

## Saturday's Picks - November 20th

Written by Anthony Lancione

Friday, 19 November 2010 23:10 - Last Updated Saturday, 20 November 2010 09:05

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With a rather busy slate of games this fine Saturday evening, there's much to get to. Hope you enjoy my debut column and more importantly hope it proves to be helpful as you prepare for your weekend hockey fix.

### Los Angeles @ Boston (7:00pm ET)

Doesn't seem to matter who Claude Julien throws between the pipes these days. Timmy Thomas has rediscovered his 2008 Vezina form, leading the league by a country mile in SV %

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and GAA. Then of course you have last season's #1 Tuuka Rask riding the pine. After summoning him Thursday to give Thomas a well-deserved night off, of course he went out and pitched his own goose egg! Coming into this one, Boston has won three straight. Away from Td Garden, Boston has compiled a 7-1-0 record, while on home ice they're still under .500. So surely, the Beantown faithful will be hoping for a home performance more closely resembling their road dominance in the early goings. Even with the solid win against the visiting Panthers in Rask's spot start, the B's are averaging 1.8 GPG over their past six home contests, while conversely potting 4.5 GPG on the road over that same span.

L.A. has come storming out of the gates this season perched in 2<sup>nd</sup> spot in the West. They've done well in instilling youth throughout the lineup, showing last year's run was no fluke. However, the heat has begun to simmer out in La-La land as the Kings have dropped their past two games, allowing 11 goals in the pair. This is still a team trying to evolve into a legit contender. As such, they will not be immune to struggles along the way, despite inferences of the opposite belief thus far. They will certainly look to tighten up the backend after getting lit up in successive games earlier in the week, so I expect a low scoring affair.

The Bruins will look to get on the board early as this has proven to be their recipe for success so far, with a fantastic 8-0 record when leading after 40 minutes. This one goes to Boston as their winning streak reaches four.

### Pick

**Boston -- Home Win-- H(ProLine)**

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### Philadelphia @ Washington (7:00pm ET)

The top two scoring & overall ranked teams in the Eastern Conference battle it out in what promises to be yet another high octane affair. The Capitals come into this bout winning eight of their last nine, with a nearly unblemished 10-1 home record. They pace the NHL in scoring (GPG) with both Alexanders rounding out the top five individual leaders.

However, Philly has been equally impressive of late in as an offensive juggernaut of their own, scoring 25 times in the past five contests. Claude Giroux & Jeff Carter have shown no signs of being burdened by the pressure of their recently minted extensions. With three lines deep of scorers that can hurt opponents on any given night, there is no need for them to shoulder the majority of the offensive load--Especially with the Briere-Hartnell-Leino connection heating up.

However, despite all the fire-power in their lineup, expect Laviolette's crew to focus on tightening up in their own end after coming up on the losing end of an 8-7 shootout against Tampa.

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### Washington in a shootout -- Tie -- T(ProLine)

### Toronto @ Montreal (7:00pm ET)

Although these two teams have been headed in very different directions the past couple seasons, there's still always something special in the air when they lace them up on HNIC. Toronto is coming off an improbable come-back vs. Nashville on Tuesday night, dramatically scoring four unanswered goals to snap a brutal eight game losing streak. After securing another against the struggling Devils, the Buds will now try to make it a 3rd straight when they take centre stage at the Bell Centre. Ron Wilson is committed to giving The Monster a lengthy string of games to see what he can do.

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The Habs on the other hand, have picked up right where they left off last season following a dramatic playoff run, as they remain in the upper echelon of the East. Carey Price has shown to Habs' upper brass that they can rest assured with their widely scrutinized decision to retain him rather than Halak after his well-documented heroics last spring. With the monkey off his back...for now, he should be much more relaxed out there. P.K. Subban will also look to put Mike Richard's comments behind him with a solid showing in this one, while still continuing with his in your face brand of play.

The Habs have dropped the past three meetings against Toronto and haven't won at home vs the Leafs in over a year. The Leafs will try to carry their recent momentum into this one extending their winning streak in the process to a triple.

### **Pick**

**Toronto -- Visitor -- V(ProLine)**

### Tampa Bay @ Buffalo (7:00pm ET)

Step aside Jaromir & Mario, Sellanne & Kariya and more recently Crosby & Malkin or the Sedins... The Dynamic Duo Award these days undoubtedly goes to Mr. Stamkos and Mr. St. Louis. This pair now sandwich Sid the Kid in the top three scoring leaders and have as a pairing been simply untouchable up to this point. Stamkos himself is somehow projecting to surpassing last season's fantastic numbers. However, goaltending has been greatly inconsistent of late, shutting down opposition one night and getting lit up the next. Although Ellis has come close to taking claim to the #1 tender status a couple times, he keeps allowing Mike Smith to jump back into the running. Despite facing major injuries by Simon Gagne and captain Vincent LeCavalier, this team has still shown the ability to score with regularity.

After a terrible October, the Sabres have been slowly starting to come back to life. They've won two of three as well as four of their past six outings to pull themselves out of the East basement. Coupled by the return of All-World Goaltender Ryan Miller, the emergence of freshman Tyler Ennis has been a pleasant addition to the team thus far. Slowly but surely, this Sabres squad, behind the guidance of evergreen Lindy Ruff, is climbing out of the mud back toward respectability. But there is still a ways to go.

After only having won a paltry two games at home so far, the Sabres are due for a win at HSBC Arena.

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### Pick

#### Buffalo -- Home -- H(ProLine)

#### Florida @ New York Islanders (7:00pm)

The battle of the basement in the East! The Islanders have been particularly woeful, reaching dead last in the NHL, leading to the early demise of Coach Gordon. Garth Snow and Mr. Wang are hoping the addition of Jack Capuano will light a fire in his player's bellies as nothing seems to be working. It should be noted of course, that the Isles have been without arguably their two best players all season in Mark Streit & Kyle Okposo. All things considered, there's still got to be more production from former #1 overall picks Rick DiPietro & John Tavares, after dropping an embarrassing 11 straight, encountering.

The Panthers on the other hand have been better, but hardly so. The loss of Nathan Horton is still felt as this team has been reduced to a scoring-by-committee dependence. A dependence which has come to bare little fruit, mind you. The Cats have been held from much worse results

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by the respectable numbers put up so far by Tomas Vokoun, who manages to still has managed to sport a 2.30 GAA and .924 SV% despite the Panthers sitting near the bottom of the barrel.

Florida has taken four of the last six matches between the two since the 08-09 campaign. The Islanders are going to make this one close, but quite possibly for the 12<sup>th</sup> straight game, no cigar.

### Pick

**Florida in a shootout --- Tie --- T(ProLine)**

**New York Rangers @ Minnesota (8:00pm ET)**

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Who could forget that magical night nearly three seasons ago to the date, when these same two teams faced off? The star player for The Broadway Blueshirts, Marian Gaborik was on the opposite side of the fence, torching his future team, New York for five goals with a helper. With his long awaited return to Minnesota, expect the spotlight to be shining brightly on him once more. His presence back in the lineup after his month-long layoff is huge. Alexander Frolov is grinning wider than the Grinch on Christmas Eve now that he will see some action with the talented winger, after a miserable start to the campaign. The Rangers have won each of their past three Saturday nighters, all of which were on the road. You can bet they feel a 4<sup>th</sup> straight is also within reach.

Marty Havlat has begun to gain steam of late, logging more minutes now after comments were made public last month by his agent with respect to lack of playing time. He will be motivated to show Minnesota that his subpar 2009 season was in fact a blip in the road. Zidlicky is back from injury and will anchor the PP.

This one may very well turn into a classic goaltender's duel with two of the World's premier netminders going head to head, in Lundqvist & Backstrom. This promises to be a low scoring affair with Minny tied for the Western conference lead with fewest goals allowed. Regardless of the line, taking the under is surely the safe bet here. However, Minnesota is also the lowest scoring team in the West for a reason.

### Pick

**New York -- Visitor Win-- V(ProLine)**

### Colorado @ Dallas (8:00 pm ET)

Although these two teams are no longer the powerhouses they were a decade ago, they both are in youth movement modes, with Colorado seemingly further along in the process, making real strides in 2010. Both teams are also coming off come-from-behind OT victories off of late two goal deficits.... and both while hosting the visiting San Jose Sharks. Impressive!

Colorado has certainly not had much trouble putting the puck in the net thus far as they lead the West in Goals scored, with 63 in just 18 games. However, on the back end Colorado is decimated with injuries, most notably to starting goaltender, Craig Anderson. Only two opening night d-men are still patrolling the blueline. With most of these voids filled with rookies, its only a matter of time before they start to experience some growing pains after an admirable start.

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The Stars have been maintaining there above .500 record, in most part due to the fine, undervalued play of Brad Richards, who once again has situated himself among the top 10 league leaders. Along with captain Morrow, supporting staffers Ribeiro, Robidas & up and comers Neal & Benn need to step up to have any realistic level of success over the immediate and long haul. Only one of these two sides will be able to sustain the momentum. The money is on the home side here.

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**Dallas -- Home Win -- H(ProLine)**

**Nashville at Carolina (7:00pm ET)**

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The Predators bounced back admirably Thursday night, shutting out the Habs, after a gut wrenching, late game collapse in Toronto a couple days prior. Pekka Rinne seems to have broken his slump with the Donut. After an up and down, streaky start to the 2010-2011 campaign, Nashville has won three of its past four and are hoping to continue turning the corner. The scoring so far has really been spread all over the roster, without one a dominant go to guy; everyone seemingly pitching in and playing their role. The Preds are in dire need of a real level of consistency at this point.

Carolina has been improving as of late with Eric Staal truly leading the way on the Ice. The Captain has secured two four+ point games in the past week alone. But despite a convincing 7-1 win the other night vs. the Sens, they will be the first to admit they didn't want to use that game as a barometer of success, due to the tragedy which had struck the club.

The Canes will nonetheless look to add to that mid week victory with another solid W.

### **Pick**

**Carolina -- Home Win -- H(ProLine)**

**New Jersey @ St Louis (8:00 pm ET)**

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After getting off to an impressive 9-3 start, the Blues have now come back to earth, having dropped five straight. Prior to the current losing streak, St. Louis, behind the stellar netminding of Jaroslav Halak only allowed an NHL-best 18 goals in their first twelve contests. Since then the Blues have given up a staggering 29 lamp lighters over their past five games alone! You know things aren't going your way when your goaltender makes a great save, only to accidentally chuck it straight back into the open cage!

New Jersey, New Jersey. What can be done to right the ship? With some of Captain Lou's injured mates slowly nearing a return, perhaps the horizon will hold better fortunes for the Devils. But in the meantime, the short term outlook remains bleak as the Devils have still yet to win consecutive games this season. Their goal differential is a terrible -36 already. Is John MacLean on the hot seat yet? If not, he needs to get Kovalchuk going to give his squad a real boost, as he only has two goals to show for his past dozen games!

New Jersey is due for a much needed victory. Take the away team.

**New Jersey -- Visitor Win -- V(ProLine)**

### Chicago @ Vancouver (10:00pm ET)

It would seem the Blackhawks can't wait to get on a charter out of Chicago and into enemy territory the way they've been playing of late-- with a sub .500 record at home and a more than respectable 5-2-2 account as the visitors. That being said, Vancouver is the one city they might want to steer clear of even then, where the 'Nucks are still unbeaten in regulation. Even then, their one blemish was an OT loss in the Home Opener way back on October 9<sup>th</sup>.

Chicago is coming off back to back wins on their western trip, including an old school 5-0 whipping of the Oilers, giving Marty Turco his first shutout as a member of the Hawks. Jonathan Toews is surely brimming with confidence after that outing in which he had already potted a natural hat trick, a mere 21 minutes into the game.

After reeling off six straight and eight of nine, Vancouver has hit a bit of a snag losing two straight. They will try to jump back on the horse with a big win. The next big gun in Chicago ready to break out of a minor funk is Marian Hossa. The home winning streak is in jeopardy. Take the Champs.

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### Chicago -- Visitor Win -- V(ProLine)

### Columbus @ San Jose (10:30pm ET)

Jumbo Joe and crew are not going to come into this one lightly, having endured two consecutive collapses in games they definitely should have closed out. Joey Thornton in particular, has uncharacteristically gone very quiet with only one goal & a single assist on the month, for two pints through seven games. In October, he recorded 10 assists coupled with five goals for 15 points through nine games. The captain will be absolutely determined to right the ship.

The Jackets have been the Cinderella team so far, resting on a 10-6 record, having won seven of their past ten after splitting the first six. Goaltending has been erratic, although generally pleasing thus far for Coach Arniel, with Mathieu Garon stepping in admirably when called upon, albeit based on only a few appearances.

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At the end of the day, the Sharks are the more motivated of the two opponents this weekend. Meanwhile Columbus has nothing to lose after being projected by many to finish dead last in the conference. So while you will likely see loose, fun hockey played by the young Jackets, the pressure is slightly higher on the Teal shirts, to be modest.

### **Pick**

**San Jose by 2 or more goals -- Home Team Plus -- H+(ProLine)**