This week, I thought I'd take a look at 10 hot starters from the West and give my prediction/analysis on whether or not their production will be sustainable for the duration of the fantasy season. (Thanks to Mike Hess for suggesting this idea in the comments section of the daily ramblings Monday)

Matt Cullen - C – Minnesota Wild

Cullen was acquired via free agency, in the off-season, and has certainly paid dividends for the Wild with six points in four contests. He's pretty much stepped right into the second line C slot alongside a pretty good energy line of Martin Havlat and Cal Clutterbuck. What's also a big

boost is that he's seeing 5:07 per contest on the Wild PP, (76.56 percent). Spending that much time with the man advantage and you're certainly going to put up some nice numbers. Cullen is a career 0.53 point, 0.15 PPP and 2.00 SOG per game player, so don't expect huge overall numbers from him. If you keep your expectations in check for a 55-point, 20 PPP, and 175 SOG season, that's still pretty fantasy worthy in many leagues.

Itch Factor: High Flier

T.J. Oshie – C – St. Louis Blues

Young Mr. Oshie is off to a flying start, with a point-per-game pace in his first five contests of the season. The bonus that also comes attached with Oshie is the seven hits and eight blocked shots, (if your league counts those stats), that he also contributes towards the peripheral stats. The downside is that if you're in need of FW, he won't give you very many, (three). For me the problem with Oshie is the distribution of ice-time in St. Louis. They have a top-six breakdown of 21:10, 19:40, 19:24, 19:09, 18:40, and 18:31, which isn't exactly ideal for fantasy purposes. According to my projections article , earlier this summer, his current stats, (18:40 and 2.00 SOG per contest), would pro-rate more towards a 55-point pace than a point-per-game pace.

Itch Factor: Faller

R.J. Umberger – C – Columbus Blue Jackets

With all the hype that has come attached with Nikita Filatov, it's actually Umberger that's really flown under the radar in Columbus. In four contests to start the season, he has four points, two of which have come short-handed, along with a plus four rating. The numbers this season, (17:40 and 1.5 SOG per contest average), aren't as good as last year's, (19:10 and 2.70), but his play hasn't dropped off all that much. If you pro-rate his peripheral numbers, they would actually look like 41 PIMs, 123 HITs and 184 BS. I know there are plenty of Filatov owners out there who'll debate me on this statement, but in terms of fantasy impact, Umberger has much more upside than Filatov for 2010-11.

Itch Factor: Decent Flier

Tomas Kopecky – RW – Chicago Blackhawks

There have been plenty of threads on the forums regarding Kopecky and whether or not he can keep up this blistering pace, (eight points in seven contests). The fact that he has spent 74.31 percent of his overall ice-time alongside superstar Marian Hossa should present pretty firm evidence to support his case. Another factor that Kopecky has going for him, is that he is a product of the Red Wings draft/development program. Generally speaking, I've learned throughout the years to never doubt the Wings' drafting ability, (Thomas Holmstrom, Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg, Niklas Kronwall, Jiri Hudler, Tomas Fleischmann, Valtteri Filppula, Jon Ericsson, Kyle Quincey, Kyle Quincey, and Johan Franzen), so I mean their track record has been pretty darn good at finding hidden gems. He hasn't exactly lit up the NHL, (61 points in 264 career contests), but he has had a 72-point season in the AHL back in 2005-06, which does show that he has some offensive upside. The deal clincher for me is the lack of competition in the Hawks' line up against Kopecky's top-six roster spot. Currently there's only Bryan Bickell (13:59), Troy Brouwer (13:57), Fernado Pisani (13:08), and an underachieving duo of Jack Skille (9:27) and Viktor Stallberg (9:15) to really compete with Kopecky, none of which have impressed enough to remove him out of the top-six.

Itch Factor: High Flier

Chris Stewart – RW – Colorado Avalanche

Stewart popped another two last night, to give him five goals on the season. Big bodied physical players tend to take a few years to develop into quality NHLers, but it appears that he has accelerated the development curve. What's also interesting is that he's had the reigns pulled on him, as he's averaging just 16:57 per contest, (15:40, 16:51, and 11:22 the last three contests, btw two game-winners*). Imagine what totals he would be putting up if he was picking up closer towards what Paul Stastny, (22:00), is averaging. Avs coach, Joe Sacco, does tend to have his favourites as well as his dog-house candidates, let's just hope that he's not going to be a later candidate.

Itch Factor: Push (Massive High Flier if he picks up 18+ mins)

Steve Sullivan – LW – Nashville Predators

A goal-per-game pace is a pretty good feat especially for a 36-year old. Sullivan has scored 260 career NHL goals, so he certainly does know how to deposit the biscuit in the net. He did have a 1.02 point-per-game average between 2005-07, which really isn't all that long ago. At just 40 percent Yahoo! owned, he's a pretty solid pick up as a temporary roster boost, but I wouldn't expect mind-blowing numbers from Sully all season long.

Itch Factor: Faller

Patrick Kane – RW – Chicago Blackhawks

I'm probably going to cop a lot of flack on this one, but I'll repeat pretty much what I mentioned last week. Marian Hossa's full-time inclusion to the Hawks line up will negatively affect Kane's fantasy production. Just comparing both of their current fantasy lines, Hossa, (11 points, plus five, six PIMs, and 20 SOG), vs. Kane, (six points, minus five, zero PIMs, and 14 SOG). Jonthan Toews has also spent 65 percent of his overall ice-time alongside Hossa compared to just 27.81 with Kane. I'm not saying to go out and drop the guy, but what I might do is secretly "test the waters" to see what you can fetch. A dual eligibility return in say Bobby Ryan, Patrick Marleau, or Ilya Kovalchuk might actually be a pretty solid return for Kane.

Itch Factor: Slight Faller (for those that were thinking 100+ for Kane this campaign)

Dustin Brown – RW – Los Angeles Kings

As promised, Kings' coach Terry Murray has stuck to his word in the pre-season of keeping Brown and Anze Kopitar together, (72.32 percent). The combo seems to have paid off as they're off to a pretty hot 3-1 start to the 2010-11 campaign. His current 3.00 SOG per game average is right along the same lines as his 2.69 career average. He's also averaging 20:16 overall as well as 2:48 on the PP. If he keeps up those numbers, I wouldn't be surprised to see him finish the season with a point-per-game pace as well as 300+ HITs. I still don't understand why Yahoo! had him originally ranked as the 179th player. Well, if you took a late around flier on Brown, you should enjoy the great returns.

Itch Factor: High Flier

Alex Steen – C – St. Louis Blues

Steen's still averaging a remarkable 7:28 on the PP, which has translated into a whole ton of SOG, but only just one PPP on the scoresheet. If you look at the ES ice-time breakdown, it's pretty even across-the-board, (13:36-12:44 between the top-eight). Steen is really gaining the extra boost in ice-time because of the PP time. At an efficiency of just 16.7 percent, the Blues are going to have to change it up, which might cause Steen's status to change dramatically. I mean, coaches just can't keep going to the same well if it's empty, right? If you're picking up Steen for his 0.6 point-per-game pace, that's fine, but I wouldn't expect anything more.

Itch Factor: Push

J.M. Liles – D – Colorado Avalanche

If you told me that about 10 days into the 2010-11 campaign, Liles would be sharing the leagues' assist list with Brad Richards, I would have told you to pinch yourself because you're dreaming. Well that's exactly what's happened, so what should we make of it? Liles was a major part of Sacco's dog house, which probably would explain the lack of quality stats from the Indiana-native last season. This year it appears that the situation has turned a full 360, and he's the favourite son for the temperamental coach. Liles' current 22:00 per game ice-time average is a huge upgrade compared to 18:27 that he averaged last campaign. What's more important is that he's the "go-to guy" on the Avs number one power-play unit unseating Quincey. Obviously, I'm not stupid enough to think that he's going to finish the season with 109 points, but with his hot start, 50 isn't out of the question.

Itch Factor: High Flier

Other Notables:

High Flier

Push

Faller

James Neal

Brad Richards

Todd Bertuzzi

Brendan Morrow

Ryane Clowe

Ryan Smyth

Rick Nash

Shawn Horcoff

J.P Dumont

Alex Tanguay

Matt Stajan

Questions or comments? Or Fliers/Fallers of your own? Like always I'll be ready and willing to discuss them with you in the comments section below. See ya next week.