In the recent *Dobber Hockey Expert's League* draft I was faced with a difficult decision. It was the seventh round and I had yet to pick a centerman. Worst of all, the cream of the crop had been picked clean. It was to be expected but I was nevertheless disappointed. Clearly I needed to grab the best centerman available and had plenty of options with upside just nothing that was a sure fire winner. All the options I considered had upside but every one of them came with a possible deal breaker. It was like when Barney describes the fatal "Ohhhh…" moment on *How I Met Your Mother* only instead of chicks I was judging NHL players.

Paul Stastny: I play for the Colorado Avalanche!

Me: Ohhhh…

Mike Ribeiro: My career high is 163 SOG.

Me: Ohhhh…

David Krejci: You ever hear of the Stanley Cup hangover?

Me: Ohhhh…

Patrice Bergeron: And then I got another concussion…

Me: Ohhhh…

Jordan Staal: So I guess you heard Malkin and Crosby are back.

Me: Ohhhh…

Jason Spezza: Hi, I'm Jason Spezza.

Me: Ohhhh…

And it went on like this for a while until I whittled it down to just two: Derek Roy and Mikko Koivu. To be fair, these two are not without their own “Ohhhh…” moments but I just didn’t see these as deal breakers the way I did with the above. So in this week’s *Cage Match* it is Derek Roy vs. Mikko Koivu where we will see which one I took in the
Expert’s League
draft and why.

The “Ohhhh…” moment for Derek Roy is quite simple; he missed the entire second half of last season, playing in only 35 games. The counter to that is two-fold. First of all, prior to last season, Roy had only missed an average of five games per season since the lockout. He does not fit my mold of injury prone. Secondly, Roy was looking like he had taken another step forward scoring at a point-per-game pace through those 35 games, a pace that would have had him score his second career 80-point season. He truly looked like the Sabres best forward.

Things are a little more crowded for Roy with the deadline acquisition of Brad Boyes and the offseason signing of Ville Leino on top of the pressure he was already receiving from the Sabres other midgets Tyler Ennis and Nathan Gerbe. All these players are really non-issues however as Roy is clearly the top centerman on the team and all of the aforementioned threats can be moved to the wing. Roy has chemistry with both of the Sabres top two goal scorers from last season (Vanek and Stafford) and should team up with them once again to make up the Sabres top line. Playing with two 30 goal scorers has never hurt anyone and certainly not someone with the playmaking skills of Roy.

Mikko Koivu’s “Ohhhh…” moment is quite similar to Roy’s. He has battled injury over the past few seasons including surgeries on both his knee and shoulder. He has not missed many games (only 16 total over the last three seasons) but has still been hampered by these injuries. It’s a catch 22. If he didn’t exert so much effort he wouldn’t get so banged up but he also wouldn’t be as effective. He’s fantasy hockey’s version of the chubby girl with great breasts and

you gotta love him for it.

I would be remiss if I did not also discuss the elephant in the room. Koivu plays for Minnesota, and that is kind of a death sentence for fantasy hockey but it also affords him the opportunity to play first line, which is not an opportunity he'd have on most other teams. This means major minutes (just like Roy in Buffalo) so it is both curse and blessing.

Now that we are all "Ohhhh-ed" out, let's take a look at the actual numbers. The following are the three year averages for Roy and Koivu against each other with a minor wrinkle. I've disregarded Roy's 2010-11 stats and put his 2007-08 stats in their place. The big thing is that as I've already explained his injury last season does not concern me in the least. On top of that Roy was on pace to hit 80 points like he did in 2007-08 so I think that justifies making a substitution.

Goals

Assists

Plus/Minus

PPP

PIM

SOG

Koivu

19.7

47

Plus-1.3

25.3

55.3

224.3

Roy

28.7

44.7

Plus-5.6

26

44

218

The numbers do not make this any easier but a deeper look should reveal a clear cut winner.

Goals goes to Roy hands down. He has consistently proven himself capable of out-producing Koivu in this category. Even playing in twice the games Koivu only managed seven more goals than Roy last season. Lighting the lamp is just not what Koivu does.

Assists are close. While you could give Koivu an edge we will see later on why this would be flawed thinking. On top of that Roy has a similar upside to Koivu in this category. I am more inclined to call it a push.

Plus/Minus is close but Terry Pegula spent like a bagillion dollars this off-season in an attempt to ensure no one on the Sabres has a poor Plus/Minus. Their defense is rock solid and they have one of the best between the pipes in Ryan Miller. Koivu has done well in his career to maintain a solid Plus/Minus since Lemaire left. Over those two seasons he is actually a Plus-2. That's like when Conan O'Brien left the safety zone of following Jay Leno, only the exact opposite. Anyways, in spite of Koivu's strong two-way game he still plays for Minnesota whose defense just got weaker with the loss of Brent Burns. He is severely limited in this category by his teammates so Derek Roy's small lead is boosted to a significant margin.

PPP are tight but once again Terry Pegula's insane desire to play out the storyline of *Brewster's Millions* is going to give Roy the edge. The Sabres already boasted the NHL's ninth best power play before acquiring Christian Ehrhoff who was fourth among NHL defensemen in PPP. Granted that was while playing for the Canucks top rated power play but clearly he will be a boost to the Sabres already formidable power play as he adds that booming shot and slick playmaking from the point that they were sorely lacking last season.

Meanwhile, the Minnesota Wild will face major losses on the power play. Remarkably they had the 13th best power play in the league but they lose stud defenseman Brent Burns, slick winger Martin Havlat and their head coach Todd Richards. In their stead the Wild have the under-motivated All-Star, Dany Heatley, and head coach Mike Yeo, who coached the Houston Aeros to the AHL's 20th ranked power play last season. Heatley managed 30 PPP last season

and in general has been a huge threat on the power play with his lethal shot. The problem is that Heatley's shooting percentage has dropped for three years running and he is becoming less and less effective every year. Now he is in Minnesota, which after a couple years on the west coast will feel like a prison sentence. Suffice to say I am entirely unenthused by what Heatley or Minnesota has to offer on the power play. I give Roy a slight edge here and his ability to snake a few extra assists on the power play are exactly why I called assists a push.

Next up is PIM and this is in Koivu's favour without contest. The problem is that it is not a big enough advantage in a category significant enough to push him over the top.

Lastly we look at SOG where Koivu snags another slight victory. His advantage would actually be much higher if not for last season's post shoulder surgery drop in shot production. I'd expect to see him back up around 240 this coming year which is a significant advantage.

It required some manipulation on my part (although I prefer to consider this critical thinking) but I gave Roy the edge three categories to two. Needless to say I ended up picking Roy, while remaining hopeful Koivu, who is a personal favourite of mine (Damn, now you guys know my taste in women!), would drop to my next pick. It was unlikely but even less likely than me taking Koivu ahead of Roy and then sleeping well that night. I know there will be those who disagree because when I made the pick someone commented (and I paraphrase), "I would have taken Koivu ahead of Roy." To you, whoever you are (because my memory is foggier than Marc Savard's) I say this; you are wrong and I (well actually Roy) will prove it to you!