The panel is back! Over the last four years, our record as a consensus is an impressive 46-14. Last year, we went 12-3 as a group. Gates Imbeau led the way individually, correctly selecting the winners in 12 of the 15 series. Read on to find out who we like in the first round, as well as our picks for the Cup winner, runner up, the Conn Smythe winner, and the top five scorers.

In the first round, the panel squeeked out a 4-4 record. Tim Lucarelli and Brendan Ross were the only members to correctly predict a LAK upset over VAN.

Expert	*NSH vs. PHX*	*STL vs. LAK*	*PHI vs. NJD*	*NYR vs. WSH*
Dobber	NSH in 6	STL in 5	PHI in 4	
Jeff Angus	NSH in 7	LAK in 7	PHI in 6	
Peter Harling	NSH in 6	STL in 4	PHI in 7	
Ryan Ma	NSH in 6	STL in 6	NJD in 7	
Chris Nichols	PHX in 7	STL in 7	PHI in 6	
Ian Fergusson	NSH in 7	STL in 6	PHI in 5	
Gates Imbeau	NSH in 6	STL in 7	PHI in 6	
Marty Kwiaton	NSH in 6	STL in 7	PHI in 6	
Anthony Lancione	NSH in 6	LAK in 5	PHI in 6	
Steve Laidlaw	NSH in 6	STL in 6	PHI in 5	
Glen Hoos	NSH in 5	LAK in 7	PHI in 5	
Tim Lucarelli	NSH in 6	STL in 6	PHI in 6	

Dave Poleck	NSH in 6	STL in 7	PHI in 6
Chris Wassel	NSH in 6	STL in 6	NJD in 7
Brian Kom	NSH in 6	STL in 7	PHI in 5
Michael Amato	NSH in 5	STL in 6	PHI in 5
Brendan Ross	NSH in 6	LAK in 7	PHI in 5
Consensus	**NSH in 6**	**STL in 6**	**PHI in 5**

The why...

East: (1) NYR vs. (7) WSH

Tim Lucarelli on Washington -

You successfully picked Washington last round, and now you have picked them again. Discuss!

How much ice time do you see Ovechkin getting per game?

Lucarelli : I picked Washington for one reason - Nicklas Backstrom. With him back in the lineup, the Caps are a different team. Most people forget to take into account the fact that he missed 40 games when they put together their predictions.

Beating the Rangers will definitely be tough, but they have the tools to do it.

Ovechkin SHOULD be playing 18-20+ per game. The more Hunter snubs him, the hungrier he will be down the road. He will eventually be playing so well that Hunter has no choice but to play

him more.

Glen Hoos on New York -

How will the Rangers avoid pulling a Boston-like fate?

Who is the X-factor in the series? (Other than the tenders.)

Hoos : Boston just hasn't been the same team the past few months. The big rematch with Vancouver in January seemed like a turning point for the worst (for both clubs). They didn't show the same hunger that they had last season, a common struggle for defending champs of late. The Rangers, on the other hand, have the hunger. I think the close call against Ottawa will only make them more focused this round, and they will look more like the team that finished first in the East.

My picks for x-factors would be Dan Girardi and Ryan Callahan. Girardi is a shot-blocking demon, and surprised with his offensive contributions in round one. Callahan is everything you want in a playoff competitor, and will lead by example.

East: (4) PHI vs. (6) NJD

Dobber on Philadelphia -

Predicting a Philly sweep? What makes this match up so unbalanced?

What will be the biggest story of the series?

Dobber : I don't believe in Martin Brodeur and I do believe in the Philly offense. In hindsight, I should have went with five games and assumed that Johan Hedberg gets involved. Brodeur has been getting win facing lower quality shots than most other goaltenders. That stops now.

Biggest story will be the Devils getting lit up like a Christmas tree. Not as bad as Fleury was, but still pretty significant.

Ryan Ma and Chris Wassel on New Jersey -

Pretty bold picks in selecting a Devils victory, how do you think they'll pull it off?

What's going to be the biggest story of the series?

Wassel : Philly lets down a bit in Game 1 especially due to rust and a goalie who can get "lost" at times. Philadelphia's PK was so-so in Round 1 and could have been exploited worse. Martin Brodeur just needs to stay focused knowing its okay to give up a few in each game. Coach Peter DeBoer at some point breaks up Zach Parise and Ilya Kovalchuk. Kovalchuk tends to work better with Adam Henrique. The fourth line has been great but if the other two lines do something then the Devils have a shot to really pull this one off.

What will be the biggest story?

It is going to be a guy like Adam Henrique or David Clarkson. These are guys that just get muddled in on ice battles but they also get in those scoring areas. Clarkson has been far more snake-bit and mostly everyone is drawn to the top lines and rightfully so. However, this is a series where the marquis may have a different stage in mind so expect it.

Ma : I just think this is their year… In terms of depth I think they have surprisingly good depth…

You got your big three of Kovo, Parise, Elias… then you kinda got good support with Zajac, Sykora, Zubrus, then you got timely scoring from Henrique, Clarkson, Poni, Gionta… So I mean they're not as superstar (Giroux, Briere, Jagr) status as the Flyers, but I think they got good timely depth in the bottom 6 (Rinaldo, Wellwood, JVR, Talbot, Couturier) than the Flyers.

The big kicker is probably the lack of offensive-defensive depth, which will be what determines this series. If the Flyers make it run-and-gun like they did with Pens, they'll win. If the Devils make it tight-close checking like they did with the Panthers, they'll win. The thing is if you look at the D, Zidlicky has done his job as the offensive QB, while the bottom/2nd pairing have gone defensive and perfect for defensive playoff hockey. Salvador (19 Hits, 10 BS), Volchenkov (15 hits, 10 BS), Greene (14 Hits, 6 BS), those guys have kinda all played their roles. If they can keep the Flyers at bay, they'll have a good chance of winning, but if Flyers run-and-gun it'll be over in 4…

Another big factor for me is goalies… Brodeur (2.06 and .922) has been solid in getting the job done. The Panthers were close because of Theo/Clem stealing a couple of games for them. If Bryz/Bob play like how they did in the first series (4.33 GAA, .856 SP), Kovo, Parise, Elias will have a field day on them. The Devils won't fall into the trap like the Pens of trying to out gun them. They'll stick to the 2-way tight checking game.

Shot differential is another big one I looked into, Brodeur faces such a low amount of shots per game cause of the tight checking D of the Devils… The Flyers are good at scoring if they can get the puck on net, but the problem is can they do that against the Devils?

Biggest story I think will be Brodeur vs Bryz… or the collapse of Bryz. He got bailed out of the first series cause Fleury was terrible, I don't think Brodeur will bail him out for a 2nd consecutive time… It'll make all the fans in Philly really re-think whether or not Bryz is a good playoff goalie (career 2.77 GAA and .909 SP) and worthy of the contract that he received or whether he was a good goalie based on systems hockey…

Chris Nichols on (3) PHX vs. (4) NSH

You were the lone panelist to pick Phoenix. How will they complete the task of beating the Preds?

Nichols : The fact that that I'm the only one of the 17-member panel to pick Phoenix to win surprises me. I respect the depth of the Preds, their cycling ability and all of the usual points (Coaching, Weber & Suter, addition of Radulov, blah, blah, blah). You know what though? I love me some Dave Tippett.

His system and Sean Burke's teachings have channeled some serious goaltending mojo for Mike Smith, who has been one of fantasy's best stories this season. In a hard-fought series, sometimes a guy like Smith standing on his head is all that matters. The gut said Phoenix in a tight series. I don't argue with the gut. I just feed it.

By the way, this is much longer than my initially-considered response to the question, which

was simply 'Mike Smith'."