Category Killers - Part 1 (Hits and Blocked Shots)

If you read my Frustration Meter column from last week, one of the types of frustrating players I highlighted was the Category Killer, which is someone who drags your team down by doing major damage in at least one category. Sometimes it's easy to tell when you have a category killer, like if he's doing poorly in something major like goals, assists, or a widely reported category like plus/minus. But most leagues nowadays count one or more secondary categories, where it might be harder to actually notice the effects of a category killer.

So for the next couple of weeks I'll run through these secondary categories and list some of the worst "category killers" from last season and see how they're doing so far in 2012-13. And as usual, I'll offer a "Final Verdict", which in this case will be what to do if you find yourself with one of these secondary category killers on your roster.

The Hits Killers and Blocked Shots Killers

In leagues where hits and blocked shots are counted, we know that not every fantasy team can assemble a roster full of players (like Dan Girardi , Brent Seabrook , Ryan Callahan , or David Backes) who not only give you solid offense, but also excel in both of these categories. But you still can do yourself a favor by being aware of which guys will really hurt your team in these categories. That way you can either avoid drafting them, or compensate for having them on your team by balancing their lack of production with other guys who give you above-average numbers.

Defensemen

In general, you'd think that most defensemen will give you fairly good numbers in these categories, since hits and blocked shots (although somewhat subjective and arena-specific stats) often go hand-in-hand with playing good defense. And although it is true that defensemen usually do better – on average – than forwards in both categories, some defensemen have surprisingly bad numbers.

The worst offenders are what I call “double whammy” guys – players who actually managed to finish at or near the bottom of the pack in both hits and blocked shots. Here are the three from last season:

Player

Hits in 2011-12

Ranking among active defensemen who played in 70+ games

Blocked Shots in 2011-12

Ranking among active defensemen who played in 70+ games

Joe Corvo

27

4th worst

56

the worst

Tomas Kaberle

21

2nd worst

80

10th worst

Keith Yandle

31

5th worst

77

7th worst

It's not too shocking to see Corvo and Kaberle on this list, as they've never been known as "defense first" blueliners and are getting up there in age. But even though Yandle is mainly counted on for his offense, it was surprising to see him fare this poorly in both categories.

Some other defensemen who played in 70+ games last season and did especially poorly in hits were:

- Jamie McBain (15 hits, worst among all 70+ game defensemen)
- Paul Martin (24 hits, 3rd worst)
- Jared Spurgeon (36 hits, 6th worst)

For blocked shots, the "worst list" for defensemen (other than Corvo – mentioned above) who played in 70+ games consisted of:

- Erik Karlsson (65 blocked shots, 2nd worst among 70+ game defensemen in 2011-12)
- Matt Niskanen (69 blocked shots, 3rd worst)

- Drew Doughty (70 blocked shots, 4th worst)

It's not shocking to see Karlsson here, as he had every reason to not focus on blocking shots. But Niskanen was a bit of a surprise, and even more so was Doughty.

For 2012-13 so far (games through February 18th), Corvo has actually managed to be below his terrible pace from last year, with just one hit through ten games, but McBain has improved his pace (four hits in 11 games). Martin is on a similar pace to what he did last year (five hits in 16 games), while Yandle is doing noticeably better in hits (eight in 16 games) but about the same in blocked shots (16 in 16 games). Doughty is averaging almost 1.4 blocks per game, which is a decent improvement from last season. But the key to remember is that even for those who are on pace to improve somewhat, all still figure to be well below average for defensemen.

Forwards

With forwards, it can often be feast or famine in terms of hits – that is, some forwards are among the league leaders, but the bottom of the barrel of forwards usually have even worse hits numbers than the bottom of the barrel defensemen. Here are some of the lowest hit totals from 2011-12 for fantasy worthy forwards who played in 70+ games, alongside their totals for 2012-13 through February 18th games:

Player

Total Hits in 2011-12

Overall ranking in hits among forwards who played 70+ games

Hits for 2012-13 (through Feb 18th)

Pace versus last season?

Kyle Wellwood

10

Last

1 in 12 games

Similar

Phil Kessel

12

2nd to last

5 in 16 games

Improved

Jaromir Jagr

14

3rd from last

2 in 15 games

Slightly worse

Michael Grabner

16

Tied for 4th from last

1 in 15 games

Much worse

Martin St. Louis

17

Tied for 6th from last

5 in 14 games

Improved

Patrick Kane

19

9th from last

1 in 15 games

Much worse

Loui Eriksson

20

10th from last

3 in 16 games

Slightly worse

Daniel Sedin

21

Tied for 11th from last

3 in 14 games

Similar

Sam Gagner

21

Tied for 11th from last

7 in 14 games

Much improved

Teemu Selanne

23

Tied for 14th from last

3 in 15 games

Slightly worse

As with defensemen, some names should not be surprising, but a few (Grabner, Eriksson, Gagner) were at least somewhat eye opening to me. And as was the case with defensemen, those forwards who are on pace to improve quite a bit in 2011-12 still will likely remain well below even the low end of average for a forward.

Blocked shots are less concerning for forwards, since only 35 total blocked shots separated the 30th best forwards (who had 58 blocked shots) from the 230th best forwards (who had 23). However, it is worth noting that among these ten forwards, only Kane (27), Gagner (30), St. Louis (39), and Eriksson (40) were in the top 200 in blocked shots for forwards in 2011-12, and there were two “double whammy” forwards, as Jagr (12 blocks) and Wellwood (13 blocks) were just as bad for blocked shots as they were for hits.

Final Verdict

Having read all this, what are you supposed to do if you own one of these guys? Basically, you have to look at the big picture before you even begin to consider panicking. Most players on these lists give you a great deal of benefit in many other categories, in which case you should be able to easily live with their drawbacks in hits or blocked shots. That being said, you should think about these players in the back of your mind when making roster decisions, as maybe you could draft an otherwise comparable player who is less of a drawback in one or both of these categories, or trade for a similar player who is better in these categories. Don’t forget to use the amazing Frozen Pool resource to help make side-by-side player decisions - it includes hits and blocks!

In terms of specific advice, if you’re hanging onto a guy like Corvo, Kaberle, or Wellwood and your league counts hits and blocks, this might be enough to convince you to cut the cord, as there are likely players on your waiver wire who could give you the offense and other stats these guys provide but without the “double whammy” drawbacks in hits or blocked shots.

Lastly, a quick note about goalies. I decided not to cover goalies in these Category Killer columns, since it’s usually pretty easy to tell when a goalie is hurting your team because there

are fewer of them on your roster to keep track of and there really aren't many (if any) secondary goalie categories in most leagues. But things to watch out for are goalies who have much better GAA than save percentage (like Martin Brodeur in 2011-12) or much better save percentage than GAA (like Craig Anderson in 2011-12).

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