The start of the 2010-2011 NHL season is well and truly underway. There have been a few pleasant surprises, as well as few “red alert” moments involving key injuries. The main thing that you need to keep in mind is that the season is still young and there’s still seven months of quality hockey remaining. 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.

Anaheim

Definitely not a positive start for Ducks to the 2010-11 season as they started with a 0-3 record, while being outscored by the margin of 2-13. Dobber beat me to it (Tuesday's ramblings), but traditionally speaking, Ryan Getzlaf is a slow starter. Since the lockout, Getzlaf has averaged 0.3 points-per-game in the first four games of each season. He generally turns it around in the second week, so if there is a panicky owner in your league, jump on that opportunity right away. The top line of Getzlaf, Corey Perry and Bobby Ryan just seems to be getting frustrated fairly easily, look for Coach Randy Carlyle to mix ‘em up soon if things don’t change for the better. Jonas Hiller hasn’t struggled per say, (.905 save percentage), but Angus might be onto something when he said that this might be a long year for the young Swiss netminder. As an owner I’m still fairly optimistic.

Calgary

After a dismal season opening 4-0 loss to their provincial rivals on opening night, the Flames rebounded with a quality 3-1 victory against the Kings on Sunday. There wasn’t really a standout Flame from the first two contests, but there are a few interesting notes. Olli Jokinen is currently averaging 5.5 SOG/game, obviously I don’t expect him to finish the season with 451 SOG, but it’s certainly a positive sign that he may be returning to vintage Jokinen ways. The fact that he’s also averaged 94 percent of his overall ice-time alongside superstar Jarome Iginla is definitely positive. Miikka Kiprusoff started off very shaky on opening night, but had a great 21-save bounce back win against the Kings. I was wrong about him last season, but if he can pull off the numbers that he had from 2009-10, Kipper could be back towards the top-five goalie that we have grown accustomed for him to be.

Chicago

The Hawks have struggled a bit in their title defense as they started 0-2 before their first victory of the season last night. They just don't look like the clean, crisp, defensive team that we saw from last season, as they're giving up on average 34 SOG against per contest, compared to just 25.1 last campaign. A player that you probably should keep an eye on is Tomas Kopecky. He spent 89.65 percent of his overall ice-time alongside Conn Smythe winner Jonathan Toews. Kopecky is also averaging more PP ice-time than Marian Hossa (5:00 vs. 3:24). I know it's still fairly early into the season, but Kane has two points and a minus four rating along with eight SOG, compared to Hossa's five points, plus four rating and 11 SOG. I personally think that Hossa's full time inclusion in the Hawks' line up will negatively impact Kane's production this season. If you have a pretty good deal sitting in front of you involving Kane, you might want to keep that thought in the back of your mind. Marty Turco has a .907 save percentage for the last three campaigns, which is probably around the numbers I'd expect from him at the end of the season.

Colorado

The Avalanche had a very surprising season last campaign as they entered the playoffs as the eighth seat out of the Western Conference. This year they might be hard-pressed to repeat that feat as a few of other Western Conference teams have markedly improved in the off-season. On a positive note, Coach Joe Sacco's favourite dog-house candidate has started off the campaign blazing hot with four assists in two contests. He's out-duelling Kyle Quincey in the PP ice-time department to start the season. (2:36 vs. 1:57) Paul Stastny is tied with Ryan O'Reilly for the team lead in SOG, (eight), I don't expect him to finish the season with 328, but a nice figure of 250 would be a nice bonus from a non-traditional shot-taker. Craig Anderson is 1-1 on the season. His 2.95 GAA is pretty dreary, but his .920 save percentage is certainly encouraging.

Columbus

The Blue Jacket's third line of Sammy Pahlsson, Ethan Moreau and R.J. Umberger has contributed four of Columbus' 14 total points this season, if you are in a deep league looking for non top-six talent, the trio could be a valuable asset. The Nikita Filatov show has begun, but the problem is he's only averaging 14:21 overall per contest. The flip side is that out of those 14 minutes, 4:24 has been with the man advantage, (97.56 percent of which has been with Rick Nash). Anton Stralman is the clear-cut winner out of the Blue Jacket's defensive corps as he's ranked 16th overall amongst all d-men in the league in terms of PP ice-time. Some positive feedback on Steve Mason according to Coach Scott Arniel, "I think it's safe to say now that he's back to where he was two years ago." His .920 save percentage against one of the most potent offenses in the league is certainly a positive sign. Is the sophomore slump over?

Dallas

The biggest news out of Dallas is probably the public intoxication charges laid to Mike Ribeiro. It appears that last season's slump is behind him as he has three points to start the season. Brad Richards is right back to where he left off, with four points and six SOG in two contests. Stephane Robidas is honestly fantasy gold in terms of the peripheral stats, (six HITs, two BS, plus three rating and four PIMs). If you can manage to get your hands on him, do it! Well Kari Lehtonen has managed to stay healthy for two contests, how many more will he last? I'll set the Over/Under at 25 contests.

Detroit

Mike Babcock was extended for four more years, which was a smart move on the Wings part IMO. Following along the same lines as Pavel Datsyuk, and Henrik Zetterberg could Valtteri Filppula be the next diamond in the rough found by the Wings? He's notched two goals including the game-winner on Saturday night against the Hawks. Mike Modano is averaging just 13:11 per contest, but 3:31 of which has been with a man advantage. If you are looking for a sleeper candidate purely for PPP, you don't have to look much further than the 21-year veteran. Jimmy Howard looked rusty in the pre-season, but put that all behind him with a season-opening shut out against the Ducks. Chris Osgood responded with a 26-save effort against a more talented Hawks squad. I still see this being closer to a 50/50 situation than an 80/20 or 70/30 split.

Edmonton

Wow! was pretty much the word that I used most often during the Oilers opening night contest against the Flames. The rookies have certainly impressed me enough to slightly change my opinion of them. I'm not as high as Dobber on the trio, but with their two opening matches, I'm at least willing to that say they've solidified some fantasy value for this season. Shawn Horcoff only potted 13 goals last season, but now has two in two contests. It appears that Ryan Whitney, (3:19 per game), and Kurtis Foster (3:06), have gained the early advantage over Tom Gilbert, (2:19), in the PP department. If Nikolai Khabibulin is still on the WW, definitely scoop him up. We all know how scarce the goalie position becomes mid-season, so it's definitely nice to have a 1.00 GAA and .970 save percentage goalie in your back pocket as trade bait.

Los Angeles

The Kings' offense has been in anaemic mode to start the season as they've registered just three goals in two contests. The top-line of Ryan Smyth, Anze Kopitar and Dustin Brown has registered a total of 19 SOG. Brown also leads the league in HITs/game with a 5.5 average.

He’s definitely the strongest candidate in the SOG/HITs department in the NHL. Jack Johnson hasn’t exactly lit up the scoresheet, but he has averaged 5:01 per contest on the Kings’ PP. If he manages to maintain that type of ice-time, owners should be in for a great productive season.

Minnesota

The Wild have been hit pretty hard with injuries early this season as they have lost Marek Zidlicky, P.M. Bouchard, James Sheppard and Josh Harding to injuries to start 2010-11. Zidlicky is still nursing a groin injury, but should be back fairly soon. The off-season acquisition of Matt Cullen seems to have been a positive one, as he’s averaging 22:12 and a team-high 5:15 on the PP. He isn’t a prolific offensive scorer, but he has been pretty consistent with five consecutive 40+ point seasons. If you aren’t expecting much more than that, Cullen could be a great add as a depth center especially in leagues that tally FW. It appears that Brent Burns has shaken off the injury bug from last season as he’s been averaging a workhorse-like 28:25 per contest. Niklas Backstrom will be looking to rebound after a dismal year, (2.72 and .903). With Cullen and John Madden they’ll be back to playing strong defensive hockey.

Nashville

The biggest news coming out of the “Music City” is the status of Pekka Rinne. He nearly gave me a heart attack after watching him crumble to the ice in their opening match of the season. The positive news is that he appears to be fine, and just needs a few days to let it rest up. I know plenty of people who have their fantasy season hinging on his success, (including myself). If you look at the numbers, I don’t know if you’ll find a more “team approach” to offense than the Predators. The forwards ranged from 17:14 to 9:18. The surprise of the bunch J.P. Dumont at just 10:32, doghouse?? The defensive pair of Ryan Suter and Shea Weber are workhorses as they averaged 27:07 and 25:40 respectively.

Phoenix

The Coyotes started the season on a high with a huge win over the Bruins in Prague, but then experienced a deflating loss the following night after a 3-0 shutout loss. The main difference I noticed from this year compared to last season was the defensive play of the Yotes. In 2009-10 they were ranked 12th overall in terms of shots allowed to the opposition per game, so far this season they’re ranked 29th, (39.5 SA/game). It’s still fairly early in the season so I’ll expect that defensive coach Dave Tippett will certainly make adjustments along the way. It’s now two consecutive seasons that Radim Vrbata has opened the season with a two-goal effort. He has a career 2.82 SOG/game average, so if you’re in a league that highly values SOG totals, he’s your guy. Keith Yandle leads the Coyotes in SOG... Kyle Turris was a healthy scratch for the two overseas contests. Tippett completely favours two-way veterans over youngsters, so this scenario could continue to frustrate fantasy poolies all season long. Ilya Bryzgalov’s current .937 save percentage ranks 13th amongst all goaltenders, he’ll be just fine.

San Jose

The Sharks came out with three out of a possible four points in Sweden, which is a strong start to the season. Ryane Clowe has led the way with three assists and six SOG. He spent 49.29 percent of his overall ice-time alongside Joe Pavelski and 8.21 alongside Joe Thornton, which should garner some attention if he's still dangling on your WW. The big four of Patrick Marleau, Dany Heatley, Pavelski and Thornton had an ice-time breakdown of 23:55, 20:43, 21:49 and 20:11 respectively. Definitely the numbers you want to see from an owner's perspective. PP breakdown of the blue liners, Boyle, (9:21), Jason Demers, (5:01), Douglas Murray, (3:32), and M.E. Vlasic**, (0:00). Numbers for Antti Niemi vs. Antero Niittymaki, (.938 to .880), edge to Niemi. Expect this battle all season long.

St. Louis

As discussed earlier with the "team approach" to winning, the Blues have taken it to the next level as 13 different scorers have appeared on the scoresheet. Alex Steen is leading the way with 12 SOG in the two victories. Since joining the Blues in 2008-09 from the Leafs, he's averaged 2.43 SOG/game. He's also averaging 11:28 in PP ice-time which close to what Nikolay Zherdev is averaging overall in Philly, (12:34), ouch! Erik Johnson owners should probably start worrying just a little bit. Carlo Colaiacovo vs EJ PP ice-time split, (43.61 percent vs. 47.87 percent). Jaroslav Halak 0.99 GAA and .950 save percentage, (Craig Anderson of 2010-11?)

Vancouver

Alex Burrows' loss is Mikael Samuelsson's gain, as he's filling in on the highly-coveted top-line spot alongside the Sedin twins. He picked up two assists along with nine SOG in two contests to start the season. He'll be a great own at least until Burrows returns. PP breakdown of the blue liners, Alex Edler, (2:21), Christian Ehrhoff, (2:18), Kevin Bieska, (1:59), and Dan Hamhuis, (1:53), probably not something that owners are looking for in terms of fantasy production. If you are a Roberto Luongo owner you might want to pay attention to the next few sentences. 2007-08, third game of the season, four goals allowed, pulled after 20 minutes, 2008-09, third game of the season, five goals allowed, pulled after 40 minutes, 2009-10, third game of the season, four goals allowed, pulled after 26 minutes, 2010-11, third game of the season, ???

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.