

Many would consider the New Jersey Devils a contender going into the NHL post-season, and the rental addition of super-sniper, Ilya Kovulchuk, was a clear sign that Lou Lamoriello and crew felt the same. But with 14 games remaining the Devils seem to have taken a step backwards of late. Did the Devils peak too early, and is the new kid in town the problem?

#### **Something Wicked This Way Comes**

Written by Brent Lemon Wednesday, 17 March 2010 10:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42

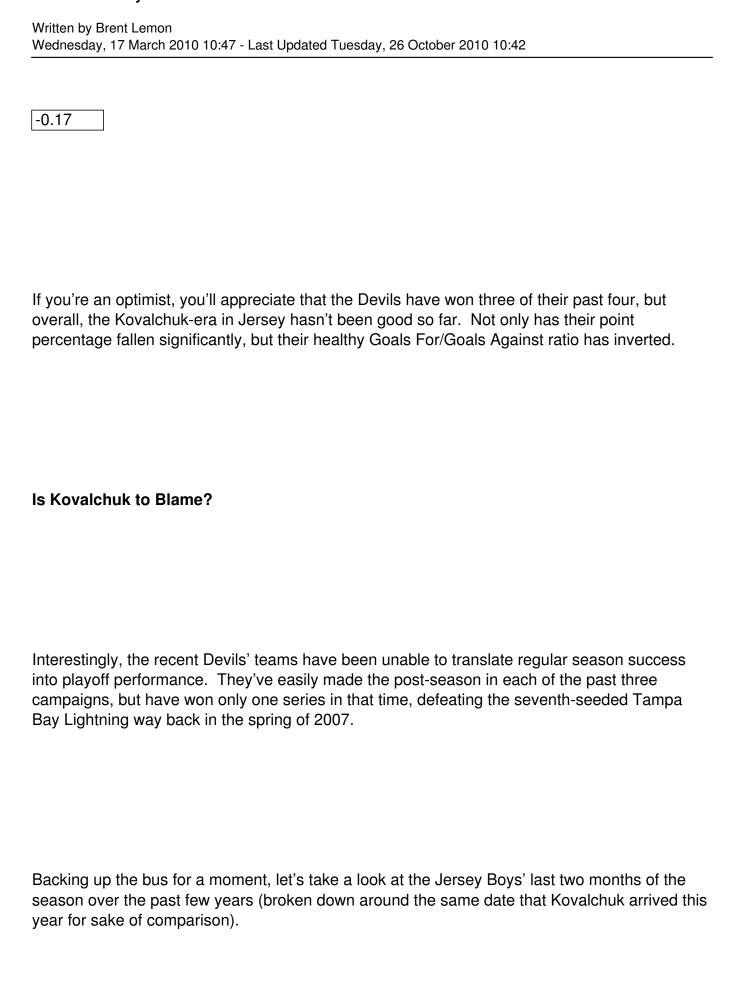
The Devils brought Hall-of-Famer Jacques Lemaire back as head coach this season after Brent Sutter allegedly developed a severe case of homesickness. Some thought that this might erode their offense, but stars like Parise continued to produce, and by the beginning of February the Devils certainly looked dominant. On February 3

, Allan Muir of SI.com even ranked them as the number one team in the NHL, despite the fact that four other teams owned better records. He argued, "they're simply playing better than any team after eight straight wins and an 11-3 mark in January."

2009-10		
GP		
Points Earned		
Point%		
GF		
GA		
GF-GA		

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Pre-5 Feb
55
72
0.655
2.55
2.24
0.21
The addition of an impact player like Kovalchuk looked to many as the proverbial icing on the (devil food?) cake. Yet, since Kovalchuk played his first game on February 5 <sup>th</sup> , the Devils' record has been less than delectable, and they've slipped considerably in the standings.
2009-10

Written by Brent Lemon Wednesday, 17 March 2010 10:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42
GP
Points Earned
Point%
GF
GA
GF-GA
Post-5 Feb
13 (with 14 remaining)
13
0.500
3.08
3.25



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New Jersey	Devils
GP	
Points	
Point%	
CF	
GF	
GA	
GF-GA	
0000 00	
2008-09	
Pre-	
5 Feb	
51	

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67				
0.644				
3.04				
2.51				
0.53				
Post-				
5 Feb				
31				
39				
0.629				
2.68				
2.55				

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0.13
2007-08
Pre-
5 Feb
53
63
0.594
2.53
2.40
0.13
Post-

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5 Feb				
29				
36				
0.621				
2.21				
2.28				
-0.07				
2006-07				
Pre-				
5 Feb				
53				
70				

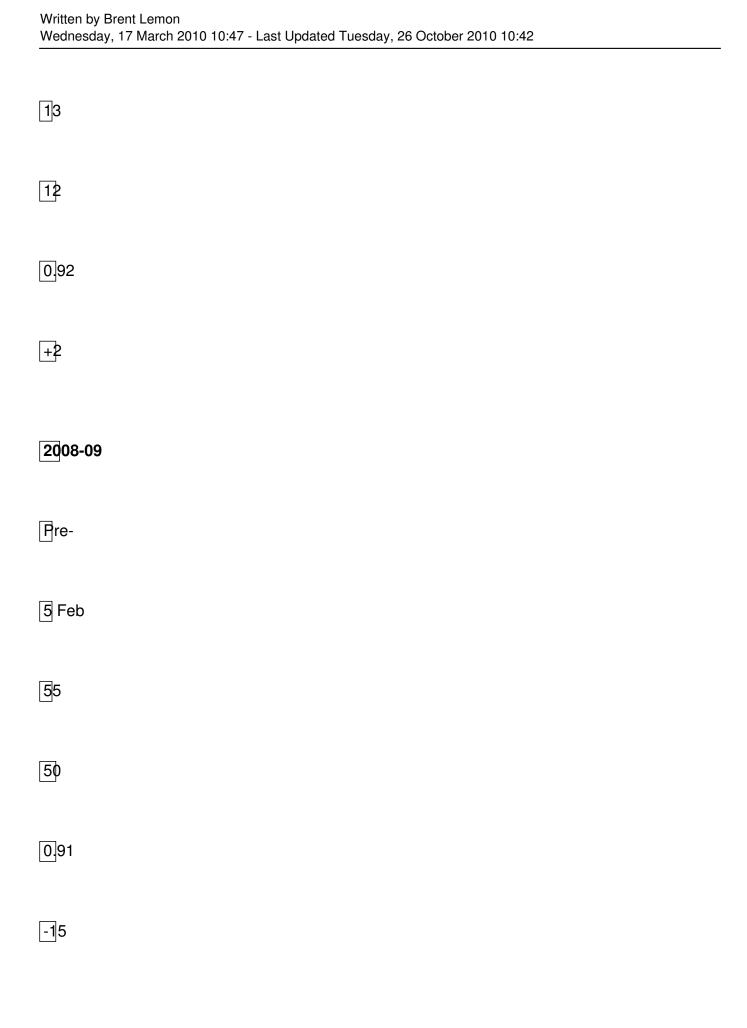
Written by Brent Lemon Wednesday, 17 March 2010 10:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42					
0.660					
2.60					
2.28					
0.32					
Post-					
5 Feb					
29					
37					
0.638					
2.34					
2.48					

Written by Brent Lemon Wednesday, 17 March 2010 10:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42
-0.14
In each year, the Devils have either let their point percentage, their GF/GA ratio, or both slip in the final two months of the season. These are hardly numbers that would have intimidated their playoff competition.
For whatever reason, the recent Devils' teams do not enter the post-season at their best.
So let's compare Kovalchuk's final two months of play against the rest of his season over the past few years (again February 5 <sup>th</sup> was used as a dividing point for consistency).
Iyla Kovalchuk
<b>GP</b>
Points

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**Point Pace** Plus/Minus 2009-10 Pre-5 Feb 49 58 1.18 +1 Post-5 Feb



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Post-		
5 Feb		
27		
41		
1,52		
+3		
2007-08		
Pre-		
5 Feb		
55		
64		

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Wednesday, 17 March 2010 10:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42 1.16 -15 Post-5 Feb 27 23 0.85 +3 2006-07 Pre-5 Feb

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Wednesday, 17 March 2010 10:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42 55 56 1.02 -2 Post-5 Feb 27 20 0.74 0

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While Kovalchuk's scoring has dipped slightly after his trade to the Devils, he's hardly in a slump. And looking back, it turns out that Kovie is a pretty decent player in the final two months of the season, particularly when it comes to defensive play – he has put up some fantastic plus/minus in those late months.

There are too many variables (like dressing room chemistry, etc.) that can't be measured to rule absolutely, but is certainly doesn't look like the current Jersey woes are Kovalchuk's fault. Instead, there may be something else at work in New Jersey.

There is some truth to the theory that strong teams don't always do as well down the final stretch; the resting of star players and a slight reduction in motivation are often cited as reasons. Unfortunately, it would take a Nicholas Chabotian-sized statistical effort to determine the exact significance of the Devil's numbers through comparison against the rest of the league, but it would be interesting. But what isn't debatable is the fact that the recent iterations of the Devils tend to play soft in the final two months of the season, and ultimately they haven't done well in the playoffs. It might be happening all over again.

This is a disturbing trend for the Devils' fans and perhaps a warning for those poolies who are thinking of selecting their players in playoff pools.

Watch the results of the remaining 14 games closely – maybe the Devils will turn it around – but if not, be wary in your pools.

# The New Jersey Devils: Is it Kovalchuk's Fault? Written by Brent Lemon Wednesday, 17 March 2010 10:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 October 2010 10:42 In Two Week's Time in Lemon Aid... What you absolutely, positively must do with your fantasy team before the regular fantasy season shuts down.