

Saturday's Picks - January 22

Written by Anthony Lancione

Friday, 21 January 2011 19:50 - Last Updated Friday, 21 January 2011 19:54



Every Saturday, we deliver the goods for the night's action. This week Anthony Lancione brings you his picks for the games on January 22nd.

New Jersey @ Philadelphia (1:00pm ET)

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The Eastern Conference leading Flyers host a team on the rise from the gutter, as the Martin Brodeur and co. have finally begun to show some life as of late. The Flyers' big man, captain Chris Pronger, has ended in injury stint and will further solidify an already confident group. Philly has only lost once all January in a 7-5 slugfest defeat in Boston, and put their month long home winning streak on the line as well. Danny Briere was rightfully selected as an All-Star. No doubt a little self-esteem boost for the \$8+Million/year man who is having an impressive campaign.

New Jersey has been attempting to pull themselves out of the gutter the past week and a half, having won three of four and recording points in each of them. They remain far down in the NHL basement, but perhaps a much less miserable second half of the season may be in the cards

Pick

Philadelphia – Home Win – H(ProLine)

Chicago @ Detroit (2:00pm ET)

The 2009 Winter Classic opponents meet in Mo-Town Saturday in an always entertaining divisional affair.

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So far the two teams have split the season series, one a piece. Detroit remains a President's trophy threat with the edge in the Central Division lead, despite a significantly depleted roster for the second straight season. Babcock's boys just flat know how to win and overcome adversity, with a mix mash of line-ups tinkering commonplace as of late.

However, this time around Marian Hossa is healthy and certainly due for a breakout game. He is not usually one who struggles under pressure, in fact he thrives on it. He's likely to step to the plate, hit one outta the park so to speak and have a monster game vs his former club.

Unfortunately for the Winged Wheels, This division is going to get just a tad tighter with the Hawks taking two points here as you'd also have to imagine the Hawk's top stars have a little more to give this season after a slow start by all the big guns not named Patrick Sharp.

Pick

Chicago – Visitor Win – V(ProLine)

Boston @ Colorado (3:00pm ET)

This is not a matchup you see every day, with the Bruins making their first visit to the Pepsi Centre in two years. However, despite both teams having a certain level of unfamiliarity with each other, this contest figures to be an intriguing one. Two of the top entry drafts runner ups in recent years in (Seguin- #2 in 2010 & Duchene- #3 in 2009) will get their first looks at each other since their days with the Plymouth Whalers and Brampton Battalion respectively. The Bruins are on a torrid pace as of late having tallied seven markers in a single game three times this month already and have outscored their opponents 40 to 24 over the same stretch! Timmy Thomas continues to stake his claim as the class of his position in the league, despite King Henrik's brilliance out in Broadway.

The Avs on the other hand have been slowly slipping down the Western conference standings this month, only just this week finally putting together consecutive victories for the first time since before Christmas. They have also not quite had the mesmerizing brick-wall display from Craig Anderson recently, as his numbers have steadily declined from last season. A big disappointment has also just entered the fray for the Colorado franchise with the news that Tomas Fleischmann will unfortunately, and shockingly be out for the remainder of the season. He was just diagnosed by doctors Thursday evening with a blood clot in his lung. Beyond general humanly concern from Flash's Avalanche teammates, this will also sting Matt Duchene in particular, as the sniper had found excellent chemistry with him upon his acquisition from the Capitals earlier this winter.

Pick

Boston – Visitor Win – V(ProLine)

Washington @ Toronto (7:00pm ET)

The Caps will surely have one thing on their mind as they fly into Toronto and straight through to the final whistle... A shocking come-from-behind defeat at the hands of the lowly Leafs on December 6th, after having been leading the Leafs 4-1 relatively late in the 4rd period. That loss, the third of the Caps now infamous (thanks top HBO) eight-game losing streak was possibly the backbreaker that sent them in that downward spiral last month which clearly dogged them for weeks. They are only now regaining some momentum, and would sure like to get some revenge to feed that surge forward in the standings that they would like. The goaltending situation is still up in the air with Varlamov and Nuevirth nursing ongoing injuries, though Varly may be ready to take the reigns back from interim backup Braden Holtby.

The Leafs have been wildly inconsistent thus far in the 2010/2011, although far too often on the negative element of that statement. However, they've gone 6-4 in January, starting off with five wins in six matches, including reeling off four straight victories. That being said, the inconsistency has remained prevalent despite a slightly more respectable run, pulling off a 9-3 victory two weeks ago in Atlanta, winning impressively in San Jose with another dramatic rally, only to get spanked around the ice 7-0 on Wednesday evening. Of course they would follow that up the next night with an impressive bounce back night handling the visiting Ducks 5-2.

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But at the end of the day, the Caps will be smelling blood, as will Ovy in particular, who has absolutely terrorized the Leafs over the past couple years, notching 19 points over his last 8 against Toronto, including a 5 point night in last season's finale between the two.

Pick

Washington – Visitor Win – V(ProLine)

NY Rangers @ Atlanta (7:00pm ET)

The Rangers put one of their finest performances of the season Wednesday night, beating Toronto by a touchdown 7-0. However, they may have been admiring the victory a little too much the following night after flying to Carolina, as they were put aside 4-1 in an uninspired effort. John Tortorella surely jolted them back into spirits after that one. Marian Gaborik looks to have broken the ice with his four-goal, five point night and will surely attempt to open the floodgates on a successful second half, more akin to what we have come to expect from the supremely talented Slovakian right winger.

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Have the Thrash been this year's Cinderella? Definitely. Will they continue to hold on to the playoff spot they so richly deserved? Possibly. Despite eventually being passed by the evergreen Nicholas Lidstrom for NHL leading defensemen scoring Big Buff, has certainly heeded the praise from many as the key piece to this very young Atlanta team this season. Although, Carolina has put on an impressive run and have nearly caught up to the Thrashers for 8th spot, they've managed to tread water, avoiding any prolonged losing streaks, even if mired in .500 hockey for over a month now.

Ultimately, this one is going right down to the wire. A three point game is in the cards for this one!

Pick

Tie – T(ProLine) ----- [New York in SO]

Carolina @ Pittsburgh (7:00pm ET)

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The Penguins may be without their dynamic duo yet again. That could naturally cause problems as it did on Thursday night, failing to score a goal against the revived (too early to say that) Marty Brodeur and the basement-dwelling Devils. They will surely be invigorated to remind the Canes of when they dashed their dreams of a 2nd Stanley cup eliminating them in the conference finals en route to their own cup in 2009.

The Canes are becoming notorious for starting slow then ramping it up a notch, after earning points in 10 of their last 13 to come out of nowhere to being on the brink of staking claim to a playoff spot.

Ultimately, the Staal brother battle will go to the elder ASG captain in this affair.

Tie – T(ProLine) ----- [Carolina in SO]

Anaheim @ Montreal (7:00pm ET)

The Captain returns! The second longest serving captain in Montreal Canadiens history, Saku Koivu, makes his long awaited return to the Bell Centre, in what is sure to be an emotional encounter. With a decade worth of memories, surely the fans will salute the former leader of the blue, white & red

Despite a setback in Toronto, The Ducks have been rolling, winning eight of ten, and seemingly not being affected by the loss of Star Ryan Getzlaf due to all of those stepping up in his absence. Hottest of them all lately is the tender, perhaps. With two shutouts, and a bevy of one goal games under his belt already in 2011, the Ducks have risen to the top five in the conference. Lubomir Visnovsky has been a warrior from the backend, and the best oldie but goodie going, Teemu Sellanne, continues his ridiculous better-than-a-point-a-game- pace at 40 years old!

The Habs have been dealt a bad few decks of cards of late, facing a myriad of injuries/illnesses to Mike Cammalleri, Maxim Pacioretty, Jeff Halpern, Benoit Pouliot, Josh Gorges and of course Andrei Markov. However, with the increasingly improving play of Carey Price, the Habs have managed not to fall too far down the Eastern conference charts.

However, the home team should manage to squeak this one out.

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Pick

Montreal – Home Win – H(ProLine)

Columbus @ St. Louis (8:00pm ET)

The Blue Jackets are trying to arrange with Marty McFly to take them one by one in the DeLorean, back to the year 2010 where things were much rosier, a grip on an early playoff-position in the standings was firm, and a home ice advantage spot was within reason. Since then, they have only managed to win 8 of 27 contests, including a mere 2 victories in 2011...both of the nail-biting variety.

Luckily for the Jackets, the Blues have also only managed to put together a measly 2 W's thus far in 2011. Despite trying to scour the KHL of as many homesick former NHL-ers as possible, and being subsequently stolen from by rival NHL GM's, you've got to feel a bit for the Blues. However, their showing against Detroit Thursday, erasing a 3-0 late 2nd period lead and forcing overtime, showed plenty of character, despite giving away the extra point in OT.

Ultimately, the Jackets' main offensive weapons are more due for a breakout than the Blues' top guns.

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Pick

Columbus – Visitor Win – V(ProLine)

Los Angeles @ Phoenix (8:00pm ET)

The 2nd half of the home & home series represents a tale of two teams headed in opposite directions with the Yotes' only having lost twice in regulations over the past three weeks. Over that span, they've been winning at a 60% clip, and grabbing points in most of their few recent losses to boot. Ilya Bryzgalov has slowly but surely been moving up the ranks back to where we've been accustomed to seeing him produce since 2006, while some fine play from Keith Yandle, another aging stalwart, Ray Whitney, and the almost return to form Shane Doan contributing on a by-committee basis, to improve Phoenix to the 5 spot in the West. But with how tight the conference still remains, Dave Tippett won't soon let his boys feel secure.

L.A. Has been brutal as of late, the opposite of Phoenix, only twice winning over their past eleven games, dating back to the Christmas break. However, they have shown resiliency in this spot over the past couple years, and with a hot Quick and Bernier, and a roster full of promise, albeit unfulfilled promise for the most part, a turnaround is surely not too far around the corner.

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At that, I suspect the turnaround will begin tonight, with a chance at some instant revenge from Thursday's opener.

Pick

Los Angeles – Visitor Win – V(ProLine)

Calgary @ Vancouver (10:00pm ET)

Talk about teams headed in opposite directions. These teams may be quite close in proximity, in terms of the league's overall landscape, however, in the standings, they are anything but. Vancouver continue to push Detroit for class of the West, and the NHL, with a stellar run dating back to November where they just last week capped off a 17 game run where they went undefeated in regulation. Luongo is getting back into prime form, the Sedins are both at least in the discussion of MVP nominees, as they strive to keep the Hart trophy within the Sedin family, and Ryan Kesler has really cemented himself as a prime secondary option to the twins, moving as far away from a one-dimensional offense has ever before in this regime.

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The Flames have truly sunk all the way to the cellar, sadly joining their fellow Albertan comrades in the depths of the West basement. With all the turmoil around management earlier on, a sad 6-0 thrashing from the not so dominant Minnesota Wild really put an exclamation mark on how poor this campaign has become. Poor off-season acquisitions, saddled with more bad contracts have really put an anchor on the Flames' short term growth prospects. Things are looking pretty grim in the Saddledome these days.

This should be a walk for the Nucks' at home to a raucous crows, no doubt.

Pick

Vancouver by 2 or more goals – Home Win Plus – H+(ProLine)

Minnesota @ San Jose

Despite a series of injury problems affecting both the #1 and #2 string goalies for Minny over the past month or so, their fill-ins have really stepped in admirably. From Jose initially to Anton Khubodin after him, and now back to ol' faithful Nicholas Backstrom, they've managed to string together a nice little stretch of seven wins in ten contests, including a 4 game winning streak and their current three gamer. In that span they've also recorded 3 donuts—2 in the past 3. So

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the team as a unit has reach seemed to have bought into Todd Richard's philosophy. Marty Havlat has been on fire, collecting just over 1 point per game over the past 6 weeks to stake claim to the team scoring lead—not unlike how he paced the Blackhawks in scoring beating out Kane and Toews the year before they won the cup. More impressively is his timing recently, as Havlat also leads the team with Game winning goals, his latest in Minny last contest.

San Jose on the other hand is starting to piece together a bit more steady goaltending and have shaken off their season-worst 5-game losing streak with a 3 game winning streak, encountering. The latest was the most impressive topping the mighty Canucks in OT in a tight affair with Joltin' Joe scoring the hugely monumental winner.

This should escalate him back to playing at the top of the leaderboard level we are used to. Naturally this will have his compatriot Olympic linemates Heatley and Marleau smiling pretty wide. In turn, this streak ultimately may very well snowball into a nice surge by the Sharks back up to the meat of the race in the conference.

Pick

San Jose by 2 or more goals– Home Win Plus – H+(ProLine)