

Rodney Dangerfield Division

Written by Russ Miller

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Widely known as the worst division in the NHL, it's sometimes jokingly called the South Least Division. Well don't look now, but the top three teams in the South East Division may have the last laugh. All three are among the hottest teams in the Eastern Conference right now. No respect I tell ya.

All hot streaks aside, it is still possible that the division winner will be the only team from the division to make it to the post-season and that their playoff opponents (sixth seed) might have more points than they do.

Oh Carolina!

Resilient comes to mind when looking at the Hurricanes this season. This team is like that pesky knight from Monty Python, "it's just a flesh wound", he would say. They just don't know how to quit. When Mr. Everything, Rod Brind'Amour, went down in mid-February with a torn

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ACL, people were quick to write off this team. They are an incredible 12-3-1 since their team captain has been out. Carolina is 11-2 in their last 13 games and last night they ended division rival Florida's seven game winning streak.

Carolina's also missing Justin Williams, who had 30 points in 36 games and Matt Cullen who was scoring at a 70 point pace. Chad Larose and David Tanabe are also out for an extended period. On top of all that, now they find out that Ray Whitney will be on the shelf for the next two to three weeks after having surgery on his leg.

Scott Walker, no stranger to missing time himself, has lost 23 games to injury this season, plus one from suspension. In March, Walker has eight points and 35 penalty minutes. Similarly, the younger version of Walker, Erik Cole has six points and 31 penalty minutes.

Stepping up in a big way has been Eric Staal. He has 17 points in his last nine games and has been a responsible plus-8 during that stretch.

Since being claimed off waivers 8 Jan 08, Sergei Samsonov has scored 29 points in 32 games and is a healthy plus-9. In contrast, while with Chicago this season, he only scored four points in 23 games and was minus-7.

Joe Corvo has been sensational for Carolina, scoring 15 points in 17 games since coming over from the Senators.

It's not only the guys scoring points that have been playing well. Goaltender Cam Ward has been simply outstanding. In nine March starts, Ward is 8-1 with one shutout, 2.16 goals against average and a sparkling 0.920 save percentage.

Injuries are a part of the game, but good grief, this is almost beyond ridiculous.

Panthers Stalking Playoff Position

Last night's shootout defeat at the hands of the Hurricanes was Florida's first loss in eight games. Surprisingly, the Panthers leading scorer in March is not Olli Jokinen (8-2-6-8) or Nathan Horton (8-2-3-5). Brett McLean is leading the way with ten points in eight matches.

The goaltending numbers in March have been amazing. Back-up Craig Anderson has three starts resulting in three wins, two by shutout. His goals against average and save percentage are a miniscule 0.67 and 0.983. Tomas Vokoun has four wins in his last five starts with a 1.55 goals against average and 0.951 save percentage.

Cory Murphy has no points in his last eight contests.

Capital Gains

Washington is making a strong bid for the post-season. Over their last twelve games, the Caps have eight wins and four losses.

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Of course it's all about Ovechkin in Da Capital. Even by his lofty standards, he's been scorching hot in March, scoring ten goals and 19 points in ten games. Over that stretch he's taken 55 shots on goal and is a plus-10.

Calder candidate Nicklas Backstrom has done his part with six assists and nine points as well as being a responsible plus-9 in March.

In ten March games, Brooks Laich has six goals and eight points. Since February 20th he's scored ten goals in 15 games.

Viktor Kozlov has scored six points in his last ten games, but maybe more importantly, he's plus-10 during that stretch.

Sergei Fedorov and Matt Cooke have been nice deadline day acquisitions. Even though he is near the tail end of his NHL career, Fedorov can still log nearly 20 minutes a game, including time on the penalty killing unit. Cooke has provided grit (25 penalty minutes) along with five points in ten March games.

Since coming over from Montreal at the trading deadline, Cristobal Huet has a 4-2 record, a stellar 1.74 goals against average and a save percentage of 0.937 to go with one shutout.

Even with the 5-0 loss against Chicago on Wednesday night, Olaf Kolzig is 3-2, has a 2.27 goals against average and a 0.912 save percentage in six March appearances.