

Fancy Stats

It doesn't matter if Alex Ovechkin plays left or right wing

BY NEIL GREENBERG June 30 at 9:16 AM  [Follow @ngreenberg](#)

(AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

Alex Ovechkin was [moved to the right wing](#) under former coach Adam Oates in an attempt to become less predictable after many of his go-to moves were easily thwarted by opposing defensemen. The Great Eight rewarded Oates for his convictions, scoring 83 goals in 126 games. Now, everyone wants to know where Ovechkin will line up when the season starts under new Coach Barry Trotz.

“We’re going to balance it out,” [Trotz told Washington Post beat reporter Alex Prewitt](#). “I told Alex, I said, ‘I know you can play both sides, but right now I’d probably say I’ll start you out on right.’”

Here’s the thing: It doesn’t matter.

Those times where Ovechkin lined up on the left side

when Bruce Boudreau was behind the bench the superstar winger generated 0.34 even-strength shot attempts (goals, shots on net and missed shots) per shift in 2009-10 and 0.27 in 2010-11. Under Dale Hunter (2011-12), Ovechkin generated 0.25 even-strength shot attempts per shift. After moving to the right side under Adam Oates he created 0.26 in the lockout shortened 2013 campaign and 0.28 the season after. In other words, pretty consistent across the board.

Alex Ovechkin, Even-strength Shot Attempts/Shift

Shot attempts include goals, shots and missed shots



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But Trotz appears to be on the right path when he says Ovechkin needs to have [“a little less glide in his game.”](#)

On Ovechkin’s even-strength shifts that started with a neutral zone faceoff during the 2013-14 season, Ovi and his linemates were outshot 127 to 161 and outscored 8-28.

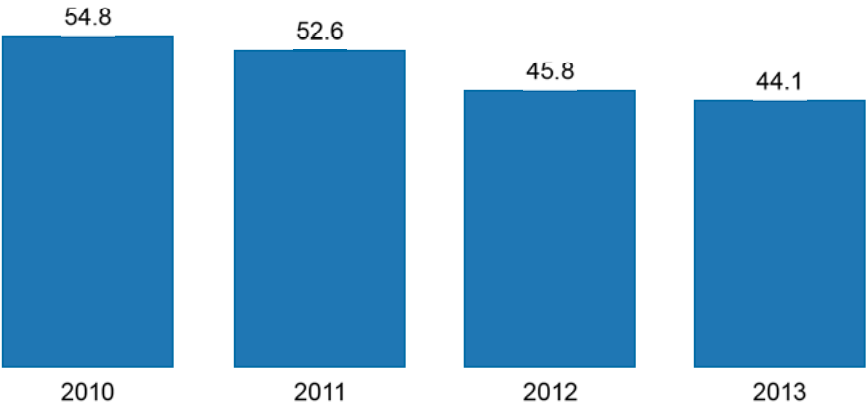
That’s a lower goal differential than when Ovechkin, [not](#)

[known for his defensive prowess](#), started one of his even-strength shifts in the defensive zone (minus-5). For context, he started [31.8 percent of his even-strength shifts in the neutral zone](#) and [27.8 percent in the defensive zone](#) — a difference of just 53 shifts over 78 games.

In fact, since Boudreau was fired, there has been a huge drop in the share of even-strength shot attempts (Fenwick Percentage) in Washington's favor when Ovechkin is on for a neutral zone faceoff.

Alex Ovechkin

Fenwick percentage during shifts that start with neutral zone faceoff

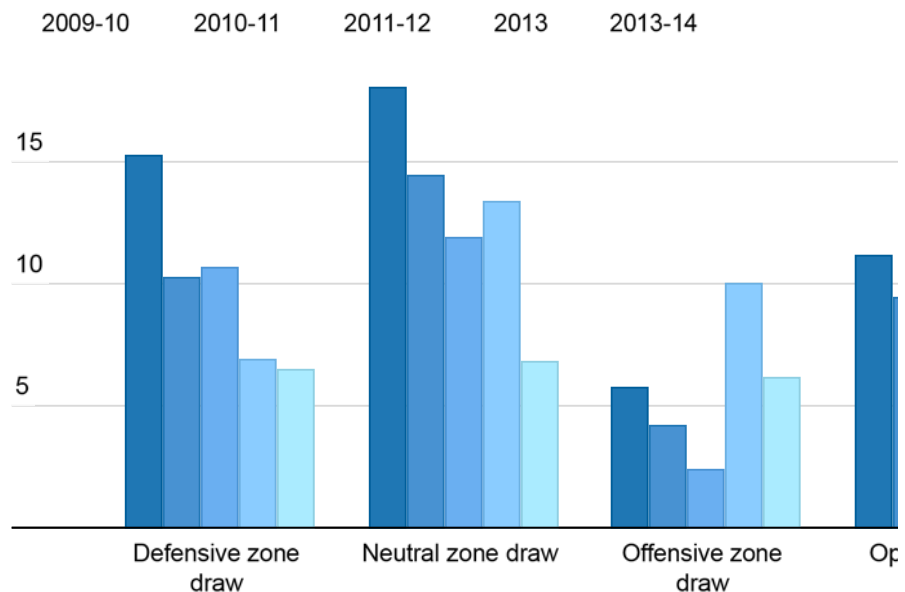


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Also concerning is that Ovechkin's goal differential on even-strength shifts that originated with an offensive zone draw last year (minus-6) was lower than when he took a defensive zone draw (minus-5) — and Ovechkin's line had a shot differential of plus-86 on the former and minus-81 on the latter. Some of that can be chalked up to poor "puck luck" in terms of shots converting:

Even-strength Shooting Percentage of Ovechkin's Line

Based on zone in which shift started



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It should be noted the higher shooting percentages on shots after a defensive zone draw is likely a sample size issue, not a situation where they are creating better quality shots.

We can see shots generated by the Ovechkin line after an offensive zone faceoff in the scoring chance area, between the faceoff dots to the top of the circles, lit the lamp infrequently despite a decent volume of attempts close to the opposing net.

Lower than expected shooting percentages like this usually bounce back the following season, however, the declining amount of shots in Washington's favor after Ovechkin's line takes a draw in the neutral zone is something the new coaching staff is right to be

**concerned with fixing. Much more so than which side
Ovechkin lines up on.**

Neil Greenberg analyzes advanced statistics for all sports
and prefers to be called a geek rather than a nerd.
