Continuing the series started a few weeks ago on the breakdown of each Western Conference team. This week we'll take a deeper look into the Wild, Predators and Coyotes.

As many of the Dobber writers have alluded to, it all boils down to 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.

The following table was the same from last week's column, with the addition of max and min instead of range.

Offensive Player's scoring position on team	West	East	League	Median	Max	Min

Top

74.6

74.1

74.3

70

112

51

2 **nd**

62.8

64.5

63.7

61

101

41

3 **rd**

55.1

54.5

54.8

53

84

37

4 **th**

47.7

45.1

46.4

47

67

33

5 **th**

42.7

38.2

40.5

38.5

53

32

6 **th**

36

34

35

34

53

22

Enough of the stats, now onto the good stuff.

Minnesota – Top-six fairly locked faces slight competition from bottom-six

Top Six
Andrew Brunette – Mikko Koivu – Antti Miettinen
Guillaume Latendresse – Matt Cullen – Martin Havlat

Cavalry

Chuck Kobasew, James Sheppard P.M. Bouchard*

Bottom Feeders

Cal Clutterbuck, Eric Nystrom, Kyle Brodziak, Brad Staubitz, and Casey Wellman.

Minnesota's top-six heading into 2010-11 will pretty much mirror the top-six that finished last campaign, with the exception of Cullen in the place of Eric Belanger. Cullen is a bit more offensively gifted than Belanger so that slight upgrade should help the offense a little bit more this season. The trio of Brunette, Koivu and Miettinen, were responsible for 145 of the total 593

points (24.4 percent) that the Wild tallied last season. They don't have the "big name" attachment next to their names, which could very easily result in them flying under-the-radar during the pre-season drafts, so don't miss out (especially on Koivu). I've provided a more in depth look in the pre-season fantasy guide, which will be released later this week. Havlat stayed relatively healthy last season as he only missed nine contests. The band-aid boy moniker continues to remain above his head, but for those who are brave enough to take the leap of faith, the reward is certainly there. Latendresse has experienced career rejuvenation in Minnesota after being traded from the Habs to the Wild midway through last season. He picked up 37 points and more importantly 133 SOG in 55 contests in the Twin City, which would have pro-rated to 55 points and 198 SOG over a course of a full 82-game schedule. Those numbers are probably a bit high to expect from him, but 45 and 175 probably would be a good ballpark figure to start with. I've never been a fan of Kobasew and don't really see very much upside. Although he has had a great AHL career (108 points in 127 contests), those numbers have never translated into the NHL level (169 points in 410 contests) and probably never will. My dark horse candidate on the Wild is James Sheppard. I know you can't always look at historical numbers to justify potential fantasy worth, but his 256 points in 217 career contests (31 in 30 during playoffs) during his QMJHL stint continues to linger in the back of my mind, especially with band-aid boy Havlat in the Wild line up. PMB could also potentially be another dark horse candidate, but his health issues are far from resolved. Latest news coming out of Minny is that he's still not exercising, which probably doesn't bode well for his chances of suiting up this season.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Bouchard, Koivu, Havlat, Brunette, Belanger, and Nolan.

End of year finish:

Koivu

71

Brunette

61

Havlat

54

Miettinen

42

Latendresse

37

Belanger

35

Nashville – Top-four fairly set, decent competition from youngsters with potential.

Top Six

Martin Erat – Matthew Lombardi – J.P. Dumont

Steve Sullivan – David Legwand – Sergei Kostitsyn

Cavalry

Joel Ward, Colin Wilson, Cal O'Reilly

Bottom Feeders

Jordan Tootoo, Nick Spalding, Marcel Goc, Jerred Smithson, Jonas Andersson, Wade Belak,

The Preds have some familiar faces returning, but a few newbies as well. Erat is the poster boy for consistency, (more about him in the guide as well), and could surprise in a top-line role in 2010-11. Dumont is always one of my favourite buy-low candidates. He started last season with 37 points in the first 53 contests, but then capped it off with just eight points post-Olympic break. A lot of that could have been attributed to him averaging just 12:24 per contest after butting heads with coach Barry Trotz in March and April. Dumont does have plenty of talent (413 points in 276 career contests, and more importantly, 82 in 45 during playoffs, in the QMJHL), so it's just a matter of time before he explodes. The Lombardi signing was a great one, as I don't think Wilson or O'Reilly is ready to take on a number one center role just yet. Sullivan's back seems to be fine as he appeared in all 82 contests last season. I temporarily placed Legwand in the number two center slot, but Wilson or O'Reilly could easily end up with that gig come April. Kostitsyn got his bail out when the Preds picked him up from the Habs in the Dan Ellis deal. Much like many of the other players mentioned in the article, the talent is there, but it's all up to him to walk through the door. If he decides to get his head screwed on right, he could be a great sleeper candidate. I've listed Ward as a possible cavalry candidate because he spent 64.4 percent of his ice-time last season with Legwand and they'll most likely want to keep that duo together. If you're looking for a point projection, you're probably only going to see a 30-35 point season from him, so probably not that big of a fantasy factor anyway. Not many people might have heard of Andersson, he was a second round pick back in 1999, and has bounced around Europe ever since. He picked up 20 points in 30 contests in the KHL last season, but with the current depth charts of Preds, he will probably return back to the KHL once the dust settles after training camp.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Sullivan, Arnott, Dumont, Erat, Legwand, and Ward.

End of year finish:

Sullivan

51

Hornqvist

51

Erat

49

Arnott

46

Dumont

45

Legwand

38

Phoenix- Top-five set in stone, potential surprises in competition from bottom-six

Top Six
Ray Whitney – Wojtek Wolski – Shane Doan

Radim Vrbata – Vernon Fiddler – Scottie Upshall

Cavalry

Petr Prucha, and Kyle Turris

Bottom Feeders
Mikkel Boedker, Viktor Tikhonov, Taylor Pyatt, Lauri Korpikoski, Paul Bissonette, Andrew Ebbett

Despite scoring just five goals more than the last placed Oilers last season, the Coyotes surprised many by finishing the regular season as the fourth seed out of the Western Conference. The key to their success was defense, which is never a good thing in the minds of fantasy hockey poolies. The Coyotes line up remains pretty much status quo with the exception of the addition of veteran Whitney to the top-line in Phoenix. Many reports out of Phoenix have Wolski being shifted to the top-line center position, which should provide a bit of an advantage to those pools which count faceoff wins while still considering him as a winger. He has point-per-game potential, but with Dave Tippet's defense first scheme, it's probably safer to pencil him in for 60. Age is starting to catch up to Doan, as his production slipped after back-to-back 70+ point seasons. The Tippet factor probably didn't help either. I'd look for a repeat season from the Albertan in 2010-11. Upshall was on a 54-point pace before blowing out his knee in January. The latest reports indicate that his knee is healthy and healing, so that's definitely a plus. I had him pegged as a breakout candidate last campaign, so extend it for 12 months later instead. Fiddler led the Coyotes in face-offs taken and wins in 2009-10, which is one of the main reasons I slotted him into a top-six role rather than in the cavalry. His 11 points in 19 post-Olympic contests were a nice bonus as well. A lot of his status this season will depend on the youngster, Turris, who picked up 63 points in 76 contests with the Rampage in the AHL. If Turris shines in camp, he'll secure the number two gig, but if he struggles Fiddler could assume the gig. If you are a betting man, the safe bet is on Turris, but Fiddler backers could be very well rewarded with a sleeper come draft day. Hanzal, Upshall, and Fiddler finished with 33, 32, and 30 points respectively as the fourth, fifth and sixth scorers on the team, that won't leave much for Prucha, Boedker and Tikhonov who rank even lower on the depth charts.

Last year's pre-season top-six:

Mueller, Lombardi, Doan, Boedker, Turris, and Prucha.

End of year finish:

Doan

55

Lombardi

53

Vrbata

43

Hanzal

33

Upshall

32

Fiddler

30

The last instalment next week: the Sharks, Blues, and Canucks.

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