Miller takes a look at the New Jersey Devils' season so far...

Hands up, how many of you pegged the Devils to finish at the bottom of their division this season? Well it was either them or the Islanders. What has transpired since the New Jersey witnessed the Los Angeles Kings raise the Stanley Cup?

Zach Parise decided to reap the rewards of free agency (have his cake) and play in his home state (and eat it too). The only players they added during the off-season were Sens cast-off **Bobby Butler** and tough guy **Krys Barch**. Also, the New Jersey goaltending tandem of **Martin Brodeur** and **Johan Hedberg** have the oldest combined age in the entire history of the NHL at 79 years.

So it was a pretty bleak summer for Devils fans. It's confounding then that New Jersey sits second in the Atlantic Division and fifth in the Conference, only one point behind Pittsburgh, who has played one more game. At no point did I ever think I would see the Devils ahead of the highly touted New York Rangers and Philadelphia Flyers in the standings this year.

We probably should have known better; New Jersey makes it a habit to excel when people write them off. They were supposed to be done when they lost (at various points along the way) Scott Niedermayer, Scott Stevens, Brian Rafalski and Scott Gomez, you know, when you didn't have to spit after saying his name.

The Devils have points in seven of their eight games to kick off this campaign. In the Eastern Conference, only Boston can say that. Time will tell if they can translate the superb start into a playoff spot, but the obvious answer is no. That's just what the Devils want you to think.

David Clarkson has been lights out this season. He leads the team in goals, points, hits, shots on goal, power play goals and power play points. He also sits second in penalty minutes. Clarkson started the season with a six game point streak and has points in seven of eight games. Many thought last season's 30 goals and 46 points were an anomaly. Clarkson seems bent on proving his doubters wrong. He has looked every bit legitimate in the games I've seen him play this season.

The ageless (okay, he's 36) **Patrik Elias** is averaging 19:36 minutes, including 4:16 on the power play. He has seven points in eight games. **Travis Zajac** is receiving 21:46 minutes per game and over four minutes with the man advantage. He only has three points in eight games this season, but he'll turn it on soon, playing with Kovalchuk. **Adam Henrique** has two points in his three games, but the guy to watch is **Ilya Kovalchuk**, who only has five points in eight games. He'll heat up as the season gets going.

Marek Zidlicky is a good pick to click, he has four points, three via the power play. He's gettting over 20 minutes of overall ice time, including 4:17 on the man advantage. Zidlicky has hit the 40 point mark five times in his NHL career, the latest coming in 2009-10. As long as he continues to get top power play billing, he'll be a useful fantasy defenseman.

Two players I would not be plucking from the wire are **Stephen Gionta** and **Ryan Carter**. They both have four points in eight games, but both are playing less than 15 minutes a game and barely get a sniff on the power play. Gionta surprised most last year by recording seven points in 24 playoff games during the Devil's unexpected playoff run. His best season as a pro was in the AHL, where he scored 30 points in 54 games, a 45 point pace pro-rated over 82 games. Carter had seven points in 23 playoff games last year and has 47 points in 262 career NHL games.

Martin Brodeur has been both hot and cold to start the year. He won his first three games out of the gate, allowing only three goals against, but followed that up with 14 goals against in his next three games. Luckily for the Devils, **Johan Hedberg** has been very good in his two games, allowing only one goal. He sports a nifty 0.48 goals-against average and an out of this world 0.980 save percentage. Granted, it's only been two games, so undoubtedly his numbers will regress.

Killer Zzzzz's?

There are more players in the New Jersey organization whose last names start with the letter Z than any other team in the league. Travis Zajac , Dainius Zubrus and Marek Zidlicky are contributing regulars, plus they have
Steven Zalewski
and Darcy and Kelly Zajac on the AHL Devils. Of course
Vladimir Zharkov
is still Devils property. Too bad Zarley Zalapski wasn't still playing.

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