Oh boy are we ever in for a treat, best on best hockey is, well, the best, and doesn't happen as often as we all would like. The downside to all the great hockey we are seeing is no NHL hockey. And while NHL teams have to abide by a trade freeze during the Olympic Games, you certainly don't have to.

All NHL teams have between 19 and 22 games remaining in the regular season. But not all games are created equal. For the shrewd fantasy owner, there is opportunity here.

In the Eastern Conference, one team (Atlanta) has 14 home games remaining, while another has only seven (Ottawa). One team has ten games remaining against teams that have 75 points

or more, while another has only four left against the top teams.

Thanks to the shootout, there are just four teams in the Eastern Conference that have a sub-.500 record and only two in the West. Alright, enough chit-chat, let's get started:

Atlanta Thrashers

Home (13-10-4)

Away (13-14-6)

Total (26-25-9)

Games Remaining

14

8

22

Against .500 or Worse

5

3

8

Against Better Than .500

9

5

14

Against 75 Points or Better

5

3

8

Atlanta finishes the season with four games against bottom feeders (TOR, CAR, CAR, TOR), immediately followed by five tough games against top teams (WSH, PIT, NJ, WSH, PIT). It's not all doom and gloom for the Thrashers; they have 14 games left against teams higher in the standings than themselves and eight against teams lower in the standings.

3 Games – CAR

2 Games – PHI, PIT, TOR, WSH

1 Game – BOS, BUF, CLB, FLA, NSH, NJ, NYI, NYR, OTT, PHX, TB

Gold Prospects:

Interestingly enough, in the five games following the Kovalchuk trade, **Nik Antropov** has recorded eight points. His career high is 59 points, set last year and he is on pace for 68 points. He doesn't seem to be letting up even in the absence of Ilya.

Tobias Enstrom has eight points in seven combined games against Carolina and Washington this season and there are five more games to go with those two teams. Enstrom scores more at home (24 points in 27 games) than he does on the road (18 points in 33 games). He's already eclipsed his career high and is on pace to finish with 57 points.

Prior to the trade, **Niclas Bergfors** had five points in four games against Washington, seven points in four games versus Pittsburgh and three points in three matches against Philadelphia. In the five games post-trade, Bergfors has three goals and four points. While his average ice time looks similar to what he received in New Jersey, in his last two games, Bergfors has averaged well over 18 minutes.

Silver Liners:

With the departure of Kovalchuk, there is an opening at the point on the power play opposite Enstrom. **Zach Bogosian** should get his share of opportunities to show what he can do, but unfortunately for Bogo, the coach has options in Hainsey and Kubina. Bogosian has six points

in seven games against Carolina and Washington this year.

In **Evander Kane**'s last game before the break, he played nearly 15 minutes (no power play time though) and had a goal and assist. Kane has four points in five games versus Carolina and Philadelphia, but has only one point in eight games against Pittsburgh, Toronto and Washington. While his future is certainly bright, he'll likely be inconsistent (as most rookies are prone to do) over the remaining 22 games.

Just call him the Road Warrior. **Bryan Little** has 18 points in 33 Road games and only eight points in 24 Home games. Now that there is no superstar in the mix, the coach may lean on Little to provide more offense. Little has eight games remaining against Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Toronto and Washington, but in ten combined games against those teams, he has a grand total of one point. The good news is that he has three points in three games versus Carolina.

Bronze Suspects:

Even though **Johnny Oduya** has a three game point streak on the go, he isn't a big point producer. There are much better options on the blue line than Johnny O.

Although **Maxim Afinogenov** is on pace to finish the season with 61 points, over 21 January/February games, he only has 11 points, a 43 point pace. In a post-Kovalchuk Atlanta, he'll be lucky to hit for 55 when all is said and done.

Life without Kovalchuk has seemingly set in for **Rich Peverley**. He has zero points in his last four games and only two points in the five games since the super sniper's exit. Peverley has some good numbers this season (ten points in nine games) against Carolina, Philadelphia and Washington combined, but all except one of those games were before the trade. Expect a reduction in points.

Boston Bruins

Home (13-12-6)

Away (14-10-5)

Total (27-22-11)

Games Remaining

10

12

22

Against .500 or Worse

3

4

7

Against Better Than .500

7

8

15

Against 75 Points or Better

3

5

8

Boston has an interesting schedule remaining. They will play 13 games against teams below them in the standings. The Bruins have nine games against teams superior than themselves, but eight of those teams have 75 points or better. Boston can't help but be stoked that they are still in the playoff hunt, after having such an injury-laden season.

3 Games - TOR

2 Games – BUF, CAR, MTL, NJ, PIT, WSH

1 Game – ATL, CGY, FLA, NYI, NYR, PHI, TB

Gold Prospects:

Marc Savard has scored eight points in six games against Buffalo, Carolina and Toronto this season. He has recorded six points in his last five games. Savard has averaged 90 points over each of his last four seasons. He may be a huge benefactor of the Olympic break. Look for him to finish the season on a strong note.

If Boston wants to increase their odds of making the playoffs this year, they will have to go with the hot hand in net. **Tuukka Rask** is 3-1 against Buffalo (1.72, 0.944), 2-1 versus Toronto (2.01, 0.939), 1-0-1 against Montreal (0.83, 0.970) and while he lost in overtime in his only game versus New Jersey this season, he recorded 36 saves, 0.92 goals-against-average and 0.973 save percentage. Rask has also won his last four starts.

Zdeno Chara is on pace for 44 points this season and has four points in his last five games. In 11 games this year against Buffalo, Montreal and Toronto, Chara has ten points. The big Slovak has finished with at least 50 points in each of the last two years and I wouldn't bet against a third straight 50 point season.

Silver Liners:

In his first 40 games of the season, **Patrice Bergeron** had 31 points (64 point pace). In the next 14 games, he has only seven points, a 41 point pace. Bergeron may be rejuvenated following his Olympic experience, but there's also a chance he may return tired. I'd lean towards him scoring around a 50 point pace the rest of the way.

Off-season surgery meant recovery instead of training during the summer for **David Krecji**. It seems to me that he may have rushed back a little early in order to play in the season opener. The 12 away games won't affect Krejci all that much as he has more points (18 points in 28 games) on the road than at home (13 points in 29 games).

It shouldn't be all that surprising that **Blake Wheeler** has been inconsistent in his sophomore season. Wheeler has had positive results against Carolina, Pittsburgh and Toronto this year. If he can ramp up his scoring just a bit over the final 22 contests, he may be able to match his surprising 45 point rookie season.

Only once over **Dennis Wideman**'s last five games has he played less than 26 minutes. He only has two points to show for all that ice time, but with a potentially fully healthy roster, the Bruins might just be able to go on a tear from here on out.

Bronze Suspects:

Derek Morris has been averaging close to 21 minutes a game, but he still receives between five and ten minutes less than Wideman does. Morris has recorded good numbers this season against Buffalo, Carolina, Montreal and Toronto, racking up nine points in 12 combined games. Diminished returns seem likely to correspond with decreased ice time.

This may be 42-year-old **Mark Recchi's** swan song. The NHL senior citizen has recorded six points in five games against Pittsburgh and Toronto, but he is a candidate to fade into retirement.

This season is a complete write-off for **Milan Lucic**. His own injuries, combined with the rest of the team's injury and scoring woes, means that Lucic hasn't been able to get into a groove at all this season. He does have two points in three games versus Buffalo and last year he lit up Buffalo, Carolina and Toronto for 12 points in 15 games. However, it is unlikely that we will see a repeat of those numbers this season due to the fact that Lucic is receiving next to no time with the man advantage.

Buffalo Sabres

Home (19-7-6)

Away (14-11-3)

Total (33-18-9)

Games Remaining

9

13

22

Against .500 or Worse

1

3

4

Against Better Than .500

8

10

18

Against 75 Points or Better

2

3

5

One good thing about Buffalo having 13 away games is that they have a winning record on the

road. They also have only five games against the other top teams. It looks like Buffalo and Ottawa will wage a pitched battle to the finish to see who will come out on top of the division.

2 Games – BOS, FLA, MTL, NYR, OTT, TB

1 Game – ATL, CAR, DAL, DET, MIN, NJ, PHI, PIT, TOR, WSH

Gold Prospects:

It looks like **Thomas Vanek** might be coming around with 14 points in his last 15 games. He still needs to put in a consistent effort to appease the head cheese, but the team ultimately needs Vanek scoring in order to be successful. He has eight points in ten games against Florida, Montreal and Ottawa this season.

Over his last 25 games, **Tim Connolly** was held pointless only three times and scored 32 points during that stretch. He is on pace to smash his career high by 20 points and finish with 75 points. Connolly has 14 points in 16 games versus Boston, Florida, Montreal, Ottawa and Tampa Bay.

After a scorching hot start, **Ryan Miller** and the Sabres have stumbled of late. In each of the months of October, November and January, Miller had a goals-against-average of less than 2.00 and save percentages in the 0.936 to 0.938 range. He had a mediocre (relatively speaking) December, recording a 2.45 goals-against-average and 0.927 save percentage. February has been abysmal for Miller with a 3.13 goals-against-average and 0.901 save percentage. The good news is that he has outstanding numbers against Boston, Montreal and New York Rangers.

Jason Pominville has 14 points in his last 14 games. He has increased his scoring in each of the last two seasons. Pominville has 11 points in 12 games this season against division rivals Boston, Montreal and Ottawa.

Silver Liners:

Coach Lindy Ruff has been trying out **Derek Roy** on the point with the man advantage. Roy has six points in seven games in February. He has nine points in ten combined games versus Montreal, Ottawa and Tampa Bay. Roy has a history of playing well during the second half of the season. Look for that trend to continue.

Andrej Sekera has three points in the four February games he has played, but has struggled

with his defensive play. Ultimately his lack of defensive consistency is what may keep him out of the line-up. It's possible that a good performance for the Slovak squad at the Olympics could help spur his development. Spending time (hopefully) learning from Chara should be a very positive experience for the 23-year-old defender.

After recording 45 points last year, this season's 38 point pace has to be disappointing for **Drew Stafford**
. He's receiving second unit power play time and has six points in eight games this season against Florida, Montreal and Tampa Bay.

Bronze Suspects:

Jochen Hecht is on the same 38 point pace as Stafford, but without any appreciable power play time, Hecht's point potential is lower than Stafford's. Hecht scores at a higher clip when he is coming over the visitor's boards.

Super rookie **Tyler Myers** may have hit a wall with only one point in seven February games. Maybe it just coincides with a 1-4-2 month for the team. Myers has scored at a better clip at home (21 points in 32 games) versus on the Road (11 points in 28 games). Interestingly enough, in Myers best season of major junior, he recorded 42 points, which is exactly the number of points he is on pace to finish this season with.

Chris Butler averages the fourth most power play time, along with the second most overall ice time on the team. That said, he is on pace for only 27 points, but a respectable 16 power play points.

Carolina Hurricanes

Home (16-12-3)

Away (8-18-4)

Total (24-30-7)

Games Remaining

10

11

21

Against .500 or Worse

0

2

2

Against Better Than .500

10

9

19

Against 75 Points or Better

7

3

10

Carolina might as well just pack it in right now. The Hurricanes are nine points out of the final playoff spot and would have to leapfrog six teams to secure a playoff position. Just to further complicate matters, they have the most difficult schedule remaining with ten games against the top teams and only two games against teams below the .500 mark. And if Cam Ward is out for any length of time, Carolina is toast.

3 Games – ATL, WSH

2 Games – BOS, MTL, OTT, PIT, TB

1 Game – BUF, FLA, NJ, PHX, TOR

Gold Prospects:

Ray Whitney entered the break on a five game, seven point run. The 37-year-old winger has 24 points in his last 23 games and is about to become an unrestricted free agent. If he ends up being dealt, it will be to a contending team and will only help Whitney points-wise. He has recorded 29 points in 30 home games and just 19 points in 29 away games this season. Whitney doesn't fare too badly against Western opponents either, recording 13 points in 16 games. If he stays in Carolina, he will continue to do well; he has 16 points in 13 games against Atlanta, Boston, Ottawa, Pittsburgh and Tampa Bay this year.

After starting the season with seven points in 16 games (36 point pace), **Eric Staal** has scored 43 points in his last 33 games, a 107 point pace. Staal has recorded 22 points in 15 games against Atlanta, Boston, Ottawa, Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay and Washington so far this season. Even if the Hurricanes hold a fire sale, it isn't likely to stall his production.

Brandon Sutter has ten points in his last 11 games played. In his last game before the break, he logged 19:28 ice time. With Carolina out of contention, Sutter will see an increase in ice time in order for management to see what he can do at the NHL level. Sutter has six points in seven games versus Boston, Montreal and Washington this year.

Silver Liners:

Joni Pitkanen has been significantly better on the road (21 points) than at home (14 points). The return of Corvo should help take some of the offensive pressure off Pitkanen, but the truth is he was doing just fine without Corvo in the line-up. Pitkanen has ten points in eight games against Atlanta, Boston, Tampa Bay and Pittsburgh this season.

Jussi Jokinen entered the Olympic break on a nine game, 12 point streak. He has 24 points in his last 18 games played. Jokinen has 15 points in 12 games against Atlanta, Boston, Tampa Bay and Washington so far this year.

Alexandre Picard has yet to play a game for his new team. With Pitkanen and Corvo in the fold, Picard will not be immediately thrust into an offensive role, but if one of the aforementioned is dealt, then Picard may get an opportunity to step up and produce. Picard has eight points in 14 games versus Atlanta, Boston, Pittsburgh and Washington while playing with Ottawa this year. He is scheduled to play his old team (Ottawa) twice before the end of the season and that's always a good motivator.

Bronze Suspects:

In his six games since returning (missed 28 games) from a serious cut to his leg, **Joe Corvo** has logged close to his regular amount of ice time (over 25 minutes per game). While he had no points to show for his efforts, the team was 5-1 over that stretch. The pending unrestricted free agent will get his timing back and start putting up some points. A 40 point pace isn't

unreasonable.

After recording a 48 point season last year, **Sergei Samsonov's** 22 points to date this season have been disappointing to say the least. He is averaging just over 14 minutes of ice time per game, although he does get some power play time. Prospects for a good finish are not promising.

U.S. Olympian, **Tim Gleason** averages the third most ice time on the Hurricanes. The return of Corvo and the arrival of Picard effectively push Gleason out of any offensive role he might have held. He does however like playing against Atlanta and Pittsburgh; Gleason has five points in five games against those opponents this season.

Florida Panthers

Home (12-11-7)

Away (12-16-3)

Total (24-27-10)

Games Remaining

11

10

21

Against .500 or Worse

1

1

2

Against Better Than .500

10

9

19

Against 75 Points or Better

5

4

9

Florida has a very tough schedule remaining with nine games against top teams and only two against the lesser likes (they ARE the lesser likes!). Florida's management is already on record as saying they are going to make "significant" changes, so the younger players may get a chance to show what they can do over the remainder of this season.

3 Games – TB

2 Games – BUF, OTT

1 Game-ATL, BOS, CAR, COL, MIN, MTL, NSH, NJ, NYR, PHI, PHX, TOR, SJ, WSH

Gold Prospects:

After recording 60 points last season, **David Booth**'s future looked bright. Only nine games into this season, Booth suffered a concussion, causing him to sit out the next 45 matches. He has yet to find the score sheet with the same regularity as last season. Maybe playing Buffalo, Ottawa and Tampa Bay will help him remember. Last season he lit up those teams to the tune of 13 points in 14 games.

Before stepping in front of a Dennis Seidenberg slap shot, **Nathan Horton** was on pace to shatter his previous career high of 62 points. Instead, he ended up with a fractured leg. The good news is that with the Olympic break, he may not miss all that many games and still could end up setting a new personal best. My money's on the 62 point hat trick!

If Florida does follow through with making major personnel changes, **Michael Frolik** should be one of the main beneficiaries. The 21-year-old Czech has loads of offensive potential as evidenced by his 138 points in 97 major junior games and jumping directly to the NHL last year, recording a 45 point rookie season.

At 26 years of age, **Stephen Weiss** is just entering his prime. The steady centre is on pace to surpass his previous career high of 61 points, set last year and logs over 20 minutes of ice time per game. He has six points in seven games against Buffalo, Ottawa and Tampa Bay this year.

Silver Liners:

Signed in the off-season to a three year contract, **Steven Reinprecht** could be one of the guys on the way out at the trading deadline. The 33-year-old Edmonton native has no points in his last 13 contests, but has recorded six points in seven games against Buffalo, Ottawa and Tampa Bay this season.

Rostislav Olesz is currently out with a broken finger (listed as day-to-day), but it's not like Florida will miss his production; he's pointless over his last 11 games. Sadly, he's still on pace for a career high 34 points. Upcoming games against Buffalo, Ottawa and Tampa Bay may help Olesz rediscover his scoring touch; he's recorded ten points in seven games against those teams this season.

Cory Stillman has missed 20 games this season with a knee injury. The 36-year-old's play has been not up to scratch so far this year. Still, he receives top power play time and averages over 17 minutes of ice time per game. Last year he recorded 27 points in 33 games following the All-Star break. He has six games remaining against his former teams (Ottawa, Carolina and Tampa Bay) and has nine points in eight games against those teams this season.

Bronze Suspects:

Jordan Leopold logs the second most time on the ice, but only gets mop up power play time. The pending unrestricted free agent is only 29-years-old and can still play the game, just don't expect boatloads of points.

Keith Ballard is on his way to his fourth 82 game season in his five year NHL career. He is on pace for 22 points, which would be one point more than his career worst. Florida has other offensive options from the backend, so Ballard is best avoided. The goalie whacker does have six points in five games this season versus Buffalo and Tampa Bay.

For a guy who averages 17:34 minutes per game, **Radek Dvorak** doesn't score much. Granted, he only receives an average of just over one minute of ice time with the man advantage and he doesn't normally play with talented line-mates. There are likely better options in your league; this one is better left alone.

Even though his overall numbers say that he logs 16:27 per game, over his last five contests, **Dmitry Kulikov** has averaged more than 19 minutes per game. He also logs the seventh most power play ice time. Kulikov is another guy who stands to benefit if they blow up the team. The points will come, just not this year.

Summary of First Five Teams

ATL

BOS

BUF

CAR

FLA

Total Games Remaining

22

22

22

21

21

Home Games Remaining

14

10

9

10

11

Away Games Remaining

8

12

13

11

10

Games Remaining Against Teams Same or Better in Standings

14

9

5

20

19

Games Remaining Against Teams Worse in Standings

8

13

17

1

2

Total Against .500 or Worse

8

7

4

2

2

Home Against .500 or Worse

5

3

1

0

1

Away Against .500 or Worse

3

4

3

2

1

Total Against Better Than .500

14

15

18

19

19

Home Against Better Than .500

9

7

8

10

10

Away Against Better Than .500

5

8

10

9

9

Total Against 75 Points or Better

8

8

5

10

9

Home Against 75 Points or Better

5

3

2

7

5

Away Against 75 Points or Better

3

5

3

3

4