

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 14 December 2010 15:17 - Last Updated Tuesday, 14 December 2010 15:33



The Christmas break is fast approaching, so this week we'll just take a look at what's been going with each of the Western Conference teams.

Anaheim Ducks

Corey Perry notched his first career hat-trick on Sunday night, as he now has 19 points and 57 SOG in his last 16 contests. Teemu Selanne is dealing with a nagging groin injury, but should be back fairly soon as he joined the team on their current road trip. With Joffrey Lupul and Jason Blake fully capable of handling top-six duties, there probably won't be a massive rush to have Selanne re-join the line up until he's full ready. It'll be an interesting situation to see what happens when all three are back to full health. Angus and I were both very high on Lubomir Visnovsky at the start of this season. He's currently fourth amongst all NHL blue-liners with 25 points and on pace to finish with 64 points. Despite starting the season 3-5-1, Jonas Hiller is starting to prove Angus wrong, as he sports an 11-6-2 record, with a 2.62 GAA and .917 save percentage since November. The flip side is that the Ducks are about to enter a gruelling seven-game road trip where he has an unimpressive 3.00 GAA. Anaheim is the sixth worst defensive team (in terms of GAA) away from the Honda Center, which means the numbers might not look as dazzling by the end of December, so Hiller-owners watch out.

Calgary Flames

After starting the season with just seven points in his first 11 contests, Jarome Iginla now has 22 points and 70 SOG in the last 20 games. He's back... Mark Giordano had a very surprising point-per-game streak in the last eight contests, while averaging a very quiet 3:28 on the PP each contest for Calgary. His 62 HITS and 86 BS go a long way in leagues that count deep peripheral stats. Mikka Kiprusoff currently owns a 2.76 GAA, which is one of his highest totals in his career. His .909 save percentage is still fairly respectable though. His backup Henrik Karlsson owns a 1.54 GAA along with a decent .927 save percentage in his last three starts. He'd carry more fantasy value if he can start in more than 16 percent of the Flames' contests.

Chicago Blackhawks

Now that Marian Hossa and Patrick Kane are out of the picture, it has been the Patrick Sharp and Jonathan Toews show in the windy city. Sharp is averaging 21:50 along with a 4.4 SOG average for the last five contests, while the later is averaging 21:06 and 4 SOG. Jack Skille ended a nine-game goal-less drought with a marker on Monday night. He did have 21 SOG in that span though. Duncan Keith is still on pace for 51 points, which is a bit less than the 69 that he tallied last year, but still within earshot of the present leading blue-liners. His current minus 11 rating is a massive downer though. Last week, I mentioned Marty Turco as a huge bust candidate, so I'll pile on the damage once again as he was shelled for another four goals in just over a period of play on Monday night against the Avalanche. His backup Corey Crawford will certainly be given plenty of rope, as his incredible 2.39 GAA and .914 save percentage shows more confidence than the numbers that Turco embodies.

Colorado Avalanche

With six points in his last two contests, Paul Stastny now has 31 points in 30 contests. In the off-season he was my dark horse pick to win the [Art Ross trophy](#) . He's no Steve Stamkos or Sidney Crosby, but I do see a little bit of a Henrik Sedin breakout in him. Hank really took off offensively last season when he lost his twin brother Daniel to an injury, which is eerily similar to the Avs current situation with the Chris Stewart injury. Henrik posted 18 points in 18 contests in Daniel's absence, and never really looked back. Stastny, without Chris Stewart, has nine points in seven contests. Will he have a similar breakout? Then again, he is backed by the most potent offense in the league... After starting the season with 22 points in the first 21 contests, J.M. Liles has come back down to Earth with just four points in his last nine. Much of his thunder has been stolen by Kevin Shattenkirk who has 15 points in the last 13 games, while averaging 20:43 per contest over that span. Craig Anderson isn't the same Anderson from last year, but being backed by the most potent offense in the league, he doesn't need to play top form in order to

pick up the Ws. Look for him to continue racking up the wins in Colorado.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Rick Nash started the 2010-11 season very quietly, with just five points in his first 10 contests, but has really woken up with 20 in the last 18. His 112 SOG ranks him 15th in the league in that department. He's on a four-game point-scoring streak in which he has tallied seven points and 18 SOG. It appears that the Nash that we all know and love is back. The entire Jackets blue-line corps has contributed a grand total of 46 points from the defensive front. To put it into perspective, the duo of Liles and Shattenkirk, mentioned above, have 42 between themselves. Yipes! Steve Mason still seems to be suffering, at least a little bit, from the sophomore slump of last season. His 3.06 GAA and .907 save percentage ranks 36

th

and 30

th

respectively. Meanwhile, his counterpart Mathieu Garon ranks fourth and seventh in the same department. Mason is the golden child, so he'll continue to see his fair share of starts.

Dallas Stars

Brad Richards leads the way in terms of scoring for the Stars with 34 points. I'm still pretty intrigued to see how the Lightning would be shaping up right about now if they moved Vinny Lecavalier instead of Richards in 2008. Either way he's setting himself up for a great future in his contract year. James Neal continues to produce at a solid pace. He contributes plenty in the SOG, HITs and the points front, but the problem is he lacks the "big name" status for any trade value. Owners are stuck between a rock and a hard place. The problem is it will be stupid to expect him to maintain this scoring pace, but on the other hand you won't ever get fair value if you are thinking of moving him. I mean you're not going to land a Pavel Datsyuk, Bobby Ryan, or Nash straight up, so what are you expected to do? What the heck is going on with Matt Niskanen, wasn't he supposed to be the heir to Sergei Zubov? He's on pace for just eight points. Ouch! Everyone in the whole wide world knows about the band-aid boy status of Kari Lehtonen, so why the heck would Marc Crawford start the guy in 22 of the first 26 contests? He was asking for trouble when he allowed that to happen. Raycroft's respectable 2.31 GAA along with .925 save percentage shows that he's ready to be a number one in the NHL again.

Detroit Red Wings

Datsyuk has been on a tear with seven multi-point efforts in the last 14 contests. His 33 SOG leaves a bit more to be desired though. Age might be starting to catch up to Niklas Lidstrom as he only has two points in the last 11 games. He's still on a 60+ point pace, so I'd hang onto him. Valtteri Filppula's inconsistent production is due to the lack of SOG. Last season he averaged 2.07 SOG per contest but this season he's only firing at a rate of 1.64, which isn't enough to really get the pucks into the opposition's net. If you compare Jimmy Howard's numbers to Chris Osgood's, they are fairly similar. The problem is Howard is getting the starts and Osgood isn't. He needs an injury or massive slump to get back into the number one role in Detroit.

Edmonton Oilers

With Ales Hemsky and Shawn Horcoff out of the picture, it's going to be the young guns of the Oilers that will carry this team for at least the next few weeks. With young kids you're going to get a lot of inconsistency, so if you are an owner of the Oilers three-headed trio of Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle or Magnus Paajarvi, be prepared for the roller-coaster ride. With Horcoff out of the picture, Sam Gagner is getting the extra boost in ice-time. He's averaging 20:17 (3:15 on the PP) in Horcoff's absence. The two SOG in the last two contests is a bit of a worry though. Oilers' blue-liner Ryan Whitney continues to lead the team in scoring with 21 points, but is currently riding a three-game pointless drought. With the amount of ice-time that he sees, that streak should end fairly soon. Nikolai Khabibulin is the temporary number one in Edmonton, but with Devan Dubnyk sporting a .920 save percentage, that number one gig is certainly up for grabs.

Los Angeles Kings

Anze Kopitar is heating up with eight points and 21 SOG in five December contests. He has a home/away split of 1.36 points-per-game at the Staples Center compared to just 0.71 away, which probably isn't a good thing since the Kings will head into four-game road trip this week. Justin Williams is also on a point-per-game pace for the month of December and is showing no signs of his band-aid boy-ness. Recent addition Marco Sturm is probably still two weeks away from returning to NHL play. He should cement a top-six role with the Kings alongside Jarret Stoll and Ryan Smyth. Stop the press! There has been a Drew Doughty sighting. He snapped a 10-game point-less drought with three helpers on Monday night, hopefully that's what he needs to wake him up from his slumber. Jon Quick picked up his 10th shutout of his career, and now ranks third, second and fourth in terms of wins, GAA and save percentage respectively.

Minnesota Wild

Since his return from a lengthy concussion, Pierre Marc Bouchard has a very quiet four points in six contests. In his final year of junior, he tallied 140 points in 69 contests, which is monstrous offensive upside. If that isn't enough evidence to convince you, three years ago he did register 63 points in 81 contests. With Marty Havlat on the other wing and Matt Cullen as their center, the Wild could have a very under-rated second line on their hands. At just four percent Yahoo! owned, he should be widely available in a few leagues. Brent Burns scored in his third consecutive contest on Sunday night but it wasn't enough as the Wild fell to the Ducks 6-2. Burns has spent the last two seasons dealing with a concussion and when asked recently about "head problems" he was quick to denounce anything negative. I'll take his word for it as his current 48-point and 144 SOG pace suggest. At just 55 percent Yahoo! owned, he's a smart pickup if you are in need of a defensive boost (Dobber Expert Leaguers pay attention!). It's been a very boom-or-bust season for Niklas Backstrom owners. In 20 starts this campaign, six have been the four or more goals allowed variety, while another six has been the one or less kind. If you break the stats down even further, he has a home/away split of 2.36 and .919 at the Xcel Energy Center and 3.50 and .906 away from Minnesota. Six of the next nine contests will be at home, so definitely bank that knowledge to your advantage.

Nashville Predators

Last season I wrote, "I've learned a couple of things in the past few seasons since becoming a hardcore fan of hockey. One is to never doubt the Sabres' coach Lindy Ruff and the second is to never doubt the Pred's coach Barry Trotz. Those two seem to possess the Midas touch as it seems no matter what they are given they always seem to make the most out of it." 12 months later and I can pretty much write an identical statement. The Preds are now 6-0-1 in the last seven contests while tallying a whooping 25 goals against their opposition. It is very interesting

considering that's pretty much an identical statement that I wrote exactly [12 months ago](#) . Déjà Vu? Sergei Kostitsyn now has a six-game point streak in which he has tallied eight points. Trotz has plenty of confidence in the young kid, which is a lot more than what the Habs management had in him in Montreal last campaign. His ice-time is still a bit low (14:58 during the streak), but it's starting to rise much like his confidence. Martin Erat is trending the same way as he also has eight points in December. He is a consistent 50-55 point guy, which means that he could be in store for 41 points in the remaining 53 contests. At just eight percent Yahoo! owned, he's a massive bargain bin pickup for an offensive fix. I sound like a broken record but, could there be a fifth consecutive year of goalie controversy in Nashville? Anders Lindback is now 7-1-2 on the season following consecutive shut outs. Pekka Rinne is on the IR and it'd be hard for him to steal the number one gig back with the way how Lindy's been playing. Seriously, Chris Mason, Tomas Vokoun, Dan Ellis, Pekka Rinne and now Anders Lindback! I'd almost be willing to bet my house on both Chet Pickard and Mark Dekanich will pan out too.

Phoenix Coyotes

I was chatting to one of my friends back home about it on Saturday night and was pleasantly shocked to hear that Shane Doan has never had a career hat-trick. He holds the longest streak amongst active players with 35 two-goal games, but zero hat-tricks. I still find it funny that Vernon Fiddler has one from this season despite Doan scoring 224 career goals more than him. Either way with nine points and 32 SOG in his last eight contests, Doan should pick one up fairly soon. At just 40 percent Yahoo! owned, he's also a strong candidate to pick up for a boost for your fantasy squad. Somebody must have spiked Keith Yandle's holiday drink as he has six points along with a blazing 23 SOG in five December contests. If you've been an avid DobberHockey reader the last few years, you're probably well versed in the Yandle-hype. It appears that it's really starting to pay its dividends. The Yotes are on the road for the next six contests, which they have a 2.57 goals allowed average in 14 away contests. Ilya Bryzgalov owns road stats of a 6-1-2 record, a 2.26 GAA along with a glittering .931 save percentage, so owners you can start licking your chops right about now.

San Jose Sharks

Ryane Clowe is shockingly tied with Dany Heatley for the Sharks scoring title with 29 points. Who would have thought that was possible with the likes of Joe Thornton, Patrick Marleau and Joe Pavelski in the mix? In an attempt to spread out the offense Pavelski has been shifted down to the third line alongside John McCarthy (who?), and Jamie McGinn. Co-incidentally he has three consecutive goose-eggs and a lowly four SOG. As a Pav owner in two leagues, I'm not a happy camper! Justin Braun is the new "hot" blue-liner for the Sharks in 2010-11. Remember Jason Demers from last season? I'd expect similar numbers, around 20 points in 50 contests. At two percent Yahoo! owned, he's worth a temporary flier if you are desperate for D help. Much of the goalie edge to start the season has been leaned towards Antero Niittymaki's way, but with two solid starts from Antti Niemi, the pendulum is beginning to swing back the other way. He has a 1.40 GAA along with an alluring 0.95 save percentage in his last two starts.

St. Louis Blues

The Blues are struggling with injuries as Andy McDonald, David Perron, TJ Oshie and Roman Polak are amongst the victims of the infirmary ward. Oshie continues to surprise me with his character. Despite a broken ankle, he continues to be a motivational factor by visiting his teammates in the locker room. He was quoted in saying, "I try to be that energy guy around the locker room as much as I can. Obviously, I can't do it on the ice, I can't do it on the bench, but I'll do whatever I can to get the guys in a good mood and have fun. I think that's a big part of playing well is coming to the rink and having a good time while you're here." If that doesn't speak volumes for his future leadership skills, I don't know what does. Alex Pietrangelo was

recently promoted to the Blues top PP unit and responded with the lone Blues' goal on Saturday night. He picked up 14 SOG along with a PP ice-time average of 3:01 in the last five contests compared to Erik Johnson's 10 SOG and 2:17 PP average. At just 23 percent Yahoo! owned, AP is a huge bargain bin pickup for the short and possibly long term. EJ continues to remind me more of Jay Bouwmeester... which isn't a good thing. The Halak attack is back on track after a mid-Novemeber slump. He has a 1.48 GAA along with a dazzling 0.943 save percentage in his last four starts.

Vancouver Canucks

One person's loss is another's gain is probably the thought that is currently occupying Keith Ballard's mind. Christian Ehroff missed the last two contests with a concussion, which has opened up the door for Ballard to garner over 20 minutes of ice-time. Depending on the severity of Ehroff's injury, Ballard does gain some temporary added fantasy value for the short term. For those of you who are in desperate need of help on the blue-line, Ballard is certainly a viable option. The biggest news coming out of Vancouver is the loss of Mason Raymond for at least a few weeks due to a broken thumb. Mikael Samuelsson should see his value skyrocket, as he pretty much has a top-six spot cemented alongside Ryan Kesler and Jeff Tambellini. Tamb-owners should also breathe a sigh of relief as he should buy a few more weeks in a top-six role with the Nucks. Roberto Luongo has been on fire as of late as he's gone 6-1 in his last seven starts. During that span he's also managed a 1.85 GAA along with a stellar .917 save percentage. Look for him to continue that trend as the Nucks head out for a Central Division swing.

Maaaasquito's Travels

Written by Ryan Ma

Tuesday, 14 December 2010 15:17 - Last Updated Tuesday, 14 December 2010 15:33

Questions or comments? As 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.