Ed. Note: This is the first installment in a series in which we'll look at different aspects of the NHL game and how to value them appropriately in your fantasy league scoring, with the objective of creating scoring systems that reflect real life value as closely as possible.

I've always been a sucker for power forwards. My favourite players are those rare stars who bring a little bit of everything to the table, with a bit of a mean streak complementing a deft scoring touch. Give me a 70-point guy with grit over an 80-point princess any day!

In the 20 years I've been running fantasy leagues, I've always tried to build scoring systems that reward this type of player. In my early days as a commissioner, before the word "roto" had entered the lexicon and when I still used a spreadsheet to laboriously crunch league stats every Tuesday, my scoring formula for skaters was *Points + (0.5xPIM)*.

This had the desired effect of elevating my favorite players to the top of the fantasy league. It helped turn the likes of Gary Roberts (193.5 points in '91-92), Eric Lindros (196.5 points in '95-96), Rick Tocchet (235 points in '92-93) and Kevin Stevens (an astounding 250 points in '91-92) into absolute legends.

Unfortunately, it also had the unintended side effect of turning Gino Odjick into a top 10 fantasy player (202 points in '92-93). Perhaps I had taken things a bit too far. A great deal of tweaking ensued.

Some years later, roto leagues took the fantasy world by storm, and online pool managers like Yahoo! made things much simpler. Penalty minutes could be added as a category alongside goals, assists, powerplay points and plus/minus; giving toughness some value, but not enough to turn Mike Peluso into one of the league's most sought after players (as he was for us in the early 90's, racking up over 400 PIM one season).

Still though, things were far from perfect. Counting PIM rewards more than just toughness; it also rewards stupidity. It gives Shane O'Brien extra value for leading the league in hooking minors. It places more value on the 15 PIM for a careless high sticking infraction, or the 10-minute misconduct for chirping, than on the 5 PIM earned for an honest fight. I've lost (and won) head-to-head games thanks to a last minute delay-of-game penalty, and it leaves a sour taste.

Most of us have been willing to live with these drawbacks as a necessary evil, in order to bring the element of toughness into the game. But recent changes have given us other options.

In the past few years, a slew of new stats have been made available to poolies through many of the most popular online pool managers. The first and most notable addition was the hits category, which suddenly gave Cal Clutterbuck real fantasy value. Hits are now available on almost all major platforms and have brought an exciting new dimension to many fantasy leagues.

True, there is some subjectivity in the awarding of hits, and there's evidence that some teams' home statisticians are a little too generous in giving credit for them. But the same can be said of other stats too; whether it's second assists, shots on goal or saves, there has always been a certain degree of discretion involved in certain stats. Personally, I don't think this factor is strong enough to warrant excluding hits. They are a critical part of the real world game, so if your goal is to mimic real life value as closely as possible, hits should certainly be on the menu.

Some pool sites have gone well beyond the basic stat categories, offering dozens of categories and allowing commissioners to customize their scoring to a much greater degree than ever before. In some cases, rather than counting all penalty minutes, you can choose certain types of penalties: fighting majors or misconducts, for example. Some even allow you to set minor penalties as a negative scoring category (less is better).

So with all these options now on the table, what's the best way to reward toughness? How do we elevate the value of true power forwards like Milan Lucic (30 goals, 62 points, 121 PIM, 167 hits and 7 fights last season), without over-inflating the value of goons or rewarding cheap penalties?

If I was starting a league today, and if my pool provider had all the options listed above, I'd count hits and fighting majors, and leave penalties out of it. This recognizes the extra value that Dustin Brown brings to the table with his 300 hits a season, and it rewards Jarome Iginla for his willingness to drop the gloves a few times a year, while avoiding the silliness of rewarding a fantasy team when one of their players incurs a tripping penalty. But that's just my opinion; it really comes down to the kind of league you want to build and which players you want to place the most value on.

A few years ago, we couldn't have even had this discussion. If you valued toughness, your choices were penalty minutes or penalty minutes. The advances in the industry have opened up a world of new possibilities to us now, so let's take advantage of it.

Does this mean the days of counting penalty minutes are coming to an end? Not anytime soon. Poolies have been tracking PIM for so long, the change will take time. Until all major fantasy providers (I'm looking at you, Yahoo!) get on board with stats like fighting majors, PIM will remain the category of choice for most leagues – for better or worse.

What do you think? What's the best way to bring the element of toughness alive in a fantasy league? And who is your all-time favourite power forward?