

How Specialization and Class Composition Affect an Arena Match

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Abstract

In the game of World of Warcraft, arena has become one of the most competitive aspects of PvP and even the game. Players are constantly trying to figure out ways to outmatch their opponents. This can often times be found in the “Flavor of the Month” class and specialization. These unique characters possess the ability when composed with the other top classes creates the most sought after or best team for the arena season. Going through forum notes as well as analyzing why team comps work is a good approach to discovering how class composition and specialization affect arena.

Introduction

The massively multiplayer online roleplaying game or MMORPG World of Warcraft made by Blizzard in 2004 initially limited player versus player (PvP) combat to the open world and offered no rewards for it. Armies of Alliance and Horde characters fought each other over Southshore and Tarren Mill, but on June 7th, 2005 they implemented the first battlegrounds. The players liked these battlegrounds, but Blizzard decided to implement something with a higher level of competition. On January 16th, 2007 the first expansion to the World of Warcraft was introduced. With the Burning Crusade came a new type of PvP called arenas. The arena put groups of 2, 3, and 5 characters against another in small area matches. This quickly became the true competitive PvP because it offered gear that was better than what battlegrounds had to offer and it provided an array of titles to the top teams. However, this arena system brought about a problem with how the classes were balanced against each other. A limited number of class combinations and specs emerged as the dominant force within

arenas. Blizzard has created what are now 30 potential specializations among 10 playable classes each with a different set of traits that have advantages and disadvantages in PvP arenas. Throughout each patch, players have received either reductions or additions to their attributes, therefore making some classes more powerful and others weaker. These were updated and explained in patch notes that Blizzard would use to describe in detail the percentages the classes' abilities were altered. There have been times in the game when these updates have been too slow and allowed a class or combo to dominate the arena scene. Due to this, specific class combinations dominate the strategy towards winning matches in the arena. As major expansions were released, classes received a whole new set of skills and attributes changing their performance in the game.

Method

Through many changes in the history of World of Warcraft several classes have come about as being the most sought after for arenas. By looking at the most recent arena season using data from the website World of Wargraphs. This is a site designed to provide a vast amount of PvE and PvP statistics. This site is also a source of information about almost every statistical value possible in World of Warcraft. The information is taken from the World of Warcraft website and is updated about every two days to keep the data current. We will analyze the data to show what makes certain class combinations work and how some class specializations are better than others. In PvP arenas, the greatest challenge is trying to be the best. Many players study the different changes to classes' values to try and determine the ones' with the highest likelihood of being the best in the upcoming arena season. For every patch that is released, the website MMO-Champion re-posts all of the information on their site for players to read. The elite

players spend time reading and discussing patch notes so that they are able to recognize improvements in stats enough to where that class could be better in the next season as seen on the WoW patch note threads (Patch4.3.0, 2011). By going through these patch notes we have figured out many of the reasons these classes have evolved into being the best. In addition to the discussions about patch notes at MMO-Champion, many online forums and website have devoted space to discussions determining the best arena class specializations. For example, Benth's (2006) post on Elite WoW guides argues the best compositions along with explanations for 2v2, 3v3, and 5v5 arena groups. In a thread started by Rasen (2012) on the EU Battle.net forums, 92 players present their (often abbreviated) cases for what the best combinations are. Our current study seeks to use evidence from the game and data from World of Wargraphs to determine current optimal combinations.

Results

At the conclusion of every arena season teams that earn the highest arena rating are put into a group among their server and are awarded different titles. The highest PvP achievement is Gladiator and it is awarded to the top .5% of all players on the realm. Many PvP players know of a few classes who are consistently the best and with each new expansion some move up in the ranks while others can fall. By analyzing the most recent expansion *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*, we have found with the data taken from World of Wargraphs a set of combinations that have consistently received a very high arena rating. Represented in Figure 2 are the most played class and specialization with an arena rating higher than 2200 points, a number which is considered relatively high for many of the games' players.

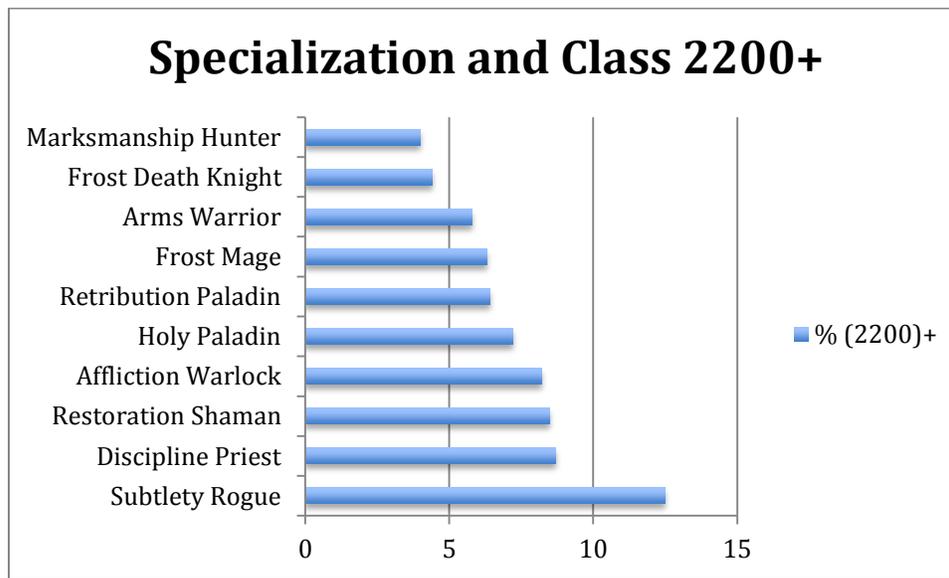


Figure 1. Distribution of the World of Warcraft population above 2200 arena rating

These ‘most played’ classes tend to be the ones in the top of each battleground with the highest arena ratings. Some might argue that these classes have a certain set of abilities and when combined with other strong classes an overpowered group combination is formed. Overpowered is a phrase adopted by many World of Warcraft players to describe how some classes are significantly better than the others. To try and figure out which classes/specs are deemed to be the best in 3v3, we used World of Warcraftgraphs to list the top rated teams along with class and specialization. These ratings have a selectable range from 2200 up to 3200. Along with this, the forum pages have players who discuss team compositions and some have begun to explain the reasons behind each class as well as what makes the specialization effective or not (Rasen, 2012). Time was also spent looking through the patch notes of each expansion and the major changes for the classes were recorded then described later in the article. To find the data we wanted we found the possible arena compositions with a rating above 2200. This search resulted in more than 130 possible team combinations. All this data was then

placed into an excel spreadsheet. Three statistical measures were provided along with the class and spec combinations. These values were percent of the arena teams with the same combination of class/spec, and the teams' highest arena rating. All of these values were recorded to the spreadsheet and we decided to sort the teams and go in order of teams with the highest arena rating. The top five teams were largely filled with what many would declare the most overpowered classes, specs, or team combos in PvP for the time being see table 1 for details. Many of the top teams were found in the European servers while the best US team only had a rating of 2684. The team combo with the highest arena rating that we found was the class combination known as RMP or Rogue, Mage, Priest. In the most recent expansion the team combination that is being selected the most with a good rating is the composition including a Rogue, Warlock, and Shaman with just over 11% of the arena team population (World of Wargraphs, 2012).

			Max	
Comp	Comp	Comp	Average %	Rating
Subtlety	Discipline	Frost	<u>7.82%</u>	<u>2822</u>
Marksmanship	Resto Sham	Feral	<u>0.67%</u>	<u>2765</u>
Arms	Resto Sham	Affliction	<u>0.84%</u>	<u>2722</u>
Subtlety	Resto Sham	Affliction	<u>11.18%</u>	<u>2720</u>
Retribution	Marksmanship	Subtlety	<u>5.38%</u>	<u>2693</u>

Figure 2. Values based on current compositions above the 2200 rating.

As seen in figure 2, Subtlety Rogues, Discipline Priests, and Restoration Shamans are the three most played classes above 2200. From our data we found seven instances in the top five arena teams to include these three classes. Some of the characteristics behind these classes ability to win are mobility, crowd control, and burst healing/damage.

To fully grasp the effectiveness of an arena team, the individual classes and specializations must be taken into account. The amount of specializations based on current talent trees is 30, which covers three specs for the 10 classes. However, five classes and specs are used very more often than any other as seen in figure 1. Two healing classes: Discipline Priest and Restoration Shaman, and three dps classes: Subtlety Rogue, Affliction Warlock and Frost Mage. These five classes account for 44.2% of the top end players, shown in figure 1. To understand why each is so effective, the abilities of the class and the skills of the specialization should be analyzed.

Priest:

The most used healing class in top end arena teams is the discipline priest due to its many special abilities. The first is the buff Power Word: Fortitude, which increases health. The second reason is the ability to shield allies and reduce damage taken. This is done through Power Word: Shield, Power Word: Barrier, and a special ability called Pain Suppression. The third is the healing spell Penance, which is unique to discipline priests and it channels health to an ally every second. Lastly, a special ability called Leap of Faith, which pulls an ally directly in front of the priest. All of these abilities make the discipline priest a viable healer for arenas due to its favorable buff, damage reducing abilities and special talents that enable the priest to heal through tight situations.

Shaman:

The second most used healer in arena matches is the restoration shaman. Shamans have many buffs available to them and their group, such as the elemental totems, imbuing their weapons, Bloodlust/Heroism, and elemental shields. Two special abilities useful in arenas is Hex, which transforms the enemy into a frog, and Purge, which removes a buff

from an enemy target. Restoration shamans have a great method of mobility called Ghost Wolf, which is almost always an instant cast. Three unique healing abilities available to restoration shamans that make them a very good healer for arenas are Riptide, which is an instant heal plus a healing over time ability; Chain Heal, which heals a target but can also jump to a nearby ally and heal them as well; and Healing Rain, which is an area of effect heal that is placed on the ground. When these talents and abilities are maximized, the restoration shaman is a very effective healer for arena battles. This includes optimal totem use, improved mobility, maximizing elemental shield use, and the unique healing abilities available to restoration shamans.

Rogue:

The number one dps class used in arenas is the subtlety rogue. Rogues have a unique ability that makes them far superior in arena matches, the ability to stealth. On top of that, rogues have many forms of crowd control: Sap, Gouge, Kidney Shot, Cheap Shot, Blind and Smoke Bomb. Rogues also have many different abilities to increase their survivability. These include various forms of reducing damage taken, regenerating health and mobility: Recuperate, Evasion, Sprint, Vanish, Cloak of Shadows, and Cheat Death. Furthermore, rogues have many abilities that eliminate cooldowns of their talents, such as Preparation. Finally, subtlety rogues have two unique abilities that make them an even more deadly threat in arena matches. The first is Shadowstep, which instantly places the rogue behind its target, and the second is Shadow Dance, which allows the ability to use stealthed moves when not stealthed. All of these abilities make subtlety rogues the number one class specialization for arena battles. Their unique and versatile abilities enable them to be deadly, near immortal and a great team player.

Warlock:

The second most used dps class in arenas is the affliction warlock. Warlocks have the unique ability to control demon pets. For the most part, the Succubus and Felhunter are used in arenas because both have silencing abilities that make them the most effective. Affliction warlocks have two crowd control abilities: Curse of Exhaustion slows the target and Fear, which includes Fear, Death Coil, and Howl of Terror, disorientates the enemy. Warlocks deal most of the damage through over-time abilities. However, affliction warlocks have damaging abilities that also heal them, Drain Life and Haunt. These enable the warlock to be very self-sustaining as well as a very deadly opponent. Lastly, affliction warlocks have the ability to place a Demonic Circle on the ground, which they can teleport to. All of these abilities make affliction warlocks very self-sustaining, very good at crowd control, and an excellent damage dealer in arena matches.

Mage:

Frost mages have been universally known to be very effective in arena. When specializing into frost, mages gain a special ability when they use frost spells: the ability to slow and sometimes freeze their enemy in place. These include Frost Nova, Ring of Frost and Deep Freeze. Furthermore, many of the mages spells increase damage done when the target is frozen, for example Ice Lance. Furthermore, frost mages gain the assistance of a water elemental pet, which attacks the same target as the mage. Mages have a special CC ability called Polymorph, which changes the enemy into sheep for a short time. Lastly, mages have two unique abilities that increase their survivability. These are Ice Block, which freezes the mage eliminating all damage taken, and Blink, which

teleports the mage 20 yards ahead. All of these unique abilities make frost mages very versatile, able to keep their enemies at a distance, and have the ability to do a great deal of damage

Discussion

The number one team on the European realm Stormscale named LEGIT uses the very popular Rogue, Mage, Priest (RMP) combo. This combo relies on the Rogue and the Mage for burst damage while the priest is assigned as a healer. This combo is very effective because the Rogue and Mage have the capability to do a lot of damage quickly while the Discipline Priest has the ability to shield them and absorb damage. While these are important points there is a plethora of reasons this team is so effective. The subtlety rogue brings the advantage of being able to start the game in stealth, invisible to the enemies and the mage can go invisible too, which allows the team to control the opening attack. Both the mage and rogue have the ability to further control their target after the initial attack. The subtlety rogue is able to use a variety of stuns and then a crippling poison that slows down the opponent. The combination of the stuns and slow that the rogue brings makes it a very useful class in this team, but the rogue also has tools to survive if it is targeted. The rogue has numerous skills for survivability which can allow it to evade attacks, remove damage over time effects, and even go back into stealth for another opener or a chance to heal. The rogue contributes a lot to the team, but the other two classes are just as important. All of the frost mages attacks slow down and potentially snare its target. This creates a deadly synergy with the rogue's stuns and crippling poison. If this team is facing a melee-oriented team then the mage has the ability to keep an opponent off of the healer by consistently slowing them with their attacks. The frost

mage also brings great survivability because of its frost barrier spell, which slows down the attacker and its ability to kite opponents around the arena. The survivability of the two burst classes make the job of the healer easier and allow them to watch all three health bars successfully. The discipline priest is able to absorb the majority of the damage taken by placing shields on the team. While the priest might have trouble if the team gets low on health because they rely more on damage absorption than healing, this rarely happens because between the strong damage reduction and the survivability of the other two classes the team is able to stay strong.

The next popular composition uses a marksmanship hunter, restoration shaman, and a subtlety rogue. This composition is highly successful because of its mobility and the escape abilities that each of these classes brings to the team. The restoration shaman makes this composition very strong because of the mobility and heals that it brings. Generally, the opposing team will go after the shaman first because it's the healer. The advantage this team has against that strategy is the fact that the shaman has the tools to escape while the hunter and rogue kill them. The shaman brings the importance of healing and has the ability to stay alive when being focused on, but the mobility and attack power of both the rogue and hunter is also critical. The hunter brings the ability to also kite an opponent around the arena by slowing them down and trapping them. The hunter's ability to control the movements of the opposition while also chipping away at their health is very valuable to this team. While the hunter can control enemy movement through various tools and traps, they also have the ability to surprise the enemy by using the ability camouflage, which makes them invisible to the other team until they attack. The other useful thing the hunter brings to the team is their ability to escape death until

the shaman can heal them through the use of their crowd control. The last teammate of this composition is the subtlety rogue who brings strong crowd control with the ability to stun and slow down opponents. The rogue also has high survivability because of its ability to stealth and avoid the opponents. The key point to this team is their mobility and their ability to slow down the opponents. The reason these are important is that it allows the shaman to escape the enemies that are focusing on it for long enough heal themselves and the teammates. This composition utilizes these skills to be a very successful and annoying team to play against.

The third and final popular composition is different than the others because it doesn't use a healer. It's very similar to the second composition that was analyzed, but it uses a retribution paladin instead of a restoration shaman. The rogue and hunter still bring the same crowd control and mobility that was analyzed in the second composition, but they work well with the paladin because of the burst damage that all of them bring. The paladin, rogue, and hunter all bring high amounts of burst damage that gives them the ability to focus on one target and kill them at the start of the match, which turns the game into a 3v2 match. The most important part of this composition is that killing one of the opponents at the start is critical because this team has no healer. The lack of healer makes it critical for this team to win quickly because they don't have the tools to survive for a long time. This team is very successful when they can execute their strategy and eliminate an opponent right away.

Every major patch brings a new arena season and a plethora of class updates. These changes force players to consistently find the new “flavor of the month” compositions that have advantages over the others. In 3v3 the RMP composition has been

one of the consistent favorites over the course of the recent patches, while other compositions have risen and fallen every patch. Although skill plays a large factor in one's ability to climb the ladders in arena rank, class composition is ultimately more important because of the interactions and synergy that certain classes have with others. The key to dominating the arena season and getting that gladiator title and mount might be partially found in your skill, but it also depends on which class you and your partners choose.

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