

## Secondary Scoring in Toronto

Written by Tim Lucarelli

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A year ago, the Leafs' best offensive line was the one consisting of Clarke MacArthur, Mikhail Grabovski, and Nikolai Kulemin. Phil Kessel's line was always considered the first line, but the offense from that line was sporadic at best. This year, Kessel is scoring at a superhuman rate (tops in league scoring). The chemistry he has formed with Joffrey Lupul (who is tied for fourth in NHL scoring) is unmistakable and the result has the Toronto Maple Leafs tied for second place in the NHL standings. With the strong play of Kessel and Lupul continuing, it is easy for fantasy owners to focus on that line, but the MacArthur, Grabovski, and Kulemin line should certainly not be ignored.

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It's no surprise the MacArthur line has been overshadowed by the Kessel line, so we'll take a look back at how the MacArthur line started out of the gate. In the 2011-12 preseason, Clarke MacArthur threw a [debatable hit](#) on Justin Abdelkader, earning himself a suspension for one preseason game and the first two regular season games.

{youtube}nTolekEvjB4{/youtube}

MacArthur was clearly upset with the ruling and the result was that he was not present on the ice with his linemates to start the year and the chemistry of this line was off to a rocky start. Other lines had the benefit of shaking off the rust and fine tuning their game throughout the preseason and the first couple weeks of the season, but this privilege was taken away from the second scoring line in Toronto.

When MacArthur did return to the lineup, all three players took some time acclimating to one another again. Clarke, the leading scorer of this line a year ago, had only one assist in his first five games. Then, it all started to come back together. On October 27<sup>th</sup>, MacArthur scored his [first goal](#) of the season, which proved to be the eventual game winning goal. Although the goal was not assisted by Kulemin or Grabovski, it was Kulemin's hard work driving the net that distracted Lundqvist just enough to let the puck slide in. In the video clip, MacArthur clearly celebrates in a way that shows a weight has been lifted off of his chest.

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The goal would spark MacArthur to score five points in the next three games and seven points in the next six games after the lone assist in his first five. Meanwhile, Grabovski continues playing strong hockey, scoring 10 points in the 14 games he has dressed for, with Nikolai Kulemin off to the slowest start, scoring only six points in 14 games. The good news for Kulemin is that three of his six points have come in the last four games, all assists on MacArthur goals.

Although Kulemin scored the fewest points of this line last year (all three were separated only by a total of five points), he still scored the most goals with 30. His slow start shows that he is still slightly snake bitten in the goal scoring department, but that has not stopped the line from putting pucks in the back of the net. In fact, MacArthur had the fewest goals of any of the linemates last season, but has the most early on, despite playing in the fewest number of games. MacArthur is a better setup man, and over time his assist totals should rise, while Kulemin's goal totals will rise.

As Kessel's line continues to dominate, opposing teams will focus on shutting down the top line in Toronto, opening the door for the MacArthur line to re-emerge as a scoring threat, something they are already doing, albeit subtly. If the Kessel line can continue its strong play, Toronto fans are going to have one of the best 1-2 punches in the league, but the second line will see less ice time. When your first line is scoring at the rate Kessel and Lupul are, you simply have to keep them on the ice as much as possible. If the Kessel line comes back down to earth a bit (more likely), the MacArthur line will certainly see more ice time and potentially see point increases.

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With two top scoring threats, a strong blue line, and steady goaltending (when Reimer returns), the Maple Leafs are going to win quite a few games over the course of the season. When that happens, the entire locker room tends to carry a positive attitude, which only helps the stats, and that's what we as fantasy junkies are really concerned about. Most fantasy owners are likely focused solely on the Kessel and Lupul combination, but it will only be a matter of time before all three of MacArthur, Grabovski, and Kulemin are all contributing fantasy relevant numbers on a consistent basis.