

Changing Things Up: Daily vs. Weekly Line-ups

Written by Glen Hoos

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A couple weeks ago, I experienced a poolie's worst nightmare. After setting my weekly line-up Sunday night, I awoke on Monday to the news that my starting goalie (Roberto Luongo) was out with an undisclosed injury – an upper body injury, no less (the worst kind!).

So, while my head-to-head nemesis coasted through the week with two healthy starters, I was behind the 8-ball from the get-go, hoping against hope that somehow my one goalie could keep

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pace with his tandem. As it turned out, Pekka Rinne came up huge for me and outgunned Henrik Lundqvist and Kari Lehtonen. But it could've turned out so much worse.

Which brings us to the question of daily vs. weekly line-up changes. If only my league had daily changes, I could've subbed in Nikolai Khabibulin for Lou and skated through the week much more comfortably. So, daily changes are obviously better, right? Not so fast.

Daily Changes: Pros and Cons

Allowing daily line-up changes brings a number of advantages. It gives the teams in your league greater flexibility to deal with situations that crop up on a day-to-day basis. Clearly, it would have helped me out in the circumstances cited above, as it would've minimized the impact of Luongo's injury on my team. (Though come to think of it, considering the shellacking his old buddies from Chicago laid on the Canucks that week, perhaps his injury was a blessing in disguise!)

Daily changes minimize regrets. With 13 healthy forwards in a league where we dress 9 each week, mistakes are inevitable. In a recent week, I chose to sit Joe Pavelski in favour of other skaters... only to watch in frustration as I missed out on his all-important shorthanded point. With daily changes, he'd have no doubt been in my line-up that night.

Daily changes also keep managers more engaged and interested. The ability to tinker with your line-up on a daily basis forces owners to pay more attention to what's going on with their team. Your roster will play more man games over the course of the week, making every night more entertaining and giving every team higher totals at week's end.

If the story ended here, it would be a no brainer – sign me up for daily changes. Unfortunately, there are also some significant drawbacks to consider.

Daily changes favour teams with depth and good health. I'm all for rewarding managers that are skilled enough to build up some depth on their bench and farm team, but the unpredictability of injuries can really skew things unfairly when daily shuffles are permitted.

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Case in point: in a league where we start 9 forwards and 4 defencemen each week, my current opponent has exactly 9 healthy forwards and 4 healthy defencemen on his active roster. Everyone else is injured or suspended. Meanwhile, I'm sitting pretty with 13 healthy forwards and 5 d-men. As much as I'll happily take every advantage I can muster, I have to admit that daily changes would give me a huge, unfair advantage this week. I'd likely rack up an extra 10-15 man games and cruise to an easy victory. I want to win, don't get me wrong; but I don't want to win on an uneven playing field.

The option of making daily moves also tilts things in favour of active managers who actually care enough to make the daily adjustments. And truthfully, they should be rewarded to some extent. But late in the season when playoff spots are at stake, I'd hate to find myself watching helplessly as my rival puts the boots to some weak sister who's lost all interest in their team and isn't icing their best line-up each and every night.

The Case for Weekly Changes

The pros and cons of weekly changes are pretty much the mirror opposite of those for daily line-ups. On the downside, you lose the flexibility to quickly respond to the unexpected injuries, hot streaks and slumps that happen every week. You reap the full consequences of your bad coaching decisions, like when you get to the end of the week and find that your leading scorer for the past seven days was tied to your bench. Managers may lose interest more quickly without the daily incentive to stay on top of their team.

On the other hand, weekly changes force managers to put more thought into their coaching decisions. In my daily-change league, my coaching tactics generally involve dressing whoever's playing that night and nothing more (except on those rare and glorious days when almost the whole league is playing, and I actually have to pick a few guys to sit it out). Weekly changes require me to put in the effort to look at upcoming game schedules, weigh the strengths and weaknesses of my opponent, and determine the best 15 players to suit up for that week.

All things considered, as a commissioner who wants to encourage a high level of engagement among my GM's, I wish I could embrace daily changes and all the benefits they bring. And yet, at the end of the day, I just can't get past the injury factor. I've been in too many leagues where daily changes have enabled those teams lucky enough to stay healthy to ascend to the top

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simply due to more man-games played.* In my opinion, weekly line-up changes are best for creating an even playing field for all teams, despite the drawbacks.

So, where do you stand – weekly or daily changes?

(* Yes, I realize this problem can be mitigated by introducing games played limits. That's another topic for another day... we'll come back to it, I promise!)