

## Michael Ryder vs. Radim Vrbata

Written by Steve Laidlaw

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There were a ton of surprises this past NHL season. Between the absurd number of injuries and the general lack of scoring, many players who were normally excellent options for streaming became mainstays on fantasy rosters. This week's Cage Match will focus on two such surprise players; [Michael Ryder](#) and [Radim Vrbata](#). The veteran wingers each scored 35 goals and 62 points this season, making them a near perfect match for one another.

Don't be surprised if both Ryder and Vrbata decline next season. They are both over 30 years old and both set career highs in goals and points (okay, Ryder's actual career high was set in 2003-04 but that was almost a decade ago and his final tally this season was just one shy). It is only logical that they would fail to repeat their respective feats. Which one of the two is more likely to repeat (or at the very least decline less)?

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My money is on Ryder. The first and most obvious reason is that he has produced like this before. As mentioned in an earlier caveat, Ryder's career high is in fact 63 points, set in 2003-04. This was also his third 30-goal season. He has produced like this before which makes it less likely that this past season was an aberration.

Vrbata's previous career highs were 27 goals and 56 points, which are not reasonably far off from what he produced this season but no other season of his really compares to the one he just had. It really seems as if for Vrbata it is about catching lightning in a bottle, whereas for Ryder it is simply about getting the opportunity to succeed.

Consider the ice time each player has received over the years. This season Vrbata skated 18:38 per game, including 3:13 on the power play and 1:16 on the penalty kill. Beyond the penalty kill time not much has changed over the past two seasons for Vrbata in Phoenix. His ice time in 2010-11 was 16:22 minutes per with 3:13 on the power play and 0:06 on the penalty kill while his 2009-10 numbers were 16:00 minutes per with 2:23 on the power play and 0:26 on the penalty kill. His opportunities and responsibilities have increased, just not drastically.

Ryder, on the other hand, was underutilized in Boston, where he spent the past three years. He received 14:29 minutes per game and 15:17 minutes per game in 2010-11 and 2009-10 respectively, while spending 2:05 and 2:25 minutes per game on the power play with negligible penalty kill time. In Dallas this past season Ryder's ice time jumped to 17:22 per game with 2:40 on the power play. Clearly Ryder's boost in production was the result of increased ice time but he also benefitted from improved linemates.

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It is impossible to argue that Ryder was skating alongside scrubs in Boston – his most common linemates included [David Krejci](#) , [Tyler Seguin](#) and [Blake Wheeler](#) – it is just that he never did build great chemistry with those players. As Frozenpool will demonstrate, Ryder skated with much more favourable linemates in Dallas this season.

EVEN STRENGTH LINE COMBINATIONS	POWER PLAY LINE COMBINATIONS
24.2% ERIKSSON,L - RIBEIRO,M - RYDER,M	25.5% ERIKSSON,L - RIBEIRO,M - RYDER,M
20.5% BENNJ - ERIKSSON,L - RYDER,M	26.5% BENNJ - ERIKSSON,L - RYDER,M
16.8% BENNJ - OTT,S - RYDER,M	24.6% NORROW,B - RIBEIRO,M - RYDER,M
15.7% NORROW,B - RIBEIRO,M - RYDER,M	5.3% NORROW,B - PETERSENT - RIBEIRO,M - RYDER,M
3.8% FIDOLEK,V - NYSTRADJE - RYDER,M	5% OTT,S - PETERSENT - RIBEIRO,M - RYDER,M

Ryder was reunited with his old running-mate from Montreal, [Mike Ribeiro](#) , but also benefitted from spending a lot of time with

[Loui Eriksson](#)

and

[Jamie Benn](#)

who are among the best playmakers in the league and are fantastically easy to play with.

Vrbata, meanwhile, may have simply benefitted from having skated with [Ray Whitney](#) , who experienced a renaissance this season however it is more than likely that Whitney was also the beneficiary of Vrbata's career season. As Frozenpool will show us Vrbata and Whitney were almost inseparable this season.

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EVEN STRENGTH LINE COMBINATIONS		POWER PLAY LINE COMBINATIONS	
Line	Line Combination	Line	Line Combination
34.2%	ERIKSSON,L - RIBERO,M - RYDER,M	38.3%	ERIKSSON,L - RIBERO,M - RYDER,M
29.5%	BENLJ - ERIKSSON,L - RYDER,M	24.9%	BENLJ - ERIKSSON,L - RYDER,M
16.8%	BENLJ - OTTE,S - RYDER,M	24.5%	NORROW,B - RIBERO,M - RYDER,M
15.7%	NORROW,B - RIBERO,M - RYDER,M	5.3%	NORROW,B - PETERSEN,T - RIBERO,M - RYDER,M
1.3%	RODREZ,M - OTTE,S - RYDER,M	1.2%	OTTE,S - PETERSEN,T - RIBERO,M - RYDER,M

[REDACTED]