Last year, I began the column by discussing a widely debated topic in fantasy hockey. Do defensemen really make a difference in fantasy pools? As much as many fantasy poolies want to deny it, defensemen do play an important role on influencing the outcome of your fantasy league. Let's visit this example:

Team A (top three ranked D-men + 25th ranked at each C, LW, RW)

Name	G	A	+/-	PIM	PPP	SOG
Dan Boyle	3	13	4	12		

9

43

Chris Pronger

3

11

11

22

6

29

Zedno Chara

1

8

4

36

5

40

Ryan O'Reilly

4

10

13

6

0

31

Alex Frolov

4

9

0

12

4

36

Tomas Holmstrom

8

2

3

10

5

19

Total

23

53

35

98

29

198

Team B (Top ranked at each C, LW, RW + 40th ranked D)

Name	G	A	+/-	PIM	PPP	SOG
Anze Kopitar						

13

14

8

4

11

52

Alex Ovechkin

14

9

10

12

8

53

Marian Gaborik

12

10

6

4

8

59

Alex Edler

0

9

-5

10

5

33

Mark Giordano

1

6

1

20

4

11

Scott Hannan

1

6

10

12

0

14

Total

41

54

30

62

36

222

As you can see, owning a combination of quality D almost cancels out owning a trio of top-end offensive players. Now take that valuable fact and see if you need to make changes to your fantasy squad.

The fantasy value of defenseman can be easily identified using two main stats, which is PP ice-time and SOG. The reasoning behind it is simple. PP ice-time usually separates players who are offensive-minded from those that are defensive-minded. The more PP time they receive means more chances they'll have to score with the offensive advantage. On a similar note, SOG usually maintains a similar line of thought. The more a defenseman shoots, the higher the chance it goes into the net. The opposite also holds true, the less a defenseman shoots, the lower the chance that the puck goes into the net. Now that we've established clear indicators on determining the fantasy value of defenseman, let's take a closer look at most of the defenseman from the Western Conference.

Anaheim

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Scott Niedermayer	34	25:41	3:57	

Stand Pat

James Wisniewski

18

25:11

1:47

Sell

Ryan Whitney

22

26:58

3:52

Buy

Brendan Mikkelson

10

16:08

0:34

WW

Nick Boynton

6

13:40

0:00

WW

Steve Eminger

3

17:59

0:21

WW

It’s a pretty simple breakdown in Anaheim, basically the top three of Niedermayer, Wisniewski and Whitney dominate all of the fantasy value for the Ducks. Nieds and Whitney have fired the most shots as well as garnering the most PP ice-time and should continue to lead that department for the duration of the season. As a defensive group they’re only averaging 1.1 SOG/contest compared to 1.4 last season, so there still is a bit of room for improvement. The person to keep a keen eye for that department is Whitney. He has a career 1.56 SOG/contest average, but is currently only firing at a rate of 1.21, which has caused coach Randy Carlyle to preach to Whitney to shoot more. It’ll certainly be interesting to see what happens to Whitney’s once he begins to get more pucks towards the opposing nets. Although Wissy is off to a hot-start, he can’t possibly keep up his point-per-game pace for the duration of the season. If you are a Wissy owner, see if you can use his hot-start and gain an upgrade somewhere else in your line up.

Calgary

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Dion Phaneuf	32	23:49	3:36	

Stand Pat

Robyn Regher

15

22:41

1:04

WW

Jay Bouwmeester

23

26:59

3:17

Stand Pat

Mark Giordano

11

18:35

1:44

WW

Adam Pardy

5

14:15

0:07

WW

Cory Sarich

11

17:29

0:28

WW

The Flames' acquisition of JBo in the off-season was welcomed by many Calgarians, the problem is it hasn't really paid off on the fantasy front. The duo of Phaneuf and JBo dominate all of the quality ice-time, as both are averaging well over three minutes of ice-time on the PP, but unfortunately their performances are being overshadowed by the hot starts of many surprises from various D-men in the Western Conference. Phaneuf is on pace to finish the season with 55 points, while JBo is only on pace for 38. That total is a bit low, but I wouldn't expect him to tally more than 50 points by the end of the season. If you are a JBo owner, you might want to use his "big name" status and see if you can get a "real" producer for your fantasy squad. Regher doesn't get enough optimal ice-time to warrant a pickup so leave him on the waiver wire. Giordano is in a similar situation as Regher, as he doesn't shoot enough to make him fantasy worthy at the moment.

Chicago

Name
Duncan Keith

SOG
33

Overall Ice-Time
26:35

PP Ice-Time
2:07

Status
Stand Pat

Brian Campbell

27

24:17

3:09

Stand Pat

Cam Barker

33

13:45

3:00

Watch

Brent Seabrook

29

24:19

2:34

Stand Pat

Niklas Hjalmarsson

12

19:55

0:03

WW

Brent Sopel

13

13:35

0:00

WW

The big four in Chicago pretty much dominate the Blackhawk blue-line. The trio of Keith, Campbell and Seabrook garner the majority of the ice-time, but give way to Barker on the PP. I stuck a watch sign on Barker only because he doesn't get a lot of overall ice-time. I'd like to see him get more than 13 minutes per contest before I deem him fantasy worthy. The Chicago blue-line is in a similar situation as the Canuck blue-line where they have four defenseman who could all reach 35+ points this season, which also acts as a double edged sword. You know that they're going to put up a few points, but it won't be groundbreaking enough to make any of them top-10 candidates.

Colorado

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
J.M. Liles	12	17:43	3:36	Sell
Kyle Quincey				

34

25:21

4:02

Buy

Brett Clark

25

18:49

2:32

Watch

Scott Hannan

14

22:34

0:36

WW

Kyle Cumiskey

19

17:34

1:58

WW

Adam Foote

8

21:27

0:22

WW

Quincey was a great acquisition in the off-season by the Avalanche and I still don't quite entirely understand why the Kings gave up on him so quickly. He's averaging close to two SOG/contest, as well as over 25 minutes per game along with tons of PP time. The Avs don't get much respect around the NHL as well as in fantasy leagues, so you might be able to get him on the cheap. Liles was primed for success this season with Joe Sacco behind the bench, while garnering premium ice-time/responsibility before sustaining a shoulder injury in mid-October. The injury seems to be lingering as it appears that he re-aggravated it when he left Friday night's contest in the first period. I think that Quincey has really asserted himself as the top-dog in Colorado, which will surely diminish Liles' fantasy value for the rest of the season. Sell now if you are a Liles owner! With Liles out for an unknown period of time, Clark might be someone to keep an eye on as he has stepped into Liles role before in his absence.

Columbus

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Anton Stralman	23	20:16	3:36	Buy
Fedor Tyutin				

31

22:53

3:17

Watch

Roti Klesla

17

21:01

0:32

WW

Mathieu Roy

7

15:38

0:02

WW

Kris Russell

20

16:55

2:45

Buy

Marc Methot

9

18:55

0:05

WW

Mike Commodore

5

17:17

0:32

WW

Jan Hejda

12

22:32

0:06

WW

Up front for the Blue Jackets seems to be in good health, but the back end has plenty of questions. The Blue Jackets have made one moves to help solve that problem by acquiring Stralman at the beginning of the season. He's stepped right in the main PP QB role as he's picking up the most PP ice-time for Columbus. He's a great buy-low candidate at the moment, as all of the indicators are pointing in the right direction for him to be very productive fantasy-wise this season. Tyutin probably isn't fantasy worthy at the moment, but he does have the upside that gives him plenty of fantasy potential. His 1.94 SOG/contest average is a good indication that the points may be coming fairly soon. A player to keep an eye on might be Kris Russell. In junior hockey, he tallied 76 goals in 241 contests, which is nearly unheard of by a defenseman. Although he doesn't garner much overall ice-time, the fact that he's picking up close to three minutes of PP ice-time certainly does give him plenty of upside in terms of fantasy potential.

Dallas

Name

SOG

Overall Ice-Time

PP Ice-Time

Status

Stephane Robidas

32

23:42

3:18

Buy

Matt Niskanen

27

19:50

4:06

Stand Pat

Karlis Skrastins

8

20:03

0:05

WW

Trevor Daley

25

22:45

2:28

Watch

Mark Fistric

11

12:41

0:00

WW

Nicklas Grossman

14

19:06

0:06

WW

Jeff Woywitka

13

13:20

0:53

WW

The Dallas offense hasn't been too bad this season, as they're currently rated as the eighth best offense in the league. What's interesting is that the Dallas D has only tallied 28 of the 145 total points that the Stars have scored. That should change as the season progresses. The problem is it's a clear cut two-dog race in Big D, and as of right now neither of the two has the edge. Robidas has the edge in ice-time as well as the shots, but Niskanen has the edge in PP ice-time. It'll be an interesting battle the rest of the way between those two. A dark horse who may also have a role to play in the race might be Daley. Although he only has three points so far, the 22 minutes of ice-time plus the two and a half minutes of PP time certainly provides him with plenty of opportunity to set a new career-high in points by season's end.

Detroit

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Nicklas Lidstrom	33	24:42	4:21	

Sell

Brian Rafalski

22

22:33

4:00

Sell

Jon Ericsson

15

16:45

0:00

Watch

Nik Kronwall

24

22:10

2:57

Sell

Brad Stuart

16

22:14

0:27

WW

Brett Lebda

14

13:11

0:05

WW

The big three in the Motor City have certainly started off slowly as they have registered a lowly 18 points in 15 contests. If you look at the Lidstrom's individual numbers they haven't been that spectacular. The SOG/contest, overall ice-time and PP ice-time have all been optimal, so that isn't the main problem. My guess is that it's the lack of offensive talent upfront due to the injuries/departures of their star players which has caused the drop in production from the blue-line. As of right now no Red Wings are on the point-per-game pace, and the last time that happened, Lidstrom finished the season with 38 points in 2003-04. If you own Lidstrom, now might be a good time to see if you can use his "big name" status and get a better return. Rafalski's SOG/contest average is a tad lower than his career average, which means that there's a bit of room for improvement. He's had three consecutive years of 55+ points, but I think he'll be hard pressed to make it four consecutive. Kronwall had a very good season last year with 51 points, but without the offensive depth upfront this year, he will also be hard pressed to hit that mark this year. The Red Wings found themselves another late round steal in Ericsson as he's leading the Detroit D in scoring with eight points. The only downside is that he's not getting much overall ice-time and any PP ice-time at all. If Mike Babcock decides to remove the training wheels on Ericsson, I wouldn't be surprised to see him out-point Lidstrom at season's end.

Edmonton

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Lubomir Visnovsky	24	20:30	3:46	

Stand Pat

Sheldon Souray

8

19:18

2:40

Watch

Denis Grebeshkov

19

23:03

2:41

Buy

Tom Gilbert

20

21:50

2:41

Sell

Ladislav Smid

5

19:45

0:21

WW

Jason Strudwick

3

16:27

0:04

WW

Taylor Chorney

11

16:47

0:36

WW

The Oilers' blue-line has been in a bit of disarray with the numerous injuries/illnesses that was floating around in the locker room. Souray has only suited up for three contests, which has

certainly swayed the numbers in the table above. He's finally begun to start doing some physical activity, but it looks like he'll probably be at least two or three weeks before he gets back into game shape. Gilbert is experiencing some sort of a slump, as he only has two points in 16 contests. The SOG and the ice-time have been there, so that's not the reason why his stats have been so poor. From the games that I've watched this year, he just doesn't look like the same Gilbert that was suiting up under Craig MacTavish last season. If you are a Gilbert owner now might be a good time to cash in the chips. Grebeshkov, however, has been building on his solid season from last year, and he's on pace to set a new career-high with 43 points. He's garnering plenty of ice-time on the PP and seems more visible in the Edmonton line up than Gilbert is at the moment. With Souray out for another few weeks, now might be a good time to pick up Grebeshkov to hold down the fort. Vizzy is pretty much the top-dog in Edmonton. With Souray out of the line up, he's getting all of the optimal ice-time as well the bulk of the offense from the blue-line. Stand pat on the veteran Slovakian.

Los Angeles Kings

Name

SOG

Overall Ice-Time

PP Ice-Time

Status

Drew Doughty

29

23:29

4:55

Stand Pat

Davis Drewiske

12

16:11

0:13

WW

Jack Johnson

31

23:01

3:01

Buy-Low

Matt Greene

10

16:46

0:04

WW

Sean O'Donnell

7

18:50

0:03

WW

Peter Harrold

12

8:32

0:03

WW

Rob Scuderi

7

18:57

0:03

WW

In just his sophomore year, Doughty is certainly establishing himself as one of the premiere young stars playing in the NHL. He's getting all of the optimal opportunities by averaging over 23 minutes per contest along with close to five minutes of PP ice-time in Hollywood. The Kings PP units have been operating at a 21.9 percent efficiency rating, and there aren't any indications that they're going to slow down, which should make Doughty a fine own for the duration of the fantasy season. Johnson is the strong buy-low candidate on the Kings' squad as he meets all the indicators which should make him successful in fantasy hockey this season. He's averaging 1.72 SOG and over three minutes of PP ice-time per contest. If an injury were to happen to Doughty Johnson's fantasy value could skyrocket. The four other D-men are all WW material.

Minnesota

Name

SOG

Overall Ice-Time

PP Ice-Time

Status

Marek Zidlicky

34

22:33

4:43

Buy

Brent Burns

44

23:44

4:37

Buy

Kim Johnsson

13

21:38

2:56

Sell

Shane Hnidy

13

14:03

1:00

WW

Nick Schultz

14

21:49

2:26

WW

Greg Zanon

15

21:36

0:18

WW

John Scott

8

8:30

0:03

WW

Zidlicky is on his way to establishing a new career-high in terms of SOG in a season, which probably explains why he's leading the Wild in points from the blue-line. He hasn't had a healthy season since the lockout, so be prepared for him to miss a few games down the road, but still expect him to hit 40+ points for a third consecutive season. Burns started the season with one point in his first seven contests, but has returned back to vintage form with six points in the last nine. The SOG and optimal ice-time is there, so use his slow start to your advantage and see if you can buy-low on Burnsy. Johnsson is getting another year older, and the shine has pretty much worn off on the 33-year old Swede. With two points in nine contests and following a shoulder injury, his fantasy value is pretty much between zilch and none.

Nashville

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Shea Weber	36	24:09		

4:03

Buy-Low

Ryan Suter

17

24:47

3:56

Stand Pat

Cody Franson

17

13:41

2:27

Watch

Dan Hamhuis

24

22:07

0:59

WW

Francis Bouillon

17

20:47

1:42

WW

Kevin Klein

10

20:40

0:34

WW

As much as the Predators offense has struggled in the first 15 contests, the blue-line has pretty much maintained par. Weber was on pace for 56 points before sustaining an injury to his foot. A lot of poolies will probably be sour on the Preds' offense, so you might be able to acquire Weber on the cheap. In Weber's absence, Suter has been the man for Nashville. The only negative that I see about him is his lack of shots. As discussed before, the lower the shot totals usually equates to lower point totals. If he can get back towards the 1.43 per contest mark that he had last season, his numbers will surely rise. With Weber out of the line up, Franson has certainly enjoyed the extra ice-time. I originally had Franson pegged as a sleeper candidate in the 2009-2010 guide, and so far he's doing alright. The main key for him is to crack the line-up on a permanent basis once Weber returns.

Phoenix

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Ed Jovanovski	38	21:40	3:31	

Stand Pat

Adrian Aucoin

42

23:39

3:43

Buy

Keith Yandle

24

17:06

2:18

Watch

Zbynek Michalek

15

21:24

0:47

WW

James Vandermeer

17

19:00

0:05

WW

Sami Lepisto

17

18:33

0:19

WW

David Schlemko

4

15:50

0:52

WW

Jovo is on the way in setting a new career-high as he's on pace to finish with 62 points and 194 SOG. If you own him stand pat, he'll be just fine. Aucoin looks like he's turned back the clock and is playing like he did as an Isle pre-lockout. He's averaging close to two and a half shots per contest, and is also on pace to finish the season with over 100 PIMs. If he's sitting on your waiver wire be sure to snatch him up ASAP. Yandle seems to be taking the all or none approach. He scored all six of his points in three contests this season along with 14 goose eggs. I have him on the watch list, as his SOG totals probably isn't high enough to warrant a pickup just yet.

San Jose

Name

SOG

Overall Ice-Time

PP Ice-Time

Status

Dan Boyle

43

25:53

4:44

Buy

Rob Blake

35

20:59

2:15

Stand Pat

Jason Demers

17

15:41

3:18

Buy

M.E. Vlasic

28

23:34

2:00

Buy

Kent Huskins

8

17:08

0:43

WW

Doug Murray

20

18:57

0:04

WW

Derek Joslin

6

13:30

0:27

WW

Boyle is sitting pretty in second place, behind only Tomas Kaberle, amongst defenseman with 16 points in 18 contests. He's also leading the Shark blue-line with 43 SOG, with Blake going down with an "upper body injury", look for Boyle to increase his near 26 minutes of ice-time per contest. He picked up almost 30 minutes in Saturday night's contest against the Pens. Blake was seen wearing a sling following his shoulder injury. The team has refused to release any major details regarding the injury, but it has been assumed that he's going to be missing "a few weeks". So if you are a Blake owner stand pat for now, but don't hesitate to drop him if a better/more viable option comes rolling along. Vlasic's fantasy value should also increase with Blake out of the Shark's line up. Demers will pretty much have his top power-play unit spot secured with Blake out of the line up.

St. Louis

Name

SOG

Overall Ice-Time

PP Ice-Time

Status

Erik Johnson

30

21:42

3:30

Stand Pat

Carlo Colaiacovo

6

18:53

2:39

Watch

Alex Pietrangelo

7

16:39

2:48

Watch

Tyson Strachan

5

12:40

0:02

WW

Roman Polak

15

20:52

0:07

WW

Eric Brewer

8

22:49

0:51

WW

Darryl Sydor

7

19:06

0:58

WW

Mike Weaver

2

18:38

0:03

WW

Barrett Jackman

2

21:20

0:16

WW

The Blues were off to a hot start to the season, before trying to experiment with their lines in the last two weeks, which has completely stunted their offense. Johnson started with seven points in his first seven contests, but only has two in the past eight. He still has yet to register his first goal of the season despite firing 30 SOG upon opposing goalies. Colaiacovo filled in admirably for EJ last season, but really has played second fiddle to EJ in the nine contests that's he's been in the line up so far. He's a good offensive-minded defenseman, but doesn't shoot enough to warrant a pickup in your fantasy league just yet. Definitely monitor his situation though. Pietrangelo might have earned a reprieve earlier this season with the injuries to Brewer and Jackman, which ultimately gave him the green light to play, but with the veteran duo now healthy and returning to the lineup, AP might just find himself back in the minors. So just like with the Colo situation, keep a close eye on his status.

Vancouver

Name	SOG	Overall Ice-Time	PP Ice-Time	Status
Christian Ehrhoff	39	21:51	3:06	

Stand Pat

Alex Edler

33

21:45

3:15

Stand Pat

Kevin Bieksa

34

22:08

3:13

Stand Pat

Willie Mitchell

17

21:57

0:10

WW

Sami Salo

17

18:52

2:02

Stand Pat

Mathieu Schneider

5

14:59

2:30

WW

Shane O’Brien

13

15:22

0:05

WW

Aaron Rome

13

13:32

0:53

WW

The Canuck blue-line situation could be described as murky at best. They pretty much have five defenseman that could all get into the 30-40 point range, which means that it's going to be a tossup each and every game regarding which player is going to be on the scoresheet for the Vancouver blue-line corps. Ehrhoff, Edler and Bieksa seems to currently have the inside track, but Salo and Schneider could easily jump into one of those roles. If you are banking on any one of those D to surpass the 40+ point mark, now might be the time to temper your expectations. Most poolies probably picked up O'Brien for the PIMs, but with Mitchell being the most likely candidate as the sixth defenseman, O'Brien might find himself in a position where he's going to be constantly healthy scratched or as a seventh defenseman, who might only pick up 14-15 minutes per contest. If you are after PIMs from a D, you might want to turn towards Matt Carkner in Ott instead.

Questions or comments? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below. We'll see you next week, as we go through the Fantasy Indicators of Success 2009 for wingers from the Western Conference.