The Avs will welcome back leading scorer Paul Stastny on Tuesday after the 22-year-old missed the last 10 contests recovering from an appendectomy. The mere fact that he still leads the team in scoring by a wide margin despite missing 20 percent of the season so far exemplifies his importance. Colorado will also welcome back Ryan Smyth to practice Monday.

During the absence of these two stars, as well as captain Joe Sakic, the Avs have discovered some interesting things about themselves.

First of all, this team is deep. Tyler Arnason, who once led the Blackhawks in scoring back in 2004, has become an offensive catalyst for this team. He had previously settled into his role as a third-line center who can occasionally sub in a scoring line. Now, with 16 points in 13 games and 11 in his last six, Arnason is proving that he belongs on a scoring line. He has been playing with Marek Svatos and Wolski, so look for Stastny to center Milan Hejduk and Andrew Brunette.

When Ryan Smyth returns, he will knock Brunette down. Either Brunette would knock Svatos down to the third line or he will go there himself, but Arnason seems to have found a home.

T.J. Hensick, the diminutive rookie who dominated in training camp, has been flourishing with the added responsibility. He has seven points in six contests and is proving to the Avs that he is ready for full-time duty. Right now, the youngster isn't getting quality ice time and his linemates are pluggers at best. His power-play time is also minimal, yet he is putting up the points. Imagine how he'll do when Brunette or Svatos get bumped down to his line!

The other thing the team has learned is that they do get some solid goaltending occasionally. This has been happening more often of late (the team is 8-3-2 in their last 13). Jose Theodore has emerged as the No.1 guy (finally), starting in 13 of 16 games, missing the three games from injury and not from the coach's decision. Theodore is 7-2-1 in his last 10 and has hammered his goals against down from 2.71 to 2.43.

Colorado is still in a playoff position and they are about to be injected with some well-rested skill. This team is poised to surprise come March and April…

Meanwhile…

Toronto's Darcy Tucker has six points in six games and has 26 penalty minutes in that span. This is the Darcy Tucker poolies wanted when they drafted him in September…

Florida's Richard Zednik has nine points in his last four games and is taking on the role of Jozef Stumpel. Every year, Stumpel has a huge second half for the Panthers and leads them on a surge that pulls them close to playoff contention. The team is surging now, but it's Zednik now who is leading the charge…

Zednik's teammate Jay Bouwmeester has 10 points in his last 13 contests. He another one of those Panthers who steps it up in February and March…

While Martin Gerber has gone 2-3-0 in his last five, Ray Emery is 2-0-0. Emery was lucky enough to play two games in which first Dany Heatley and then Daniel Alfredsson returned to the lineup. Lucky or not, he is winning now and is a very cheap pickup in leagues of all formats. Two weeks from now, when he has another five wins, he won't be so cheap. Grab him while you can…

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