

## Everything You Need to Know

Written by Ryan Ma

Monday, 13 April 2009 19:27 - Last Updated Monday, 13 April 2009 19:32

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This will be a must-read for all playoff poolies, as I'll break down everything you pretty much need to know about each of the Western Conference matchups.

There are two traditional ways to approaching a playoff pool. First, is the **SPRAY** method, where you take a little bit from each team, usually the top performers, and hope to generate points that way. The only problem with that is that out of the millions that play in hockey playoff pools, half of them will generally use the method, which means that essentially you'll be pretty much picking the same team as everyone else, so the chances of you winning are highly unlikely.

The second method that others will use is the, **PRAY** method. Basically you load up all the players on one team and hope they make it all the way to the Stanley Cup finals.

A smart combination of both will probably be the key to winning your playoff pool. First, be objective in coming up with who you think will legitimately win the Stanley Cup. Then choose players who are dark horse candidates on that team that will produce until the very end eg.) Todd Bertuzzi or Ryan Kesler going to the end will be much more productive than a Patrick Marleau getting knocked out in the first round. People who won playoff pools last season are

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the people who picked up Johan Franzen, Ryan Malone, Mike Ribeiro over guys like Alex Ovechkin, Joe Thornton, or Jarome Iginla.

WARNING: this is a pretty long read (roughly 6000 words), but I'd rather give you more info than less. Hopefully it helps you out in your playoff pools.

Players who I suggested last week and their production during the week.

Matthew Lombardi 0 G, 3 A, -1, 0 PIMs, 1 PPP, 10 SOG

Jon Cheechoo 1 G, 1 A, 0, 10 PIMs, 1 PPP, 2 SOG

Tomas Holmstrom 0 G, 2 A, -3, 2 PIMs, 1 PPP, 6 SOG

Scottie Upshall 2 G, 1 A, 0, 2 PIMs, 0 PPP, 12 SOG

Ryan Whitney 0 G, 1 A, -2, 4 PIMs, 1 PPP, 7 SOG

T.J. Galiardi 0 G, 1 A, 0, 4 PIMs, 0 PPP, 8 SOG

Rebounded in the final week of the regular season, as most of my picks were hits last week.

### San Jose .vs. Anaheim

Wow huge Pacific Division matchup in the first round for a top vs. bottom matchup. The Ducks righted the ship at the end of the season with a 7-2-1 record to finish the regular season. Can the Sharks get over years of post-season disappointment?

### Goalies

Evgeni Nabokov has a 3-2-0 record with a 2.00 GAA and .930 save percentage against the Ducks this season. 16-7-4 in 28 Post-All-Star game appearances. Key-stat, 29-4-2 at home this season.

J.S. Giguere 1-1 record with a 2.00 GAA and .949 save percentage against the Sharks this season. 7-6-1 in 15 Post-All-Star game appearances. Key-stat, 33-17 and 2.10 and .925 save percentage in his career in the playoffs.

### Analysis

I don't know if you can completely commit yourself for a top-seeded team to get knocked out in the first round, but despite Giggy's struggles this season, statistically speaking he has played his best games against the Sharks, which would instantly ring alarm bells in my head. Giggy will certainly make this series a lot more interesting than your typical one vs. eight matchup. Slight edge to Sharks(55 to 45).

### Defensemen

### Sharks

Rob Blake, finished the season with ten goals and 35 assists, which is the first time in three

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years he's cracked the 45 point plateau. His plus 15 rating also shows that he's doing his part on the defensive end of the ice as well. Only hiccup I can see is that he had a 0.67 point-per-game first half average compared to a 0.53 second half average.

Dan Boyle, finished the season with 16 goals and 41 assists, which was sixth overall in terms of scoring for a defenseman in the NHL. Boyle led the Sharks in both overall and power-play time on ice, which means that he should get plenty of opportunities during playoff time to put up points for the Sharks.

M.A. Vlasic, finished the season with six goals and 30 assists. He's second behind only Boyle in average ice-time per contest. Only down side is that he finished with only one assist in the final nine contests of the season. I probably wouldn't pick up Vlasic unless you are dedicating your entire playoff pool on Sharks.

Christian Ehrhoff, finished with eight goals and 34 assists, which is third amongst all Shark defenders this season. He doesn't garner as much ice-time as Vlasic, but does have more offensive upside. He had a much strong second half with 23 points in 33 contests than first half, which shows that he's heading into the playoffs with confidence. Ehrhoff is my dark horse defenseman for the Sharks.

### Ducks

Scott Niedermayer, finished the season with 14 goals and 45 assists, which is the third highest point total in his 17-year NHL career. He also tallied 30 points in the final 33 games, which proves that he's geared up and ready to go for the post-season. He's a must-own for playoff pools.

Chris Pronger, finished with 11 goals and 37 assists, which isn't as strong as a campaign as fellow blue-liner Niedermayer. He has 92 career playoff points in 134 contests, which makes his near 0.70 point-per-game playoff average also a must-own for fantasy pools.

Ryan Whitney, since traded from the Penguins, tallied 10 points in 20 contests for the Ducks. The fact that he's garnering nearly 24 minutes of ice-time per contest with big minute-chewers Niedermayer and Pronger in the lineup shows that he's an integral part of the Ducks blue-line corps. He's probably not a must-own, but if you are loading up on Ducks you probably won't want to miss out on Whitney.

Francois Beauchemin, was averaging huge minutes, before missing most of this season with an ACL injury. He speedily recuperated from the injury and will be returning to the Ducks lineup just in time for the post-season. Beauchemin has never been a huge point producer, but his presence will probably keep Pronger, Niedermayer and Whitney fresher throughout the playoffs if they are to make it deep this season. He's a great dark horse candidate for playoff pools.

### **Analysis**

Once again, it'd be hard to argue against the top-seeded team, but if you compare the two

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teams it'd be hard to go against a team that has 390 man-games of playoff experience despite being the underdog. Edge to Ducks.

### Forwards

#### Sharks

Joe Thornton, his 86 points is the lowest offensive output since his 2003-04 NHL season with the Bruins, which is the first alarm bell. He finished the season with 31 points in 37 Post-All-Star game appearances, second alarm bell. 48 points in 70 career NHL playoff appearances for an All-Star caliber player, third and final alarm bell. All signs are pointing towards him being a flop this post-season.

Patrick Marleau, finished the season with 71 points, which is the third-highest total in his 11-year NHL career. Although he was battling injuries, the fact that he finished the season with six points in his final 15 games, warns me not to pick him up in playoff pools. On a positive note, he does have 59 points in 86 career playoff contests, which might give you something to ponder about.

Devin Setoguchi, had a great sophomore year as he finished with 65 points in 81 contests. Like many of the other Sharks, Setoguchi disappeared for most of the second half as he only put up 21 points in the final 37 games. He only has nine games of playoff experience, so I wouldn't bet the farm on him producing mind-boggling numbers this post-season.

Jonathan Cheechoo, had another disappointing season, but did manage to finish the season on a high with five points in his final six contests. He remains the odd-man out with Thornton, Marleau, Setoguchi, Ryan Clowe, Joe Pavelski, and Milan Michalek occupying the top-six of the Sharks lineup. But if the Sharks go down early to the Ducks, you might just see Todd McClellan re-unite the big line of Cheechoo, Marleau and Thornton to jumpstart the team. Cheechoo is a great dark horse sleeper candidate for this season's playoffs.

#### Ducks

Ryan Getzlaf, has been on a tear to end the season as he posted 21 points in the final 18 games of the season. I also like the fact that he turned around a horrendous February and finished the season on a high. He's a difference maker and we'll see that in the playoffs this season. He's a must-own for playoff pools.

Corey Perry, is the other half of the Ducks' dynamic duo. He finished with 18 points in the final 18 games and really brought life back into the Ducks' lineup when they seem to be roasted in mid-March. Perry only has three points in six matchups against the Sharks this season, which probably won't win over many playoff poolies. Either way you are banking on the Ducks this post-season picking up both Perry and Getzlaf is a must.

Teemu Selanne, will be the difference maker in this series, if he shows up Ducks will win, if he doesn't Ducks will be ousted quicker than you can say "Quack Attack". The thing with Selanne

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is that he always shows up when the Ducks need him the most. Since the 2005-06 playoffs, Selanne has put up 33 points in 43 playoff contests with the Ducks and should put up similar numbers this season. He also has 88 points in 69 games against the Sharks since 1989. Bank on Selanne playing a major role this post-season.

Bobby Ryan, has had a somewhat decent sophomore year as he put up 57 points in 64 contests. Ryan has operated at near the point-per-game pace for most of the year, which should continue into the post-season this year. He's the sleeper pick of the Ducks in this season's playoffs.

### **Analysis**

This is a stark contrast between two teams, on one-side you have a few seasoned veterans who have been there done that but has never been able to secure a championship, on the other you have a team of young-budding superstars chomping at the bit to try to knock off the heavy favorites for the Stanley Cup. Because the Sharks don't have a history of finishing off their opponents, at best you can do is call it a draw between the forwards of the two teams.

### **Red Wings .vs. Blue Jackets**

Another huge divisional matchup this time with the Central Division. Red-hot goalie versus red-hot offense, who will win out?

### **Goalies**

Chris Osgood has a 2-2-1 record with a sub-par 3.37 GAA and .855 save percentage against the Blue Jackets this season. 11-5-3 in 21 Post-All-Star game appearances. Key-stat, 13-6-4 at home this season, with a 3.28 GAA and .878 save percentage.

Steve Mason 3-2-0 record with a sparkling 2.38 GAA and .930 save percentage against the Red Wings this season. 16-9-5 in 35 Post-All-Star game appearances. Key-stat, no playoff appearances, 42.9% away win percentage, 63.6% home win percentage.

### **Analysis**

Very similar to the matchup above, I don't know if you can completely commit yourself for a second-seeded team to get knocked out in the first round, but the numbers are there for another first round upset. A lot of Detroit's playoff fortunes will depend on the play of Osgood, if he plays well, they'll repeat as championship, if he falters they'll be out in the first round. Mason is red-hot and ready to establish himself as a top-tiered goalie in his rookie season in the NHL. I don't think you can go against 113 games of playoff experience over zero. Edge to Wings (60 to 40).

### **Defensemen**

### **Red Wings**

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Niklas Lidstrom, finished the season with 59 points in 78 contests, which is slightly below the numbers he has put up in the past four seasons. His plus 31 rating still ranked amongst the leaders on the Red Wings which shows that he's taking care of both ends of the ice. Despite a slow March production, Lidstrom managed to pick up six points in the final five games for the Red Wings, which is a good sign that he'll be ready for playoff hockey. He's a must own in all formats of playoff pools.

Brian Rafalski, finished with the exact same total as Lidstrom, 59 points in 78 contests, which was a new career-high for the nine-year NHL veteran. He averaged just ten seconds less than Lidstrom per contest in power-play time, which makes him also a must own in playoff pools this season.

Nik Kronwall, followed in the footsteps of Rafalski and also established a new career-high for himself this season. He took a huge step in his development as he picked up nearly 20 points more than he did last season and really has asserted himself into the Red Wing's blue line corps. He won't get as much overall or power-play ice-time as Rafalski or Lidstrom, but if you are banking on the Red Wings to go deep into the playoffs, I'd for sure pick up Kronwall in your playoff pools.

### **Blue Jackets**

Fedor Tyutin, finished the season with a career-high of 34 points with the Blue Jackets this season. His 167 SOG was also the highest mark that he's fired in his career. Tyutin is pretty much the only productive defender on the Blue Jackets, so if you are going to pick up a Columbus blue-line, you better make it Tyutin.

Mike Commodore, won't light up the score sheet as his 24 points this season was nearly a career-high for the rugged veteran defenseman. His 49 playoff appearances will probably play a bigger role in this post-season than his offensive ability. Commodore might be a decent pick up if your playoff pool counts PIMs, as he has 52 career playoff PIMs in 49 contests.

Jan Hedja, also set a new career-high mark with 21 points in his third season in the NHL. His plus 23 rating was the most productive on the Blue Jackets, which means that he'll be heavily leaned upon to keep the high-flying Red Wings' offense from getting the puck past Mason. Same case as Commodore, his strong defensive play will play more of a prominent role than his offensive scoring ability.

Kris Russell, doubled his point total from his rookie season, but that isn't saying much since he only picked up 10 points as a rookie. Russell once put up 32 goals in 59 contests with the Medicine Hat Tigers in the WHL, which is unheard of from a defenseman, so that shows that one day he will develop into an elite NHL blue-liner. Russell won't do much damage on even-strength, but on the power-play will be a different story. He ranks second amongst blue-liners in power-play ice-time for the Blue Jackets, which makes him a great sleeper pick for playoff pools this season.

### **Analysis**

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You can't really argue against a pairing of seasoned playoff vets vs. a defensive corps that has a total of 86 playoff contests under their belt. Huge edge to Red Wings.

### Forwards

#### Red Wings

Pavel Datsyuk, 97 points in 81 contests, 23 points in 22 contests in last season's Stanley Cup winning playoffs. Can't really argue with the numbers, must own in playoff pools.

Henrik Zetterberg, bit of a down year with 73 points in 77 contests. 27 in 22 in last season's Stanley Cup winning playoffs. Once again can't really argue with the numbers, also must own in playoff pools.

Marian Hossa, similar to Zetterberg, didn't have a great year, but didn't need to. 26 points in 20 contests during last year's playoffs and scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent at the end of the year looking for a big payday.

Johan Franzen, signed a big deal to stay in Detroit, will that positively or negatively impact his playoff performance? Went on a tear with 13 goals in 16 playoff contests last season, can he repeat that feat? Finishing off the season with one point in final five games rings alarm bells.

Tomas Holmstrom, hernia surgery probably slowed down his production this year, but still managed to finish with five points in the final six games of the season. If you are going to go hardcore on Red Wings you might as well add Holmstrom to the list, as he'll be doing all the dirty work in front of the net for Datsyuk and Zetterberg.

#### Blue Jackets

Rick Nash, tore it up in the final two months of the regular season as he picked up 22 points in the final 20 contests for the Blue Jackets. He has six goals in six contests against the Red Wings this season and will need to keep that pace up if the Blue Jackets have any shot at upsetting the Red Wings in the first round of this year's playoffs.

Kristian Huselius, was beginning to find his groove before sustaining a concussion-like injury near the end of the regular season. In March he picked up 13 points in 15 games while almost averaging three SOG per contest. He tends to pull a disappearing act in the playoffs as all Flames' fans can tell you, so I'd put a buyer-beware sign on him before considering to pick him up for playoff pools.

Jason Williams, has really enjoyed his move from Atlanta to Columbus, as he finished with 29 points in 39 contests for the Blue Jackets this season. He's also ranked third amongst Blue Jacket forwards in power-play ice-time while averaging 3:13 per contest, which should give him plenty of opportunities to wreck havoc on Osgood.

R.J. Umberger, really has taken another step in his development as he fired 61 shots more on

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goal this season than last year. His 26 goals is also double of the total that he potted last season, which is a positive sign heading into the playoffs. If Umberger can provide some timely secondary scoring for the Blue Jackets, an upset might be in store for Columbus.

Antoine Vermette, picked up 13 points in 17 contests since joining the Blue Jackets from the Senators at the trade deadline. His value is along the same lines as Umberger. If the Jackets' second unit can outscore the Wings' second unit, they'll have a good shot at upsetting Detroit in the opening round of the playoff.

### Analysis

Once again you have a stark contrast between two teams, on one side you have the reigning Stanley Cup champions, and on the other you have a team of young-budding superstars experiencing the playoffs for the first time in their young NHL careers. The Red Wings have the advantage of going through the process last season, as they have the expectation to repeat as champions again this season. Edge to Red Wings.

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### Canucks .vs. Blues

This has the makings of a very good matchup or a very quick blowout victory. It's a battle of two hot goaltenders, which should result in multiple low scoring games. I'd put a buyer-beware tag on all players in this series.

### Goalies

Roberto Luongo has a 2-1-0 record with a 2.67 GAA and .911 save percentage against the

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Blues this season. 22-7-3 in 32 Post-All-Star game appearances. Key-stat, 19-5-4 at home this season, with a 1.99 GAA and .929 save percentage. Luongo also has a 1.77 GAA and .941 save percentage in 12 playoff appearances.

Chris Mason 1-2-0 record with a 3.44 GAA and .863 save percentage against the Canucks this season. 21-8-6 in 35 Post-All-Star game appearances. Key-stat, 1-4 in the playoffs, with 3.45 gaa and .901 save percentage.

### **Analysis**

This is a matchup of two of the hottest goaltenders in the second half of this season. Both have similar numbers since the All-Star break which has led their teams to post-season berths. Luongo has the numbers in the playoffs to prove that he's game breaker and will show that to the young inexperienced Blues this series. Edge to Canucks

### **Defensemen**

#### **Canucks**

Kevin Bieska, finished with a career-high of 43 points this regular season. He leads the Canucks' blue-line corps in power-play ice-time, which should give him plenty of opportunities to pick up points this post-season. His zero points in nine playoff appearances unfortunately won't exude confidence in many minds of playoff poolies.

Alex Edler, is second behind only Bieska in terms of power-play time on ice per contest. He also averaged 1.68 SOG per contest since the All-Star break, which is a good sign that he'll get some pucks towards the net for the Canuck forwards to poach on in front of Mason. If you are looking the secondary option on the blue-line in Vancouver, Edler is the man.

Mattias Ohlund, really has dropped off his offensive production in the last two years, thanks to the addition of Bieksa and Edler into the Canucks lineup. He finished with six points in his final 21 contests, despite averaging over 20 minutes of ice-time per contest. His power-play ice-time has been relegated to behind Bieksa, Edler and Sami Salo as he averages just over two minutes on the power-play per contests. There are probably better options to own than Ohlund for playoff pools this season.

Sami Salo, is in the same boat as Ohlund. The pairing used to be lethal a few years back, but has dropped off considerably since Bieksa and Edler joined the Canucks lineup in a full-time basis. Salo averages 20 minutes overall, and three minutes on the power-play each contest, but with Edler and Bieksa there, won't get optimal playing opportunity in the playoffs. There are better options than Salo in playoff pools.

#### **Blues**

Carlo Colaiacovo, really has blossomed since being traded from the Leafs to the Blues earlier this season. Colo finished with 29 points in 63 contests, while leading the Blues' defenders in

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power-play ice-time. The Blues finished ranking eighth overall in terms of power-play efficiency and a lot of that could be attributed to the play of Colo. If you are going to own one Blues' defenders make sure it's Carlo.

Barret Jackman, won't light up the score sheet as his 21 points this season the second-highest of his career for the hard-checking defenseman. He'll certainly be heavily leaned upon in defensive situations to try to shut down the Sedins in their opening round matchup against Vancouver. He won't produce enough offensive to warrant pickup in playoff pools.

Jeff Woywitka, finished third in Blues' defensive scoring, which isn't necessarily a great feat considering he only tallied 18 points this season. The only bright spot is that he's second behind only Colaiacovo for power-play ice-time, which will certainly need to be firing on all cylinders if the Blues are to upset the Canucks this series.

### **Analysis**

It's not really a matchup when one team has 150 games of playoff experience compared to just 59 for the young inexperienced Blues. Experience will win out between the matchup of these two defenses. Big edge to Canucks.

### **Forwards**

#### **Canucks**

Daniel Sedin, finished the regular season on a high while scoring 23 points in the final 21 contests for the Canucks. His point-per-game pace will certainly be depended upon heavily as the Canucks face a red-hot Mason in the opening round of the playoffs. Sedin is a must-own if you are going after Canuck players in your playoff pool.

Henrik Sedin, similarly to his twin brother, Henrik also finished the season on a high while tallying 25 points in his final 21 contests. If you own Daniel you might want to combine him with Henrik as the duo will certainly need to pick up the scoring slack for the Canucks in the post-season. Both Henrik and Daniel are up for unrestricted free agency at the end of the season and a huge playoffs might lead towards a huge pay day in the off-season. That should be enough motivation for the twins to produce come playoff time.

Mats Sundin, really slowed down at the end of the regular season as he only picked up eight points in the final 13 contests for Vancouver. Mats Sundin is a playoff performer as he has 74 career playoff points in 83 contests playing previously for the Nordiques and Maple Leafs. If there is ever going to be a time for Sundin to win himself a Stanley Cup, now might be the only time as age is catching up to the 38-year old.

Ryan Kesler, is finally fulfilling the potential that many Canuck fans have been awaiting on for years and years as he finished his career-year with 59 points in 82 games, and really does deserve to be named the MVP of the Canucks this season. He finished third in team scoring while ranking second in overall ice-time per contest for Vancouver. His point-per-game average

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in the second half of this season should prove that he will be a serious dark horse candidate in playoff pools this year.

Pavol Demitra, had a great second half of the season after being re-united with Sundin and Kesler on the Canuck's second unit. He picked up 28 points in 32 contests and will need to carry his 0.65 point-per-game playoff average into this year's playoffs if they are to defeat the Blues in the first round this season.

Alex Burrows, finished the season with 19 points in his final 21 games, and has proved to have developed plenty of chemistry playing alongside the Sedin twins. If the Canucks can get to the Western Conference finals, he could produce along the same pace if not more than a Patrick Marleau or Tomas Holmstrom. Consider Burrows another dark horse candidate for the playoffs this season.

### **Blues**

Keith Tkachuk, finished the season with his lowest point-per-game total in his career, which shows that age is finally catching up with the 37-year old. He still has a bit of gas left in the tank as he finished by scoring seven points in the final four games to get the Blue into the post-season this year.

T.J. Oshie, had a bit of a slow start to the season with five points in the first three months of the season, but managed to finish strong tallying 27 points in the final 35 games for the Blues. He tallied five points in four contests against the Canucks this season, and could be a big role player in the Blues lineup during the playoffs.

Brad Boyes, led the Blues in goals scored this season with 33 and will need to continue to be the sniper that he is if the Blues are to upset the Canucks in the first round of the playoffs. The big line of Tkachuk, Boyes and Andy McDonald will need to re-ignite some of that chemistry they had early in the season.

Andy McDonald, finished the season with 44 points despite missing 36 games this season due to an ankle injury. The Blues' power-play is ranked in the top-eight in efficiency, which can be mostly attributed to McDonald's playmaking ability. Look for Andy Mc to lead the Blues in assists this post-season.

David Backes, is the dark horse candidate for the Blues this season. He finished second in team scoring with 54 points along with 165 PIMs. The main question is with Boyes, McDonald, Tkachuk, Oshie, Patrik Berglund and David Perron occupying the top-six where does Backes fit in the situation? However, a return of Paul Kariya, might provide Backes with a dangerous line mate.

### **Analysis**

The forward lines of each team are very similar in a way that both teams have talented scorers that play a dynamic free-flowing offensive game. The main difference will be the scoring

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potential of the Canucks. Vancouver has the veteran presence of the Sedin's, Sundin, and Demitra compared to just the Blues who only have 127 playoff man-games between their top-ten forwards. Edge to Canucks.

### **Flames .vs. Blackhawks**

This has the makings of a very good four versus five matchup. The Blackhawks have owned Calgary this season, but will it be a different story in the post-season?

#### **Goalies**

Mikka Kiprusoff has a terrible 0-3-1 record with an atrocious 4.66 GAA and .856 save percentage against the Blackhawks this season. His 17-12-2 record in 33 Post-All-Star game appearances probably doesn't exude confidence either. Key-stat, his .903 save percentage is the lowest average since his dreadful 2002-03 season with the Sharks.

On the other hand, Nikolai Khabibulin has a sparkling 3-0-0 record with a 2.00 GAA and .941 save percentage against the Flames this season. His 12-4-2 record since the All-Star break certainly provides a stronger case than Kipper does. Key-stat, his 2.33 GAA and .919 very closely mirror the numbers he had when he won the Stanley Cup in the 2003-04 season with the Lightning.

#### **Analysis**

This is the exact same goalie matchup as the 2003-04 Stanley Cup finals, where Khabibulin stood on his head to steal the Stanley Cup away from the Flames. It just looks like the Hawks have owned Kipper this year, and could do the same against the Flames in the post-season, while the Bulin wall has stood tall against the Flames. You have to give the edge to the Blackhawks in this one.

#### **Defensemen**

##### **Flames**

Dion Phaneuf, had a bit of a down season in fantasy terms, but was still very productive in real-life for the Flames. He finished sixth in Flames' overall scoring while ranking fourth overall in time-on-ice per game average in the NHL. Phaneuf only has two points, and a minus seven rating in four contests against the Blackhawks this season, which probably isn't something to look forward to during their first round matchup against Chicago.

Adrian Aucoin, managed to finish the season with 34 points in 81 contests. The Flames will need him to provide some secondary scoring if they are to beat the Blackhawks in the opening round of the playoffs. Aucoin finished the season with only one point in the final nine games of the season. I personally wouldn't pick Aucoin unless you're devoting your pool to the Flames this season.

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Jordan Leopold, certainly didn't provide the umph that the Flames were looking for when they acquired his services from the Avalanche at the trade deadline. He tallied only four points in 19 contests despite averaging 18:48 per contest for the Flames. They'll certainly need him to be a difference maker if the Flames are to defeat the Blackhawks this opening series.

### **Blackhawks**

Brian Campbell, led the Blackhawks in scoring from the blue-line with 52 points in 82 games. He finished the second half of the season with zero goals, which is a worrying sign for the offensive defenseman. Either way, Campbell usually steps up his SOG average in the playoffs, which makes him a must own in playoff pools.

Duncan Keith, led the league in plus/minus this season and is the second consecutive year that he topped the plus 30 mark. The Hawks will rely heavily on his defensive skills to shut down the Flames top-line of Jarome Iginla, Mike Cammalleri and Olli Jokinen. Don't look for Keith to light up the score sheet in the playoffs though.

Cam Barker, ranks second behind only Campbell for power-play ice-time in Chicago. 29 of this 40 points this season have come from the power-play, which will be a similar scenario in the playoffs this season. If you have to choose a second defender behind Campbell, make sure you choose Barker.

Brent Seabrook, actually averaged more ice-time per contest than Brian Campbell did, which begins to show the development in the young Hawks' defender. The top-pairing of Keith and Seabrook has shut down many offenses as well as provided enough offense to help the Blackhawks win plenty of games. Similarly to Keith, he'll do well as a shut down defenseman, but don't hold your breath for a massive amount of points.

### **Analysis**

The Flames defensive corps pretty much composes of one person, Phaneuf. The Blackhawks have four d-men that could really step up their play and provide a spark or their team. That in addition to the best shut down pairing mixed with offensive ability, in my opinion, of Keith and Seabrook in the NHL certainly gives a big edge to Blackhawks.

### **Forwards**

#### **Flames**

Jarome Iginla, finished the regular season with 89 points which is just slightly below the numbers that he put up in his last two seasons. His power-play points really dropped off in the second half of the year which doesn't bode well for the Flames' captain. Either way if you are going to own a Flame you can't go wrong with Iggly.

Mike Cammalleri, finished the season strong with 22 points in his final 21 contests of the season and certainly was a pillar in the success of the Flames this season. The only down-side to

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Cammy is that he was point-less along with a minus nine rating in four contests against Chicago. He'll be seeing a lot of Keith and Seabrook, so I think you should taper your expectations for Cammy this post-season.

Olli Jokinen, picked up 15 points in 19 contests since joining the Flames at the trade-deadline from Phoenix. The thing with Jokinen is that he's inconsistent. He had 11 point-less games, along with four multi-point efforts while tallying only three points in the final 11 games of the regular season. This is Jokinen's first taste of the post-season, will he make the most of it, or will he crumble? I wouldn't touch him with a 10-foot pole in playoff pools to be honest.

Todd Bertuzzi, would be my dark horse candidate for the Flames this playoffs. Despite the rest of the Flames having terrible numbers against the Hawks, Bertuzzi actually has been very productive against Chicago. He tallied three points in four contests while picking up eight PIMs and 11 SOG. If the numbers hold true, it looks like it'll only be Bert that will be producing for the Flames this post-season.

### **Blackhawks**

Patrick Kane, followed up his decent rookie year with a decent sophomore season but an ankle sprain in late-December probably still has lingering effects, as he finished the second half of the season with only 28 points in 37 games. He found his groove in April as he picked up six points in the final seven contests for the Hawks to secure fifth place in the West. Look for Kane to have point-per-game numbers in this season's playoffs.

Jonathan Toews, really took the next step forward in his development, as is improve upon last season's point total by 15 points. That plus the fact that he's playing great two-way hockey should bode well for the youngster in the opening round. Toews should also be owned in playoff pools.

Martin Havlat, somebody must have made one hellvua band-aid, as oft-injured Havlat managed to play in 81 of the 82 contests this season. Not only that but he was very productive throughout the season as well, as his 77 points was a career-high, while his plus 29 rating ranks in the top-ten in the league. Havlat is pretty much the only forward with playoff experience, so he'll need pass on the knowledge towards some of the young kids.

Patrick Sharp, injured his knee in early April, but should return to the ice once the playoffs start later this week. Prior to his injury, Sharp averaged just eight seconds less than Toews on the top Blackhawks' power-play unit, which is a tell-tale sign that he should have a very productive playoffs as Chicago ranks just outside of the top-ten in PP efficiency. Sharp is my dark horse candidate from the Blackhawks.

### **Analysis**

Both teams are very evenly matched up front. The series breaker will be the performances of Jokinen versus Havlat. If Jokinen has a more productive playoffs, Flames will win, if Havlat outguns Jokinen, it's good-bye Calgary. I'll have to give a slight edge to Calgary because Iggy

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and Bertuzzi have been there before, where as Toews and Kane haven't. It definitely should make an interesting series. Slight edge to Flames.

Well there ya go, hopefully that's enough information for you to make an informed choice as to who are the smart candidates to pick and who isn't going to be reliable in the post-season. Good luck in your playoff pools.