

Brian Campbell: The X-Factor

Written by Jeff Angus

Wednesday, 09 April 2008 02:22 - Last Updated Wednesday, 09 April 2008 06:04



The San Jose Sharks come in to the post-season firing on all cylinders. They possess the best Vezina candidate in net, one of the most dominant forward in the Western Conference, and a great supporting cast. Coupled with this is the fact that both Marleau and Cheechoo seem to be rounding into form after horrendous starts to the season. But the main reason for their recent hot play has been without question the trade deadline acquisition of Brian Campbell.

Campbell is a dynamic skater that can break down a team and quarterback a deadly powerplay unit. He has added a dimension that the Sharks had previously lacked: a game breaker on the back end. He is a free agent after this season so you know there is some extra motivation, and he could be in line to receive a massive contract, especially if he can help the Sharks capture the Stanley Cup.

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Other X-Factors:

Jamie Langenbrunner always steps his game up come post-season, and is an obvious pick for any playoff pool. The Devils are a bit weak on the back end, and need to get their dreadful powerplay in order if they plan on overcoming the Rangers top-ranked PK unit.

Jose Theodore has never lost in the first round before, and is playing for a new contract. Expect him to push the Avalanche through the first round, and potentially further (if their defense can hold up).

Alexander Radulov broke out last playoffs against the Sharks. The Wings are a nearly impossible hurdle for Nashville to overcome, but do not count the Predators out if they can get scoring from three lines.

Mike Green is arguably the best skating defenseman in the East. His speed can wear the Philly defense down, and open up space for the likes of Ovechkin, Semin, and Fedorov.

Ryan Getzlaf is the key to the Ducks winning the first round. Their depth up the middle behind him is pitiful, and his wingman Perry is still injured.

The entire Dallas defense is the key to their cup hopes. It looks like Sergei Zubov will be out during the first round, and he was phenomenal last season, logging huge minutes against the Canucks.