

## Reality Check, Part 3: Special Agents

Written by Glen Hoos

Saturday, 22 October 2011 22:28 - Last Updated Sunday, 23 October 2011 17:49

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*Ed. Note: This is the third instalment 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. Click here for previous entries: [The Power Game](#) ; [A Case for the Defence](#) .*

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Vancouver broadcaster Don Taylor was in Toronto recently, and he remarked with some amazement at the size of the media scrum at the ACC that day. He thought nothing could top the level of hockey madness in Vancouver, but T-dot had proven him wrong.

The reason for all the hoopla? No, Brian Burke hadn't shot off at the mouth again; Ron Wilson had not been fired. No star player had been injured; no front-liner had been acquired.

Instead, for the first time ever as a Leaf... *David Steckel was in the house!*

Okay, so the acquisition of a player of Steckel's calibre isn't exactly front page news in most cities. Having said that, there's little doubt that Steckel brings a much-needed element to the Leafs' line-up – value that goes beyond his ability to (inadvertently?) take opposing superstars out of the line-up for three-quarters-of-a-year.

Steckel is a faceoff specialist. At 62.3%, Steckel led the league last year in faceoff percentage among those who took more than 400 draws.

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Faceoff proficiency is a skill that is highly coveted by every team, with a tangible impact on success or failure on any given night. But for our purposes here at Dobber Hockey, the question is: does it have a role to play in your fantasy league?

For those with an interest in having their league reflect reality as closely as possible, the ever-expanding selection of stats available to poolies allows you to take your pool as deep as you want to go. This week we look at a grab-bag of specialty categories and the impact they could have on your league.

**Faceoffs:** Faceoffs are one of the more popular specialty categories, and for good reason. It's a crucial skill, very easily measured, and offered by the majority of fantasy league platforms. But before you rush to add faceoffs to your league, there are a few considerations to work through as a commissioner.

The first choice you have to make is whether to count faceoff wins, or faceoff percentage (assuming your host offers both options – some, like Yahoo!, only offer wins). Given the choice, faceoff percentage will give you a more accurate measure of the top faceoff men. Though aces like Jonathan Toews and Ryan Kelsner will be near the top of either category, FO% reflects the fact that guys like Steckel and Manny Malhotra (61.7%) are truly the league's best faceoff men (as opposed to a player like Eric Staal, who just takes a ton of draws; Staal ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in wins last year, despite winning only 48% of his faceoffs).

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Another factor to keep in mind is your positional requirements, and how the introduction of faceoffs will impact them. In my league, we're on Yahoo!, which means we have no choice but to use FOW. However, our positional requirements don't differentiate between C, LW and RW – we just classify skaters as Forwards or Defence. In hindsight, the combination of our positional settings with FOW isn't ideal. It's created a situation where centres are much more valuable than wingers. Teams are hesitant to trade a top centre for a top winger, and some of our managers (myself included) can ice a forward line-up consisting almost entirely of centremen. In the future, I hope Yahoo! will give us the option of FO% so we can rectify this situation.

If your league counts FOW, and your line-up calls for C, LW and RW, keep an eye out for wingers like Patrick Sharp who rack up the faceoff wins while being listed as a winger. Those guys are gold, and it's a huge advantage if you can dress a couple of them each week.

**Shootouts:** Love it or hate it, there's no denying the significance of the shootout in today's NHL. It's created an important role for shootout specialists like Jarrett Stoll (who went 9/10 last year to lead all sharpshooters) and Erik Christensen (who's consistently been among the league leaders in SO% since the adoption of the shootout).

I can understand those who hate the gimmick and want no part of the shootout in their fantasy leagues. Personally, if it's an important part of NHL play, I'd like to incorporate it into my league (again, assuming your chosen host offers it, which Yahoo! doesn't).

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Much like faceoffs, it raises the question of counting total shootout goals vs. shootout percentage. I'd favour SO%, so the stat doesn't automatically favour players from teams that allow more of their games to get to the shootout.

**Clutch Scoring:** The best players produce when it counts the most. What's more important: the fourth goal in a 5-1 win, or the second goal in a 2-1 overtime victory?

I've always tried to value clutch scoring in my leagues. Game-winning goals are the obvious stat of choice, but GWG has some limitations. In that 5-1 game, the winning goal was likely scored in the first period when the drama was low, and only became the winner after standing up through two more periods of uneventful play. Rewarding it seems pretty arbitrary at that point.

More interesting are some newer categories offered by hosts like Fantrax, such as OTW (overtime winners) and ShW (shootout winners). These goals may be more rare, but they do a better job of rewarding clutch scoring. Again, Yahoo! is behind the times on this, offering only GWG (remind me again why I'm still using Yahoo! as my host of choice?).

**Other Options:** A glance at Fantrax's category listing reveals a stat for every taste. We've already looked at [hits](#) , [fighting majors](#) , [minor penalties](#) , [shot blocks](#) , [giveaways](#)

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and

[takeaways](#)

in previous columns. Others that may appeal to some of you include game misconducts, penalty shot goals or %, shifts, hat tricks and, yes, even Gordie Howe hat tricks (GHHT). We've truly entered the golden age of stats geekery!

Whichever categories you use, these specialty stats can make fantasy beasts of players who would otherwise be only average. Case in point: the aforementioned Stoll, whose shootout mastery was accompanied by 753 FOW (57.5%), 164 hits and 187 shots – a special agent indeed!

*What do you think? What are the advantages and drawbacks of these categories, and which ones do you like to employ?*