

## Looking For the Cream of the Crop

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 19 January 2010 10:18 - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 January 2010 08:41

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With roughly 32 games left for each team in the remainder of this fantasy season, now is really the time that starts separating contending teams from the pretending teams. This week we'll take a look through the Western Conference to review what's been going since the calendar rolled over to 2010.

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

### Maaasquito Buzzings...

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

**Goals**

**Assists**

**+/-**

**PPP**

**SOG**

Miettinen (4)

Belanger (3)

Goc (5)

O'Sullivan (3)

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Vrbata (14)

Ott (3)

Malhotra (3)

Leach (4)

D. Miller (2)

Gagner (13)

Torres (3)

Umberger (3)

Jackman (4)

Miettinen (2)

Benn (13)

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Vrbata (3)

Stralman (3)

McClement (4)

Brouwer (2)

Umberger (12)

Steen (3)

Hanzal (3)

Hanzal (4)

Sexton (2)

Stralman (12)

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### **Maaaasquito Bite of the week:** Brandon Yip

With the recent news of Milan Hedjuk's knee surgery, it really has opened up a top-six spot for rookie newcomer Yip on the Avalanche squad. I've managed to catch a few Avs games on Center Ice and every time I tune in it seems the announcers mention his name two or three times per shift. If it isn't for his 18 accredited hits, or his 24 SOG, it's mentioned for his smart physical play. What's also amazing is the fact that he's averaging just 11:58 per contest and 1:19 on the PP. With Hedjuk out of the Avs line up in the last two contests, Yip's seen his ice-time average increase to 15:05 and 2:05 on the PP. Look for him to maintain those numbers until at least the Olympic break. If you are looking for some help on the wing definitely give Yip a go.

Now onto the good stuff.

### **Anaheim**

The big news coming out of Anaheim is the loss of Teemu Selanne, who recently returned from a hand injury, to another injury. He's out for the next two-six weeks with a jaw injury. To make matters worse, the Ducks also lost Saku Koivu to a lower-body injury. On a positive note, they're currently just sitting six points out of a playoff spot in the Western Conference, so if they can muster up a short winning streak they could be primed for post-season berth come April. Bobby Ryan owners should be laughing as frustration has equalled 31 PIMs in the last three contests for the sophomore. Scott Niedermayer has a minus 17 rating, which is by far the lowest in his 18-year NHL career. His 3.7 percent shooting efficiency is also the lowest mark, by about

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three percent, in 11 campaigns. He's a strong buy-low candidate at the moment.

On the opposite end of the scale, Ryan Whitney has gone pointless in nine consecutive contests while only registering 20 SOG during that span. He's a strong drop candidate at the moment. J.S. Giguere hasn't started a game since the third of January, which firmly entrenches Jonas Hiller as the number one in Anaheim. With the lack of starts for Giggy, it hasn't provided very many trade "showcase" opportunities for the Ducks to potentially move him at the deadline. I think the Ducks will have to swallow his contract and bury him for the rest of this season.

### Calgary

The Flames are struggling offensively as they have only picked up one victory in the last seven contests. During that span they have just tallied 14 goals, which certainly won't be enough to get them into the post-season. Captain Flame, Jarome Iginla, only has one assist in eight contests, but does have 27 SOG. The Flames second leading scorer, Rene Bourque, is also on a three-game point-less drought. His 11 PIMs should help ease some of the pain. Olli Jokinen is on his way up as he's averaging four SOG and 1.6 PIMs per contest in the month of January. Wow! Who would have thunk that at this point of the season that Mark Giordano would lead both Dion Phaneuf and Jay Bouwmeester in point production for the Flames. There isn't anything special that I can dig up about Giordano to explain it. So it probably comes down to the poor play of both Phaneuf and Bouwmeester. Miikka Kiprusoff has only one win in his last six starts, while possessing a 3.42 GAA along with a very ordinary .887 save percentage. Although I couldn't dig up any hard numerical data to prove it, I do think that the Flames rely heavily on Kipper, which will lead him to be overworked as the season wears on. With this year being an Olympic year, along with the compressed NHL schedule, I think Kipper's stats will slip as the season progresses.

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### Chicago

Patrick Kane has been red-hot by tallying 31 points in 24 contests since the end of November and is also leading the Hawks in PP ice-time. Jonathan Toews and Troy Brouwer both have seven PP goals apiece. Dustin Byfuglien continues to be very under-rated in fantasy leagues. He's averaging 0.7 points, 0.8 PIMs, and 3.1 SOG per contest in the last month. If you are struggling with injuries on the right wing definitely consider Byfuglien as an option. Duncan Keith has already tied his career-high with 44 points with 33 games to go. Could 60 be a possibility for the Olympian? Cam Barker returned from injury and registered an assist on Sunday against the Red Wings, but still hasn't tallied a single SOG since his return, which could spell trouble. It appears as though the Hawks are using a 2/1 split for goalie starts between Cristobal Huet and Antti Niemi. Niemi (1.90 and .920) does have slightly more impressive numbers than Huet (2.19 and .907), but that start ratio will likely maintain for the remainder of the season.

### Colorado

The big news coming out of Colorado is the loss of Milan Hejduk as discussed earlier. Now's actually a pretty good time for Hejduk to get that knee taken care of so he can fully utilize the two-week Olympic break to get it fully healed for the stretch run of the season. It's painful from a fantasy front, but probably ideal for the "real-life" Avs. The more I watch Paul Stastny the more I'm convinced he's going to be a top 10 scorer in the league. The way that he makes his line mates around him better just never ceases to amaze me. One major benefactor is Chris Stewart. He has eight points, 12 PIMs and 25 SOG while averaging 3:45 in PP ice-time in seven January contests. With Hejduk out of the way, he should get the green light from now to the Olympic break. After tallying just 14 points in his first 28 contests, Liles now has seven in his last six. His 1.33 SOG per contest average is a bit of a downer though. Kyle Cumiskey also caught my attention in Monday night's contest against the Oilers. With Kyle Quincey and Liles manning the one-two spots on the Avs blue-line depth charts, Cumiskey won't garner enough production to be fantasy relevant. Craig Anderson is on a roll as he's on a four-game winning streak, while picking up his fourth shutout of the season. I still think his numbers are too darn good to maintain until the rest of season. I expect them to settle around the 2.70 and .910 range by season's end.

### Columbus

After going on an 11-game goal-less drought, Nash finally broke the goose egg with a pair against the Blackhawks on Saturday and made it two consecutive contests by notching another one on Monday night. He tends to score in bunches so ride him out on this next hot-streak. He's averaging only 1.75 SOG per contest in the last eight games, compared to 3.95 prior, so Hitch probably has him thinking more two-way than offense. The Jackets have gone 4-4 during that span so maybe something's in the works. Kristian Huselius is having another one of those "hot" months as he now has 11 points in January. Raffi Torres now has 14 goals. He's been a force averaging three SOG per contest in the month of January. He was once a 27-goal scorer in Edmonton in 2005-06, so the scoring potential is definitely there. Anton Stralman now has three points in the last four contests, and is beginning to find some consistency in his scoring. Mathieu Garon seems to have temporarily surpassed Steve Mason for the number one gig in Columbus. He now owns a 4-2 record with a 2.27 GAA along with a respectable .918 save percentage in January. If the Jackets need a sparkplug to ignite the offense, Garon may be the man.

### Detroit

Todd Bertuzzi scored to end an eight-game goal-less drought. With all the wounded Wings slowly starting to return back to the lineup, Bert's fantasy value will continue to plummet. If you are a Bertuzzi owner definitely see if you can sell-high on him right now. Henrik Zetterberg now has a three-game points scoring streak in which he has tallied five points. He was on an awful six-game point-less drought prior to the offensive outburst, but should return to the point-per-game pace for the remainder of the season. Pavel Datsyuk could probably maintain a similar pace, but I wouldn't count him in for a fifth consecutive 87+ point pace. Nicklas Lidstrom is also following suit behind Datsyuk and Zetterberg as he's tallied five points in the last three contests. What's also a positive sign is that he's registered 10 SOG during that span. His plus seven rating in the new year is also an added bonus. See if you can catch an unsuspecting Lidstrom-owner off-guard by buying low on the defensive vet. Oh where oh where has Chris Osgood gone? That's the main question that Osgood-owners are asking. Jimmy Howard was given a shot at the number one gig and he's essentially run away with it with his dazzling 2.18 and .930 numbers. Osgood will be given a shot eventually, so if you are an owner you have to be patient and play the waiting game.

### Edmonton

Nothing really too special coming out of E-town to report about. I have already begun my "Fall for Hall" or "Sin Bin for Seguin" chants. I think that basically sums up what's going to be in store for the Oiler players for the remainder of the season. The only reprieve that owners might have is hoping that GM Steve Tambellini swings a few deadline deals to find new addresses for a few fantasy-worthy Oilers. Lubomir Visnovsky and Sheldon Souray both have the talent to be very productive on contending squads. Patrick O'Sullivan and Mike Comrie could also be good rental candidates. Other than those four mentioned along with Dustin Penner and maybe Sam Gagner, I don't think any of the other Oilers are entirely fantasy-worthy at the moment. Edmonton as a team allows 31.8 SOG per contest to the opposition, so if you aren't too worried about GAA or save percentage, and is just looking to pick up saves Jeff Deslauriers could be a good candidate.

### Los Angeles

Dustin Brown now has three points in his last four contests, which is quite impressive considering he had three in the previous 27. He's shooting the puck more, which is also a positive sign. Anze Kopitar is back towards the point-per-game pace that he established at the beginning of the season. Interesting stat: the Kings are 12-3 when Kopitar scores a goal. Brad Richardson is on quite the hot streak as he now has 15 points in the last 21 contests. He's starting to develop plenty of chemistry playing alongside Jarret Stoll and Scott Parse. His career-high is only 22 points so I wouldn't invest too highly on him, but definitely keep an eye on his situation. Drew Doughty continues to be the dish master as he now has eight assists in seven January contests. He's averaging 24:28 per contest for the Kings, while ranking 13<sup>th</sup> in the league in terms of PP ice-time with 4:33. I'd pencil him in for 55 points, but 60 probably is a realistic total. Jon Quick finally picked up his first shutout of the season. He had four in about the same amount of starts last season.

### Minnesota

Guillaume Latendresse continues to make an impression as he's been on fire since changing his address mid-season. He has 12 points and 33 SOG in nine January contests and is really clicking with Kyle Brodziak and Martin Havlat. Mikko Koivu, Andrew Brunette and Antti Miettinen have combined for a minus 18 rating in January. The second line has really taken over the offense for the Wild. Petr Sykora was a healthy scratch for six consecutive contests before being re-inserted back into the Wild line up on Monday night. He displaced Miettinen off the Wild top-line, which could make for some interesting implications moving forward. Marek Zidlicky has eight points in the last nine contests, but only 13 SOG. Brent Burns passed his neuro-psyche baseline test, which basically means that he's on his way to receiving medical clearance to resume practicing. He's probably realistically two-three weeks away from returning to the Wild line up. Niklas Backstrom has hit the wall in January as he possesses an atrocious 4.03 GAA along with a .861 save percentage.

### Nashville

The Preds are on a roll as they've won three of the past four contests. The interesting thing is that they've been doing it mostly without the services of Jason Arnott. He returned against the Leafs on Monday night, which should give them an extra offensive kick. Patric Hornqvist continues to be on a tear by firing everything including the kitchen sink against opposing goalies. He's averaging four SOG per contest as well as tallying at above the point-per-game pace in January. Hornqvist is currently only two points off the team lead. Shea Weber is also back towards the point-per-game pace with eight points in eight contests. Another goalie battle is brewing in Nashville as Pekka Rinne and Dan Ellis have been splitting starts in January. Rinne is 3-1 with a 2.91 GAA and a .902 save percentage, while Ellis is 2-2 with a 1.31 GAA and a .951 save percentage. Flip a coin to decide who's number one moving forward.

### Phoenix

Shane Doan continues to lead the Coyotes in point production, but he is facing some competition as both Matthew Lombardi and Radim Vrbata are nipping at his heels. Lombardi has seven points in the last nine contests all while averaging 17:48 per contest. His 20 SOG during that span is also an added bonus as well. Vrbata has 171 SOG, is tied for 10<sup>th</sup> in the league in that department, the more he shoots the more opportunity he'll get for points. Ed Jovanovski's rollercoaster ride continues, as he picked up a whopping four assists along with a plus four rating on Saturday night only to follow that up with a goose egg and a minus five on Monday night. He also only has six shots in the last six contests which is a worry. Following along the same lines as Backstrom, Ilya Bryzgalov has also hit the January wall as he possesses a 4.23 GAA along with a .865 save percentage in seven contests. I have two opposing lines of thought about this situation. 1) The Coyotes were playing above their heads to begin with, so it was bound to happen that they would fall back towards Earth. 2) They are a Dave Tippett coached team, and Tippett-coached teams aren't this poor defensively. The next few games will probably determine if it's scenario one or two.

### San Jose

The Sharks absolutely gave the Flames a drubbing on Monday night as almost everyone who suited up for the Sharks registered a point in the matchup. Dany Heatley extended his point-scoring streak to seven contests in which he tallied nine points and 32 SOG. Joe Thornton is also on a five-game point-scoring streak. What's also interesting is the fact that despite the Sharks scoring nine goals in Monday night's contest, Jumbo Joe still managed zip in the SOG department. Joe Pavelski woke up huge with four points last game, he's on his "magical fourth year" and I definitely think that he has it in him for a breakout from here on out. Dan Boyle recently had a five-game point-scoring streak snapped with a goose egg against Edmonton, but he does have eight points and 20 SOG in the last seven contests. He averages 4:28 on the PP per game, which should essentially give him a real shot at 70 points this season. Evgeni Nabokov continues to roll with a 5-2-1 record in January. He's a strong candidate to hit 40+ wins this season.

### St. Louis

The Blues are now 4-3-1 under new coach Davis Payne. They're now averaging 2.63 goals per game, compared to 2.53 prior to Payne, so there have been some slight improvements. What's not going to make fantasy poolies happy is the fact that the Blues essentially split the lines pretty evenly. They have split the lines: 21 percent to David Backes, Paul Kariya, and T.J. Oshie, 15 percent to Brad Boyes, Jay McClement, and Alex Steen, 13 percent to Andy McDonald, David Perron and Patrick Berglund, and 12 percent to Keith Tkachuk, Brad Winchester and B.J. Crombeen in the last three contests. With that type of setup you're not going to see any fantasy gems coming out of St. Louis. I would be very surprised if any Blues player hit the 65 point mark at the end of the season if they keep this current setup. Chris Mason had his four-game winning streak snapped in the loss to Blue Jackets on Monday night, but still managed to maintain a 2.00 GAA along with a .928 save percentage for January. It was right around this time last year where Mason put up a force field (2.10 GAA and .928 save percentage) to guide the Blues into the playoffs. Could he have a repeat performance?

### Vancouver

The biggest news coming out of Vancouver is the return of Pavol Demitra to the line up. He spent most of his time on the third line alongside Kyle Wellwood and Tanner Glass. His fantasy value for the remainder of the season will depend on the play of Mikael Samuelsson and Mason Raymond. If one of them falters Demitra could find himself on the second line, if not he'll be loitering in the fantasy abyss on the third line. If you have a roster spot to spare, I'd recommend you to take the gamble, but if you need instant production, I'd stay away. Alex Burrows has 22 points in the last 16 contests. Henrik Sedin is leading the league with 67 points, who would've thought that at the beginning of the season? His twin brother Daniel has 35 points in 26 contests since his foot injury. Alex Edler is slowing down as he only has two points in the last eight contests. The point production isn't too much of an alarm, but the 14 SOG during that span is. Roberto Luongo has been stellar but not extraordinary in the month of January with 2.32 and .921 numbers.

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Questions or comments? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below. I hope to see you guys back here again next week to discuss more from the Western Conference.