

March 31, 2012

Written by Jeff Angus

Friday, 30 March 2012 22:14 - Last Updated Saturday, 31 March 2012 14:26

Brad Richards has seven goals and 22 points in March.

He had nine goals and 23 points in December, January, and February, combined.

Breaking news: Nick Backstrom is back in for the Capitals tonight. I'd wager he has a significant impact.

Dallas prospect Reilly Smith was seeing time in the top six last night towards the end of the game - he showed good jump, creating a few chances and even hitting the post on one of his shots.

Need goalie stats desperately? Sebastian Caron may be a good late season add.

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Tampa prospect JT Brown (the recently signed college star) is making his NHL debut tonight.

Happy 41st birthday to the Russian Rocket, Pavel Bure!

The Sharks dipped into the NCAA UFA pool, signing defenseman Matt Tennyson from Western Michigan.

Tennyson scored 11 goals and had 24 points in 42 games. He is a California native, and the first member of the 'Junior Sharks' to sign with the real Sharks. The Junior Sharks are an elite junior hockey club in California.

[Anze Kopitar](#) now has 25 goals on the season. He had 25 goals last season, as well. Two years ago, he scored 34.

Kopitar would probably be closer to 34 goals this season if it wasn't for a horrific offensive slump in December, which saw him score only twice in 23 games. He has seven goals in the month of March. Consider him a buy-low for next season (assuming someone is silly enough to move the talented young center).

[Jeff Carter](#) was seen before the Kings/Flames game wearing a walking boot - suffice to say he did not play. He has had multiple foot injuries in the past, but no news on what, exactly, this latest one is.

Typical Oilers game - a goal from the kids (Eberle), and a loss. They sure do know how to tank.

Steve Tambellini tried to recall [Magnus Paajarvi](#) from the AHL, but the move was ruled ineligible because the Oilers have already made four post trade deadline recalls and demotions. Surprising but not shocking that the Edmonton management group misread the CBA (or simply forgot about it).

[Alexander Radulov](#) had two points last night, and has five in five games since returning. I'd consider him a 75-80 point forward (assuming he sticks around after this season).

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Max Lapierre made the most of his first line promotion – three points, including his first goal in a while. He's turned into a pretty solid two-way forward in Vancouver since coming over from Anaheim last season.

[Henrik Sedin](#) had three helpers. He played with Burrows and Lapierre.

[Roberto Luongo](#) was supposed to start last night, but [Cory Schneider](#) drew in at the last minute. Luongo felt a slight twinge in his neck during the warm up and pulled himself from starting - it doesn't sound serious, though.

First goal in 15 games for [Steve Ott](#) last night.

Alex Burrows has 25 or more goals in four consecutive seasons. Not bad for a former ECHL player.

[Cam Atkinson](#) is going to be a hell of an NHL forward. Tons of skill, and he plays with confidence. Wants to be a playmaker every time he is on the ice.

Atkinson had three shots in about 16 minutes of ice time.

[Nikita Nikitin](#) 's breakout season continues – three points for the Jackets last night, and almost 26 minutes of ice time. He's a top pairing, front line defenseman since coming mover from St. Louis. The Blue Jackets are a lousy team, but it is still impressive what he has done.

[Zach Bogosian](#) 's NHL career has been a disappointment to date, but don't write him off just yet. He is still young and defensemen sometimes take nonlinear paths to their future roles. Bogosian had three helpers and five shots for the Jets last night.

[Roman Josi](#) was a plus-3 and had four shots on goal in his first game back in a few weeks.

Crosby had four points for the Pens last night – another dominant performance for him. Not

much else to say, really.

[Tyler Ennis](#) has to be one of the hottest forwards in the league over the last few months – he scored again last night, and is showing why many pegged him as a future top line talent. Lack of size is his only weakness – so quick, smart, and skilled.

Malkin had seven shots on goal and two points. Neal scored and is only two goals away from 40. When was the last time linemates/teammates were 1-2 in shots on goal for the entire league?

Big game for Michael Del Zotto last night – three points and a couple of shots on goal. The Rangers are trying to figure out where he fits in as the playoffs approach – I think last night gave them a good look on what he can do in offensive situations.

[Emerson Etem](#) is tearing up the WHL playoffs right now. In Game 2 of his series with Medicine Hat (against Saskatoon), the physical winger had five points. In Game 3, he had three goals in a 3-2 win. He's going to force Anaheim to make some tough decisions next season, as they will want to have some roster spots open for the likes of [Kyle Palmieri](#) , [Peter Holland](#) , and Devante Smith-Pelly.

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In an unsurprising bit of news, Justin Schultz is [unlikely to sign with the Ducks](#) before the NHL season ends.

Two players who are having strong finishes to the season on Long Island – [Josh Bailey](#) and [Kyle Okposo](#)

Bailey has 11 points in his last five games, and eight in his last two. He's looking much better and more dangerous at the NHL level as a winger, which bodes well once [Ryan Strome](#) is ready to play a top-six role (not next year, maybe the one after).

Okposo had an abysmal start in October, but he has an outside shot at 25 goals. He may never be the 40-goal guy many expected or hoped, but he's a solid player who will be a contributor wherever he plays. He's still pretty young and he's been on some awful hockey clubs – don't forget that.

Who starts game one for the Caps – [Tomas Vokoun](#) , [Braden Holtby](#) , or [Michal Neuvirth](#) ? My money is on Neuvirth.

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The Canucks are expecting [Daniel Sedin](#) back for game one of round one. I wouldn't anticipate a return any time sooner.

[Kevin Bieksa](#) is sitting out with a minor injury. He'd be playing if these games were more important – the team likely wants to get him 100% and ready to go.

[Jordan Schroeder](#) is [having a solid season](#) in the AHL (40 points in 68 games is far from incredible, but his overall improvement has been impressive) – he scored twice on Wednesday night in Abbotsford, and could see some time in the NHL as early as next season.

I'd expect Schneider to start two of the final five Canucks games (Luongo is getting the call against Dallas tonight).

[A thorough breakdown](#) of Luongo and Schneider. Lots of statistics used to compare the two Vancouver 'tenders.

"One thing is clear that Luongo is not responsible for how other players play., especially since his performance in Vancouver has been top notch. That is unfair. Still, in the playoffs the margin for error is acutely small. Boston with the greatest goalie ever - ("gotta pump Timmy's tires"), went to game seven three times including one overtime game last year. So, it's clear, every edge counts. As big a fan of Roberto as I am, I feel the time has come! I say start Cory."

Nashville stud prospect (and eventual [Ryan Suter](#) replacement) [Roman Josi](#) played last night. He'd missed the previous nine games with an injury.

Did you know... [David Aebischer](#) is playing in the AHL? The former starter in Colorado is the goalie for the Jets farm team... I only noticed when [checking the box score](#) from their most recent game. Their opponent, the Norfolk Admirals, have won 21 straight games.

I am working on my top 10 keeper league defenseman list now. I have finished with the lists for both prospect defensemen and prospect forwards.

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Here is my defenseman list from [2010](#), and here is the [2011 list](#). I made a bold call back in 2010 with Karlsson on the list (he was an unproven rookie at the time).

These lists are also meant to show how quickly things can change. Only two years ago [Andrei Markov](#) was a top-of-the-class offensive defenseman. Now? He's an afterthought. [Tomas Kaberle](#) wouldn't be on the top 50 defenseman list, let alone the top 10, like he was back in 2010.

One thing is for sure – 2012 will mark the end of [Mike Green](#)'s reign at the top of the list.

Number 38 for Neal - what a sick pass from Crosby:

{youtube}A1V3oCebFhc{/youtube}

Schneider robs Eriksson - beauty save:

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{youtube}CYbw3vpTOlg{/youtube}