

Hey everyone, it's been awhile! With a bit more than half of the spring split already having been played, I wanted to take some time to discuss the team that has surprised me the most: Rascal Jester.

When I first wrote about this team in my pre-season Power Ranking, I listed this team and AXIZ as my two bottom teams, and both of them have performed significantly better than I had initially expected. On the other hand, it feels like the SoftBank Hawks are just showing up for a paycheck. Relative to how strong this roster should be, last place is a bit embarrassing.

In particular, I want to take a look at Rascal Jester's rookie top laner, Kinatu. Already we've seen significant growth from this player even over the last few weeks. Before we get there though, there are a few things we need to consider first.

Firstly, let's look at how Rascal Jester has been doing. At 5-3, they currently sit firmly in 3rd place. I had some pretty strong feelings about this team prior to week 4. They were good at one thing, and one thing only. However, they were so good at this thing that it got them a bunch of wins.

Secret was insanely good at determining when someone on the other team was out of position, even if it was just by a tiny margin. Then the rest of the team would follow up, and they would turn situations that didn't look like a fight was going to happen into dominant positions. By week 3, Secret and hachamecha were able to coordinate further and pick off members pretty consistently.

However, this came with deficits. When the season started, they had some of the worst macro decisions I've seen from a pro team in a long time. However, even now they have made significant progress. To start, the team would consistently show up to neutral objectives late and stand around looking at the other team hit dragon. Then in weeks 2 and 3, they started trading neutral objectives for cross-map plays, namely hitting towers. Now they're able to get to objectives first more often so they are able to set up fights more effectively.

The second thing to discuss before we look at Kinatu more in depth is the concept of 1st through 5th players. To co-opt an idea from Dota 2, where players are ranked 1-5 in terms of farm priority, basically how much gold you are going to be giving to these players, in League of Legends it is useful to rank players in terms of how much attention and vision they are given as a proxy for how much resources they are given. This changes on a game-to-game basis, but by averaging out over a bunch of games you can get a good idea of how a team likes to play.

In general, your 1st Player is going to be getting the most attention and vision because they are strong playmakers. Easy examples of this include players like Huni or Uzi, where junglers spend a lot of time around them to help set up plays and stifle their opponents from attacking them. On the opposite end, your 5th Player is generally left to their own devices, and are measured by how effectively they can play with no resources. These players tend not to stick out in our minds as much, but Paz and Ceros are some names in the LJL that come to mind.

It is worth noting that supports can be your 1st Player, and often are. Major playmaking supports like Aphromoo, or vision gods like Mata can be 1st Players, because of how much you need to play around them. The key thing to pay attention to is how much presence a player has in a game. If they aren't pushing the tempo themselves, threatening to make big plays, or by scaling and forcing the enemy team to do something, they can't be a 1st Player.

Traditional carries can also be 5th Players, like C9 Sneaky. In the US, you sometimes hear these players referred to as "role players", as in, they play their role, they do what they are expected to do, no more, no less.

You don't need to try and quantify what makes someone which player on a given team or in a given game. It is simply a useful concept to help think about what you are expecting from a player and evaluate their performance within the context of what they are given. This is important because if you try to evaluate Sneaky by the same metrics by which you evaluate Doublelift, you won't get a very meaningful answer because they have different expectations of what they need to be doing in a game.

I encourage you to think of a team you like to watch and see if you can easily place their players 1-5. There are far more useful, and thereby correct, answers than there are incorrect ones, so don't be surprised if the list you come up with differs from what someone else thinks.

That said, throughout the first half of spring, for Rascal Jester, I would rank the players as the following:

1. Secret
2. hachamecha
3. Ssol
4. Recap
5. Kinatu

Again, this changes from game to game.

It's worth noting though, that until their game against the Hawks, I'm pretty sure Kinatu didn't receive a single gank. They considered it a few times, but never committed to it. Kinatu didn't receive almost any vision support, and was expected to teleport to fights, sometimes to his personal detriment. Even in the game he played Renekton, the kind of character you usually try and gank a lot, he received no help.

So, as a 5th Player, how did he stack up?

Pretty solidly. In the context of his team, Kinatu has done his job and has been a fantastic role player. You'll notice that his individual KDA is heavily correlated with how well the rest of his team is doing, which is pretty standard for 5th Players. In their wins, he has a KDA of 21.0. In their losses, he has a KDA of 1.5. He's not dying at abnormal rates, like some 5th Players do.

He's able to participate in fights because he's not super far behind, and through the first 3 weeks, he fairly consistently was able to create some zone of control in fights to buy space for the rest of his team to do what they needed to do.

Now, the thing that excites me, is that in their game against the Hawks, Kinatu showed he can do a lot more than be the 5th Player on his team. Rascal Jester gave him some attention from Secret and hachamecha and actually ganked his lane to dive apaMEN and push him off the tower. While I still wouldn't put him as the 1st Player, in this game he was at least 3rd Player, maybe even 2nd. And he did WELL. While he didn't make big highlight plays, he was able to function effectively with the extra gold and had a proportionally increased presence in the game.

This makes Kinatu, and the rest of Rascal Jester, considerably more adaptable and thereby dangerous. A rookie having the ability to play multiple roles on a team is uncommon and valuable. I'm excited to see how he is able to play the rest of the split, and continue to build an identity.

However, there are still some things I would like to see to help take him to the next level.

I want to see a larger champion pool. He has played 3 champions so far: Aatrox, Gnar, and Renekton. These are typically strongside champions, and therefore usually champions you see played by Players 1-3. Champions like Ornn, Gangplank, and Gragas are on average better when played by Player 5 because they don't need as much gold to function.

I want to see proactive diving teleports. So far, Recap and Kinatu have generally had mediocre teleport usage. If you are going to be leaving Kinatu as your weakside 5th Player, use that to your advantage. Set up dives where he teleports to the minions crashing into the turret, or let him use his teleport for lane so he doesn't have as large of a deficit in early laning.

I want to see more lane freezes. This is kind of the opposite of the above point, but they don't have to be mutually exclusive. You can't teleport to the opposite side of the map while freezing a wave, because your opponent will push the wave and you'll lose a ton of minions. But if you're not planning to teleport out, freezing a wave puts the opposing top laner in a dangerous position if they don't have a lot of vision control, because now that Rascal Jester have shown they are willing to gank for Kinatu, they have to respect the possibility that hachamecha could be right around the corner.

Overall, I have been pleasantly surprised by both Kinatu and the rest of Rascal Jester. While I think they have a ways to go before they can contest for the top spot, as they still need to clean up some of their macro decisions and teamfights, they have already outperformed my initial expectations. I'm excited to see how they look going forward, because their newfound adaptability will make them very dangerous.

Author: [@Joushi_TV](#)

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