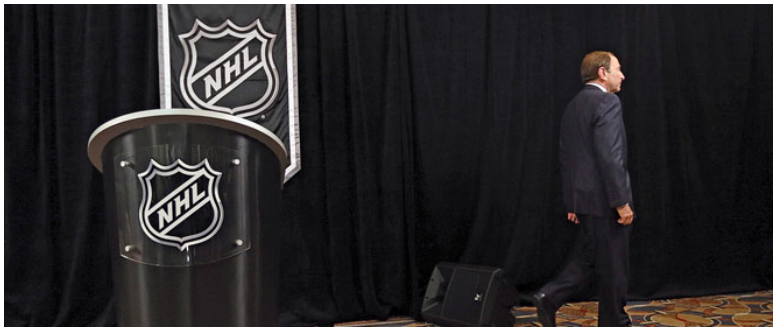

The NHL "Equivalency Pool" - midseason analysis

Back in September, I posted an article about a lockout experiment I'm running with my league: an NHL equivalency pool involving the players on our fantasy farm teams. With little NHL-related to talk about as we enter the holidays, I thought it's time to a bit of analysis to see what we can learn from this league.

For the full lowdown on how the NHL equivalency pool works, click here. Briefly, each team chose seven players to dress from its farm team roster, including a minimum of two defencemen. The prospects must be playing in one of the following leagues: AHL, KHL, WHL, OHL, QMJHL or NCAA. Scoring is calculated by taking the player's points per game this season and multiplying it by the NHL Equivalency Rating for the league in which that player is suiting up.

League Equivalency Ratings are as follows (developed by Gabriel Desjardins of BehindTheNet.ca):

AHL 0.44
WHL 0.3
OHL 0.3
QMJHL 0.28
KHL 0.83
NCAA 0.41

In theory, the equivalency ratings allow for a meaningful cross-league comparison between players, by enabling us to calculate the number of points a player would score in the NHL this season, based on their current production in a lower level league.

So, what have we learned so far? For some context, let's look at the top 15 players in our league as of this writing:

Player

League

GP

Pts

Equiv. Rating

NHL Equiv. Total

Vladimir Tarasenko

KHL

23

25

0.83

74

Evgeni Kuznetsov

KHL

32

29

0.83

62

Nail Yakupov

KHL

22

18

0.83

56

Justin Schultz

AHL

26

38

0.44

53

Jordan Eberle

AHL

26

38

0.44

53

Ryan Strome

OHL

32

62

0.30

48

Alex Galchenyuk

OHL

33

61

0.30

45

Cam Atkinson

AHL

25

29

0.44

42

Mark Scheifele

OHL

29

48

0.30

41

Ty Rattie

WHL

30

47

0.30

39

Brayden Schenn

AHL

25

26

0.44

38

Nino Niederreiter

AHL

26

27

0.44

37

Nazem Kadri

AHL

24

24

0.44

36

Boone Jenner

OHL

32

47

0.30

36

Marcus Foligno

AHL

24

24

0.44

36

The first observation that jumps out is that the top three players are from the KHL. Looking at the league ratings, this is not surprising: the KHL's rating of 0.83 is almost double that of the AHL, and close to triple that of the CHL's three leagues. This allows a player like Vladimir Tarasenko to take top spot with just over a point per game, while Jordan Eberle is well behind him despite scoring almost a point-and-a-half per game in the lower ranked AHL.

Meanwhile, a CHL player has to do something rather spectacular to make a meaningful contribution in this pool. We can see from the numbers above that Ryan Strome and Alex Galchenyuk trail Tarasenko by nearly 30 equivalency points, despite shooting out the lights to the tune of nearly two points per game in the OHL. A point-per-game player in the CHL will barely register in this league; witness defenceman Morgan Rielly, whose 28 points in 33 games this season have Leaf fans salivating, but who only totals 21 points in the equivalency scoring system.

Looking at the numbers, I think this pool does serve as a useful measure of the strength of the farm teams in my league, but it's not the type of measure I was expecting when I set out on this experiment. Because the equivalency ratings favour the KHL and, to a lesser extent, the AHL, the numbers are skewed in favour of older prospects. An 18-year-old QMJHL prospect has to be truly sensational to match up favourably with a 22-year-old in the KHL who puts up decent numbers.

This being the case, what the equivalency pool really seems to be measure is the NHL-readiness of a prospect today, moreso than their long-term potential. If all these prospects were dumped into the NHL today, the more established KHL and AHL players would tend to make a greater immediate impact than the younger, greener prospects from the junior leagues. That doesn't mean, however, that these players have better long-term upside or higher ceilings.

Beyond the results, the real value in running the equivalency pool (aside from providing a much-needed distraction from lockout talk and NHL podium banter) is that it has caused me to keep a closer eye on what's happening with my prospects. Unfortunately, that means that I'm getting an eyeful of Joe Colborne 's awful season – but it also means I'm growing an early attachment to the players who will one day don the black and red of my Airborne Attack.

What do you take away from this experiment? Have you run a similar league? Do you have any suggestions for improving the scoring system?

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