

Production versus years of experience

## **Part IV: Is there a prime of penalty minutes for enforcers?**

Pierre P. Ferguson, M.Sc.  
Dalhousie University, Canada  
*www.thephysicsofhockey.com*

It is evident that skaters have a development to go on before becoming an elite player. In previous articles, skaters and goaltenders took several seasons of NHL experience before reaching their full potential. The results of these articles can be very interesting when it comes for drafting players in hockey pools. Another possible category for pools is the “enforcer” category, where only the penalty minutes counts.

In this article, we checked if there is a trend for enforcers in terms of their penalty minutes potential with the number of years they play in the NHL.

### **Correction factor**

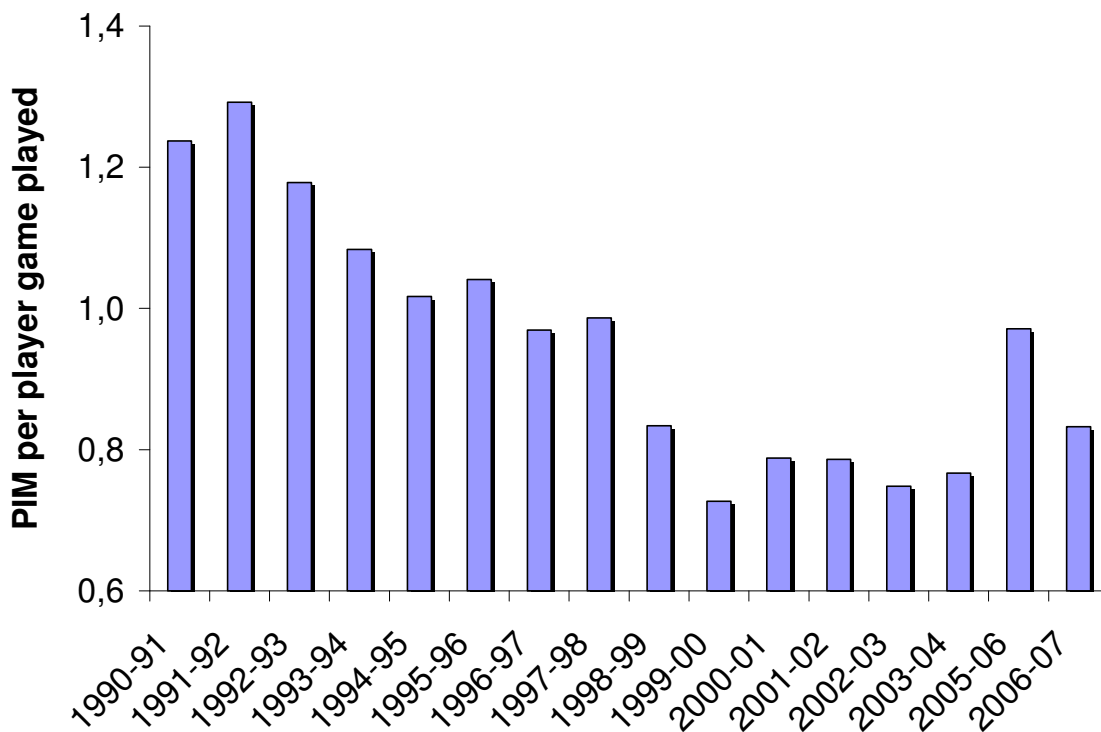
As the previous articles, we have to take in consideration the number of penalty given in a game changed in the past decade. This is shown in Figure 6. We have taken the total penalty minutes for every season from 1990 to 2007. We have then divided these numbers by the total number of games played. This had to be done since the number of total game played is different every season. A relative penalty minute correction per season is obtained.

### **Results**

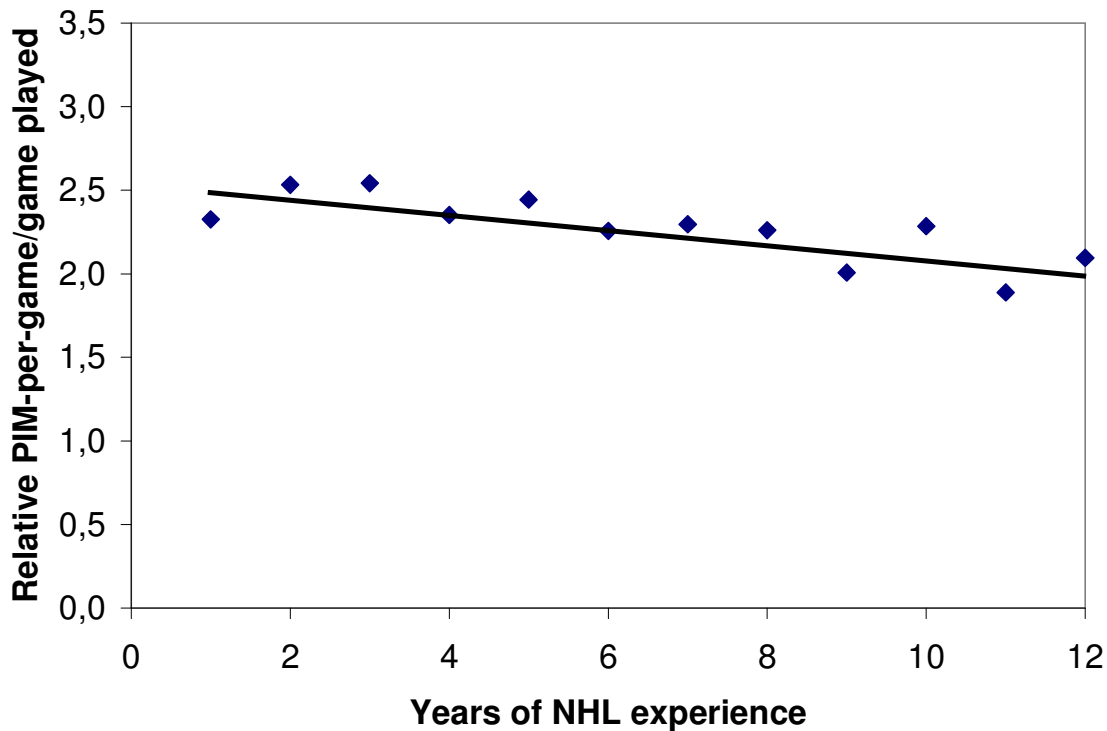
For the penalty minutes (PIM) category, we took the 34 players who had the best PIM per game average during the 2005-06 season. The players had to play more than 10 games during that season and rookies were not considered. Figure 7 presents the results, with the correction factor included.

A year of experience is defined here as a season played in the NHL, with a minimum of 10 games played. It can be pointed out that from Figure 6, that a peak occurs for the season after the lockout, 2005-06. This peak is not due to an increase of game misconducts or fights, but of an increase of hooking and obstruction calls due to the application of the new rules by the league. A decrease of penalty minutes is strongly observed from left to right which is due to the less fighting in hockey and less “enforcer only” players.

**Figure 6: Penalty minutes awarded to a player per games played, from 1990 to 2007**



**Figure 7: Enforcer penalty minutes contribution per years of NHL experience**



Although not the same trend as previous results (for skaters and goalies), a trend of a linear decline is noticed for the enforcers. The age factor has a lot to do in this category. Young enforcers tend to fight more than the older ones. And of course, they are more prone to make a mistake that cost them a game misconduct. It's a way for them to prove that they can stick in the NHL. Also, experienced enforcers usually have another role than fighting. An example is tough guy Chris Neil of the Ottawa Senators who gets quality powerplay ice time. It is also interesting to mention that players in this calculation are not all 4th line forwards; they are also defensemen and some first line players, such as Todd Bertuzzi of the Detroit Red Wings. The role and the age of the players have to be taken in account when drafting in your hockey pool for the penalty minutes category.

It is also useful to mention that the tough enforcers who get high PIM per game average don't always play 82 games in a season. They can be often healthy scratches and miss a lot of games, especially for the younger ones. This is the same discussion as said before for the injured forwards.

### **Quick conclusion**

A trend is observed, but is different for what was observed in previous articles of the skaters and the goalies. We have shown that there is a linear decline relation between the penalty minutes for enforcers with their years of professional NHL experience. When it comes to hockey pools, enforcers should be carefully studied on the role they play on their team and on the number of games they play in a season.