

## Parliamentary, My Dear Clouston

Written by Russ Miller

Thursday, 28 January 2010 11:57 - Last Updated Friday, 29 January 2010 01:54

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Earlier this season, I came down pretty hard on the Ottawa Senators franchise, so much so that I was accused of being a Toronto Maple Leaf fan! While I definitely do not bleed blue and white, one has to be impressed by the Senators confidence level and work ethic during their current seven game winning streak. To me, that is directly attributable to the coaching staff led by Cory Clouston.

Ottawa has weathered the storm of having both Daniel Alfredsson and Jason Spezza out of the line-up for extended periods as well as key players Pascal Leclaire, Filip Kuba and Milan Michalek out for varying lengths of time. The team is playing very well and could set a franchise record if they can manage a win against the Penguins Thursday night.

However, let's not forget that immediately preceding those seven wins, the Sens had recorded five straight losses. In those five games, Ottawa scored a total of five goals. Interestingly enough, over their most recent seven game run, the Senators have allowed a combined seven goals.

Do I think that Ottawa will make the playoffs this year? It will be tough, the Eastern Conference

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is very competitive. Any losing streak could put a team in free fall and in danger of missing the post-season dance. That said, I am certainly more open-minded about their prospects than I was a couple weeks ago.

I don't get it, the Sens fire their goaltending coach Eli Wilson and they immediately go on a tear? Was Wilson responsible for Ray Emery's shoddy play as well? Maybe, but highly unlikely. With both Pascal Leclaire and Brian Elliott out of the line-up, third string goaltender Mike Brodeur kicked off the Sens current winning streak in fine fashion, recording 62 saves and allowing only two goals in the first two games. Brian Elliott then relieved Brodeur and proceeded to rattle off five straight victories, surrendering five goals against during the streak. Over his last five games, Elliott has a 1.00 goals-against-average (duh!) and 0.964 save percentage. It will be interesting to see what happens when Leclaire is ready to make his return. Assuming the streak is over by then, I see a relatively even split happening, at least until the next Leclaire injury.

Team Captain Daniel Alfredsson has shown no signs of rust since returning (earlier than anticipated...once again!) from his injury with ten points in six games. I'll bet Peter Forsberg wishes he had Alf's recuperative powers.

Is it a coincidence that Alex Kovalev has a seven game point streak at the same time as the Sens winning streak? No, this is the production that Ottawa had hoped for after he signed in the nation's capital this past summer. The enigmatic Russian has eight points in his last seven games.

Milan Michalek is having a Cy Young type season. He currently has 18 goals and only six assists. While he is in line for a career high 28 goals, Michalek is on pace to finish with 37 points, which is only two points better than his career low of 35 points. He has points in two of his three games since returning from injury.

Jason Spezza has a point in each of his two games since returning to the line-up and Nick Foligno has four points in his last five games.

### Rock You Like A Hurricane

No one in the entire league averages more time on the ice than Joni Pitkanen's 27:07. With Joe Corvo having been out since the end of November, the Hurricanes really needed Pitkanen to step up his game and he has delivered. In 18 of his 43 games, Pitkanen has logged at least 29 minutes of ice time. He is on pace for a career high 50 points.

Another fine Finn, Jussi Jokinen has scored seven points in his last three matches. He is on pace to finish with 24 goals and 59 points, surpassing his career highs in both goals (17) and points (55). How many of you had Jussi finishing the season with more points than his namesake from Calgary? Olli Jokinen is on pace for only 51 points this season.

On the surface it looks like Eric Staal is scoring at a point-per-game pace with 40 points in 40 games. The truth is, since November 30, the elder Staal brother has scored at a 113 point pace (33 points in 24 games). Kudos to those of you who kept the faith or even better, bought low on this fantasy thoroughbred.

With three points in his last four games, Rob Schremp is starting to build up some momentum. He has been taking a regular shift with Blake Comeau and Jon Sim, not the most talented linemates, but he is getting some power play time. Schremp has ten points, including four with the man advantage, in 11 games so far this month.

Eleven games ago, so the story goes, Mike Knuble went to Coach Boudreau and implored him to leave the lines together and let the guys build some chemistry. The Caps have only lost once in those 11 games. The lines? Ovechkin-Backstrom-Knuble (now you see why Knuble wanted to leave the lines together!?), Semin-Laich-Fleischmann, Chimera-Morrison-Fehr and Bradley-Gordon-Steckel.

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Caps forward Alexander Semin has 19 points in his last ten games, recording points in all but one of those contests. He is on pace for 39 goals and 86 points this year, bettering last season's career highs of 34 goals and 79 points.

### **Weekly Man Crush Update**

I hope many of you were able to watch last night's game on television. On Tampa Bay's first goal last night against Montreal, Steve Downie made a great play, forcing a turnover and making a nice pass to Martin St. Louis to open the scoring. Downie also drew two penalties and was a force when battling for puck possession.

He now has 17 points over 25 contests in December and January (a 56 point pace), including ten points in his last 12 games. In those 25 matches, Downie finished a minus in only two of those games. Perusing the top 15 plus/minus players (all plus-20 or better) over the same period, only Patrick Marleau could match Downie. Everyone else recorded more minus games. This kid is only going to get better as he gains more and more confidence.