I win a lot in fantasy hockey. I often win the league and am almost always a top threat. There is one common thread I have followed in my success in head-to-head leagues. I don't overpay for defensemen. It just isn't necessary. There are several factors against it.

(Note: For an opposing viewpoint, see Russ Miller's article HERE)

If you play with daily roster changes, you really can roll with little to no defense. Many players have thrived in leagues with a hole or two in their lineup, and it is always on the backend. This is just because the value of a defenseman pales in comparison to that of rotating a higher scoring forward in and out of the lineup. Now in some leagues you are required to carry defensemen due to position game limitations or weekly roster moves only, but many others lend themselves to the disregard of the blueline. Still, in whatever league you are in, and whatever style it is, you can discount anyone but the most elite of defenders, and come out ahead. Here are some of the reasons why.

The Spread is Small- When you think of an average, easy to obtain point producer from a forward position, many people would think 40 points is realistic. In contrast, defensemen producing at a 25-point level pop up on the free agent list every year in abundance. Now consider the top point producer in the game for each. Last season, Lidstrom had 70 points and the previous season was Niedermayer with 69. In total there are five or so players each year that reach the 60-point plateau in this NHL and then down from there. So, if one player of those players (both getting old by the way) reaches 70 points or so, that is a 45-point improvement between an average waiver-wire addition and the best in the game.

If you look at just goals, the difference would be around 25 for the leader (only 19 last year) to eight or so for the run-of-the-mill defenseman. That is a 17-goal swing and that is being optimistic. So 45-point spread and 17-goal spread on defense. If you look at offense, any given year a player can have 110 points or even significantly more. With an easy to obtain player producing 40, that is an astronomical 70-point swing. Ovechkin will continue to push the ceiling for goals in the NHL each season, but in general, you can usually count on a player or two getting 50 goals. For a typical player, 20 goals are very easy to acquire. So that is a 30-goal swing to go with a 70-point swing. As you can see in both cases, nearly both category differences are doubled for forwards than defenseman, making the acquisition of elite forwards much more important than blueliners. You could almost have an average forward play half the games of an average defenseman and still come out even.

Defensemen are Risky Prospects- As Dobber mentioned in " The Young D-Man Mentality ", the progressions of these young players at the position are extremely slow. The longer you take to wait on a prospect D, the more risk you are taking on in spending that space on the player instead of on some other promising players that pops up on the waiver. You can't use the space

to do more prospecting, and you are up the creek if they never pan out.

Production Highly Related to Situation- Though your linemates and situational opportunities are important, defensemen are much more dependent on others. Because they generally do not shoot or score as much as forwards, D-men count heavily on assist for their point totals. It is just a basic result of their position. If they have no one to feed, they won't succeed unlike forwards (Ovechkin as a rookie for an example) who can carry themselves.

So the point is clear. I'd rather invest my drafting in forwards who are higher scoring, faster maturing and more independent than defensemen who lack all of these traits. If you grab a couple defensemen early in say the tenth round or so to get 45 points, I will grab a 30-point D-man sleeper at the end of the draft or off waivers. Those 15 points will be easily made up by the 70-point gem I can snag mid-draft at forward while you resort to an average 40-point player late in the draft. That is plus-15 points for my team not to mention all the other stat improvements often like goals surely and shots on goal. The scarcity factor isn't even that important when you have to pay out the nose to get a player like Lidstrom at 60-some points each season. At that same spot in the draft, you can get a 90-point forward and be laughing later.

League rules may vary, but generally speaking as far as your basic leagues go - too many people overpay for their rearguards.