Line combinations are the agony and ecstasy in fantasy leagues. General Managers live and die by mix and matches done by NHL coaches since the stone-age, it seems. What we are going to do today (and every week) is analyze various line combinations and pairings to give you the best chance to succeed in your fantasy hockey leagues. Yes injuries will play a role and as the season rolls along those impacts will have a correlation to line combinations.

First up, we will go backwards a bit and take a look at some defensive pairings and those forward combinations that drive a GM the craziest. Let's get started, shall we?

The defense rests……

Grant Clitsome, D, Columbus Blue Jackets – Clitsome has been an interesting case ever since he was called up last year due to injury. The defenseman tallied 19 points in 31 games last year and became something of a power play presence. Due to an average training camp, Clitsome was bumped down the depth chart a bit but injuries and poor play elevated him right into a top role once again. He has spent the most time with
Kris Russell (35.63% in all situations)
. Russell and Clitsome had instant chemistry last year and though it took a bit of time this year, Clitsome has shown signs of offensive production while playing better defensively with Russell. Do not let the -4 fool you, the 22:00 a night is a positive sign as Russell is playing about the same time.
Fedor Tyutin
also plays pretty well with Clitsome but only plays with him about a quarter of the time. Keep an eye on that pairing though as
Kris Russell
seems to be paired with
Aaron Johnson
more and more. Johnson is viewed by many as being a defensive liability at crucial times so be careful.

Kimmo Timonen, D, Philadelphia Flyers – Timonen was thought to have been undergoing a fantasy decline along with **Chris Pronger** but a funny thing has happened at the start of the season. Pronger was late coming back from injury and then took a freak high stick to the eye that will cost him about another ten days or so. Timonen has been paired with
Brayden Coburn
nearly half the time (49.32%) but his pairing with
Matt Carle
(6.53%) has been intriguing. Overall, Timonen has nine points in eleven games and it does not hurt that Timonen has worked well with the
Claude Giroux-James vanRiemsdyk-Jaromir Jagr
line. Would he have benefitted that much with Pronger in the lineup? That answer is maybe at best. Timonen has a better chemistry with Coburn and if Coburn can stay disciplined, Timonen can be an assist producer at a rate that makes him an above average fantasy producer.

Josh Gorges, D, Montreal Canadiens – Gorges has provided a surprising amount of offense while **PK Subban** tries to find himself in the forests. The duo is actually together 55.09% of the time in all situations but clearly Gorges does not spend much time on the power play (less than 3%). It seems that more points are coming Gorges' way almost at Subban's expense. The ice time of Gorges averages right around 21:00 (20:44 currently). Gorges has the ability to get the puck to the net as well which is why it is curious that he does not get a little more power play time. Then again his 5 on 5 ability is not questioned. He will be an interesting case to keep an eye on to see if he can stay anywhere close to around a half point per game (right now 6 pts in 11 games, plus-6).

The Forward Thrust….

Matt Duchene, C, Colorado Avalanche – Duchene has really been a perplexing case. He has been struggling ealy so much so that he only has 1 goal and 4 assists in ten games. His line partners have been all over the place to. He has played with
Milan Hejduk
(around 36%) the most but lately has played with
Joakim Lindstrom
and
Chuck Kobasew
a decent amount (over 12% EV). Clearly Coach Joe Sacco is trying all sorts of combinations as our fantasy owners. A guy like Duchene will turn it on eventually and it may just be with guys like Lindstrom and Kobasew to be honest. Duchene will be one to watch in the coming weeks

as far as who he will stay paired with.

Eric Staal, C, Carolina Hurricanes – Staal has to be an experience this year for fantasy owners that is beyond frustrating. Staal and **Jeff Skinner** have been separated for good chunks of time to try and light a fire under Staal. While the 5 points is not real bad on the surface after 11 games (every player slumps), the minus-13 and only 1 EV point is. Also, the fact that **Jiri Tlusty and Chad Larose** have been playing with him almost 10% of the time and especially more in the first and second periods, the alarms have to be going off for GM's. Even **Alexei Ponikarovsky and Tuomo Ruutu** are seeing significant time (almost a fifth) with Staal. When will something work? It may take a few weeks and combos fantasy fans. One last thing, his playing time is down to near 20:00 and his shot percentage is 7.9% early are also red flags.

Evander Kane, LW, Winnipeg Jets – There has been a regression in Kane's development and part of it may just be the lack of chemistry with **Nik Antropov and Alex Burmistrov**. Clearly the two Russians have benefitted but Kane really has not as of yet. Things are getting better but to see (32.42% of time on EV) with these two and little production is disconcerting. Worse for owners may just be the fact that guys like **Andrew Ladd** and even **Kyle Wellwood** do seem to mesh a bit with Kane. There seems to be other options so keep an eye on them. In the meantime, Kane's ice time has dropped so much (less than 14:00) that one has to wonder if the when will be too late.

That is it for this week ladies and gentlemen, we will be back next Monday with more line combination scenarios. As always, you can follow me on Twitter @TheProgramBTR and fire away those questions. Thanks again.