

## The dynasty begins in Pittsburgh

Written by Dobber

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After watching the young Penguins perform above and beyond expectations last season - not only getting into the post-season, but getting in with authority - conventional thinking was the team would pick up where they left off.

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After all, the kids just needed some experience and now that they had a taste of the NHL playoffs, they would take the next step.

But to start the 2007-08 campaign, things did not work out that way. The expected winning streak didn't happen and Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin didn't march away with the league scoring title. Marc-Andre Fleury didn't pile up wins and defenseman Ryan Whitney did not leave Nicklas Lidstrom in the dust with big production.

Poolies were starting to bail on the team, or at the very least loosen their stance on not trading any Penguins. I even dealt a few Pens in a couple of my leagues.

Year after year fantasy junkies are taught the same lesson: It's a long season.

The march of the Penguins has begun and all it took was an injury to Crosby and the emergence of Ty Conklin to bring this team together. When Fleury suffered a high ankle sprain, the 31-year-old Conklin took over netminding duties and the team hasn't looked back. The Pens started winning low-scoring games with Conklin posting a 14-3-3 record.

When Crosby went down with the same injury as Fleury, the team pulled together and Malkin put everyone on his shoulders. The sophomore has 15 points in his past five games and is suddenly tied for second in league scoring. His linemates have been rolling, as well – Ryan Malone has 13 points in nine games and Petr Sykora has 12. Also, Whitney has eight points and Sergei Gonchar has 11 in the same span.

When Crosby returns – he's practicing now – he will add a second wave of attack, bringing along the likes of Colby Armstrong and Jordan Staal. When that happens, things will really be scary.

Just like poolies expected back in September...

The long-awaited second-half surge of Jonathan Cheechoo has finally begun. He has eight points in his past seven games and is back as a fixture on Joe Thornton's line...

Colorado's Tyler Arnason is playing so well that when Paul Stastny (probably Tuesday) and Ryan Smyth (a week to 10 days) return, he will keep a permanent spot on a scoring line. The 28-year-old has 12 points in his past seven contests...

The Carolina Hurricanes are not only losing games (they have lost their grip on first place in the Southeast), but they are not scoring goals either. The Canes have just 43 goals in their past 19 contests and are 7-11-1 in that span. Eric Staal is pointless in his past six games, Erik Cole has one point in eight games, while Cory Stillman and Ray Whitney have just one point combined in their past four.