

April 23, 2012

Written by Dobber

Monday, 23 April 2012 00:03 - Last Updated Monday, 23 April 2012 10:02

I muse below about which defensive team could meet the defensive LA Kings, but I've just found out that their next opponent is known. St. Louis, known for winning lots of 1-0 games, will face Los Angeles, known for winning lots of 1-0 games. Quick vs. Elliott, because I think Hitchcock is going to ride each goalie until they lose or play badly and right now it's Elliott's to lose. Now, six months ago the thought of a 'Brian Elliott vs. Jon Quick' as an epic goaltending battle was laughable. It's funny the difference that six months makes.

The Penguins are out, and with it my chances of winning two of my three playoff pools. And that's where my love of this team ends. Without hockey pools, Pittsburgh is just one of thirty. I know some hardcore Philly fans – and Pittsburgh haters – have been teasing me, accusing me of homerism. But the fact is I like the Preds, the Oilers, the Flyers (yes – believe it or not – I just didn't give them a hope in hell two weeks ago) and the Leafs just as much, were it not for my fantasy hockey stake in them. I also like and respect any organization that builds patiently through the draft, or runs a smart company. So the Panthers and Sens are growing on me, and the Red Wings GM Ken Holland is my favorite. Just so we're clear on bias.

The teams that I dislike are the ones without a clue – so the Leafs in the pre-Burke days, the Flames, the Wild before they cleaned house a year or two ago, etc. I'm a businessman who loves good business sense. And that's another reason why I love keeper league fantasy hockey. Run your team like a business. Think short term and long term.

So what went wrong with the Penguins, the best team in the last 20 years other than Detroit in

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the early 00's? They took the Flyers lightly, thinking they could out run-and-gun them in Games 1-3. And you know what? They were probably right...*if* Fleury was on. But he was far from on. Even in Game 4 he was bad, but he was protected. In Game 5 he was finally "on" in the latter two periods.

It's not because the team poured money into "three stars" as someone suggested last week. In fact, they have poured money into six stars (Crosby, Malkin, Staal, Neal, Letang, Fleury). They also did a "buy low" on [Steve Sullivan](#), have Kunitz on the cheap and they have one of the best defensive defensemen in the league with Michalek. Throw in an agitator (Cooke) a jack-of-all trades (Dupuis) and a tenacious checker (Vitale) and the elements are there. From a business standpoint, the Pens have one of the best put-together teams in hockey. But a) they underestimated the Flyers and b) there was no Fleury to bail them out. If Fleury posted even a .890 SP, the Pens would have been fine. But he wasn't even close to that.

Fleury's final save percentage for the round was 0.834. Try to find me any goalie in history who moved onto the next round with that number.

Another reason that the Flyers won? How about the fact that [Claude Giroux](#) is a superstar? Of all the arguments that I got a year ago, and two years ago about

[Steven Stamkos](#)

being part of a "Big 4" I think a better argument can be made about Giroux. While Stamkos could one day get 70 goals...I think 125 points is out of his range. Whereas Giroux could get 125 points. Feasibly. Not saying he will, I'm just saying I won't fall off my chair in shock if he does. I do think we'll see him in that 105-110 range within three years if he stays healthy.

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Giroux has tallied 107 points in 83 games this year!

Signs that Danny Briere is winding down – he’s still a playoff stud, but this is the second year in a row that he’s been a playoff stud after being a regular season dud. And his minus-5, which is a team low, doesn’t bode well either. He’s only 34, and he still dazzles out there. But parts of his game are weakening.

Signs that [Jakub Voracek](#) is winding *up* – he had 15 points in his last 15 regular season games and has seven points in six playoff games in this, his fourth NHL season.

[Eric Wellwood](#) has been so strong defensively I hold little hope for him getting a shot as a second-liner. You’re seeing the makings of a solid checking-line player.

So do the Penguins bring [Steve Sullivan](#) back? Not a whole lot of room under the cap and they have to re-sign Niskanen. Also, do they go with [Brad Thiessen](#) behind Fleury? [Brent Johnson](#)’s contract is up.

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Sharks. Obviously tear it down. At this point, the group they have will not win the Cup. If it's me, I think the coach goes. I also see what the market is for [Patrick Marleau](#) and [Joe Thornton](#) . One or both get moved for some young talent. If they do as well as the Flyers did last summer, they'll be laughing all the way to the bank. They also need to quit pretending Niemi is an above average goaltender. He's average at best, and goes through too many cold streaks. I think the team would do better with Greiss to be honest. But he's not the answer either. Besides – Niemi is signed for another three years.

So what are the moves? Trade one of Thornton or Marleau (or both – but that's hard to swing in the cap world). Buy out Handzus. Let all the UFA's go except maybe [Torrey Mitchell](#) . And let the coach go. Extreme? Yes, but I'm normally pretty patient – I get upset when fans or the media don't give a plan enough time. So when I'm ready to pull the plug, it must be serious! What would you do?

[Patrik Berglund](#) – great rookie season, terrible sophomore season, great third year, terrible fourth year. Another Vinny Prospal? Look at him go with [Andy McDonald](#) (who is signed for another season).

Last week I launched the next wave of fantasy hockey – [dobberprospects.com](#) . If you haven't checked it out, take a look. To my hockey blogger friends – please spread the word! The site is priceless for keeper leagues and it's only going to get better as we fill it with content. Brendan Ross has been filling the ramblings with some great thoughts from around the prospects world.

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[Mark Stone](#) played 8:43 Saturday but he's already outscoring fellow rookie-debut guy Chris Kreider, notching his first assist. He was used properly – limited ice time, quality linemates when he played, and some power-play time. Love it. Hate it when a skill guy comes in and sees time with the pluggers. I'd rather he get one minute playing one shift with two stars, than 12 minutes of action with a checker and an enforcer.

I mused on Twitter that I thought [Raffi Torres](#) would get 20 games, such as with Dale Hunter on Pierre Turgeon. Pretty close! I just knew the hammer would come out though, the media has been clamoring for it for quite some time now.

So Red Wings fans – is [Jimmy Howard](#) the answer? Solid numbers last season, but in the playoffs he's 13-15, 2.63 and 0.915. Not to blame, but with a better team in front of him can he do it? And now that some of the veterans are slowing down, to the Wings start to bring in the kids a little faster? A rebuild won't happen, and isn't needed. But time to let Holmstrom, Hudler and Stuart go. Beg Lidstrom to stay. Graduate [Gustav Nyquist](#) and [Brendan Smith](#). And sign one marquee free agent. Just like that, an awesome team is iced once again.

Danny Cleary [will have surgery](#) to repair torn cartilage on his left knee.

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Historic AHL streak – Norfolk won 29 regular season and playoff games in a row before losing Saturday. Finally. That's Tampa Bay's farm team. The undrafted [Cory Conacher](#) has been leading the way there, and as I've said here many times, he's worthy of a look in keepers.

So how many of you took [Michael Frolik](#) in your playoff pool? A point in each of his three games so far. He went 63 games this season without posting points in three of them in a row.

Not a bad time for [Tyler Seguin](#) to pick up his first two points of the series.

[Rich Peverley](#) has been huge for the B's so far. Coming off his best points-per-game average of his career, he's stepped up his production further. He's in his prime, so if healthy I think he'll bury his career high of 55 points next year.

With [Mike Green](#)'s goal yesterday, give him 33 points in his last 87 games.

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So that brings us to the Canucks. Blame [Cory Schneider](#) . Couldn't get it done. Terrible.

That line was a joke, of course. But I think a few Canucks fans popped a vein in their forehead when they read that. Actually, Schneider's 1.31 and 0.960 numbers are more than enough to win a series. The team just couldn't score. They were up against a team that had trouble scoring all season long but won enough games to get into the playoffs because their goalie and system often would not allow more than one goal against. Vancouver tried to out-defense the Kings just like the Penguins tried to out-offense the Flyers – but the Kings have been squeaking out wins that way all season ...and the Flyers have been blasting pucks by opponents while allowing beach balls through all season.

If it comes down to it, I pray (as a fantasy owner) that the Flyers and their 6-5 ways face the Kings and their 1-0 ways in the Final... that the 6-5 way will win. I would love the copycat trend that it would start.

So what happens to the Kings if they end up playing the 1-0 Blues, the 1-0 Coyotes or the 1-0 Predators? Now those are teams that could go toe to toe with the Kings in this sort of thing.

Zach Kassian was a healthy scratch for the first time. MA Gragnani didn't get into a playoff game, one year after leading his team in playoff scoring.

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So is zero points and minus-3 the last we see from [Sami Salo](#) ? The 37 year old is a UFA in the summer.

Only four players on the Kings were in the red on the plus/minus ledger – including [Jeff Carter](#) and [Mike Richards](#)

For now, the links on the players here aren't working. For some reason, once clicked, it adds "25" to the link towards the end. But if you remove the "25" from the link it will go to the player. It's part of a long list of things we're still working on for the site. The list includes – [DobberBase](#) logins, [ball](#) mobile access, the new shop that will be up by next weekend (and when it's up I'll have the Keeper League Fantasy Pack up for sale!), and the [Frozen Pool](#) links. I think in that order, too.

By the way, if you want to check in on how you're doing in my free playoff pool, the link is in the menu along the top, check it anytime. And please support our sponsors – The [Fan Zoo](#) and [Cool Hockey](#), whenever you're in the market for products that they sell. Without them, this would just be a free fun playoff pool with nothing on the line. Because of them, the winners get cool –quality -

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stuff.

[Tim Thomas](#) with the paddle down beauty – wasn't going in anyway, but it would have bounced off the post and along the line for an easy tap-in if any Caps were around:

{youtube}n_FI4SfCIKw{/youtube}

[Claude Giroux](#) hammers Crosby and then scores a beauty.

{youtube}JEVdL2Ej_AA{/youtube}