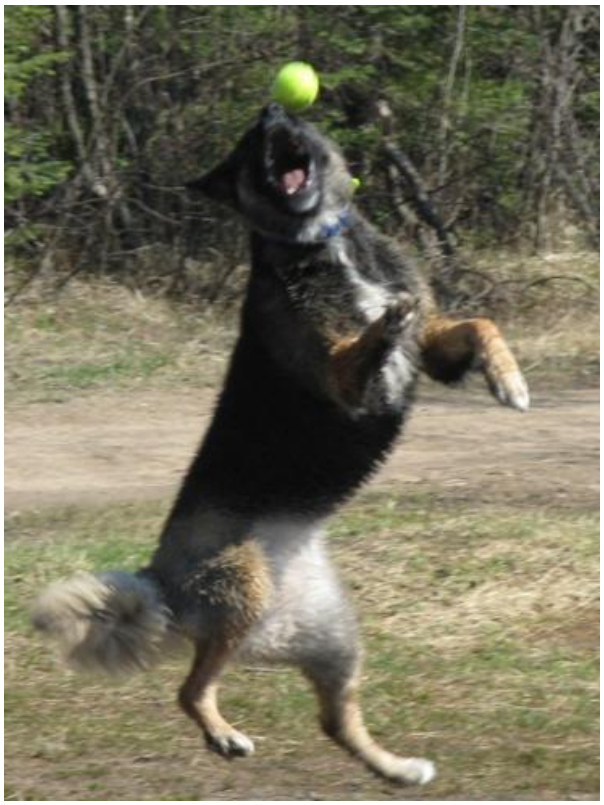

Terrific start out of the gate last week, much improved over last season's finish. My 8-5 record is a nose ahead of Thunder's 7-6 record from last Saturday. The snowy weather seemed to be pivotal in my first week victory, with more snow on the ground this Saturday morning; could I possibly make it two in a row?? Only one way to find out on the best hockey day of the year (which is really any day all 30 teams are in action) as some poolies will cheer and rejoice in their 15th round selection posting a 3 pt. game and we won't hear the end of it until Christmas, while others will drown their tears with a multitude of beers.

Toronto Maple Leafs @ Vancouver Canucks

The Leafs are the only team without a win this season. They haven't beaten the Canucks in the post lockout era, and have given up the most goals in the league this year (4.6 GAA). Combine that with their 60.7% PK rate and this spells disaster for the Leafs. H. Sedin has eight points in four home games this year.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: H

San Jose Sharks @ Atlanta Thrashers

First off let's give props to Ilya Kovalchuk for his nine goals in seven games to start this season. D. Heatley has 16 pts. in 16 career games versus his former team and this seems like a difficult team for Pavelec to bounce back against. The season is young but special teams can attribute to the Thrashers 4-2-1 start. They are tied for the top ranked PP in the league at 28.6%, combined with the 2nd best PK at 90.6%. That PK will be in tough as the Sharks roll into the Florida state with a 34.4% PP on the road.

Pick: V

Thunder's Pick: H

Florida Panthers @ Philadelphia Flyers

The Panthers have had a rough start to the season at 2-5-1 as Clemmensen didn't even make it two minutes into his start against the Sabres earlier in the week. After Vokoun's solid 41 save performance Friday night against the defending champs, look for him to get back to back starts as his 2.64 and .914 split versus the Flyers all-time looks much better than his 3.68/.904 stats to start the year. Florida has taken three out of the last four versus the Flyers, but haven't shown enough consistency to come back with another strong game in Pennsylvania.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: H

Boston Bruins @ Ottawa Senators

The B's have won seven of their last eight meetings versus the Sens, however they've been massacred by injuries early on to start the year. The Sens have started the season well and Jason Spezza finally showed up with a three pt game in the teams last outing. Leclaire has never faced Boston in his career while Thomas has a 12-5-2 record with a 2.09 GAA and .935 SV% with threeSO to show for versus the Sens. I think the B's find a way to climb over .500, just barely though.

Pick: T (Boston to win in a shootout)

Thunder's Pick: H

Washington Capitals @ NY Islanders

The league's 3rd best offense (3.8 GF/G WSH) faces off again the league's second worst defense (at 3.9 GA/G). AO has 6 multipoint outings in 9 GP this season. With 12 G's in 15 career GP versus the Isles look for Ovechkin to light the lamp early, and often. Rolly's 1.74 career GAA versus the Caps gives the Isles some hope on paper, but that's where it ends, on paper.

Pick: V+

Thunder's Pick: V

NY Rangers @ Montreal Canadiens

Montreal has won four of their last five H2H meetings with the Rangers. Despite some of their deficiencies as long as the Habs can operate at their league leading 93.8% PK at home there should be another W on the wall for the Habs faithful to cheer for.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: H

New Jersey Devils @ Pittsburgh Penguins

The defending champs put their 9-1 start up against the unbeaten Devils (4-0 on the road). Fleury is 4-0-2 with a 1.30 GAA in his last six starts versus the Devils, but both teams won three games each last season. Parise has 4 goals in his last 3 games, but was held to only three pts in six outings against the Pens last season. Crosby and Malkin are both over a ppg versus the Devils in their careers, including eight points in six games apiece last year.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: V

Buffalo Sabres @ Tampa Bay Lightning

Buffalo's high octane offence rolls into Tampa tonight to face the surging Lightning. Scoring 19 goals in their last four games Buffalo has chased starting goalies out of the net in three of their last four outings. Lecavalier remains goalless this season, and that streak is at 15 games if you go back to last season. Luckily he has 9 goals and 10 assists in his last 15 versus the Sabres. The Bolts are 3-0-1 at home this year and are coming off an impressive win versus the Sharks. St. Louis leads the way with 12 pts. this season, but their success can be attributed to another bounce back story in Ryan Malone who leads the team with seven goals. That combined with Stamkos' impressive play, which includes five goals in four home games and averaging fourSOG/game overall, gives the Lightning some hope this year.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: V

Carolina Hurricanes @ Minnesota Wild

This matchup features a couple of teams that aren't even close to meeting expectations for this year. With two wins each at home, the Wild haven't lost at the Excel Energy Centre this year

giving them the edge going into tonight's game. The Wild have the league's top PK this year at 91.6%, but it will be their PP (41.7% at home) that should get plenty of chances as the Canes give up a league high almost 6 PP chances per game. The biggest surprise, Jussi Jokinen and Eric Belanger lead their respective teams in scoring with 7 and 9 pts. respectively.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: H

Dallas Stars @ St. Louis Blues

The Stars head into St. Louis with a 3-0-3 road record this year, averaging four GF/game on the road. The strong play of James Neal and Jamie Benn should help them stick in the top 6 this season, putting all that Fabian Brunnstrom hype to rest once and for all. The Blues look to be turning the corner after Friday's 3-1 victory winning for only the 2nd time since returning from Europe. EJ appears to be playing great after his knee injury from last year with seven pts in eight games and could maintain a sick pace once Boyes, Berglund, Oshie, and Backes start putting the puck in the net again (combined for only 6 goals this season).

Pick: V

Thunder's Pick: H

Nashville Predators @ Chicago Blackhawks

The Preds aren't going to win many games this year unless their special teams start to step things up. You can't expect two goals apiece from Weber and Suter and five p. nights from Dumont to put W's in the standings every game. The worst PP in the league at 9.1% and the third worst PK at 71.9% belongs to Nashville. After Mitchell's hit of the year candidate, look for recipient Jonathan Toews to sit out of the lineup with an "upper body injury", translation, he got his clock cleaned! The Hawks are third in the league firing over 34 SOG/game and rank first in only allowing 21.9 shots/game. Combined with their 5-0-1 record in their last six games versus Nashville at the United Centre and the Hawks should get back to their winning ways.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: V

Los Angeles Kings @ Phoenix Coyotes

Both teams have gotten off to terrific starts this season. Dave Tippett has done a great job with the Coyotes in sending down a lot of their young talent down to the AHL level to let them develop properly. While we've been talking about the Kings and their offence for quite a few years, and who thought it would take an old thumper like Ryan Smyth to get these guys playing some of their best hockey of their young careers. Anze Kopitar has arrived, eight goals, 16 pts.

in his first 10 games of the year have him on pace for over 120 pts. on the year. Let's temper those expectations, but don't be surprised to see at the minimum a Zach Parise type 94 pts. when all is said and done. While the Kings have taken the offensive route, the Yotes have played stifling defence, giving up five goals during a four game win streak that has seen them knock off SJ, STL, BOS, and DET. Bryzgalov is 5-0-1 with a 0.97 GAA, 2 SO in his last 6 starts.

Pick: V

Thunder's Pick: V

Detroit Red Wings @ Colorado Avalanche

The Western Conference leading Detroit Red Win...uhhh, wait a second, let me try this again, the Western Conference leading Colorado Avalanche... wow we haven't heard those words since 02-03, back when Hejduk was a 50 goal scorer and Peter Forsberg's ankle was good for 105 pts. This is a rematch of last Saturday's tilt which saw the Avs rally from behind in the 3rd period (I don't think that happened even once last year) to complete the comeback in the shootout. 5 Avs have eight pts or more in 10 games including 18 year old stand out Ryan O'Reilly, leading 18 year olds in scoring with nine pts. In contrast only Zetterberg is above 0.8 ppg for the Wings who are looking for their first road victory of the year. Craig Anderson's 2.25 GAA and .930 SV% stand in the way of that (never thought I'd see that from an Avs goalie not named Roy). Osgood 3.16 GAA and Howard 4.21 GAA may force Holland to start shopping for a goaltender after Halloween.

Pick: H+

Thunder's Pick: H

Edmonton Oilers @ Calgary Flames

The battle of Alberta continues in the latter part of the doubleheader on CBC this Saturday. The Oilers and Flames boast identical 6-2-1 marks to start the year and look for visiting Oil fans to be cheering Penner Penner Penner. It's amazing what a new coach can do to a young power forward's crumbled confidence. It's safe to say the Penner-Gagner-Hemsky line should see another game together after a 13 pt. outing against the Blue Jackets. The Flames have taken the first two meetings of the year and look for plenty of PP opportunities that arise from uncontrolled emotions. This should set us up for a high scoring affair as the Flames are tied for the best PP in the league at 28.6% (31.6% at home), while the Oilers are ranked 1st with 4.5 GF/game on the road and have a 40% success rate with the man advantage away from Rexall place.

Pick: V

Thunder's Pick: V

Columbus Blue Jackets @ Anaheim Ducks

Good thing Ken Hitchcock re-inserted Filatov into the lineup for their game against the Oilers on Thursday night... for an entire 5:42. While two-way superstar Rick Nash put up a fat goose egg to go along with his -3. I feel the pain of fellow posters in the forum, but the reality of the situation is the Jackets blew a 4-1 lead in Edmonton, yet another example of dinosaur Hitchcock's defensive strategies have no place in today's new NHL. Steve Mason should be back in goal for Columbus as he's posted a shutout in his only appearance at the Honda Centre. The Ducks continue to struggle this year, with only six goals scored in four home games, if I recall correctly Getzlaf seemed to have a slow start last year (one pt in his first six GP) before going on a tear right around this time. Jonas Hiller may be fumbling his opportunities to lead this team as the starter and depending on the status of Giguere's groin; Giggy may get the start as he's 15-2-2 with a 1.76 GAA in his last 19 starts versus Columbus.

Pick: H

Thunder's Pick: V