Last season I wrote a few columns breaking down each of the Western Conference team's top-six and bottom-six, so I'll go back to the well once again and give you better insight into this season.

As Russ Miller said in his article last week, at the end of the day what it all boils down to is opportunity. A top-line player will receive every possible chance to succeed, while a top-six

player will receive decent even strength/second unit power-play ice-time for production. A bottom feeder will most likely receive checking line time and definitely won't receive ample optimal scoring time. Their big break will only come if there are injuries or sudden collapses of young players from their team's top-six. We all like to be optimistic with our projections, but there really isn't a point in projection 80 points for a player who won't even crack a team's top-line let alone top-six. If you haven't read my projections article, definitely go and take a gander. I know I had an eye-opening experience when digging up all the stats.

Note:

Take the line combos with a grain of salt. They are just arbitrary and are used primarily to separate a team's top-six from the bottom-six

. I really don't want to get into arguments about player X had chemistry with player Y, therefore they'll be on a line together during the season.

If you've followed my columns during the last couple of seasons, you'll realize that I'm heavy into my stats. Yes, Shoeless I can bend the stats to say whatever I want, but at the end of the day it still paints a general picture of what goes on in the real world. So I'll start off with a few more stats that I dug up from last season, but first, I have a few questions that I would like you to ponder. Without looking at the table below, I want you to think of and write down a number that you think an average team's leading scorer would tally in a season. Now I want you to think about and write down a number that you think a third-leading scorer would tally and finally I want you to ponder and write a number that the sixth-leading scorer would average. Now compare those numbers to the numbers in the table below.

Offensive Player's scoring position on team

West

East

League

Median

Range

Top

74.6

74.1

74.3

70

61

2nd

62.8

64.5

63.7

61

60

3rd

55.1

54.5

54.8

53

47

4 th

47.7

45.1

46.4

47

34

5 th

42.7

38.2

40.5

38.5

21

6 **th**

36

34

35

34

31

Were you even close? Or better yet did you cheat? If you did it just shows how competitive some fantasy hockey poolies are... I was initially shocked to see how the numbers broke down for players and was definitely intrigued to see that an offensive player, who ranked third in team scoring, would average less than 60 points a year. I initially thought that a mid-60s prediction would have been reasonable, but I guess not. Sure you have a few standout examples like Alex Semin (84), Ryan Kesler (75), Dany Heatley (82) and Vinny Lecavalier (70), but on a whole, most of them were just in the 50 point range. I've always been a believer of capped scoring (upper limit as to what the entire team of players can score) amongst teams, and this certainly re-affirms it. It'll definitely make you think twice in making draft choices if a player is choked behind two superstars a la Bobby Ryan, Jordan Staal or Johan Franzen.

A few more quick hits:

- Washington's top-six was the most productive while tallying 457 points. Vancouver was second with 445 points. The Stanley Cup winning Hawks tallied 357, 100 points less than the Caps, hmmm....
- Toronto was dead last with 241, Edmonton was second last with 243 points and Phoenix was third last with 246.
- 18 of the team leading scorers were centers(if you count Henrik Zetterberg as a C), seven were righties, and five were lefties.
- Only two teams had three 80-point scorers (Washington and San Jose). Only three had three 75-point scorers (Vancouver) and only five teams had three 65- point scorers (Tampa Bay and Chicago)

Enough of the stats, now onto the good stuff.

Anaheim – Fairly Locked, no major competition from bottom-six

Top Six
Bobby Ryan – Ryan Getzlaf – Corey Perry
Jason Blake – Saku Koivu – Joffrey Lupul

Calvary

Teemu Selanne*, Ryan Carter, Dan Sexton

Bottom Feeders
Matt Beleskey, Todd Marchant, George Parros, and Kyle Chipchura

Anaheim's top six is fairly set in stone. The only major factor that could throw a wrench into

things might be if Selanne decides to return for another season. Lupul's back is still in question, so if he's injured once again, look for Sexton to get a brief audition in the top-six.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Lupul, Getzlaf, Perry, Ryan, Koivu and Selanne.

End of year finish:

Perry

76

Getzlaf

69

Ryan

64

Koivu

52

Selanne

48

Marchant

22

Calgary – Murky top-six, stiff competition from bottom-six

Top Six

Alex Tanguay – Matt Stajan – Jarome Iginla

Rene Bourque – Olli Jokinen - Nik Hagman

Calvary

Daymond Langkow and Ales Kotalik*

Bottom Feeders
David Moss, Curtis Glencross, Raitis Ivanans, Mikael Backlund, and Tim Jackman

Calgary's top six is fairly murky. There are a few interchangeable parts where all three of the top centers could see some time alongside Tanguay and Iginla, which means that they'll be stealing points off each other throughout the season. I wouldn't be surprised to see a very LA-like production line of 81, 56, 53, 51, 47, and 42 for this season. With Stajan, Langkow and Jokinen up the middle, it pretty much removes Backlund from being productive fantasy-wise this season. The latest news coming out of Calgary is that Langkow's neck injury hasn't progressed as much as it should have, which kind of substantiates the Jokinen signing. Look for Jokinen to secure a top-six role to start the season, but if he falters, Langkow could easily be a replacement.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Bourque, Jokinen, Iginla, Glencross, Langkow and Moss.

End of year finish:

Iginla

69

Bourque

58

Langkow

37

Jokinen

35

Glencross

33

Dawes

32

Chicago- Fairly set top-six, slight competition from bottom-six

Top Six
Patrick Sharp – Jonathan Toews – Patrick Kane

Troy Brouwer – Dave Bolland - Marian Hossa

Calvary

Viktor Stalberg

Bottom Feeders
Marty Reasoner, Tomas Kopecky, Jack Skille, Igor Makarov, and Kyle Beach

Chicago has lost a lot of its offensive depth after all of the movement of their youth in the off-season, but the positive thing is that their pipeline is fairly full and the departed players could be replaced with similar skilled prospects. The top-five players are essentially locked, so most of the competition will probably occur in Brouwer's top-six position, where Stalberg might make a strong top-six push. With Hossa healthy for a full season, the Hawks' top-six should enjoy a SJ-esque (89, 83, 82, 57, 51, and 36) seasonal production this campaign.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Sharp, Toews, Kane, Versteeg, Bolland and Hossa.

End of year finish:

Kane

88

Toews

68

Sharp

66

Hossa

51

Versteeg

44

Brouwer

40

Next week: the Avs, Blue Jackets, and Stars.

Questions or comments? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them in the comments section below.