

Sweet or Sour: Western Conference

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 08 February 2011 11:07 - Last Updated Wednesday, 09 February 2011 09:50



Following along the lines of my Eastern counterpart, this week we'll look ahead to the final 30 games (or so) and see what might be in store for the balance of the season. I'll pick one player from each Western Conference team that should be in for a sweet finish and one whose production over the last stanza may leave a sour taste in their owner's mouths. I'll try my very best to avoid being Captain Obvious.

Anaheim

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Sweet: **Teemu Selanne** sits second in team scoring and is on pace for roughly 70 points by season's end, which isn't exactly crazy numbers, but considering he's on the wrong side of 40 it could be a great send off in what may be his final season in the NHL.

Sour: In contrary to the thoughts of fellow Dobberite DonCoburleone, I don't doubt **Joffrey Lupul's** scoring ability, but what I am opposed to, is the lack of opportunity in Anaheim. He's averaging just 13:13 per contest with minimal impact on the PP (2:05). The glaring red-siren for me is the injury to Ryan Getzlaf. That should have been a top-six opportunity alongside Bobby Ryan and Corey Perry handed to him on a silver platter, but the Ducks coaching staff chose Matt Beleskey over Lupul instead. Anaheim seems content on keeping Getzlaf, Ryan and Perry together and Jason Blake with Saku Koivu and Selanne, which would leave Lupul shafted out into the cold.

Calgary

Sweet: **Brendan Morrison** was riding a seven-game point-scoring streak in which he has

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tallied 10 points before being held off the scoresheet on Monday night. It all started when he was united on a line alongside Flames' captain Jarome Iginla and reclamation project Alex Tanguay. If they can continue this hot offensive outburst, Calgary might just find themselves in a playoff position come April.

Sour: On the other end of the spectrum **Jay Bouwmeester** has been in a major downfall. In the last 12 contests, he has registered just a single point despite averaging the most ice-time (26:40) per contest in all of the NHL and it's not like he's completely removed from PP situations either (2:41). Either way, if you happen to be the 58 percent of Yahoo! owners out there, now might be a great time to make the swap before you're left with the sour taste in your mouth.

Chicago

Sweet: With 10 points in the last 10 contests, **Dave Bolland** is showing some of the magic that he presented us with during last season's Stanley Cup-winning run. He doesn't exactly have superstar potential line mates in Bryan Bickell and Fernando Pisani, but they're good enough to continue chipping in with a few goals here or there.

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Sour: **Patrick Sharp** had 36 points in 36 contests prior to the return of Marian Hossa and Patrick Kane around December 28. Since then, he has just 11 points in the last 16 contests. His ice-time has also taken a bit of a hit as it's dropped to an average of 18:27 during this recent stretch.

Colorado

Sweet: I'm opposed to the opinion of Dobber and Angus, as I think **Peter Forsberg** could be a great fantasy asset come April. Yes, I know he's been there, done that before and teased us with his potential, but he's also had much more rest than the previous comeback attempts. Both Joe Sacco and Milan Hejduk have commented that he looks great on the ice, so count me in as a strong believer. How much of a dark horse team would the Avs be if they got both Peter Mueller and Forsberg back for the playoffs?

Sour: With 19 points in 32 contests, I was completely impressed by **Brandon Yip** last season, but this year is a different story as he's going to draw the short straw once Forsberg returns to the Avs' line up. Yip's more of a third-line energy guy, and that's probably where he's going to wind up in the final third of the fantasy season.

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Columbus

Sweet: I know many poolies have soured on **Steve Mason**, but a recent stretch of a 4-2 record along with a respectable 2.64 GAA and .904 SP and he's showing small signs of a bounce back. Last week I mentioned how Cam Ward's career path mirrored closely to Mason's and how the numbers are looking eerily similar. Could this be the calm before the storm?

Sour: Don't let **Kristian Huselius'** recent three-point outburst fool you. Prior to the explosion, he recorded just three points in the previous 12 contests. If you happen to be one of the 14 percent Yahoo! poolies that are a Huse-owner, cut bait now!

Dallas

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Sweet: With five goals and 21 SOG in the last six contests, **Brendan Morrow** is on pace to finish with a career-high in goals tallied, while appearing to have finally recovered from his ACL injury of two seasons ago. Look for him to finish strong this fantasy season.

Sour: After posting 41 points last season, **Stephane Robidas** was practically a household name at the draft tables earlier this season especially in leagues with an emphasis in peripheral stats like HITs and BS. Unfortunately, 2010-11 hasn't been the same, as the offense has dried up a bit. The main reason is the drop off in SOG as he's only on pace for less than half of his totals from last campaign.

Detroit

Sweet: **Nicklas Lidstrom** was on a tear to start the season, but has recently hit an offensive slump with just five points in the last 12 contests. Once the infirmity clears (Pavel Datsyuk, Tomas Holmstrom, Mike Modano and Danny Cleary) Lidstrom will be putting up mind-boggling numbers once again, don't you worry.

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Sour: There's not a lot of room on an NHL roster to house three 40-point defenseman which means that there's not a lot of room for **Niklas Kronwall** to put up fantastic fantasy numbers moving forward. Expect maybe 30-35 by season's end, but 40 seems a bit of an over-reach.

Edmonton

Sweet: The problem with owning band-aid boys is that they're a major headache over the course of a full season. **Ales Hemsky** has had his fair share of injuries this season, so that should mean that he will be given the all clear by the fantasy hockey gods for the rest of the way right? Since the lockout, Hemsky has a 0.92 point-per-game average when he does suit up. If I were Oilers GM Steve Tambellini, I'd start with that as my trade negotiations during the next 20 days.

Sour: **Nikolai Khabibulin** owns a dismal 8-24 record, along with a GAA that's nearing 3.50, on 29 other NHL teams he'd be riding the pine pony, but on a rebuilding Oilers' squad he's still garnering a few spot starts. Unless you're desperately in need of a goalie, there are probably 50 goalies that would be less detrimental to your fantasy squad than the Bulin wall.

Los Angeles

Sweet: There's quite a few "big names" (Anze Kopitar, Dustin Brown, Justin Williams and Drew Doughty) in LA, but it could be a "role player" like **Ryan Smyth**, that could be the one that will make a bigger fantasy impact down the stretch. He garners the second-most PP ice-time amongst Kings' forwards, behind only Kopitar, while maintaining pretty decent overall ice-time and SOG totals. 20 points in 29 could very well be a realistic total for "Captain Canuck".

Sour: With 24 points in 29 points in Manchester of the AHL, **Andrei Loktionov** was recalled by the Kings to fill in for the injured Marco Sturm. During his brief cup of coffee, he's responded with four points in 14 contests. The 20-year old has plenty of offensive upside, but there isn't enough opportunity for him to flourish on a team that's so deep with offensive depth. Expect bigger things from him next year, but count this season as a wash.

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Minnesota

Sweet: Andrew Brunette slumbered through the first half of the season with just 18 points in the first 37 contests, but has since recorded 12 points in the last 15. Much of that can be attributed to the trio of Mikko Koivu, Antti Miettinen and Brunette finding some of that great chemistry that they had last season. Since the lockout, this is the portion of the season where he has shown strong fantasy production. Buckle up and enjoy the ride.

Sour: Cal Clutterbuck has certainly had himself a great season with arguably his best season of his young professional career. The offensive output could be in jeopardy as the Wild's infirmary begins to clear. Once Matt Cullen returns from his "upper body" injury, that'll force Clutterbuck further down the Wild's offensive depth charts. You'll probably still enjoy the plenty of HITS that he brings, but you'll miss out on the bonus point and SOG production that has been attached.

Nashville

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Sweet: I just can't stop singing the praises of **Pekke Rinne** moving forward. In the months of Feb/March, he has a career 27-9-8 record along with a dazzling 2.05 GAA and impressive .929 SP. With stats like that backstopping you during the stretch run, I would not be surprised to see Nashville creep up to contend with Detroit for the Central Division title come April.

Sour: One of my main mantras for fantasy hockey is that in 97.5 percent of all cases, production comes after opportunity. Unfortunately, **J.P. Dumont** isn't receiving the opportunity in Nashville, which fully explains the lowly production rates for the one-time QMJHL scoring superstar. During the last 13 contests, Dumont has averaged just 10:06 per contest, with a couple of seven minute doozies against the Red Wings, Oilers and Sharks. If you get short-changed that much ice-time, it's just impossible to expect the production. Don't expect any miracles from Dumont moving forward.

Phoenix

Sweet: Following along the same lines as Nashville, my sweet candidate is goalie **Ilya Bryzgalov**

Saturday night and Monday night's shut out victories against the Wild and Avs was exactly how I pictured the Coyotes's style of play during the off-season, which is keeping the opposing SOG low (25/26) and out towards the perimeter, and having the D-men and defensive forwards actively blocking a ton of shots (10/11) in front of Bryz. That's pretty much the M.O. of all Dave Tippett coached teams, so if they can manage to maintain that defensive scheme, I wouldn't be surprised to see Bryz get back towards the 2.29 and .920 numbers that he posted from last

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campaign.

Sour: I've always liked the two-way approach that **Martin Hanzal** has to his game. The problem with that is that when you're classified as a "two-way" player the offensive side of things tend to take a backseat to the defensive side. A new career-high could be set but maybe only 35-40 points, which isn't exactly all that fantasy worthy.

San Jose

Sweet: Could this be the first season, since the lockout, where the Sharks finish the regular season without a point-per-game player? The most likely player that will buck that trend could possibly be **Joe Thornton** as he's beginning to round the corner with 11 points in his last 10 contests. He's always been a dependable offensive producer, so look for him to carry the torch in the remainder of this season.

Sour: With 34 points in 50 contests, **Logan Couture** has certainly had a very productive rookie season. The real problem for me is that it's a numbers game for the Sharks. They have seven

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players that are all fairly capable of scoring on any given night and generally speaking, it's the top-six that are the ones that registers the points, which leaves one person drawing the short straw. Currently it's Couture as he's lining up on the third line with Ben Eager and Kyle Wellwood, but it could very easily be Ryane Clowe or Devin Setoguchi moving forward. I'm not a fan of leaving things to chance so if you have an opportunity to rid yourself of the headache, I'd certainly jump on that opportunity.

St. Louis

Sweet: I'm a bit wary of players returning from injury, as there is always a lingering effect factor that's associated with them, but I have a good feeling for **Andy McDonald** that he'll make a big fantasy impact in many leagues down the stretch. Since his return he's averaged 20:24 and 2:12 on the PP, which is certainly enough opportunity for him to make a strong fantasy impact the rest of the way.

Sour: With just a single point and seven SOG in his last six contests, **Erik Johnson** is on my do-not-touch list for the remainder of this season. He's starting to give way to Alex Pietrangelo (2:44), compared to EJ's 2:09, and really starting to lose any worth in terms of fantasy value.

Vancouver

Sweet: It appears that **Mikael Samuelsson** is the new flavour of the month as he's taken over the left over PP ice-time vacated by Alex Edler's injury by joining the Sedin Twins, Ryan Kesler and Christian Ehrhoff on the Nucks top PP unit. He has nine points in the last four contests and looks pretty invincible from a fantasy standpoint. One thing that coaches don't want to mess with is chemistry, which that top unit has plenty of it, so look for them to stay intact until Edler returns.

Sour: One major player that I thought would have garnered much more responsibility with the Edler injury was **Keith Ballard**, unfortunately he's still averaging minimal ice-time (13:12) and zippo PP ice-time (0:00). It kind of makes you wonder 'what was management thinking?' when they shelled out \$21 mil on a five year contract just to utilize him as a fifth or sixth depth defenseman.

Questions or comments? As always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below. We'll see you back here next week as we discuss more from the

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