Taking a look at Face-off Win % and Power-Play Points

In last week's column I highlighted the "Category Killers" (players who drag your team down by doing major damage in at least one category) for Hits and Blocked Shots. This week I shift to two other secondary categories – faceoff percentage and power play points – where it is just as hard (if not harder) to notice the effects of a category killer but where the effects can be just as bad (if not worse) to your team. Once again I examine the full season results from 2011-12, and then see if any of the players are on pace for improvement based on their 2012-13 numbers so far.

The Faceoff Percentage Killers

In this category, fantasy teams run into the most trouble with two types of players whose poor performance might not be easy to notice - (1) guys who have a percentage that isn't that terrible but is made all the worse because they take more faceoffs than most other forwards, or (2) guys who might not take too many faceoffs but have a downright horrible percentage.

To help put things in perspective, among the 90 players who took more than 550 faceoffs in 2011-12, only 55 finished with a win percentage above 50% and only 25 others had a percentage between 47% and 50%.

For the first type, in 2011-12 there was:

- Patrik Elias (16th most faceoffs taken, but a pretty bad 44.1%)
- Steven Stamkos (27th most faceoffs, winning only 45.5%)
- Frans Nielsen (40th most faceoffs, winning a mere 45.2%)
- Mike Ribeiro (71st most faceoffs, but a truly dreadful 42.2%)

As for players who were just plain terrible but fortunately didn't take as many faceoffs, they included:

- Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (a dismal 37.5%, but only the 96th most faceoffs taken)

- Matt Read (41.0%, but only 136th most faceoffs)

- Patrick Kane (42.2% but only the 101st most faceoffs)

It's interesting that Kane is on this list, since in last week's column we saw that he also does quite poorly in hits. Seeing RNH and Read here is not too surprising, since young players often struggle with faceoff percentage more than veterans. Elias' numbers were really bad – the closest thing to a "double whammy" in this category since he took so many faceoffs and his percentage was pretty terrible. Ribeiro's was even worse, but taking only the 71st most faceoffs helped cushion the blow to his fantasy teams.

What about 2012-13 so far (through February 25th games)? – For the most part, percentages are pretty similar. Elias' is holding fairly steady at 44.4%, but at least he's only taken the 123rd most so far this season, so that lessens the negative impact. Ribeiro is also in similar territory at 41.8%, but the pain from that number is actually being felt more due to him having taken the 51st most faceoffs in all of the NHL. Stamkos is up slightly to 46.1% (35th most faceoffs taken), but Nielsen is down to 42.4% and still is taking a lot of faceoffs (47th in the NHL so far). RNH is on pace for the 41st most faceoffs, and fortunately has raised his percentage to 42.5%, which is still very poor but not nearly as bad as last season. With Kane, it looks like the Blackhawks are following the lead of the Devils with Elias in that they seem to be trying to work around this weak point, as the high scoring Blackhawk has taken only five faceoffs all year (but lost them all)!

The Power Play Points Killers

Here you need to be aware of two types of hard to notice category killers – (1) players who aren't high very scorers to begin with, but managed to score an even lower percentage of points on the power play than would have been expected, and (2) players who might actually give your team a decent amount of power play points (PPP) but whose output was much lower than expected given all the power play time they received.

For the first type of player, other than Pascal Dupuis ' jaw dropping one power play point out of 59 total points that I pointed out in a previous column, there were these lowlights:

- Viktor Stalberg (43 points, none on the power play)
- Ryan McDonagh (two points out of 32 total)
- Chris Kelly (one of his 39 points on the power play)
- Nick Foligno (four of 47 total points on the power play)
- Brad Marchand (six out of 55 total)

What about 2012-13 so far (as of February 25th)? Once again Stalberg has no PPP so far (despite getting 2:49 of PP time per game), while McDonaugh and Kelly both have one of their five points on the PP, which is a better percentage (albeit from a small sample size). Marchand's pace is up too – two points out of 12 on the PP so far. And while Folgino's season has been a disappointment so far, at least he's had two of his six points on the PP.

Here are some examples of the second type of player, with their 2011-12 stats alongside their numbers for 2012-13 so far (through February 25th games):

Player

2011-12 ranking for overall PP ice time

2011-12 NHL ranking for PP points

2012-13 ranking for overall PP ice time

2012-13 NHL ranking for PP points

Comparison of 2012-13 numbers versus 2011-12

Jack Johnson

4th

68th

31st

92nd

Still bad (similar gap)

Michael Del Zotto

6th

99th

123rd

178th

Still bad (similar gap)

Chris Kunitz

23rd

60th

20th

21st

Very much improved

Drew Doughty

27th

115th

73rd

69th

Much improved

Dustin Brown

43rd

77th

131st

69th

Much improved

Jakub Voracek

56th

146th

7th

17th

Hugely improved

Ryan Smyth

125th

200th

223rd

229th

Improved, but strictly waiver wire at this point

As we can see from this table, and unlike what's happening so far with shooting percentage numbers, quite a few year-to-year changes are shaping up. Only a couple of players (Johnson and MDZ) are on pace to follow a somewhat similar gap as last year. Kunitz and Voracek are significantly improved, with Voracek's gains mirroring his overall increase in production as he makes the leap to stardom. But Kunitz's gains are harder to explain in that although the Pens PP is clicking at a roughly 10% higher rate than last season that still wouldn't explain Kunitz's big jump in production with comparable PP time. My guess is that last year's numbers were more of a negative aberration, in which case his great PPP start to 2012-13 might end up lasting the entire season. For Doughty and Brown, they're doing the best they can on a team that just can't seem to generate much offense. And as noted in the table, Smyth is waiver wire material at this point.

Final Verdict

The final verdict is similar to last week in that most players on these lists give you a great deal of benefit in many other categories, in which case you should be able to live with their drawbacks in faceoff percentage or power play points. But you can (and should) be thinking about the possibility of drafting or trading for an otherwise comparable player who is less of a drawback in one or both of these categories. For specific advice, if your league counts faceoff percentage and you have Nielsen then I'd look to flip him for someone else or package him in a larger trade, as his other stats don't make up for his big drain on this category. And if you have Ryan Smyth
, this is all the more reason you should realize he's the odd man out on an young Edmonton team that simply doesn't need him for much of anything at this point beyond his locker room

presence. This also highlights the poor years that MDZ and Johnson are having, although at least with Johnson he's still getting PP time while MDZ seems to still be one step behind his teammates after being late to sign a contract after the lockout ended. If you've wanted to get MDZ in your league, you should reach out to his frustrated owner and don't be afraid to point out his PP struggles in an effort to get the cost down!