The picks are coming a little early this week as I'm heading down to watch the Wild – Avs game Friday night, which means I have to drop my dogs off at my in-laws Thursday evening. Thunder (the brown/black mutt) isn't feeling so well, so her sister Caribou (black lab) has been called up on an emergency one game basis from juniors. The best part about the trip down to St. Paul is making my wife (a beloved Leafs fan) wear my Nordiques jersey! Although the highlight of the weekend for me will be the hockey game, for my wife it'll probably be a visit to IKEA the following day... Anyways, let's hope to some fortunate bounces to start 2011 off on the right foot!

Pittsburgh @ Boston

The Bruins went into Pittsburgh and managed to put seven goals up on the scoreboard. It is very unlikely for the Pens to return the favour this time around. With questions still surrounding

Sid the Kid, everyone is looking to Malkin to carry the team on his back as was the case a few years ago when Crosby was out with his high ankle sprain. Their game on Wednesday against the Habs saw the Pens pop home 4 PPG and they were lead by a committee of Staal-Letang-Goligoski. The law of averages should kick in on Saturday. Thomas is 7-4-3 in his career versus the Pens, including a .918 SV% over his past 10 starts. The only player to score at a ppg pace versus the Pens is veteran Mark Recchi with 13 points in his last 12 games. The only thing the Pens and B's have in common is that their backup goalies sport similar .927 SV%, no wonder these two teams are having success this season.

Pick: H

Caribou's Pick: H

New Jersey @ Florida

Lemaire has gone 2-7 since taking over. The Panthers, meanwhile, are coming off of a terrific special teams performance versus the Caps. They scored times with the man advantage and held the Caps to a big goose egg on six opportunities. The Devils have the worst offense in the league combined with the worst team SV%. The only time Brodeur has ever finished his career with a GAA over 2.50 (excluding 91-92 where he only made 4 appearances) was in 05-06 with all the bloated goal scoring due to the new rule changes. His GAA is currently 3.05. He's also never had a sub .900 SV% season (same exclusion), but currently sits at .887. Is it time to stick a fork in him?? Despite the Devils' defensive troubles this should be a low scoring affair as the highest GAA for any of the goalies vs. the other team is 2.34 (Hedberg). The Devils have a .200 winning % on the road... ouch!

Pick: H

Caribou's Pick: H

Calgary @ Toronto

Phaneuf will be looking for a better outcome against his former team than his visit to Alberta earlier this season. He's played as many games for the blue and white this year as last year (26) yet his production is even worse. At least he's still taking penalties…. The Flames have gotten 39 points out of Hagman + Stajan in 79 combined GP. Kipper is 5-1-1 in his career versus the Leafs and as terrific as Reimer has been for the Leafs, he can't win them all stopping 40 shots night in and night out. Iggy has 11 points in his last five against the Buds.

Pick: V

Caribou's Pick: H

Buffalo @ NY Islanders

After a stretch that saw the Isles go 7-1-1 to pull themselves out of the basement in the NHL, they've managed to only win one of their last four meetings. The Sabres on the other hand come into this one being led offensively by Cody McCormick in their last week of action. Unfortunately for the Isles their leading offensive producers versus the Sabres are still out with injury (Streit and Okposo). Tavares looks to continue his hot streak of late with 15 points in his last 13 games, which seemed to happen soon after he dropped the mitts. Hmmm, same thing happened with Crosby when he went on that crazy run. Coincidence? Maybe… nonetheless time to jump on the Poulin bandwagon!

Pick: H

Caribou's Pick: H

NY Rangers @ Montreal

The Rangers boast the most road wins of any team in the NHL, meanwhile the Habs have been solid at home with a 14-6-1 record. King Henrik has been terrific this season, with five shutouts already. However, the Habs will be hoping that Cammalleri gets back into their line-up as he's potted 10 points in his last five games against the Rangers. Brian Boyle is second on the team in goals and is on pace for over 25. The Habs 2nd overall PK unit is ranked a dismal 24th at home.

Pick: V

Caribou's Pick: V

Tampa Bay @ Carolina

Isn't it amazing what a 40 year old goaltender can do to help turn your team around? Roloson is 3-1 in a Tampa uniform with a 1.71 GAA and a .946 SV% with two shutouts. I'm assuming Ellis will get the first game of the B2B this weekend against the lowly Devils, although he has had success (2 wins, 1.50 GAA) in 2 starts versus the 'Canes. The Bolts hold a -27 GF:GA differential on the road this year. Carolina is +5 at home. Eric Staal has 25 points in his last 20 games versus the Bolts, while Cam Ward has won 11 of 16 starts. I'm sure most of those came against Mike Smith, who is 0-7-2 in that same time span. The Bolts are the only team without a SHG this season.

Pick: V

Caribou s Pick: H

Columbus @ Detroit

I remember earlier this year the Jackets were on fire… 14-6 to start the year and heading into a

home-and-home with the Wings. The team dropped both games and from there on out they have struggled, winning only six of their next 23 games. Another home and home with the Central leading Wings could make or break Columbus' season. Howard is 7-0-1 versus the BJ's with a 1.39 GAA. Everyone is still waiting for Steve Mason to show his Calder self. Could we have another, dare I say it, Andrew Raycroft on our hands?? If the Jackets can keep this one close they might have a chance as they have a .579 and a .625 win % in one and two-goal games, respectively.

Pick: H

Caribou's Pick: H

Atlanta @ Dallas

The Dallas Stars go from last place in the Pacific last season to leading the division through the first half of the season. Kari Lehtonen has remained relatively healthy. Stars have a point in every game in 2011 so far, and are one of only five teams in the league to shoot at a 10% + rate. This doesn't bode well for a team ranked 29th in the league in shots allowed. Dallas' PP is ranked 5th in the league at home. The Thrashers are quite the road warriors leading the NHL in goals, shooting percentage, and are 3rd on the PP on the road. Unfortunately their PK is third worst on the road as well. I'm curious as to when the last time d-men ranked first and second in team scoring at the end of the year was?

Pick: T (Dallas in the SO)

Caribou's Pick: H

Anaheim @ Phoenix

Despite allowing the most rubber on net in the league the Ducks have been playing really good hockey even with Getzlaf out of their lineup. Jonas Hiller has 11 wins in 16 career starts against the 'Yotes. Despite their defensive system Phoenix has still managed to rank 11th in GF in the NHL. The Coyotes have a league worst 9 OTL, but have the 5th and 8th highest win % in the league when trailing after the 1st and 2nd period respectively. The Ducks are 20-3-2 when they score first.

Pick: V

Caribou's Pick: H

Chicago @ Nashville

The first game of a home and home scenario sees two teams rolling at the moment going head to head. The Hawks have won four of five, while the Preds have a six-game winning streak. This should be a great test for Crawford to see if he can out battle Rinne and perhaps push himself into top-10 talk (at least from a fantasy perspective). The Hawks were dominant in avoiding a sweep of the high-flying Avs. The Preds have the 3rd highest win percentage when they outshoot their opposition; unfortunately they're facing the 2nd highest shooting team in the league in the Hawks.

Pick: V

Caribou s Pick: V

Edmonton @ Los Angeles

This match up does not look good for the Oilers at all. Quick is 4-1-1 against the Oilers with a 1.77 GAA. He also has a sub 2.00 GAA at home this season. The Oilers continue to go with Khabibulin even though Dubnyk hasn't allowed more than 3 GA in his last 5 starts. Khabibulin has lost his last 7 starts overall. The Kings and Oilers are 0.33 % apart in winning % in 1 goal games this season.

Pick: H+

Caribou's Pick: V

St. Louis @ San Jose

This matchup sees two teams on opposite sides of the consistency spectrum in terms of scoring. The Blues are the only team who hasn't been shutout this year. The Sharks, on the other hand, lead the league by being shut out seven times so far this season. The Sharks were shutout only twice all of last season. The 05-06 Wings and the 06-07 Sabres are the only post lockout era teams to score in all 82 games in a season. The Sharks have a .474 and .250 win percentage in 1 and 2 goal games this season. In the last 3 seasons Conklin and Halak have combined for a 5-3-1 record against the Sharks with a sub 2.00 GAA, compared to a 4-3 record with a 2.85 GAA for N&N. Despite only 6 road wins, the Sharks are only one game over .500 at home.

Pick: V

Caribou's Pick: V