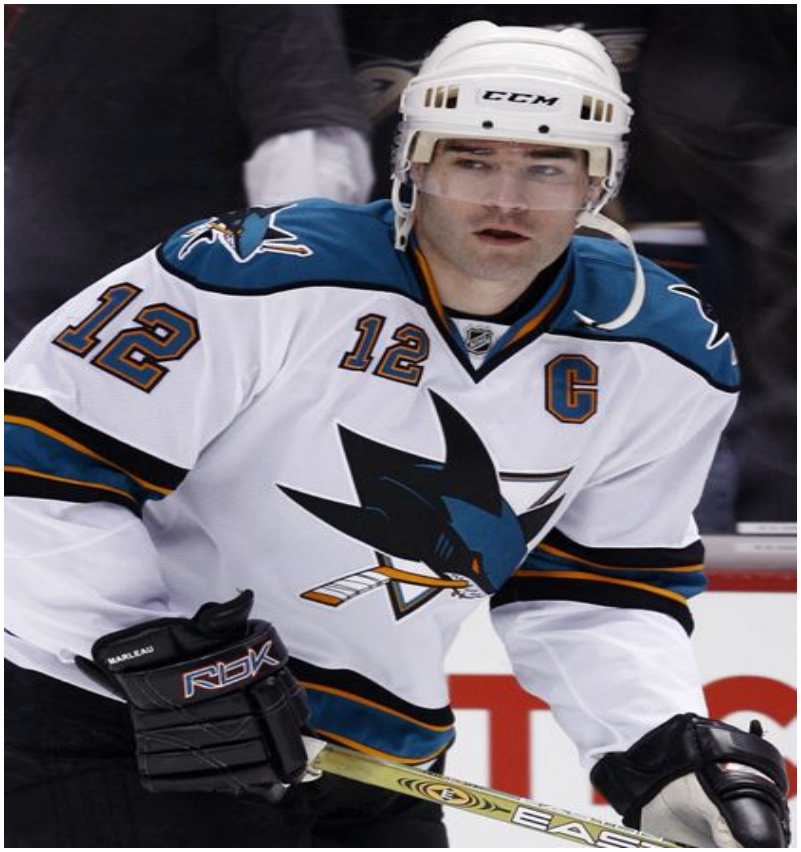

Aneroid, Saskatchewan is best known for two things: a piece of lost survey equipment and NHL star, Patrick Marleau. And with all due respect to that long-ago misplaced aneroid barometer, you're probably more interested in the 44-goal-scoring former captain of the San Jose Sharks.

In this age of overwhelming information, it is refreshingly unclear whether or not Marleau was actually born in Aneroid (some sources suggest he was born in nearby Swift Current), but he did spend his childhood growing up in the tiny hamlet in the southwest corner of Canada's most-difficult-to spell province before being drafted by the Seattle Thunderbirds of the Western Hockey League in 1995.

The Sharks selected Marleau second overall (behind Joe Thornton) in 1997, and eventually presented him with the captaincy in the second half of the 2003-04 season.

But while San Jose's regular season successes became to accumulate, Marleau and company began to attract criticism for not being able to get it done in the playoffs, exiting early year after year after year. Eric Duhatschek recently wrote that in professional sports, "the greatest sin of all seems to be being good, but maybe just not quite good enough."

San Jose ordered the 'C' ripped from Marleau's sweater during last year's offseason.

And then, amazingly, Marleau enjoyed his best year of hockey, earning an Olympic gold medal and shooting his way to a personal high in goals scored during the regular season, plus he racked up13 points in the post-season (including the goal that dumped the Detroit Red Wings from the post-season). He finished 14th in Yahoo rankings, up from 77th the year before, and 144th the before that.

All this success comes with a punch line however; the 30-year-old goes into this off-season as Unrestricted Free Agent (UFA).

It's been a wide ride in the last few years, but what can poolies expect from the intriguing son-of-Saskatchewan in 2010-11?

Marleau's Numbers

GP

Goals

Points

Points After First 15 Games

Projected points based first 15 games over an 82-game schedule

1999/00

81

17

40

8

43.7 (3.7 more than actual)

2000/01

81

25

52

12

65.6 (14.6 more)

2001/02

79

21

44

7

38.3 (5.7 fewer)

2002/03

82

28

57

8

43.7 (13.3 fewer)

2003/04

80

28

57

7

38.7 (18.3 fewer)

2005/06

82

34

86

16

87.5 (1.5 more)

2006/07

77

32

78

13

71.1 (6.9 fewer)

2007/08

78

18

48

5

27.3 (20.7 fewer)

2008/09

76

38

71

16

87.5 (16.5 more)

2009/10

82

44

83

21

114.8 (31.8 more)

Marleau has been a durable member of the Sharks' dressing room, never missing more than a handful of games on behalf of his owners in any given campaign.

Further, while the last two seasons have witnessed Marleau's two hottest scoring starts in the past ten years, they are not a universal trend (and in fact, the 2008/09 relatively hot start is partially explained by Marleau's missing of eight games that year). However, it would seem that for most of his best years, he has gotten off to a relatively quick start. Conversely, never has a quick start led to a dismal year final for Marleau.

What's Ahead in 2010/11?

The biggest unknown for Marleau and poolies interested in owning him has to be where will he play next year?

The Fourth Period reported that "It has been widely speculated that the Sharks might go in a different direction this summer and opt against signing Marleau to a new contract."

As for Marleau, the Mercury News reported that "the player who scored five of San Jose's seven goals in the Western Conference finals, sort of sounded like someone who wanted to stay where he is after his contract expires June 30.

There's lots of time to think about that," Marleau said. "We love San Jose. We'll see how every thing works out."

Some have speculated that because of the Marleau family's love of California that he will take offers from the Los Angeles Kings or Anaheim Ducks very seriously. The Kings are very much in the market for a scorer and while most rumours talk about Ilya Kovalchuck, some, including Lyle "Spector" Richardson, think the Kings will pursue Marleau over Kovie.

Now that's likely a tempting image for some owners: Marleau on Anze Kopitar's wing. But before we get caught up in the novelty of Marleau in a Kings' sweater, we must remember that he spent most of his brilliant 2009/10 season working with Dany Heatley and Joe Thornton – hardly regular season slouches.

Further, despite playing for a single NHL franchise his entire career, Marleau has watched the Sharks almost constantly evolve around him. If Lombardi successfully persuades the Marleaus to move south along Highway 5 there will be some who predict radical changes to Patrick's scoring, but the veteran's scoring trends have already weathered some significant changes and wild changes are unlikely.

Marleau's demonstrated ability to pile up points makes him a tempting target for your squad this fall, but as his scoring trends illustrate, he is less than entirely predictable despite his durability. This year's UFA status further complicates things – likely raising poolie interest but also further clouding predictions for 2010/11.

And that unpredictability seems deliciously ironic for a man from a town named after a barometer.