One of the most precarious situations in fantasy hockey is dealing with a player following his breakout season. Just what do you make of that breakout? Was it just another stepping stone? Has he reached his peak? Was this just a flash in the pan?

In this week's *Cage Match* we will look at two of this season's bigger breakout stars and will answer all your questions about what those breakouts mean. It's Jordan Eberle vs. Tyler Seguin. The future is now.

With the pedigree of both of these players I can assure you right off the hop that neither one is a

flash in the pan. So they will either go up from here or this is their plateau. Logic dictates that since this was only the sophomore campaign for these two that they will simply continue to grow and pay dividends for their fantasy owners. By taking a look at the ice time for both players you can see that there is some merit to this idea.

Eberle averaged 17:35 minutes per game this season, with 3:00 minutes per game on the power play. Seguin received even less ice time with just 16:56 per game and 2:27 on the power play. Neither one received any significant penalty kill time. The penalty kill is where these two have the most potential for expansion of ice time there is also a fair amount of room for both to receive more power play time. This is especially true for Seguin whose creativity gives him near unicorn status in the Bruins lineup.

Looking even deeper into the ice time situation for both players we see that Eberle was handed an absolute peach of a situation. Eberle received 60.7% of his even strength starts in the offensive zone. Oilers head coach, Tom Renney, was shameless in his line-matching this season putting Eberle against the opponent's weakest lines whenever possible. Eberle was definitely coddled this season and he absolutely reaped the benefits. There is growth potential for Eberle in terms of overall minutes but it is highly unlikely that Renney could up his minutes while also continuing to give him the best matchups.

It is instead more likely that Eberle be given more defensive responsibilities – it is just the natural progression for a star calibre player and Eberle is so smart there is no reason he shouldn't be a quality defensive player. So yes there will be more minutes but they will not be easy minutes.

Eberle wasn't just given the best minutes however. He was also given the best linemates. As Frozenpool will show us, Eberle always skates with the best centerman in the Oilers lineup, whether that's Nugent-Hopkins or Gagner seems to matter very little.

Even Strength Line Combinations		Power Play Line Combinations	
Freq	Line Combination	Freq	Line Combination
38%	EBERLE,J - HALL,T - NUGENT-HOPKINS,R	52.2%	EBERLE,J - HALL,T - HORCOFF,S - NUGENT-HOPKINS,R
21.6%	EBERLE,J - GAGNER,S - HALL,T	14.7%	EBERLE,J - GAGNER,S - HALL,T - HORCOFF,S
19%	EBERLE,J - NUGENT-HOPKINS,R - SMYTH,R	14.1%	EBERLE,J - GAGNER,S - HORCOFF,S - NUGENT-HOPKIN
13%	EBERLE,J - JONES,R - NUGENT-HOPKINS,R	9.9%	EBERLE,J - HALL,T - HEMSKY,A - HORCOFF,S
8.4%	EBERLE,J - GAGNER,S - SMYTH,R	9.2%	EBERLE,J - HALL,T - HORCOFF,S - SMYTH,R

It is highly unlikely that the linemate situation will change for Eberle in the future. He will never be far from the likes of Taylor Hall and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins. The only thing that may change is that line may start seeing tougher minutes.

The biggest concern about Eberle's breakout season is the astronomically high shooting percentage he posted – 18.9% for 34 goals on 180 shots. I don't see this as much of an issue though. Eberle is more than capable of repeating that marksmanship. He is like Dany Briere in the way he gets himself to the highest percentage areas and uses his sweet hands to finish. There are few players as dangerous in tight. If Eberle has one flaw it is his inability to snap off a strong one-timer. If he ever masters that skill he could take it to another level entirely. This would likely see his shooting percentage go down, but his shot total would go up.

So Eberle should not drop much from his 76 points this season. If the Oilers choose to give him more defensive responsibilities you can also bet that will come with an increase in overall ice time. The effects of these changes should cancel each other out, as should any change in Eberle's shooting percentages. There is little chance Eberle will be moved away from the Oilers talented pivots so linemates will not be an issue.

There is hope for some improvement for Eberle if the Oilers can dramatically improve their defensemen. By adding a few puck-movers to the team, the Oilers would be increasing the amount of offensive opportunities for the team. While this would have little effect on Eberle if he continues to be coddled, it could bode well for his future if the team hands him over more responsibility.

The other area Eberle could see a big increase is in power play production. The Oilers did have one of the most potent power plays in the league this past season (third overall at 20.6%) but they were also in the bottom half of the league in terms of power play opportunities. An improved Oilers defense will allow the team to push the play forward generating more scoring chances but also more penalties against the other team. Eberle scored 10 goals and 20 points on the power play this season but we could easily see him with 15 power play goals and over 30 power play points if the Oilers can get more power play opportunities.

Barring any major improvements on the Oiler blueline Eberle has probably plateaued. As he improves as an overall player his focus on the offensive side of things will be reduced. The Oilers need to make enormous strides as a team for Eberle to reach his potential. He has 100-point upside but he needs help.

Seguin, on the other hand, he should keep on improving. He scored 29 goals and 67 points in 81 games this season, but as mentioned earlier his minutes were limited. He also played some pretty tough minutes. While it is true that Seguin received 55.8% of his even strength starts in the offensive zone, the Bruins are also one of the best teams in the league at pushing the puck forward so you can only fault him so much for this. More importantly, Seguin was often matched up against the opponent's best lines.

As Frozenpool will show us, Seguin was used predominantly as a winger on the Bruins more defensively-minded second line.

Even Strength Line Combinations		Power Play Line Combinations	
Freq	Line Combination	Freq	Line Combination
66.6%	BERGERON,P - MARCHAND,B - SEGUIN,T	37.2%	BERGERON,P - MARCHAND,B - PEVERLEY,R - SEGUIN,T
18%	KREJCI,D - LUCIC,M - SEGUIN,T	32.6%	BERGERON,P - MARCHAND,B - SEGUIN,T
8.4%	BERGERON,P - POULIOT,B - SEGUIN,T	14.2%	BERGERON,P - POULIOT,B - SEGUIN,T
3.7%	KELLY,C - LUCIC,M - SEGUIN,T	10.3%	KREJCI,D - LUCIC,M - SEGUIN,T
3.4%	HORTON,N - LUCIC,M - SEGUIN,T	5.7%	HORTON,N - KREJCI,D - SEGUIN,T

In the future Seguin projects to be a top line centerman for the Bruins, which means he should continue to see a hefty amount of offensive zone starts but also more ice time and most importantly more power play time. Since Bruins head coach Claude Julien is unshy about playing Seguin against the opponents best players there will be nowhere near the steep learning curve Eberle faces as his responsibilities increase.

Another thing to like about Seguin projecting as a top line center is the fact that this also means more time spent with the puck on his stick, which can only mean good things for his growth into a star.

It should be noted that Seguin moving to the center position full time would be a negative with regard to his positional eligibility in fantasy pools but with the way certain providers are handing out multiple position eligibility it's become fairly irrelevant, kind of like when you go off to college and realize that everyone else is just a person with diverse skills and interests. So maybe it's time to dispense with all the labels? But I digress.

For Seguin the most important thing is getting bumped up to the top line and also onto the top power play unit. With that opportunity he can put his vast skillset to use. This season proved he can take advantage of an opportunity by vastly improving on his rookie totals. One can only imagine what he could accomplish if given Eberle's cushy minutes.

At only 20 years old, Seguin also has time on his side. While it is true that Eberle is only turning 22 in a couple of weeks, two years is a long time for players so young and with Seguin receiving less than the prime opportunities Eberle has there is more growth potential.

There is some volatility here though. Since Seguin has yet to be given top line duties for an extended stretch we simply do not know what he is. He has yet to develop his niche. Right now he is a guy who shows you flashes of brilliance but will he be more of a playmaker or a sniper? I

envision a Spezza-like future for Seguin, which is definitely a good thing. As a centerman he should be predominantly a playmaker but with his combination of size, speed and creativity he should continue to score a healthy amount of goals. It will be important that Boston surrounds him with good enough wingers that he can reach his potential however. Continuing with the Spezza comparison it is impossible to see Seguin getting to his 100-point upside if Lucic and Horton are the top two wingers on the team – remember Spezza had his near-100-point seasons skating with Heatley and Alfredsson. While they are both fantastic players, they are not the sorts who will elevate someone's scoring to the next level. This means that Seguin in the near future only projects to have a small increase in scoring with improved ice time.

Also working against Seguin is the Bruins' overall lack of power play success. They are one of the worst teams in the league at drawing penalties and are only mediocre in terms of power play efficiency. Now you could argue that pushing Seguin up in the lineup (particularly if Seguin continues to improve as a player) will serve to help with both problems but I still see it as a limiting factor. A bump up to the top line and to the first power play unit under the status quo probably yields at best a 15-point boost for Seguin and that assumes he actually receives that boost in minutes in the near future. Boston is deep and can afford to bide their time with Seguin so it could be a few years before we see him in full bloom.

Long term I see very little difference between the upsides for Seguin and Eberle in terms of pure points but I do feel as though Eberle is more of a pure goal-scorer. If your pool favours goal-scoring then it may make sense to lean in that direction. At the same time Seguin has shown himself to be a much more prolific multi-category presence. Between the sheer dominance of the Bruins and what that has done for Seguin's plus/minus, Seguin's propensity for shooting the puck much more and Eberle's Lady Byng aspirations the advantage goes to Seguin in a multi-cat pool. If it's just pure points I have to side with Eberle – the status quo favours him. The Oilers also have much more room for improvement than the Bruins. While there is no doubt that Seguin has far more room for personal improvement it may not matter how much he improves if he is not put in the position to capitalize.

Of course, all of this prognostication assumes good health and as we have seen, Eberle's size is an issue and he may continue to get banged up, which favours the larger and more chiseled Seguin. We all know you can't really go wrong in this *Cage Match* so it seems to be more a case of fitting each player's strengths and weaknesses to your pool. I am confident about the Eberle pick for points only however. The Oilers just have to improve their blueline this summer and if done right Eberle could pull a Giroux and give us back-to-back breakouts.