Alexei Ponikarovsky of the Toronto Maple Leafs has always been cast as a supporting offensive role type of player, never good enough to generate points without the help of other, more “offensively-gifted” players.

In January and February combined, Ponikarovsky had 12 points in 26 games. Something changed for Ponikarovsky in the month of March; Poni had 15 points in only 11 games. Maybe not being able to rely on guys like Sundin (from previous years) and Antropov has forced Ponikarovsky to modify his approach to the way he plays the game.

He has equaled his career high in goals (21) and with 54 points, has already surpassed his previous career high of 45 points. He should eclipse the 60 point mark by the end of the season.

The extra large (6’4” 220 lb) native of Kiev, Ukraine turns 29 next week and is under contract for one more year at a reasonable stipend of just over two million dollars. So giddy-up and flog this Poni down the back stretch all the way to your league championship.

The streaky Mikhail Grabovski is hot again and has ten points in his last five games.

Jason Blake is on pace for 28 goals, 64 points and 296 shots on goal. It hasn’t been an easy

season for him, but Coach Wilson seems to be able to get the most out of Blake. Prior to the All-Star game, Blake had 31 points in 43 games. After the All-Star break, he's been a point per game player, recording 27 points in 27 games. Blake has a string of three consecutive seasons with at least 300 shots on goal. I wouldn't bet against him making it four in a row.

From February 7 to March 5, Pavel Kubina had 14 points in 13 games. Since that streak, he's recorded only two points in nine games. Kubina has tied his career high of 40 points that he set last season.

It's been a tale of two seasons for Matt Stajan. From October to December, he had 30 points in 34 games. Since then, he's scored 19 points in 34 games.

Snowball's Chance in Hull

Since Coach Cory took the reins, the Ottawa Senators have been on fire, going 15-7-3, recording points in 18 of 25 games. Their recent success has fueled optimism that they could sneak into the playoffs. Last night's loss to Carolina should help quell that talk.

To make their plight even more difficult, the schedule maker has left Ottawa to finish up the season with six of their remaining nine games on the road. Ottawa's road record is a dismal 12-19-4, not nearly good enough for them to leap the craptastic Canadiens, a punchy Panther posse, a streaky Sabres squad AND the hard-working Maple Leafs for that last playoff spot in the East. Ottawa appears destined for ninth spot in the Conference.

The Sens have been led by the usual suspects. Over their last 11 games, Daniel Alfredsson has 15 points, Jason Spezza 14 points and Dany Heatley has eight points. Filip Kuba has seven points in his last five games.

Chris Neil is playing for a new contract next season and has four points in six games. Brendan Bell has six points in his last four games, while promising Nick Foligno has six points over his last six games.

Positively Negative Thoughts

Montreal has nine games remaining, five at home and four on the road. Five of those games are against teams below them in the standings. It says here that the Canadiens will make the post season dance, but will be first round fodder.

Rod Brind'Amour is back to his old self, helping Carolina to a 9-1-2 record for the month of March, while scoring 15 points in 12 games. He is plus-7 in March after entering the month a woeful minus-30 on the season.