It's not super-common, but from time to time I hear about fantasy leagues that include both the NHL regular season and NHL playoffs in their scoring. I'm not talking about leagues that have a separate playoff component, in which there is a regular season champ and a playoff champ; where the teams and rosters carry over but regular season and playoffs are treated as separate competitions (we do this in my own league, in fact). I'm talking about leagues in which regular season and playoffs are combined as part of a single competition.

Today, I'm opening the floor for discussion, and inviting you to convince me that this is a good idea. I've seen a number of approaches to this, from straight combined totals over the course of the regular season and playoffs, to different weightings given to playoff stats. Even Dobber himself used to include playoffs as a factor in his player rankings. But I've yet to see a system for combining the two that makes any sense to me.

The way I see it, much like church and state, regular season and playoffs should be forever kept separate. When it comes to fantasy, the “first and second seasons” are two totally different animals requiring significantly different strategies. From October to April, it’s often best to diversify, and avoid putting too many eggs in one basket. If you built your team around this year’s Capitals or Kings, you know why. In the playoffs, conversely, victory comes to the owner who picks the right basket and goes all in.

It’s nearly impossible to forecast the playoff seeding during the regular season, and the unpredictability of the final standings means success will be determined as much by luck as skill. As I write this article, there are just three nights left in the regular season, and yet there are still major question marks over who will grab the bottom seed or two in each conference. In an era in which 85% of teams are in the hunt for a playoff spot heading into the final week of the season, a fantasy owner in a league that includes playoffs can only hold their breath and hope that they’ve put their money on the right teams.

I’m also not a fan of how the playoff factor skews a player’s value, and limits the pool of valuable fantasy players. Should Steven Stamkos’ value take a hit because he has the misfortune of playing for a squad that has no viable goaltender? And is it really in the best interests of my fantasy league to have players from the NHL’s 6-8 worst clubs see their fantasy viability decreased even more than it already is, because they have no chance of skating in the playoffs?

Finally, from a commissioner standpoint, this type of league can be very difficult to maintain and track. Many of the top fantasy management websites don't have a playoff option at all, let alone one which carries over from the regular season. If you're going with this approach, you are severely limiting the sites you have to choose from, or you are committing yourself to doing some manual tracking of stats.

So have I made my feelings clear? I'm not a fan of combining regular season and playoffs. Having said that, there are enough people out there doing it that I wonder if I'm missing something. Perhaps other commissioners have dreamt up creative league configurations that circumvent the issues I've laid out here. So, I open the floor for comments. If you're in this type of league, how does yours work, and how do you avoid these pitfalls? Let's see if you can convince me that this is the way to go!

If you're not in a league that combines regular season and playoffs, what's your preferred format for a playoff pool?