

**March 3, 2013**

Written by Chris Nichols

Sunday, 03 March 2013 00:05 - Last Updated Sunday, 03 March 2013 23:00

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Wayne Simmonds has five goals in his past six starts, with totals of 7-5-12 over his last 11 GP. In that same span he's added 19 hits and 19 PIM. Linemate Danny Briere has collected 3-5-8 in his past eight outings, while Brayden Schenn can add an assist to his stellar February splits of 6-10-16 in 15 GP. This was also the third time this season in which he's registered five hits, bringing his overall total to 54 in his 22 starts. That's about the same strong pace he had last year.

\*

The rave reviews continue to roll in for Jakub Voracek, who fired home his ninth goal of the season against the Sens. In his first four campaigns, he netted 38, 50, 46 and 49-point efforts. To date, he's on pace for a pro-rated 89-point season.

His first eight games saw sporadic production with only 1-2-3, but the Flyers kept the faith in him and continually rolled him out onto the first power play unit time after time. He and Claude Giroux found their way back together and they've been ripping apart opposing defences lately. Giroux's six-game point streak was stopped, but he had 4-8-12 in that short timeframe. He also ran up nine shots against Ottawa with another four blocked, so it's not like there weren't a lot of

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chances for him to extend that streak.

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Simon Gagne had a goal and four shots in his debut earlier in the week. He had three shots and no points Saturday, beginning with the same Sean Couturier and Max Talbot, including secondary power play time.

Luke Schenn has quietly picked up points in four of seven, which can be especially helpful if your league counts hits. He rang up another six hits here, which brings him to 86 overall. With only six points on the year, his overall value may still be hidden a bit in most leagues.

Ilya Bryzgalov has stopped 23 of 24 in his past two starts now, so he's slowly chipping away at his fantasy owners' numbers. He has also won five of his past seven clashes.

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---

Another outstanding goaltending performance in the books for an Ottawa Senators netminder. Ben Bishop turned aside 39 of 41 in the loss, which leaves his splits at 2.15/ .938 overall.

Colin Greening has 2-4-6 in his past six tilts. 14 hits too.

\*

Alex Killorn has points in five of eight for Tampa Bay and it's worth noting that he jumped into the top six for quite a few shifts after Benoit Pouliot left the game hurt. Pouliot has been with Vincent Lecavalier and Martin St. Louis lately, with Cory Conacher and Teddy Purcell flanking Steven Stamkos. Killorn had already been seeing some quality power play time of late, even without Pouliot out.

Marc-Andre Bergeron has points in four of eight. He's also been seeing some power play time, as he tends to when he's in the lineup, and might be a short-term option in deeper leagues.

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Bruins rearguard Dougie Hamilton has been a regular presence on the first power play unit with Tyler Seguin, David Krejci, Nathan Horton and Milan Lucic. The rookie has put up 10 points in his 18 starts, including six in his past seven alone.

Anton Khudobin has won three of the four times he's received the call and remains a strong win possibility as a spot-starter going for a contender like Boston and his peripherals aren't damaging either.

\*

Andrei Loktionov has points in five straight after scoring against the Sabres. He has been Ilya Kovalchuk's centre the last couple of those games. Loktionov only played 12:54 and had some power play time.

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No Thomas Vanek for Buffalo, but Cody Hodgson and Jason Pominville each came up with two-pointers for their owners. Marcus Foligno was initially slotted into Vanek's spot, but Steve Ott was juggled in eventually. Vanek's upper-body injury is thought to be very short-term.

\*

Braden Holtby earned his third shutout of the season already, stopping all 35 shots he faced from the Jets. He's 7-7-0 on the year with unimpressive 3.01/ .907 peripherals, but look more closely and see that five of his last six starts have been outstanding and he's steadily making progress. Before this game alone, his GAA was 3.26 and his SV% was .899.

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Since the start of February, Troy Brouwer has posted 7-4-11 in 13 GP. He also has 33 SOG and 29 hits in that time. He sees regular first unit power play time and has some Swedish dude named Nicklas Backstrom as his centre.

Okay, but seriously. Backstrom has generally had middle of the road options – relatively speaking – on his wings since Alex Ovechkin and Mike Ribeiro have been teamed up. But Backstrom has still put up 2-14-16 in 20 outings, including 2-10-12 in his past 13 affairs. Not too shabby.

Don't look now, but Eric Fehr – on Backstrom's other wing - has tallied 4-4-8 in his last 9 GP. Plus-eight in that time as well. You'll remember that Fehr used his lockout time as a UFA to play overseas in SM-liiga, which afforded him the chance to find his touch with the puck again after missing too much time due to injury in past years. Fast-forward to him finding some chemistry in a second-line NHL role alongside one of the better passers in the game and things are looking up for him these days.

\*

Eric Tangradi has been as consistent offensively with the Jets as he was with the Pens, as in he has yet to record a point this season.

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One thing he is doing now though, is hitting people. He only had six in five starts with the Penguins, but he matched that total in Saturday's game here alone. He has 24 in nine games for Winnipeg, although unless you're in the deepest of deep leagues he's still not a valued fantasy addition at this point. Nonetheless, that is an element of his game which attracted the Jets to him in the first place.

\*

Jose Theodore was injured early in his game against the Canes, which means we're going to see Jacob Markstrom back up with the Panthers and likely getting more starts. Early word on Theodore's situation indicated we're not talking about a short-term issue. Maybe this is THE break for which Markstrom has been patiently waiting.

\*

Riley Nash and Jussi Jokinen had some chemistry going in this one against the Panthers on the

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third line, each coming up with

three pointers. Nash came through with his first career goal too.

\*

We knew from last year that Jiri Tlustý and Eric Staal meshed well together, but adding Alex Semin to the mix has been nothing short of spectacular. Just how well has the trio been faring? Staal is basically on the same pace right now as his legendary 100-point sophomore campaign. One which he has never really been able to come close to matching until now, and we're obviously talking about a shortened season pace as opposed to an 82-game total. The added bonus for Staal's fantasy owners is that after having been a combined minus-30 over his past two years, he's currently at a plus-14 rating.

\*

Cam Ward has won three of his past four, stopping 108 of 116 shots for a .931 SV%. He's 8-6-1 on the year with 2.93/ .905 splits.

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Kris Letang picked up four assists, which is the first time he's had more than two points in a game this year. That effort also pulls him even at the point-per-game pace through his 19 starts.

The Pens had been using Sidney Crosby with James Neal recently, but they started this pond hockey game against the Habs breaking them up. Crosby went back with his usual Chris Kunitz-Pascal Dupuis wing set, while Brandon Sutter took on Matt Cooke and James Neal. Cooke had already been seeing quite a bit of L2 time before Evgeni Malkin was hurt anyway. Cooke has all of his 11 points on the season since February 1, including six in the past six tries. Sutter has points in three of six after this two-goal outing.

Kunitz not only has 27 points in 22 GP, but 23 of them have come in his past 15 affairs alone.

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Lars Eller has eight points in his last 10 starts. Brendan Gallagher has five in the past five, including 11 SOG in his past three games. Brian Gionta has scored thrice in his past two tilts after five games without a point. Five of Max Pacioretty's last eight contests have resulted in a two-point effort.

\*

Andrew Cogliano had four multi-point efforts last season playing all 82 games. After Saturday's hat trick, he has four of them already after 20 starts. He did have a hat trick last year too.

Saku Koivu. Point-per-game player 20 games in. Did not think I'd be writing those words headed into this season.

\*

Keith Yandle has six points in his last seven times out and he has three shots in each of his last four starts.

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Sunday's game against the Blues should see the Stars use lines of Loui Eriksson-Jamie Benn-Jaromir Jagr; Roussel-Roy-Cole; Morrow-Eakin-Smith. That moves Eriksson up from the second line; Cole up from the third; Morrow down to the third.

Eriksson has four points in his last four games, six in his past seven and nine in his past 11. But with 13 in 21 overall, hopefully this move can result in some continued momentum on that front to make up some of the ground lost earlier in the year. Eriksson-Benn-Jagr certainly has the makings of an explosive trio. Glen Gulutzan mentioned wanting to not see so many minuses on the ice as the first line has produced in the past handful of games as well.

\*

Justin Williams' eight-point total coming into this one against the Canucks didn't inspire an overwhelming need for fantasy owners to have him active nightly, but he does now have points in three of four. The fact that he spends a lot of time skating with Anze Kopitar and Dustin Brown certainly doesn't hurt his cause. He's also been shooting the puck on par with a pro-rated

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pace that would challenge or beat his career best in that department too, which helps the cause in standard leagues.

\*

Mason Raymond had one point in seven games before tonight's multi-pointer. Jannik Hansen stopped a six-game pointless skid by making several scoring summary appearances against the Kings. Dan Hamhuis now has points in four of six from the back end.

\*

This next blurb is not a knock on Joe Thornton at all. He has actually been among my favourites for years. He had 3-11-14 on that remarkable six-game point streak to kick off the season when the Sharks were invincible and his line was otherworldly. He had one point over the next eight games. Now he's riding another six-game point streak. Such is the way it goes in the sporting world. He tends to do really well against the Preds too. Before Saturday night's multi-pointer, he already had 9-39-48 in 38 career GP against Nashville.

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Like most Sharks, Dan Boyle had a pretty quiet February with only three points; but he should be in a good position to bounce back with a strong March and could be an inexpensive trade option if his owner has a bad case of short-season fever.

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League hearing for this one Sunday. What will be the outcome?

{youtube}zkklaBnwEhY{/youtube}

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