

No Matt, No Problem for Enstrom

Written by Russ Miller

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Tobias Enstrom's overall numbers are a little deceiving. Fully half of his 22 points have come over the 14 games since Mat Schneider was dealt. Enstrom has logged 25 minutes or more ice time in ten of the last 14 games, including four efforts over 27 minutes.

In the 57 games prior to the Schneider deal, Enstrom played 25 minutes or more only eight times. Of Enstrom's eight power play points, half of them have come in the last 14 games.

Last year, as a rookie, Enstrom led the entire league in power play ice time. Of course that was with a different coach. It looks like the new coach has turned the sophomore loose on the power play now that Schneider is no longer in the mix.

Enstrom leads the team in short-handed time on ice and is one of only four regulars that are a plus player on a team that is minus-24 overall.

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What we're seeing from this small but smart 24-year-old Swedish sophomore isn't a mirage. He has the skill set to be an excellent power play quarterback. Great skater, check. Excellent passing ability, check. Heavy shot, check.

The remaining games are a preview of what Enstrom should be like next season. He'll finish strong and 45-50 points looks like a lock next season.

Todd White has points in 14 of his last 15 games.

Kyle Okposo has a six game, seven point streak currently on the go. On the season, Okposo's average ice time is 17:34, but during his last ten games, he has averaged over 21 minutes a night. The big winger doesn't even turn 20 until next month. No Weight, no Comrie, no Guerin, no Hunter, no problem.

One of Okposo's team mates has also been lighting it up of late. Blake Comeau has ten points in his last eight games, while being blanked in only one of those contests. Now I've never been a believer in Comeau's offensive upside, mainly because he hasn't shown off the chart offensive numbers at the major junior or AHL level.

In his last season of junior hockey, Comeau scored 74 points in 60 WHL games. In 92 career AHL games, Comeau has 62 points. He does appear to have the ability to step it up in the playoffs, although that clearly isn't going to be a factor with the Islanders. In his last two junior playoff seasons, he recorded a combined 31 points in 36 games.

Say what you want about deadline deals not making much of a difference, but Pittsburgh has points in ten straight games since they acquired Chris Kunitz, going 8-0-2 in that span. Kunitz has been playing primarily with Sidney Crosby and Bill Guerin. Kunitz has 12 points in his ten games as a Penguin. Guerin has nine points in the seven games since the trade and Crosby has 13 points in those seven games.

Granted the changing of head coach from Michel Therrien to Dan Bylsma was the likely catalyst for the surging Pens, who have gone 11-1-3 since the coaching change. Does anyone else out there think they could coach this Pens squad? Seriously, Therrien was constantly changing up the lines. It's tough to get into a rhythm when you can't even remember who is playing on your wing on any given night.

How hard is it to talk to Sid and Gino and see who THEY want to play with? Put together a decent checking line and then cobble a fourth line together from your farm team because you can't afford anyone else and they won't see more than five minutes a game anyway. Roll out your first two lines as often as possible, spelling them with the occasional energy shift by the third line. Open bench door, close bench door. Repeat for 60 minutes. Pure genius.

The New York Rangers recent additions have contributed to a 5-2 record since deadline day. Nik Antropov has six points and Sean Avery has recorded five points in their seven games as Rangers. Derek Morris has only been a minus player in one of his seven games for New York and is now receiving around 20 minutes of ice time per game.

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Cam Ward has really impressed me this season. I saw him live in Ottawa last month, but only for one period as he was hung out to dry by his defence against Ottawa. He made several highlight reel saves before being pulled for his own safety.

Again last night, Ward was sensational against the Devils, recording 41 saves in a very important win for the Hurricanes. The team is now sitting in a tie with Montreal for seventh in the Conference, three points ahead of Florida.

Although Ward has seemingly been around for much longer, he is only 24-years-old and his numbers have clearly improved over each of his last three seasons:

Season	Wins	GAA	SV%	Shutouts
2006-07	30	2.93	0.897	2
2007-08	37	2.75	0.904	4
2008-09	36 (proj)	2.51	0.913	5

Anton Babchuk scored two power play goals last night and I think he has a bright future with Carolina. In the three games prior to last night, Babchuk put up consecutive gooses eggs, but in the ten games before that, he had nine points.

Top point scoring defensemen over the last month:

Mark Streit and Sergei Gonchar had 14 points, Andrei Markov 13 points and Cam Barker, Tobias Enstrom, Mike Green, Pavel Kubina and Mathieu Schneider all had 11 points.

Top point scoring forwards over the past month:

Ilya Kovalchuk (24 points), Eric Staal (23), Jarome Iginla (22), Evgeni Malkin (21), Mike Richards (20), Sidney Crosby (20), Alexander Semin (20), Alexander Ovechkin (19) and Pavel Datsyuk, Mike Ribeiro, Ray Whitney and Todd White all with 18 points.