEN,F - PARENTEAU,P - ROLSTON,B
11.3%	PP	MOULSON,M - NIELSEN,F - PARENTEAU,P - TAVARES,J
6.7%	EV	MOULSON,M - PARENTEAU,P - TAVARES,J
3.7%	EV	PARENTEAU,P - TAVARES,J
2.8%	EV	BAILEY,J - GRABNER,M - PARENTEAU,P

This just makes things even more interesting as this has been Parenteau's most productive stretch this season, scoring 15 points over that stretch. Over the long haul though, this should be a detriment to Parenteau's production. Nielsen is a fine player but he cannot match Tavares' production. Moreover, Nielsen is used in more of a checking role which means Parenteau will be seeing less than optimal minutes.

It is true that both Parenteau and Moulson average similar minutes (approximately 18 minutes per game of which around three come on the power play) but the Nielsen line does not receive favourable zone starts. Currently Parenteau's zone starts sit at 55.7% which is right behind Moulson's 57.4% but Parenteau's is declining. Nielsen receives only 45.3% offensive zone starts which is much more reflective of what Parenteau is currently seeing.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention that Parenteau is an upcoming UFA. Obviously the team would like to keep him but there is no telling what a move might do for his production if that did

occur.

Both Parenteau and Moulson have shown chemistry with star centerman John Tavares but it is clear that Moulson is winning that linemate battle. That combined with the stronger track record and the slightly stronger stats gives Moulson the edge, no matter what Paul Giamatti thinks .

The real irony is that these players have become valuable in spite of their draft position. I find it simultaneously cruel and fantastic that both Moulson's and Parenteau's former teams would kill to have them now after letting them go for free. How many years have we had to endure the Penguins quest for a goal scoring winger? How about the Kings similar quest? What about the Ducks desperate need for scoring depth? Don't be like these NHL teams. Don't let the exact type of player you have been looking for get away from you for nothing. Grab on to both of these guys and enjoy the ride. It just happens Moulson's ride will be a little bit more exciting.