Michael Grabner 's 2011-12 season has been perplexing to say the least. Now I knew there was a strong possibility that the speedy Austrian would suffer through a sophomore slump, but the reasons for his struggles have been puzzling. Grabner potted 34 goals last season and 52 points while being nominated for the Calder Trophy. This season he is on pace for just 31 points and about half the goals.

Sometimes a change in line mates can drastically affect whether a player's production goes up or down. In Grabner's case the players he has skated with the majority of the time haven't changed from this year to last.

2011-12

Frequency

Strength

Line Combination

30.93%

EV

40 GRABNER,MICHAEL - 51 NIELSEN,FRANS - 21 OKPOSO,KYLE

18.1%

EV

40 GRABNER,MICHAEL - 51 NIELSEN,FRANS - 15 PARENTEAU,PIERRE

8.62%

EV

40 GRABNER,MICHAEL - 26 MOULSON,MATT - 91 TAVARES,JOHN

2010-11

Frequency

Strength

Line Combination

28.48%

EV

40 GRABNER,MICHAEL - 51 NIELSEN,FRANS - 21 OKPOSO,KYLE

6.92%

EV

12 BAILEY,JOSH - 40 GRABNER,MICHAEL - 51 NIELSEN,FRANS

4.76%

EV

40 GRABNER,MICHAEL - 58 JOENSUU,JESSE - 51 NIELSEN,FRANS

You can see Grabner has been playing with Frans Nielsen and Kyle Okposo nearly 30% of the time in both campaigns. If you think Nielsen and Okposo might be the problem, they're not. They have already combined for more points this season than they did all of last year.

Another troubling drop off in Grabner's production has been his plus/minus. In 2010-11 he finished as a plus-13, while this year he sits a minus-15. So maybe Grabner is just not a very strong defensive presence. Well you might be surprised to learn he sits second in the league in takeaways.

Rank

Player

Pos

Team

GP

Total

1

O'REILLY, RYAN

C

COL

76

95

2

GRABNER, MICHAEL

R

NYI

71

89

2

TAVARES, JOHN

C

NYI

75

89

3

THORNTON, JOE

C

S.J

75

88

4

DATSYUK, PAVEL

C

DET

63

87

5

HOSSA, MARIAN

R

CHI

75

82

5

TOEWS, JONATHAN

C

CHI

59

82

6

KANE, PATRICK

C

CHI

76

72

7

PAVELSKI, JOE

R

S.J

75

71

8

KOPITAR, ANZE

C

L.A

75

70

9

SPEZZA, JASON

C

OTT

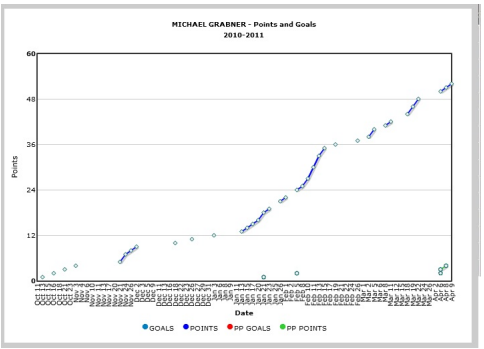
75

63

Grabner seems to be in all the right positions to continue his production, but his numbers have just not reflected his surroundings. In fact his ice-time has even increased a little bit this season to 15:45 per game, compared to 15:04 last year.

The main thing that does stand out when looking at his drop in production is his shots on goal. In 2010-11 Grabner had 228 shots and this year he has just 153. Obviously a drop off in shooting the puck decreases your percentages of scoring and hurts fantasy owners in the shots category.

One thing that is clearly evident is that the majority of Grabner's production in the 2010-11 season came in January and February. He had two different six game point streaks and 17 goals to go along with 26 points that came in those two months. This chart gives a better illustration.



When you have a huge point streak in a short window like Grabner did last year, it can give the illusion of a very productive season. The total sum of the numbers may look great over an 82 game stretch, but on closer inspection the totals may not reflect a full campaign. Players with high goal totals and low assist numbers like Grabner are much more susceptible to streaky play.

Grabner seems to be a player you have to be willing to take a gamble on. He has the talent and abilities to put up big numbers, but also the tendency to disappear for large stretches. That's the thing about streaky players; it's a lot easier to go cold than it is to stay hot.