We are at the point in the season where the teams who have no chance or virtually no chance of making the playoffs start to record some unexpected victories. The reason is likely two-fold. First, a team out of contention has the immense pressure to win lifted off their shoulders. Players can stop squeezing the stick so hard and let up a little, reverting back to doing what got them there. Secondly, some of the top teams will rest or seriously limit their superstar's ice time, thereby throwing the underdog a bone.

Looking back over the past few years, some teams that ended up just out of the playoffs closed the final ten games of the year with an excellent finishing kick. Last season, Buffalo ended the campaign in tenth place and on a 7-2-1 run. The season before that, Buffalo, Chicago and Edmonton all finished the year 6-3-1. In 2006-07, Toronto (6-3-1), Montreal (7-3-0) and Colorado (7-2-1) gave the eighth seeds a run for their money.

**Maple Leafs**

Even though they are not mathematically eliminated, Toronto has realistically been out of playoff contention for some time. Coming off the break, the Maple Leafs have the fifth most points in the Eastern Conference. They have won five of their last seven games.

The line of Tyler Bozak, Nikolai Kulemin and Phil Kessel has been making some noise of late. **Bozak** has 13 points in his last 14 games, including six in the last four. **Kulemin** has a six game point streak on the go, with eight points during the run. In seven of his last eight games, he has played over 19 minutes per game. Since January 9, **Kessel** has 27 points in 25 games.

Newly acquired **Luca Caputi** has five points in eight games and has been averaging just over 15 minutes of ice time per contest. **Viktor Stalberg** has five points in his last five matches. **Mikhail Grabovski** has a single point in each of his five games since returning from injury.

On the flip side, **Tomas Kaberle** has one point in nine games in March, which only means he's

due for some points.

**Hurricanes**

Carolina headed into the Olympic break on a five game winning streak. Since returning, the ‘Canes have been a positively average 4-3-1. They will need to be much better than that if they want to make up the ten points (and pass six other teams) to get to that final playoff spot in the East.

**Jussi Jokinen** has 29 points in his last 25 games, but is pointless in his last three. **Tuomo Ruutu** has eight points in his last eight games.
**Brandon Sutter** has at least a point in seven of his last nine games (nine points).

**Panthers**

Florida is all but finished sitting eight points back of the final playoff spot. They may be 4-3-1 since the break, but going 0-5-1 in February basically ended any playoff aspirations.

**Islanders**

The Islanders sit seven back, but making up that many points while overtaking four teams at this point in the season is very difficult. That said, they are currently riding a modest three game winning streak where they have beaten both New Jersey and Vancouver.

**Blake Comeau** has 13 points in his last nine games and has seen a spike in ice time during the last four games, receiving over 20 minutes per game. Included in that stretch are four multi-point efforts. **John Tavares** has five points in his last one game. In his previous 20 contests, he had five points. **Matt Moulson** has nine points in his last ten games. Surprisingly, **Richard Park** also has nine points over his last ten games. **Josh Bailey** has points in five of his last seven games played.

**Thunder (Thrashers) and Lightning**

Tampa Bay (six back) and Atlanta (five back) both have their work cut out for them if they want to finish with a playoff dance partner. I wouldn't bet the house on either of them.

**Senators**

The team that seems to have taken the hardest hit from the break is easily the Ottawa Senators.  Heading into the Olympic Games, the Sens were 14-2-0. Coming out of the break, they are an Eastern Conference worst 1-5-1, only five points up on the eighth place Bruins. They should still hold on to a playoff spot, but this latest stretch has to be disconcerting to say the least.

**Record Since the Olympic Break:**

TEAM

W-L-OTL

GP

MAX PTS

ACTUAL PTS

% OF MAX

MTL

7-1-0

8

16

14

87.5

WSH

6-1-1

8

16

13

81.3

PIT

5-2-1

8

16

11

68.8

NJ

5-3-0

8

16

10

62.5

TOR

5-3-1

9

18

11

61.1

FLA

4-3-0

7

14

8

57.1

CAR

4-3-1

8

16

9

56.3

NYI

4-3-1

8

16

9

56.3

PHI

4-3-2

9

18

10

55.6

BOS

4-4-1

9

18

9

50.0

NYR

3-3-2

8

16

8

50.0

BUF

3-4-1

8

16

7

43.8

ATL

3-5-1

9

18

7

38.9

TB

2-5-1

8

16

5

31.3

OTT

1-5-1

7

14

3

21.4