Based on last week's article, if ice-time and SOG are any indicators of fantasy success, this week's column will be a good complement in identifying a few trends moving forward. We'll take a look seven lucky advancers as well as seven unlucky decliners to help you get through that mid-season lull.

Advancers

**David Backes**

At 80 percent Yahoo! owned, Backes probably won't be available on your waiver wire if you're playing in a competitive league. What you will probably need to do is see if you can acquire him through trade. I'd probably sell hard on the fact that the Blues are in the bottom-third of the league in offense (2.64 goals per game), then I'd drop the 'they're tied with Calgary, (25th overall ), in terms of power-play efficiency, do you really want to hang on to him?' What you will have in the back of your mind is that he's averaged 20:42 overall and 2:38 with the main advantage, along with 20 SOG during the last two weeks. Those numbers should equate to a 70-75 point pace if he continues to be given that opportunity.

**Paul Stastny**

Following along the same lines of strong pickup candidates, there's probably not a lot of downside in trying to make a pitch for Stastny. He registered 22 points in 24 contests when Chris Stewart was in the line up prior to his hand injury and just 15 in 18 when Stewart was out. During the injury lull, the Avs' second line of Matt Duchene, Milan Hejduk and Tomas Fleischmann really took over the offensive duties, leaving Stastny to toil with two-way guys like David Jones and T.J. Galiardi. Now that he has his wingman back, look for Stastny to boom once again. If they ever find a quality LW to complement the duo that line could be unstoppable.

**Dustin Penner**

The Oilers are still going through their growing pains, but there's still a few diamonds in the rough available from the Edmonton roster. Penner's finding his ice-time spiking as he's averaged 19:28 during the last six contests (3:07 on the PP). At a salary cap hit of just $4.25 million, he could be a cheap bargaining chip for contending GM's to try to acquire at the trade deadline. The Rangers, Preds, Coyotes, and Avs could use someone of Penner's talents for a scoring role. So look to acquire Penner now as a pre-emptive strike for Feb. 28.

**Vladimir Sobotka**

With injuries decimating the Blues' line up, Sobotka has seen an increase in responsibilities during the last two weeks. He's currently lining up alongside the aforementioned Backes on the Blues' top-line and the duo seems to have developed plenty of chemistry. He's certainly earning coach David Payne's trust, as he averaged 19:25 and 1:42 on the PP during the last six contests. Sobotka isn't going to singlehandedly win you the league title, but he could be a quick band-aid fix for the next couple of weeks till his responsibilities disappear.

**Antoine Vermette**

Another cheap pick-me-up option is Vermette as he's currently just 24 percent Yahoo! owned but could see a big boom in production the rest of the way. I'm starting to realise the importance of a strong faceoff man. Possession is nine-tenths of the law, and that's why a good faceoff man makes such an impact in "real-life". Whether it's winning a draw to the point and having the d-men boom a shot to the net, or winning the draw then cycling it down low, it all comes down to winning the faceoff. Vermette is currently sixth in terms of faceoff wins (463) and 20$^{th}$ in terms of winning efficiency (55.6 percent) of players who have taken 300 or more faceoffs. Add that to the fact that he has a 3.29 SOG per game average in January and it's just a matter of time

before the points follow.

**Antti Miettinen**

The Stars drafted Miettinen in the seventh round of the 2000 NHL Entry draft but after spending four seasons with the Stars, he was allowed to walk and has found a home in Minnesota alongside fellow Finn Mikko Koivu. He won't amaze you with dazzling overall numbers, but the 3:43 PP ice-time average in the last couple of contests, on the league's ninth best power-play, should yield a decent return. Miettinen is also on pace as the team's second leading shot taker behind only Martin Havlat (2.67 SOG per game average). As we discovered last week, ice-time plus SOG generally leads to success.

**Dave Bolland**

Bolland has been pretty disregarded for the last few years in the Windy City, but he's caught my attention recently. He won't ever produce at Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane or Marian Hossa levels, but he is a very quiet fantasy producer that can certainly benefit your team. Bolland has three points, five SOG, 16 FW, 17:17 TOI average, and 1:49 PP TOI in the last two contests. He's only on pace for roughly 40 points, but he did tally 16 points in 22 contests last playoffs, which shows me that he could be a crunch time producer when called upon. The third line of Fernado Pisani, Bryan Bickell and Bolland has really developed some positive chemistry of late, so I'd use that trend as a quick little offensive boost if you are in need of some help up the middle.

Decliners

**Jonathan Toews**

Generally I'm not a big fan of selling low as you don't get fair market value for players who aren't living up to potential. On the other hand "big name" players always have that "free pass" factor, or the things will always "turn around" moniker. Last season, the Hawks had plenty of depth so key defenders were not entirely drawn onto the Toews line. This season, the depth has vanished and the Toews-line is being completely hounded by the opposition's top defensive units. During the last stretch of six games Toews has registered just one goal and one assist, which just isn't good enough to cut it as a main pillar of your fantasy squad. I'd open negotiations by flaunting how "he has 37 points and led the Hawks to a Stanley Cup, or that he's on the fifth best offensive team in the league", but I'd be open to easily moving him for a return of Anze Kopitar, Henrik Zetterberg or Stastny.

**Patrick Marleau**

A couple of weeks ago, I forecast that a change was in order for the Sharks top trio of Joe Thornton, Dany Heatley and Marleau, but the more I watch the Sharks, the more I'm convinced that this is going to be a down year for Marleau. The last time that he was this terrible in the plus/minus column he rattled off just 48 points in 78 contests. The star power in SJ will make sure that he doesn't have that low of an output, but if you're still thinking point-per-game or 80-point mark, it's probably time to rethink that strategy. A lot of poolies out there might think he's a great buy-low candidate, so let them take the fall for you instead.

**Mason Raymond**

Raymond was the apple in many poolies' eyes when he reeled off 18 points in 25 contests prior to December 8th. Then boom a broken thumb sidelines him for 10 contests and now he's lost all of his mojo. With just three points in nine contests since his return, as well as a TOI average of 16:06 and close to zero PP time (0:23), Raymond's 62 percent Yahoo! owned rating is way too high for my liking. I know LW tends to be the shallowest of positions in fantasy hockey, but if you are still holding onto the hope that he's going to show some of that early-season magic, it's probably time to move on.

**Niklas Kronwall**

Now that Brian Rafalski has found his offensive game, Kronwall has essentially been kicked back to the curb. His overall ice-time still remains relatively high (24:27), during the last two weeks, but it's the lack of PP time (1:37) and SOG (11) that's the major worry. I know many of you will make the argument that he was a 51-point d-man two seasons ago, but so were Dion Phaneuf and Sheldon Souray and where are they now? Use the fact that he's on an offensive powerhouse like Detroit to your advantage. I'd easily swap him for Ryan Suter, Dennis Wideman or Andrew MacDonald at the moment.

**Mark Giordano**

The Flames have been in a bit of a rut lately as they have a 2-1-3 record from the last six contests, which isn't a bad record if you are sitting at the top of the standings, but if you're at the bottom looking up at 14 teams ahead of you, it might be time to pack it in for a rebuild. Gio was on pace for a career-high with 20 points in the first 38 contests, but much like the entire Flames' squad, he has gone cold turkey of late with just two points in his last eight. His TOI is still pretty high (26:30 and 3:32), so I'd use that as a major selling point in an attempt to move him on the

down low.

**Stephane Robidas**

At the beginning of the season Robidas was consider gold for leagues that recorded blocked shots and hits. He still is very strong in that department but isn't exactly irreplaceable. It's not the peripheral stats that I'm concerned with, it's the offensive scoring that mostly worries me. In the last two weeks, Robidas has seen his SOG (two), TOI (22:35) and PP TOI (1:53) dry up very quickly, which something tells me that he's dealing with a hush-hush injury of some sort. On the flip side Trevor Daley has seen a spike in the same respective stats, 13, 24:18, and 2:18. I'd use his strong peripherals as a major selling point, but I'd openly take a Dan Girardi, Brent Seabrook, and probably Dennis Seidenberg in a package deal to get an upgrade somewhere else.

**Alex Edler**

I know I've been quite 'defense' heavy this column, but I just haven't noticed that many offensive players who are struggling at the moment. Edler is another candidate who's been majorly slumping these past two weeks. The numbers (13 SOG, 24:16 TOI, and 2:57 PP TOI) are all there, but the production (two goals) has not. He's someone that I call a "phantom candidate", which means that he's there on the ice, but never seems to be in the play or possessing the puck. I've watched a few Canuck's games over the last couple of days, and I saw how much the Sedin's and Ryan Kesler hog the puck to keep it down low and work from the trapezoid. If it does go to the point it goes to Christian Ehrhoff, who puts it on net, or passes it back down deep. Edler is almost non-existant on the PP, which is why I'd use his "big name" to see if you can sell-high(ish) on the Swede. I'd massively sell the fact that he's on the unit with the twins and throw all the numbers at your potential trading partners.

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 back here next week as we discuss more from the Western Conference.