

Statistically Speaking

Written by Russ Miller

Friday, 26 October 2007 02:58 - Last Updated Friday, 26 October 2007 10:01



I thought I'd start off this week with a quote from former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics".

You can bend and twist statistics to suit almost any argument. With that in mind, let's take a look at some interesting ones:

We are witnessing a lesson in Chemistry 101. After three consecutive seasons of over 100 points, the Flyers hit rock bottom last season finishing last overall with 56 points. Over the summer, they brought in five new players. Normally, when teams make large scale personnel moves, it takes the players a little time to gel together. After only nine games (6-3), it looks like the Flyers are back with a vengeance.

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Heading into Thursday night's game, the Flyers offence was really clicking, averaging a league best 3.88 goals per game. Goals against are equally impressive. After the insane 1.67 goals against per game that the Wild are averaging, Philadelphia was tied for second at 2.00 with four other teams.

After the big hullabaloo over the Rangers summer free agent signings, most prognosticators thought that the Rangers defense would be the trouble spot. The slow start (3-5-1) can be directly attributed to their inability to score goals. They entered Thursday night's contest coming off back to back 1-0 shutout losses. The Rangers have only scored 15 times in nine games and are dead last in the NHL, averaging a meager 1.67 goals per game. Much more was expected from the likes of Jagr, Shanahan, Gomez, Drury and company.

It's not that they aren't getting enough shots on goal; the Rangers are averaging over 34 shots a game (add another 31 last night), third best in the league. Brendan Shanahan leads the league in shots on goal with 54, but he only has one goal to his credit. The power play has been unproductive, clicking at a rate of only 12.8%, 7th worst in the league (before Thursday night's game). Although Edmonton would love to have those numbers instead of a mind-numbing 2.9%.

The saving grace has been the stellar play of Henrik Lundqvist. He's sporting a 1.77 goals against average, a .934 save percentage along with two shutouts for the goal starved Rangers.

Catching New Jersey on their last match of a nine game, three week road trip was a timely break for the Rangers. New Jersey might have been guilty of looking forward to Saturday night and their first game in their brand new arena.

New Jersey is the only team without a home win. Of course, the Devils have yet to play a game at home. Couldn't the league schedulers have made New Jersey one of the teams that opened the season in London and then given them the following week off, instead of the Kings? Ottawa is the only team in the league without a loss on the road. Can you name the top three power play teams in the NHL (prior to Thursday's games)? If you guessed the Islanders (27%), Canadiens (26.8%) and Flyers (25%) you would be correct.

The Toronto Maple Leafs public address announcer should start stocking up on throat lozenges. The Leafs are averaging the second highest goals per game and have scored a league high 42 goals in eleven games. The problem is that they've also given up the most goals in the league with 44. Only Atlanta averages more goals against per game.

Beast from the East (3-25 Oct 07)

Every second week, I'll designate one player as the Beast from the East. It's the East's answer to Angus' Prime Cut in the Wild West.

There were several players that warranted consideration for this title, but in the end there can only be one. Big Nik Antropov has simply been a beast to kick off this season.

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The 6'6" 230 pound Kazak has seven goals and seven assists in eleven games. From a fantasy point of view, his plus 11 and 26 penalty minutes are just as valuable. He's on pace to score 52 goals, 104 points and 194 penalty minutes. While that's definitely not going to happen, there is reason to believe that the former tenth overall selection (1998) has the talent to put up 65-70 points this season.

This is Antropov's seventh NHL season. Several years ago, there were loads of articles written about the age of 27 being a player's best statistical season. The theory was that a player's prime was between 25-30 years of age and at 27 he would be in the middle of his prime years. Last year Antropov was on pace to score 50 points. If he can stay healthy and that's a big IF, he will easily eclipse his previous career highs of 18 goals and 45 points.