A month of the 2008-09 NHL season has come and gone and I figured I would change it up a bit in this week's format and do a three-part series regarding fantasy hockey. We'll start with goalies this week...

Maasquito Buzzings…

- 29 of the league's top 52 point getters were from the Western Conference, so it's beginning to even out between the two Conferences.
- Five of the top ten players that garnered the most time on ice were defensemen from the Western Conference. Only big surprise is Francois Beauchemin, he's ranked ninth overall, ahead of Chris Pronger.
- Sammy Pahlsson is leading the Western Conference in faceoff wins with 144.
- The Ducks are flying mighty as Ryan Getzlaf tallied 10 points last week. While teammates

Corey Perry and Teemu Selanne both tallied nine points each.
- Dustin Brown is leading the Western Conference with 42 hits.
- Fabian Brunnstrom is shooting at an astounding 35.7%, he won't keep that up though. Brad Boyes is second at 31.8% and Andrew Brunette is third at 30.8%. I really only see Boyes really able to keep this pace, he's a genuine sniper.
- Teemu Selanne has been on fire on the power-play as he potted six power-play goals last week, he now has seven overall taking the lead away from Keith Tkachuk. Todd Bertuzzi remains to be a surprise at five power-play goals.
- If you are looking for power-play points you might want to look towards Calgary as Jarome Iginla and Dion Phaneuf are averaging over six minutes of power-play time per game. No big surprises on this list, expect Stephan Robidas, he's garnering 5:32 on the power-play, but that number will drop once Sergei Zubov returns this week.
- Dion Phaneuf leads the Western Conference with 51 shots on goal, finally the Phanuef of old returns, and guess what Calgary had a six-game winning streak, could there be a correlation?
- Derek Dorsett is leading the NHL in PIMs. He's my pick to be this season's Daniel Carcillo, all of his PIMs have mostly been via fights plus 10-minute misconducts tacked on in the end. Jared Boll returns but Dorsett will probably continue to rack up the mins anyways. Add him now if you are looking for PIMs help.
- Minnesota finally allowed a power-play goal to break the perfect streak. They still are operating at 91.7%.
- Anaheim now claims the top spot in the Western Conference in five-on-five scoring ratio with a rating of 1.26. Phoenix is the worst with a rating of 0.71, followed by Dallas at 0.79.
- Minnesota is averaging a league-low of 9.1 minutes in penalties per contest. So don't look for any big goons from the Minny line-up. Columbus is averaging the Western Conference high of 21.7. Once again provides more evidence to pick up Dorsett for PIMs.

Around the West

In Chicago, the goalie battle continues between Nikolai Khabibulin and Cristobal Huet. Khabibulin seems to have the edge as he owns a 3-1-2 record compared to Huet's 2-2-1 record. Khabibulin has a 2.44 goals against average and a .918 save percentage compared to Huet's 2.73 GAA and .910 sv%. Both goalies are very even, the main difference between the two is probably Khabibulin's shut out against the Oilers. The Hawks just can't afford to keep both goalies, while chewing up $13 million in salary cap. A few teams, including the Thrashers, Islanders, Blue Jackets or even the Stars, could use a goalie so you might see Khabibulin dealt fairly soon.

In Columbus, Pascal Leclaire remains injured with a sprained ankle. I think it's similar to the one that Marc-Andre Fleury had last season, so it might be a long-term lingering injury. Fredrik Norrena will get the bulk of the starts until Leclaire returns. Daniel LaCosta should backup Norrena, and might get a few starts if it is a long-term injury. Unless you are in serious goalie trouble, probably take a pass on Norrena or even LaCosta.

In Detroit, it's still the Chris Osgood show. He's 5-1-2 in eight starts this season, but his peripheral stats aren't up to par with last season. Osgood currently has a 3.21 gaa and a .884 sv%, which just won't cut it if you are after a championship in your pools. Ty Conklin isn't fairing much better as he is 3-1-0 with a 3.19 gaa and .897 sv %. Heading into this season I honestly

thought that Conks might be able to steal the job from Osgood, but he hasn't performed well enough to do so. Osgood owners just sit tight he's much better than the numbers are right now and will settle right around his career average of 2.44 and .907.

In Predators territory, Dan Ellis was lost for most of this week because of a stiff back. He wasn't doing much anyways with a 3.28 gaa and .873 sv%. Didn't they trade Chris Mason to the Blues, so that Ellis can have the full-time gig? Pekka Rinne has filled in admirably for the injured Ellis as he is 2-0, with a 1.45 gaa and a .944 sv%. They ran with the hotter goalie last year between Mason and Ellis, so they might do it again this season. There's a good chance that Rinne can take the job away from Ellis if he keeps it up. Rinne would be a great replacement for Rick DiPietro owners. Pick him up ASAP if he's available in your leagues. Nashville is only giving up 26.5 shots per game and their stingy defense will help out Rinne.

Seems like a revolving door for goalies in St. Louis. They have suited up five different goalies this season. It began with Manny Legace, then Chris Mason, Ben Bishop, Chris Holt and now Marek Schwarz. It'll return back towards the tandem of Mason and Legace fairly soon as both are returning from injuries. The Blues are near the top-10 for giving up the least amount of opposing shots, so the goalies should really benefit from the defensive system. It looks like its going to be a platoon system for the duration of the season, so consider Legace and Mason as probably a third goalie for your fantasy squads.

Now let's head up to the Northwest Division, Miikka Kiprusoff seems to be back into vintage form as he reduced his 4.69 gaa and .843 sv% down to 2.83 and .907 in two weeks time. It might be too late now, but if you can pry Kipper from an unsuspecting owner, he should be solid for the rest of the season. Kipper probably rejoins the elite group of goalies, once he gets back on track. Curtis McElhinney won't get into enough starts to warrant a roster spot.

In Avalanche country, Peter Budaj seems to have taken the number one gig momentarily from Andrew Raycroft. The Avs are giving up an average of 3.10 goals per game, which doesn't make it particularly appealing to own either goalie at the moment. Budaj is one of those high wins, high gaa and low sv% goalies to own. He wouldn't be a bad option as a third goalie for spot starts, but anything more he's probably hurting your team more than helping it.

The biggest goaltending battle, in my opinion, is the one that's happening in Edmonton. There's a three-way battle between Dwayne Roloson, Mathieu Garon, and Jeff Drouin-Deslauriers. At the moment, it seems to be Roloson .vs. Garon. Roloson started in back-to-back games this weekend and was victorious on both contests. Roloson also has superior stats with a 2.22 gaa as opposed to Garon's 3.18. Roloson also owns the edge in save percentage with a .929 rating compared to .895. Garon started the season red-hot winning his first three starts, but then dropped the next three. The kicker is that they can't send JDD down to the minors because he would have to go through the waivers system, and another team would surely claim him if that happened. My bet is on Roloson, to re-claim the number one job back in Edmonton. If you need a goalie Rolo is probably your best bet because he's only 5% owned in Yahoo leagues.

Minnesota is known for always time-sharing their goalies, but this year they seem to have taken a different approach as Niklas Backstrom is the undisputed number one in Minny. Heading into

the season, I thought that Josh Harding would get into at least 30 games, but it doesn't appear that will happen after Backstrom's hot start. His 2.26 gaa and .923 numbers are right on his average, so you can probably expect Backstrom to maintain similar numbers throughout the season. Minny's defensive system will certainly help out Backstrom. He's probably a solid number one option this year.

Many fantasy owners are still awaiting the arrival of Roberto Luongo. He's just under the .900 save % and 3.00 gaa mark, which is very un-Luongo-like. Many owners are stuck between a rock and a hard place. You can't really deal him for fair value at this point in the season, and it's not like you can just outright drop him. You pretty much have to just take the bad and hope that he returns to form asap. Vancouver is giving up right around the league average of 30.5 shots per game, so it's not like they are complete irresponsible on defense. Just wait it out on Luongo.

J.S. Giguere is along the same boat as Luongo. He had a brilliant season last year while posting a 2.12 gaa and a .922 sv %, but this year has just been totally backwards as he is on the unhappy side of the 3.00 gaa mark. On a happy note, his .907 sv % is actually not too far off his .915 career sv % mark, so things are bound to get better as the Ducks adjust defensively. Jonas Hiller probably won't get enough of a shot to steal the gig from Giggy, and will probably only get into a handful of games. Giggy owners sit tight and hope for the best, as in the Luongo-case above.

Two's not enough, let's make it three-in-a-row with underperforming goalies. Marty Turco has given the most fits to owners this season. His atrocious 4.34 gaa and .837 sv % are just killing fantasy teams at the moment. The problem is the Stars don't have a reliable back up to help Turco weather the storm. Tobias Stephan is fairing much better and the Stars maybe looking at other options fairly soon if things don't change. At $ 5.7 million his price-tag is just too much for team's to pick up, so trading him is probably not a viable option for the Stars. I'd bench Turco until he can re-gain his form if you own him. If you can acquire Turco from a really frustrated owner, he might be a great buy-low option, as the Stars are the fourth ranked team in terms of shots allowed per game. Once Turco gets back on track, the defense is in place to help him out. I'd make a serious run at Turco if you can.

Jason LaBarbera is receiving the bulk of the starts in LA, and probably will do so for the duration of the season. The Kings' defense looks much improved compared to last season as they are ranked only behind San Jose for opposing shots allowed per game. LaBarbera probably won't be a first option on fantasy squads but if you can use him as a third option, where you only spot start him that would certainly help out your team. Erik Ersberg probably won't garner enough fantasy value to be owned in fantasy leagues.

The Coyotes' season will rest on pretty much one person, that person is Ilya Bryzgalov. If he plays as well as he did last season, the Coyotes will make the playoffs this season. If he continues on the path he has played in the last five games they won't. Bryz started the season 2-0, but has gone 1-4 since and now sits with a 3.01 gaa and .902 sv %, which won't cut it in many fantasy leagues. You also have to take into consideration that many of those starts have been on the road and against Eastern conference teams, so that probably played a role in the

horrible numbers, but he'll come back around. Mikael Tellqvist probably won't get much time with Bryzgalov, the workhorse, between the pipes, so don't ignore him for now. Hang tight on Bryz and you should be rewarded.

Last but not least we have the Sharks. You pretty much only need to know two words. Evgeni Nabokov. Nabby has been a bit off this season, as his numbers have not been great, he is however off to a great 8-2 start. The main thing for fantasy owners to be aware of is that the Sharks are the league's most defensive teams. They are only coughing up an average of 23.4 shots per contest, so if Nabby lets in two goals, it's only going to be a .913 sv %, which might not be enough to win you head-to-head or even roto leagues. If you are a Nabby owner and your league counts total saves as a category you might want to add goalie like Mike Smith in TB, Tim Thomas in BOS or Tomas Vokoun in FLA just to even out the stats.

Stay tuned next week a column on Western Conference fantasy defensemen.