For the Ottawa Senators the 2011-12 season was a huge success. Despite losing in the first round of the playoffs to the New York Rangers, the Senators earned a postseason spot in the Eastern Conference when most prognosticators had them pegged for dead last. While the majority of the credit has gone to management, new head coach Paul MacLean, and Norris Trophy candidate Erik Karlsson, Jason Spezza's outstanding season has been lost in the shuffle.

Spezza tied a career high with 34 goals and finished fourth overall in league scoring with 84 points, but it was his all-around play and consistency in 2011-12 that was most impressive. The Senators center had 50 games where he recorded at least one point, which was good enough for tenth overall in the NHL.

Rank

Name

Pos

Age

Yrs

Team

GR

GP

Total Points

PPG

GP w/ Point

% of GP
w Pnts

STAMKOS,STEVEN

C

22

3

T.B

82

97

1.18

60

73.2

MALKIN,EVGENI

C

25

5

PIT

75

109

1.45

60

80.0

ELIAS,PATRIK

L

36

15

N.J

81

78

0.96

59

72.8

KESSEL,PHIL

C

24

5

TOR

82

82

1.00

57

69.5

WHITNEY,RAY

L

39

19

PHX

82

77

0.94

55

67.1

HOSSA,MARIAN

R

33

13

CHI

81

77

0.95

55

67.9

POMINVILLE,JASON

R

29

7

BUF

82

73

0.89

53

64.6

KOPITAR,ANZE

C

24

5

L.A

82

76

0.93

53

64.6

NEAL,JAMES

L

24

3

PIT

80

81

1.01

52

65.0

THORNTON,JOE

C

32

13

S.J

82

77

0.94

50

61.0

SPEZZA,JASON

C

28

8

OTT

80

84

1.05

50

62.5

PARISE,ZACH

L

27

6

N.J

82

69

0.84

50

61.0

KARLSSON,ERIK

D

21

2

OTT

81

77

0.95

50

61.7

GIROUX,CLAUDE

R

24

4

PHI

77

94

1.22

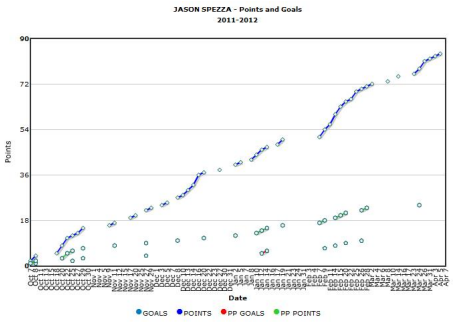
50

64.9

You can see Karlsson also recorded at least a point in 50 games this season. With that kind of consistent production from both the front and back end, it is clear why Ottawa surprised a lot of teams this year. Consistency is what separates a good player from a great player. Everyone in the NHL is capable of turning it on for stretches at a time, well almost everybody, but to do it night in and night out is another story altogether.

The Senators were in a battle down the stretch to secure a postseason appearance, and during

that run Spezza played his best hockey of the season. He had a point streak of 11 games through February to early March, and a six gamer from late March to early April.



In fact from February 7th onward he only had six games where he was held without a point. Not only was this great for the Sens playoff push, but it was crucial for fantasy owners as well. Points are even more valuable for poolies later in the season as owners are trying to hammer down playoff spots, and make a postseason run.

Spezza's contributions did not stop at offense in 2011-12; he led all Senators forwards in ice-time with an average of 19:55 per game and was a machine in the face-off circle. He took more draws than anyone else in the league this season with 1700.

Rank

Player

Pos

Team

Won

Lost

Total

Win%

1

SPEZZA, JASON

C

OTT

909

791

1700

53.5

2

STAAL, ERIC

C

CAR

882

799

1681

52.5

3

PLEKANEC, TOMAS

C

MTL

824

854

1678

49.1

4

BERGERON, PATRICE

C

BOS

973

668

1641

59.3

5

TAVARES, JOHN

C

NYI

813

772

1585

51.3

6

GIROUX, CLAUDE

R

PHI

828

715

1543

53.7

Spezza also finished second overall behind Bruins center Patrice Bergeron in face-off wins with 909.

Rank

Player

Pos

Team

Won

Lost

Total

Win%

BERGERON, PATRICE

C

BOS

973

668

1641

59.3

SPEZZA, JASON

C

OTT

909

791

1700

53.5

STAAL, ERIC

C

CAR

882

799

1681

52.5

GIROUX, CLAUDE

R

PHI

828

715

1543

53.7

PLEKANEC, TOMAS

C

MTL

824

854

1678

49.1

TAVARES, JOHN

C

NYI

813

772

1585

51.3

Taking key draws is not something Spezza would have been doing earlier in his career as his defensive abilities were always in question. Now that face-off excellence is part of his repertoire, poolies have the added benefit of contributions from Spezza in other categories besides points.

For whatever reason despite being more than a point a game player and a plus-77 for his career, Spezza has never really been placed in the league's elite. He is certainly widely regarded as a great player, but his name is rarely mentioned alongside other superstars in the NHL. Perhaps a lot of that can be attributed to other Senators like Martin Havlat, Dany Heatley, Daniel Alfredsson, and now Karlsson overshadowing him in recent years. However with a few more seasons like 2011-12, Spezza could end up in a category all to himself.

Feel free to follow me on Twitter at @amato_mike