

Heating Up

Written by Tim Lucarelli

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With the buzz of the NHL All Star game wearing off, we enter the final stretch of our fantasy hockey seasons. Since the most talented players in the game were just showcased, I'll stick with that theme and take a closer look at some of the hottest scorers since December 25.

John Tavares – Tavares leads the NHL in points (22) since Christmas, scoring at a 120-point pace and averaging 4.4 shots per game. In those 15 games, Tavares also has 4 game winning goals, second most in the NHL over that stretch. While Tavares was having a decent year with Moulson and Parenteau, the most recent spark can likely be traced to Kyle Okposo taking Parenteau's place and turning the Islanders' top line into one of the best in the league.

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Martin St. Louis – Marty didn't make the All Star game this year, but don't be fooled. After a relatively slow first half (something that's become customary for St. Louis), he has the second most points in the league since Christmas, with 19 points in 14 games. St. Louis and Stamkos have continued to be paired together, with the third wheel most recently being one of Lecavalier or Downie.

Evgeni Malkin – there is no way you can talk about the hottest players in the league right now, without mentioning Evgeni Malkin. Malkin has surprisingly been better with Crosby out of the lineup, than with him in. Malkin's skillset is unreal, as evidenced by his first period goal in the All Star game, and right now he is firing on all cylinders. Malkin has 18 points in his last 14 games, averaging a pace of 105 points and over 400 shots on goal. Over that stretch, he also leads the NHL with an impressive six game winning goals.

David Krejci – what you may find surprising is that Krejci also has 18 points in his last 14 games, tied with Malkin and Datsyuk for the third most since Christmas. Krejci is more of a setup man, while on pace to have less than 150 shots and registering 13 assists, but his performance is certainly heating up.

Vincent Lecavalier – In the last 14 games, Lecavalier has scored 17 of his 40 total points this season. Tampa Bay is a team that typically comes on strong in the second half, so a continued surge from Lecavalier is certainly possible.

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Erik Cole – Cole has been one of Montreal's best players this season and he is only getting better. Cole has 16 points since Christmas, which is tied for seventh most in the league over that stretch. His hitting has opened up space for linemates Desharnais and Pacioretty, and fantasy owners are reaping the benefits.

Patrik Elias – Elias started the year on fire, then cooled a bit, but is hot once again. He is scoring at just under a point-per-game on the season, but is firing at a 1.14 clip since Christmas – a 94-point pace. The main reason for Elias' rejuvenation this season may just be the return of long time friend Petr Sykora, as Elias is noticeably having fun once again, and the points are coming as a result.

Mikhail Grabovski – While it's easy to fall into the shadows of Lupul and Kessel in Toronto, Mikhail Grabovski is truly shining. The 27 year old center is scoring at only a 61-point pace on the year, but has been scoring at a 94-point pace since Christmas. Grabovski is in a contract year, so look for Burke to try to lock him up soon.

Eric Staal – After an atrocious start to the season, Eric Staal is finally beginning to turn things around. Staal is scoring at just over a point-per-game pace since Christmas (16 points in 15 games). He is still minus-two over that stretch though, which raises questions as to how long he can keep up his current pace.

Some other noteworthy performers from the East include Patrice Bergeron, Matt Moulson, Alex

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Ovechkin, P.A. Parenteau, Steven Stamkos, David Desharnais, and Erik Karlsson.