

Preparing for the Stretch run

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 10 February 2009 04:29 -



The final stretch of the fantasy season is about to begin, whether you are 20 points up on your competition or 20 points down, now is the time to make a late season surge. The waiver wire is littered with tons of potential pickups and if you are in a position where you are looking up at the competition, you'll need to take some gambles in order to get you to the finish line.

First, let's take a look at a few:

Maaasquito Buzzings...

Players in the last week with the highest production in each category who are less than 50 percent owned in Yahoo leagues.

Goals

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Assists

+/-

PPP

SOG

Kesler (3)

Niskanen (7)

Walker (6)

Lehtinen (4)

Cleary (15)

Neal (3)

Walker (5)

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Grossman (5)

Neal (3)

Ott (14)

Svatos (2)

Lehtinen (5)

Filppula (5)

Edler (3)

Neal (13)

McClement (3)

Filppula (4)

O'Sullivan (4)

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Ott (3)

Umberger (13)

Ott (3)

Colaiacovo (4)

Leino (4)

Niskanen (3)

Berglund (13)

Anaheim

The Ducks schedule looks pretty soft for the next little while as they only have three games scheduled for the next 12 days. Don't be surprised, if you own a lot of Ducks that you begin to slip a few notches on the fantasy ladder during the next two weeks. After tallying five goals in five games near the end of January, Bobby Ryan had a four-game goal-less streak. He snapped that streak with a goal on Saturday night against the Flames. Ryan is still a rookie, so expect hot and cold streaks for the duration of the season. As Dobber stated in an earlier article, Teemu Selanne's return has definitely negatively affected Ryan's ice-time. J.S. Giguere picked up his first win in nearly a month after snapping a four-game losing streak. Jonas Hiller has played much better than him, and is certainly more deserving of the number one gig in Anaheim, but in the end you just can't bench a \$5.5 mil goalie. Giggy should be the number one the rest of the way. After tallying nine points in five games, Scott Niedermayer now has a

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four-game pointless streak in February.

Calgary

Calgary had a terrible week as they lost all four contests, while giving up 14 goals to their opposition. Mike Cammalleri is doing his part to halt the losing streak as he potted his 10th goal in nine games. Jim Vandermeer, Brandon Prust, and Wayne Primeau are all out with injuries but should be returning to the lineup by the end of the month. They don't have much fantasy significance, but the veteran presence might help out some of the young kids like Rene Bourque and David Moss offensively. Miikka Kiprusoff struggled this week by allowing 11 goals and owning a .896 SP in three starts this week. Dion Phaneuf is struggling offensively with only one goal in the past five games, but he does have 21 shots on goal, so it's just a matter of getting the lucky bounces before he explodes for points again.

Chicago

Chicago had a decent week with two solid wins against Calgary and Edmonton, but couldn't make it three in a row as they were blasted by the Canucks on Saturday night. Patrick Kane is continuing to struggle as the sniper only has one goal in the past 18 games. He's also not getting it done in the assists column as he only has five assists during that span. It looks like that ankle is still majorly bothering him. If you are in a one-year league, I'd try to use his "big name" and see if you can net a big catch in return. Kris Versteeg continues to flourish as a center in Chicago. He potted his fourth shot-handed goal of the season, while winning 11 of 15 faceoffs. If your league counts faceoff wins, he'd be a great option to go after in trade talks in your fantasy pools. News out of Chicago is that the Blackhawks are trying to negotiate a new deal with Martin Havlat. He might be the first of the big named candidates to take themselves out of the free agency race at the end of the season. That doesn't really affect the Hawks top-nine, but it does affect prospects like Jack Skille, Igor Makarov and Kyle Beach.

Columbus

Looks like Steve Mason's mononucleosis is much more serious than the Blue Jackets initially let on. The Jackets placed him on IR this weekend. I don't know much about Mono, so I did some research and found.

<http://www.webmd.com/hw-popup/risk-of-ruptured-spleen-following-a-mononucleosis-infection>, which could potentially sideline Mason for four-to-six weeks. I still think that Mason is a product of Ken Hitchcock's defensive scheme as opposed to pure skill, see Pascal Leclaire's statline for last season. Which means picking up Wade Dubielewicz wouldn't be a bad idea for the time being. The Blue Jackets will most likely turn towards making a claim on a goalie going through re-entry waivers (Manny Legace**, Dany Sabourin or Martin Gerber) to solve their goaltending woes if Mason is deemed to be out for a long period of time. Kristian Huselius continues to be hot as he now has 12 points in the past 10 games. Mike Commodore is point-less in four games and only has five shots on goal.

Colorado

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Colorado's up and down season continues. They picked up two solid victories over the Flames and Stars, but then fall to the mediocre Blues 4-1 on Saturday night. Worst of all, they lost sniper Milan Hejduk to a jaw injury in the first period. If Hejduk is out for an extended period of time, the Avs could fall too far behind in the playoff race and never recover in time this season. If that is the case look for potential unrestricted free agent, Jordan Leopold to be donning a new uniform to finish off this season. Christ Stewart has been hot as he now has four goals in the past eight contests. He joined Wojtek Wolski and Ryan Smyth on the Avs top-line on Saturday night, while tallying the Avs lone-goal. Peter Budaj continues to struggle as he hasn't had a one-goal outing in 11 contests.

Dallas

The Stars have been red-hot as they have scored 19 goals in their past four contests, while winning seven of their last eight contests. Most of the wins can be attributed to the solid play of Marty Turco who has allowed only 13 goals during that span, while maintaining a .934 SP. Stephane Robidas ended a six-game point-less streak with an assist on Sunday night. Both Jere Lehtinen and Steve Ott established new career-highs by scoring 11 points while on eight-game point scoring streaks. Lehtinen has points in 11 of his past 12 games. Fabian Brunnstrom tweaked his ankle and remains day-to-day. Matt Niskanen is also red-hot with eight points in the past five games, while garnering a plus seven rating. He's garnered 20 minutes or more of ice-time in six of the past seven contests. He's a decent pickup while being only 30% owned in Yahoo leagues.

Detroit

There isn't a clear distinction between backup and number one between the pipes in Detroit. Both goalies have played roughly the same amount of games, but one clearly has the better numbers. Ty Conklin picked up his sixth shut out of the season when the Red Wings blanked the Penguins on Sunday and now sits tied second in the NHL with Niklas Backstrom. If Conklin continues to play this well, he'll easily head into this season's playoffs as the number one. If you own Osgood, and you haven't picked up Conks yet, you better do so ASAP. Johan Franzen missed Sunday's game with a bruised and swollen hand, X-rays didn't reveal any major damage so he'll most likely return later on this week. Marian Hossa potted his 30th goal of the season, which is the seventh time in his NHL career. He has 29 or more goals for nine consecutive seasons. Nicklas Lidstrom is finally rounding back into form as he now has a four-game point scoring streak in which he has tallied two goals and two assists. He's also a plus six during that span. Dan Cleary skated with Henrik Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk on the Wings top-line as Tomas Holmstrom is out with injury.

Edmonton

Edmonton's season continues to be a yo-yo. After getting drubbed by the Sabres 10-2 last week, the Oilers put up another spiffy as they got toasted by the Red Wings 9-3. The injuries are starting to run through the Oilers' lineup as Shawn Horcoff is out with a hip injury sustained in Thursday night's contest against the Blues and Lubomir Visnovsky is out with a shoulder

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injury. Ales Hemsky has been the lone bright star in the Oilers' lineup this season, but is marred in a terrible slump. He only has three points in the past seven contests. Hemsky has the potential to be a better than a point-per-game player if the Oilers can find him more offensive line mates, but until that happens he'll continue to struggle. Dustin Penner just doesn't seem to cut it as he only has one goal in the past seven contests while being minus six during that span. Sheldon Souray continues to chug along with eight power-play goals this season. He's also on pace to record 272 shots on goal which would smash his current career-high by nearly 50.

Los Angeles

The Kings are enjoying success away from home, as they are now 3-1 on their current road-trip. The Kings are enjoying some timely scoring from their top-six as Dustin Brown, Kyle Calder and Jarett Stoll have developed plenty of chemistry playing together, while the Kings top-line of Anze Kopitar, Patrick O'Sullivan and Alex Frolov have also begun to show tons of chemistry as they registered four points in Saturday night's 3-1 victory over the Devils. The scoring and tight defense is exactly what they'll need in order to get into the playoffs this season. I posed a question last week, whether the Kings will change it up to go with Erik Ersberg or stick with Jon Quick and it looks like the later option is what's going to happen in LA. Quick has won six of his last seven starts, while maintaining a very respectable .921 SP during that span. I still don't see why this guy still only 24% owned in Yahoo leagues? Kyle Quincey didn't register a point in Saturday night's contest, but still managed to register six shots on goal, that shows me that he's getting more confident shooting the puck. He's on pace to finish with around 45 points, which wouldn't be a bad season for a 23 year-old D man. Oscar Moller missed his 13th game of the season with a fractured collarbone, but looks ready to rejoin the Kings lineup on Tuesday night against the Islanders. I don't think the Kings will want to mess with their current top-six, so Moller will most likely lineup with Michal Handzus and Wayne Simmonds on the Kings' third line.

Minnesota

It appears that the Wild are attempting to re-sign both Niklas Backstrom and Marian Gaborik for next season. The owner, Craig Leipold, confirmed to the Star Tribune that he has every intention of re-signing the pair. It's up to them if they want to re-sign in Minny. Personally, I don't see why they would want to re-sign before the trade deadline. They aren't exactly being offered crazy amounts of cash, so why not take a gamble and see if any other teams are willing to "show them the money" in the off-season. If they don't get any offers they like, they could easily just return to Minny for another season. That's exactly why the Wild will need to deal them at the trade deadline to at least get some sort of compensation for them, or face losing them for nothing in the off-season. I'd said this a few times already, if you have the space stash Josh Harding! Mikko Koivu continues to play well with four points and 14 shots on goal in the past four contests.

Nashville

The Predators are heating up at the right time as they have only lost twice since the All-Star break. They had a solid week going 3-1 while allowing only seven goals. Jason Arnott seems to

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be finding his groove as he now has a four-game goal scoring streak. He fired 20 shots on goal during that span, and could be as productive as Ryan Getzlaf, Pavel Datsyuk, or Vinny Lecavalier for the duration of this fantasy season. I'd try to buy-low and throw everything including the kitchen sink to land him in your pools. Shea Weber is ice-cold as he now is riding an eight game pointless drought. I sure hope those that owned Weber listened to my advice a few weeks ago and sold high on him. With the emergence of quality waiver wire D like Matt Niskanen and Carlo Colaiacovo, you're pretty much going to get (expletive) all for him. Dan Ellis might be clawing his way back to the number one gig in Nashville. He picked up a shut out against Minnesota on Friday night, but had a sub-par outing on Sunday night. The ball will bounce back into Pekka Rinne's court, but if he falters it could open the door for Ellis.

Phoenix ☐ ☐

The Coyotes will need to play much better hockey if they have any shot at the post-season this year. They have now lost a season-high six consecutive games. It's not a good sign that on Saturday the Hurricanes came into Jobing.com Arena and smashed them 7-2. On a positive note, Shane Doan collected his 600th career NHL point and continues to roll along near a point-per-game pace. Ilya Bryzgalov is winless in his last six starts, and has allowed 21 goals during that span. His save percentage has also been atrocious as he's only stopped 150 of the 171 that he's faced during the six-game losing streak. I just don't see the Coyotes making the playoffs this season, so for those owners of Bryz, now might be a good time to cut bait on him and pick up a better statistical goalie in Dubie or Quick.

San Jose

The Sharks might have hit a mid-season hump as they have lost three consecutive contests for the first time this season. Two of which have been OT losses, so the Sharks have come out with a few points in the losses. Tuesday night's contest against the Bruins will see Joe Thornton face off against his old squad. Christian Ehrhoff continues to be hot as he now has four goals in the past seven games. Milan Michalek remains inconsistent as he picked up three assists in Thursday night's contest against the Hurricanes, but zero in Saturday night's contest against the Blue Jackets. I think he'll be hard pressed to finish the season with more than 55 points this season. You can pretty much pronounce Jonathan Cheechoo DOA as his pointless streak has hit six-games, he does have 13 SOG during that span though. He needs to get back onto the Sharks' top-line if he is to have any fantasy value for the rest of this season.

St. Louis

Chris Mason is red-hot with a 5-1-2 record in the past eight starts, which includes two shutouts. With Manny Legace out of the picture, it looks like the Blues will live and die with Mason for the duration of the season. They will use the inexperienced Chris Holt as Mason's backup, which means Mason will start in 90% of the Blues' remaining contests this season. At 23% Yahoo owned, Mason is another bargain bin replacement for your goalie stats going forward. Brad Boyes is maintain his hot-streak as he now has nine points in the past five contests, while firing 16 shots on goal and a plus three during that span. David Perron is leading the team with 28 assists this season which is one more than the 27 points that he put up with the Blues in his

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rookie season last year. Last week I mentioned Carlo Colaiacovo. He picked up four assists this past week, while registering nine shots on goal. As long as Eric Brewer is out of the Blues' lineup, look for Colo to maintain over 20 minutes of ice-time per game as well as plenty of power-play ice-time in St. Louis.

Vancouver

Ryan Kesler entered this season as a two-way center looking for top-six minutes and five months later, the Canucks are using Kesler to help jump start two NHL veterans who have a combined 2105 games of experience between them. The trio has combined for a total of 15 points in the past two games and look to be the hottest line in the NHL. Kesler has a three-game point-scoring streak in which he has tallied eight points while firing 11 shots on goal. At only 13% Yahoo owned, he's another bargain bin pickup for the rest of this season. Kyle Wellwood is riding a horrible nine-game pointless streak and has only registered six shots on goal during that span. He's pretty much droppable now in all fantasy pools. Youngster Alex Edler is picking up his offensive production as he now has six points in the past three contests. He picked up three points on the power-play in Saturday night's 7-3 blowout win over the Blackhawks. If he can maintain that power-play QB slot he could also be someone to look out for in the final stretch of this season.

The final stretch is about to begin, it's the moves or non-moves that you are going to make that will determine where you finish this season. Hopefully, you make the right ones which will lead you to the championship.