The two hottest teams in the league right now are the Pittsburgh Penguins (9-1-0) and Carolina Hurricanes (8-2-1). No one should be all that surprised with the Pens hot streak; they have two of the top players in the game on their payroll. I didn’t expect to see Carolina this hot down the stretch.

Over the last month, Anton Babchuk has been among the top scoring defensemen in the NHL. Brian Rafalski and Pavel Kubina had 13 points during the last month, Mike Green and Tom Gilbert scored 11 points. Nik Lidstrom, Matt Schneider, Andrei Markov, Ryan Suter, Kyle Quincey and Anton Babchuk all had ten points.

Last year for Avangard-Omsk of the Russian Super League, Babchuk recorded the fifth highest points total amongst defenseman with nine goals and 26 points in 57 games. In his last two years of AHL hockey, Babchuk scored 23 points in 38 games. He also played 91 NHL games with Chicago and Carolina over that same period with only 24 points to show for it.

Babchuk is averaging 17:20 of ice time on the season, but over his last four games, he's averaged over 22 minutes per game. In his last ten games, Babchuk has points in eight and was a very healthy plus-11. At 24 years of age, the best is yet to come for this big (6'5") defender.

Babchuk was picked up in all three tiers of Dobber's three-tiered hockey pool this week.

Some players just seem to play better on certain teams. Erik Cole fits that bill as a Hurricane. Carolina drafted the rugged winger in the third round back in 1998. In his first six seasons with Carolina, Cole never scored at less than a 40 point pace, averaging a 55 point pace and 47 actual points over that stretch. After being traded to Edmonton last July, Cole scored at a disappointing 35 point pace with the Oil this season.

Now that he is back in familiar territory, Cole has recorded six points in the three games since returning to the Canes at the trading deadline. That deal has seemingly spurred the Hurricanes offence, which has scored 18 goals in their last three games.

Another Eric is also glad Cole is back in town. Eric Staal has eight points in the last three contests. From February onwards, Staal has 22 points in 17 games. The line of Staal, Cole and Tuomo Ruutu has 20 points in the last three games.

Matt Cullen is another 'Cane that left for a season and then came back "home" to Carolina and picked up right where he left off. In his last four games, Cullen has seven points. Ray Whitney also has seven points in his last four games played.

Even Sergei Samsonov has made a return from the obituaries to the sports pages with five points in his last three games, four of them courtesy of the power play.

In his last four games, Cam Ward has four straight wins, a 1.50 goals-against-average, 0.948 save percentage and one shutout. His shutout win on Monday night gives him three straight 30 win seasons. Only a select few netminders can match that feat; Miikka Kiprusoff now has four, Marty Turco six, Henrik Lundqvist and Ryan Miller just need one more win and Roberto Luongo needs seven more wins to record four straight 30 win seasons.

Ducks J-S Giguere entered the season with a string of four straight 30 win seasons, but he needs 13 wins and there are only 15 games remaining for Anaheim. Thanks to Martin Brodeur's lengthy injury, his 30 win streak will end at 12.

Top Scoring Forwards Over the Last Month:

Player	Team	Points
Ilya Kovalchuk	Atl	28
Jarome Iginla	Cgy	

20

Mike Cammalleri

Cgy

19

Mike Richards

Phi

18

Jonathan Toews

Chi

18

Eric Staal

Car

18

Zach Parise

NJ

18

Alexander Semin

Wsh

17

Joe Thornton

SJ

17

As you can see, it’s not even close. Kovalchuk has been absolutely thrashing (sorry, couldn’t resist) opposing goaltenders. He is on pace for 44 goals and 95 points, but I wouldn’t rule out 50 goals and 100 points if he can keep up this torrid pace for a little longer.