

Off to the Races

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 06 October 2009 11:58 - Last Updated Wednesday, 07 October 2009 17:30



The start of the 2009-2010 NHL season is well and truly underway. There were certainly plenty of surprises, as well as plenty of hair-pulling mistakes. The main thing that you need to keep reminding yourself is that it's only six days into the new season, and not to panic too much, there's still plenty of time left in the season, before you call a fire-sale. Similar to last season I'll provide you with weekly updates, so that you have access to the latest news that's been happening from the Western Conference front.

As always before the good stuff let's take a look at a few:

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Maaasquito Buzzings...

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

Goals

Assists

+/-

PPP

SOG

Wolski (3)

McClement (3)

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E. Johnson (4)

McDonald (3)

Raymond (13)

Neal (2)

McDonald (2)

Hejda (4)

Clark (2)

Samuelson (10)

Moss (2)

Clark (2)

Hannan (3)

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Doughty (2)

Wolski (8)

Byfuglien (2)

Bourque (2)

Vandermeer (3)

Bourque (2)

Sharp (8)

Sharp (2)

Quincey (2)

Sydor (3)

Dawes (2)

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B. Richards (8)

Anaheim

The Ducks had a relatively easy schedule to start the season as they only had one contest up until last night. Jonas Hiller started the season with a shaky four-goal outing in his 2009 debut. J.S. Giguere should get the tap on the pads in tonight's contest against the Wild. Look for them to have an even 50/50 spilt for at least the first ten contests until one can truly establish themselves as the clear-cut number one in Anaheim. Selanne was a surprise as he led the Ducks with five SOG along with over six and a half minutes of power-play ice-time in Saturday night's 4-1 loss to the Sharks. Bobby Ryan, Corey Perry and Ryan Getzlaf was a combined minus eight in the contest, if they continue to struggle look for coach Randy Carlyle to juggle the lines. Scott Niedermayer continued his workhorse ways as he garnered a team-high 27:43 in ice-time. With relatively no competition from the rest of the Ducks' defensive corps, Ryan Whitney tallied his first goal of the season, surprisingly he's only 29 percent owned in Yahoo leagues, so if he's still available snatch him up ASAP, especially if you are a Andrei Markov owner.

Calgary

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Calgary started off their campaign on the right foot as they picked up two big victories against their division rivals the Oilers and the Canucks. It appears that David Moss has done his best Mike Cammalleri impersonation as he tallied twice this past week, while spending a whopping 80.14 percent of his shifts alongside Olli Jokinen and Jarome Iginla. It also appears that Rene Bourque's ankle injury is completely behind him as he's leading the Flames with three points. The Flames are separating their eggs into different baskets as they have split Dion Phaneuf from Jay Bouwmeester. The pair only spent 17.82 percent of their total shifts together. Mark Giordano seems to be the early winner as he's spent 79.37 percent of his shifts with either Phaneuf or Bouwmeester. If you are in a deep 14+ team fantasy league he could be worth some strong consideration. Miikka Kiprusoff is back to his old self, I don't quite know if that's a good or a bad thing. A couple of positives is that he has a 100 percent win ratio, and that he has a .921 save percentage. The downside is that he has a 3.00 GAA. With Kipper it's always going to be a double edged sword.

Chicago

Chicago started both of their games overseas in Finland, and probably should have come out with two victories but Tomas Vokoun's remarkable season debut burst that bubble. Patrick Kane was experiencing no problems from his off-season drama as he picked up four points and 12 SOG to lead the way. Dustin Byfuglien and Patrick Sharp both had identical two goals, one assist and one power-play goal stat-lines. The Chicago four-headed defensive monster of Duncan Keith, Cam Barker, Brent Seabrook, and Brian Campbell looked like they haven't missed a beat from last season as the foursome combined for a dazzling 18 SOG overseas. The intriguing story line comes between the pipes as Cristobal Huet's three goal, .875 save percentage performance was clearly overshadowed by Antti Niemi's 23-save shut out performance the following night. We saw Nikolai Khabibulin seize the number one gig away from Huet last season, can Niemi do the same this year?

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Colorado

Colorado shocked pretty much everyone as they took down the highly-touted Sharks in their home opener and followed that up with a solid 3-0 shutout of the Canucks. With a few more of those quality performances they'll guarantee themselves out of the race for the Taylor Hall sweepstakes. I've always believed in the saying, "It's better to draft a top-line player from a crappy team than to draft a third liner on a great team." The saying is proven true once again as the Avs top-line of Milan Hejduk, Paul Stastny and Wojtek Wolski combined for an impressive total of 11 points and a plus nine rating in their first two victories of the season. I'm starting to believe that Stastny is beginning to enter Sidney Crosby/Evgeni Malkin territory in terms of play-making ability. Despite a team-leading eight SOG, Wolski is still only 37 percent owned in Yahoo leagues. Pick him up ASAP. A few months back I wrote that Darcy Tucker would start the season as a top-six player in Colorado and was quickly denounced by many Dobberites, do you believe me now? Kyle Quincey was a favorite of mine last season, despite being traded from the Kings to Avs, he seems to be keeping his mojo as he's averaging 5:44 on the power-play for Colorado. Mark Streit proved everyone wrong by moving from one of the top power-play units to one of the worst in the league, while still maintaining a similar production, can Quincey do the same this season? Craig Anderson has certainly made me into a believer. Two wins, 1.00 GAA, .973 save percentage and one shut out, if only the Avs continue to be this good for the whole season...

Columbus

The Blue Jackets started their season 2-0 for the first time in team history with a big win over the Canucks last night. What's also surprising is that they have done so while spreading out the offense compared to recent years where it was only Rick Nash producing the lone spark of

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opportunity. Three players share the team lead in SOG with six, followed very closely with two players with five and another two players with four. Fedor Tyutin seems to be coming out as the power-play winner as he leads the team in power-play ice-time by averaging 3:43 in the two contests so far this season. Derick Brassard and Kristian Huselius is occupying the most of Nash's ice-time as they have gained a 69.53 percent stake in his overall ice-time. Mason is doing his best to disprove the sophomore slump theory as he maintains a very respectable 2.00 GAA along with a .947 save percentage so far in this early season.

Dallas

The Stars had a stellar season opener despite giving up two first period goals on Saturday night. James Neal led the way with two markers, one of which was on the power-play, while Brad Richards led the team with eight SOG. The later also led the team in power-play ice-time with 5:48 on the man advantage. At only 33 percent Yahoo-owned he's a major bargain that's still widely available on many waiver wires, and is a perfect candidate as a third/fourth center in fantasy leagues. The Dallas blue-line really lacks a "big-named game changer", but they do possess a few very under rated D-men in Stephane Robidas, Trevor Daley, and Matt Niskanen, all of which are all under 33 percent owned in Yahoo leagues. Robidas has the most across-the-board upside, as he could flirt with 40 points, 80 PIMs, and 160 SOG by the end of the season. Marty Turco seems to have put his horrible 2008-09 season behind him as he had very respectable 1.85 GAA and a .923 save percentage numbers to start the season.

Detroit

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The Red Wings will certainly be looking forward to playing on North American soil after their dismal start to their 2009-2010 season with two huge losses to their division rivals, the Blues. Their downfall was mostly due to their lack of quality goaltending as the duo of Chris Osgood and Jimmy Howard yielded nine goals in their two contests in Stockholm. They'll certainly need a better than .836 save percentage if they are going to get back into the Stanley Cup finals for a third consecutive season. On a positive note, Johan Franzen leads the team with nine SOG, he'll need to get into the 300 SOG range if the Red Wings are going to once again lead the league in offense this season. Nik Kronwall continued his hot-streak from last season with two points in two contests. Dan Cleary continues to impress also with two points in two contests. It never ceases to amaze me how he always ends up pulling off 40-point seasons out of his bottom. Perhaps this year he reaches the half-century mark?

Edmonton

The Oilers' home-opener would have been a largely successful one if it wasn't for the last minute hiccup by Nikolai Khabibulin. Seriously, why did he come out to play the puck anyway? It's been four days since the goal and I'm still asking myself that very question. Moving on, Patty O'Sullivan had a great debut with six SOG. He had a few opportunities including the open-net miss in the last minute, but the way he approached the game seemed like he was a man with a mission. The Oilers have been lacking that for the past few years, so if he can continue to play with that type of motivation, look for the former CHL/AHL rookie of the year to have a very productive fantasy season. At 54 percent owned in Yahoo leagues, that number will inch considerably closer to 100 in the next few weeks. Heart, that is one thing that Sam Gagner has plenty of. Here's to a 5'11", 190 pound youngster, taking on a 6'2", 197 pound 17-year vet in a brawl while following that up later by barreling down ice and scoring a game-tying goal with seven minutes remaining in regulation. That's how you should respond after getting demoted to the fourth line, not pull out the "I want to be traded, because you aren't utilizing my skills properly." stunt that Heatley pulled in the off-season. (Sorry as an Edmontonian, I had to throw

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in a Heatley jab somewhere) Circle November 27th on your calendar boys and girls, because that's the date when the Oil will take on Heatley and the Sharks, and you better bet your bottom dollar that I'll be booing him every time he touches the puck from my TV screen from half way around the world here in Australia.

Los Angeles

The Kings certainly didn't revert back to their stingy defensive style, compared to last season, as they allowed six goals in their season opener on Saturday night. Dustin Brown led the way with seven SOG and should once again lead the Kings in that department at the end of the season. Anze Kopitar, Ryan Smyth and Drew Doughty led the Kings scoring with two points each, all of which were on the power-play. From the snippets of the game that I watched, the power-play looked quite organized and showed plenty of chemistry. They could be a surprising group that ranks amongst the top ten in productivity this season. Doughty wound up with 3:30 on the power-play compared to Jack Johnson's 1:04. If that's the split that the Kings are going with, Johnson could lose his fantasy value very quickly, especially if he continues to have many minus three performances like he had in the season opener. Jon Quick had a dismal start as he allowed six goals along with a .800 save percentage. Coach Terry Murray initially stated that he wanted Quick to start in 60 games this season, a few more of these and Erik Ersberg might be the one starting the 60.

Minnesota

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The Wild had the tall task of taking on the stingy defense of Columbus to start the season and wound up losing a very close 2-1 contest. Coach Todd Richards stuck to his guns of vowing not to place his emphasis on defense and to play an uptempo game, as they allowed 39 SOG to the Blue Jackets, compared to their 30.7 average last season. I don't know if that's going to help Niklas Backstrom's numbers this season, but he still ended up with a very respectable 2.04 GAA and a .950 save percentage, which should make many of his owners proud. Mikko Koivu led the team with six SOG, there were earlier reports that he injured his knee in Sunday's practice, but it seems to have faded to the background. Keep a watchful eye over the Wild's number one center though. Brent Burns seems to be back to his old self with 25:11 in ice-time along with four SOG and four PIMs, it looks like his concussion from last season is over and done with. His 42 Yahoo-owned percentage is quite low for a player of his caliber. Tonight's contest against the Ducks will reveal more to see if the Wild are a truly one-goal team or if it was just Columbus' stingy D.

Nashville

The Predators opened the season against Dallas and certainly held their own with a shootout victory. Jason Arnott continues to prove that he is one of the most under rated players in fantasy hockey. If he keeps this production he'd finish the season with 164 points and 574 SOG. That's not going to happen, but a very respectable line of 65 points, 55 PIMs, 20 PPP, and 200 SOG certainly isn't out of the question. First injury blow to the Predators goes to J.P. Dumont, he was crushed into the boards by Robidas and left Saturday night's contest. From the news that I can gather, it doesn't appear serious, and could very well suit up for Thursday night's contest against the Avs. Shea Weber garnered 28:37 and Ryan Suter picked up 27:44 while Dan Hamhuis picked up 27:30 in overall ice-time, can you say workhorses? Teemu Laakso played 6:20, so talk about lack of confidence in the kid. Dan Ellis started the game and played soundly to a 1.85 GAA and .950 save percentage performance. Pekka Rinne owners meet panic button.

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Phoenix

The Dave Tippett era in Phoenix has begun and it looks pretty darn good. Something tells me that the Coyotes' dismal season last year could be related to the lack of coaching experience in Wayne Gretzky. Radim Vrbata looked great with two goals and six SOG on opening night. Surprisingly, only 1.52 percent of his shifts were alongside Shane Doan, hmmm. It looks like Phoenix may be trying to preserve Ed Jovanovski for the long haul as they gave Zbynek Michalek and Adrian Aucoin more ice-time than JovoCop. The former had zero power-play minutes though. Ilya Bryzgalov looked average with a 3.00 GAA, but his .909 save percentage is certainly something that's note-worthy. He has a career .912 save percentage which would complement a high-win, low save percentage goalie, like Evgeni Nabokov or Miikka Kiprusoff, nicely.

San Jose

After a shocking defeat to the Avalanche the Sharks bounced back nicely with a 4-1 win against their division rivals, the Ducks. Patrick Marleau led the way with three goals, while garnering just under 20 minutes of ice-time. Joe Pavelski and Dany Heatley both registered an identical stat-line of two assists, but the former also registered 10 SOG, which is a remarkably higher than the 266 he had last season. Perhaps the loss of offensive depth in San Jose has forced Marleau alongside Pavelski, which should guarantee that the youngster will have a solid year fantasy-wise in his "magical fourth year". The latest update is that Pavelski is going to miss two weeks due to a lower-body injury after blocking a shot. Something tells me that something is broken down there. Two major surprises came out of SJ this weekend, who are Benn Ferriero and Jason Demers. You can read all about the later in the forums. Ryan Clowe (2006, 34 points in 58 contests), Milan Michalek (2007, 55 points in 79 contests), Devin Setoguchi (2008, 65 points in 81 contests), Benn Ferriero (2009?). I know there are going to be lots of Setoguchi owner's that is going to rake me over the coals on this one, but history has proven that the

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Sharks are always willing to place a young kid alongside Thornton just to see how they pan out. I'm not saying Setoguchi is going to get booted off that top-line, but you have to be open to the fact that his job may not be as secure as many owners are banking on.

St. Louis

They started off extremely hot last year as Keith Tkachuk, Paul Kariya, Andy McDonald and Brad Boyes combined for a total of 46 points in the first 11 games of the season. Well, it seems like history is repeating itself once again this season as the foursome has combined for 13 points in their first two games of the season. Last week in the comments section of my draft review article, I was questioned why I would take Tkachuk so early, I think the answer lies right there in front of you. Tkachuk has the highest overall career point-per-game totals in the first month of the season. The four to five months layover in the off-season really helps him get refreshed for the upcoming season. As the season wears on, the physicality of his play wears him down. Do I plan on owning the 37-year old all season long? Hells no. Do I plan to take advantage of his usually hot starts? Hell yes! I entered the season thinking that Backes is going to draw the short end of the stick this season, and so far it's being proven true. As a positive he did managed to average 17:03 in ice-time the first two games of the season, but spending 50 percent of your ice-time not playing alongside any of the foursome mentioned above is certainly not good news. Erik Johnson has reclaimed the number one power-play quarterback moniker as he averaged 4:15 on the power-play in Stockholm. Chris Mason and Ty Conklin had surprisingly similar numbers as they each picked up a start against the Wings.

Vancouver

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Vancouver started the season slowly with three consecutive losses. Alex Burrows is leading the team with 16 SOG. The highly-touted rookie, Sergei Shirokov, spent a majority of his ice-time (63.28 percent) alongside off-season acquisition of Mikael Samuelsson and Ryan Kesler. He only spent 9.59 percent of his ice-time alongside both of the Sedins. Another downer is the fact that he's also tied for the team lead in plus/minus with an atrocious rating of minus four. The Canucks' blue-line corps had the ice-time break down of 22:32, 21:43, 21:33, 20:49, 17:19, and 16:05, that's pretty much as even as even gets, and that's without Mathieu Schneider in the line-up. Roberto Luongo certainly wasn't his vintage self, as he spots a 4.55 GAA and a .820 save percentage for his efforts after these three starts. Don't worry, Luongo started with a 3.29 GAA along with a .886 save percentage last season and a 4.20 GAA along with a .863 save percentage the season before that. Moral of the story, Luongo always starts slow, but will be back to vintage form in a few games. Interestingly enough he now also has three consecutive seasons, where he was pulled from his third start of the season. Luckily enough he has always rebounded with two solid victories after being pulled in the previous two seasons, which should bode well for his next start against the Habs tomorrow night.

Questions or comments? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below. See ya next week.