The 'Looking Ahead' series helps you get the edge when setting your fantasy lineups.

A tough decision can be made easier with these charts showing you the best five and worst five schedules for upcoming seven-day periods. Some of you used them last year but for the benefit of new readers here is a refresher. The number next to the team indicates the 'multiplier' to use on a player's point-per-game pace to give you an idea how many points to expect for that week.

Conference Bias

Our closest results so far when comparing the two conferences. Nearly equal in the “Best Bets” section, we see Eastern Conference teams 18 times to the Western Conference’s 17. The “Steer Clear” was 20-15 in favor of the West. So it seems like the schedule is leaning closer to even between the two conferences, but the East still has a slight advantage.

Southeastern Takeover

I had to make a decision this past week on who to drop on one of my rosters to activate a certain player. I talked it over with a few people and we came to a unanimous decision to drop Tomas Fleischmann. So what does he do? He promptly goes out and puts up three points the next night. That’s not reason enough to play your Panthers this week, but it does give you an idea that the Panthers aren’t nearly as bad as they’ve seemed.

Through all the bellyaches in South Florida about the proposed new re-alignment, the Panthers can enjoy the fact that their next few opponents give them the opportunity to get guys back on track, help improve Tomas Kopecky ’s Hall of Fame status and play Jose Theodore and Scott Clemmensen over the clearly more talented Jacob Markstrom.

The next two weeks, the Panthers have the opportunity to play every team in their division with a home and home versus the Hurricanes this weekend, then two home games against Winnipeg sandwiched around a trip to Washington. They finish it off with home games against Montreal and Tampa Bay. Florida has a real opportunity to not only get back into the playoff race but take over the division (worst division in the league).

Expect Kris Versteeg to return during the next few games and Brian Campbell to average a point per game over the next week, as well as Fleischmann to continue to punish me for dropping him.

Who Needs Parise?

Amazingly, after losing Zach Parise to the Wild and Ilya Kovalchuk starting the season slowly, the New Jersey Devils are still only two points behind Pittsburgh for the division lead, with a game in hand. New Jersey has been a revelation this season with some pundits believing they're better than they were last year when they lost in the Finals to the Kings.

Patrik Elias and Kovalchuk are once again leading by example and playing the Pete Deboer way. I remember thinking when the Devils picked up Marek Zidlicky last season that he would turn into a point machine. While he was pretty good, it seemed like his overall play was down from where he was in Minnesota. This year has been different, he's had more poise and has been able to play the point on the powerplay more effectively with less giveaways.

The Devils have some interesting matchups in the next week. They play a floundering Buffalo team on Saturday; have a back-to-back against the Leafs and Bolts, another game against Buffalo, and another back-to-back with Carolina and Winnipeg. This may sound odd, but Toronto is the best defensive team out of all those teams.

This could be a huge week for Devils players. Also, keep an eye on David Clarkson as he looks to cash in on a huge contract extension.

Bench Your (Dallas) Stars

I like to read hockey message boards and forums to find out the inside scoop on what fans think of their own teams. When Erik Cole was traded for Michael Ryder this week, I took a peek and find a hilarious amount of comments that showed both teams hate the deal. So by trade math, this means that the trade was equal and pretty fair for both sides.

Despite acquiring Cole, the next two weeks for the Stars sucks. No other way to put it. While Kari Lehtonen
is back, don't expect a ton of success from Dallas for the near future (fantasy wise). Sunday game against an improving St. Louis team, off until Thursday when they play the hot, defensive-minded, Cup-defending Kings. Then another defensive battle in Phoenix, followed by, you guessed it, another defensive team in Nashville.

Be prepared for some low-scoring games, so bench your Stars if you have other options.

Yeo! We Can't Score

Looking at the standings, you'll see Minnesota at second in their division behind Vancouver, with a game in hand. A lot of people were excited to see the Wild finally shake off that Lemaire stigma that has been lingering since he left. Even after Craig Leipold begrudgingly spent a ton of money he didn't have to get players that could help his team and sign them to deals that caused a half season lockout, the Wild still can't score goals. With a ton of rookies trying to make their way, the Wild are still a year or two away, and this week you should stay away (see what I did there?) from playing them.

Games against Anaheim, Chicago, Nashville and Vancouver are looming on the schedule, which are some of the best offensive and defensive teams in the league. We can still expect Parise to keep scoring at a decent clip, but Dany Heatley will go cold (as if he hasn't already) and Wild fans will continue to watch
Ryan Suter
and mutter "HE'S worth $98 million?"

Possible Pickups

Here's a list of some players, owned in less than 30% of Yahoo leagues, to target during the upcoming Monday through Sunday week.

New Jersey: Travis Zajac (19%) – Second on the team in forward ice time (behind Kovalchuk). Also playing with Kovy at even strength and powerplay.

Detroit: Dan Cleary (7%) – Six points in his past five games. Skating on a line with Datsyuk (Franzen's return could shuffle the lines).

Florida: Tomas Kopecky (12%) – Seven points in his past four games, including a hat trick and four point night in his last game. Skates with Fleischmann in all situations.

Phoenix: Mikkel Boedker (20%) – Five points in his past five. Most powerplay and even strength time on ice per game amongst all PHX forwards.

Chicago: Viktor Stalberg (9%) – Two goals in his past three games while averaging three shots on goal per game. Playing on the powerplay with Kane and Sharp.

Best Bets
Carolina (4.40) - 4 Games: FLA, @FLA, BUF, MTL
Chicago (4.31) - 4 Games: CLB, @DET, MIN, COL
Phoenix (4.25) - 4 Games: ANH, ANH, @ANH, STL
Florida (4.25) - 4 Games: @CAR, CAR, WPG, @WSH
New Jersey (4.11) - 4 Games: @BUF, @TOR, TB, BUF
Steer Clear
Nashville (1.81) - 2 Games: @SJ, @LA
Dallas (1.95) - 2 Games: STL, @LA
Calgary (2.00) - 2 Games: VAN, SJ
Toronto (2.80) - 3 Games: NJ, OTW, @BOS
San Jose (2.85) - 3 Games: NSH, @VAN, @CGY
Friday, March 8
Best Bets
Florida (5.41) - 5 Games: @CAR, CAR, WPG, @WSH, WPG
Carolina (4.40) - 4 Games: FLA, @FLA, BUF, MTL
Winnipeg (4.29) - 4 Games: WSH, @FLA, @TB, @FLA
Phoenix (4.25) - 4 Games: ANH, ANH, @ANH, STL
NY Rangers (4.24) - 4 Games: BUF, PHI, @NYI, OTW
Steer Clear
Minnesota (1.91) - 2 Games: EDM, @CHI
Dallas (1.95) - 2 Games: STL, @LA
Toronto (2.80) - 3 Games: NJ, OTW, @BOS
St. Louis (2.80) - 3 Games: @DAL, @LA, @PHX
San Jose (2.85) - 3 Games: NSH, @VAN, @CGY
aturday, March 9
Best Bets
Florida (4.41) - 4 Games: CAR, WPG, @WSH, WPG
Columbus (4.31) - 4 Games: COL, EDM, VAN, DET
Phoenix (4.25) - 4 Games: ANH, @ANH, STL, DAL
NY Rangers (4.24) - 4 Games: BUF, PHI, @NYI, OTW

Los Angeles (4.20) - 4 Games: NSH, STL, DAL, CGY

Steer Clear

Minnesota (2.76) - 3 Games: EDM, @CHI, @NSH
Buffalo (2.80) - 3 Games: @NYR, @CAR, @NJ
Philadelphia (2.81) - 3 Games: @NYR, PIT, @BOS
Dallas (2.86) - 3 Games: STL, @LA, @PHX
Ottawa (2.90) - 3 Games: @NYI, @TOR, @NYR

unday, March 10

Best Bets

New Jersey (5.26) - 5 Games: @TOR, TB, BUF, @CAR, WPG
Detroit (4.41) - 4 Games: COL, EDM, @CLB, CLB
Florida (4.31) - 4 Games: WPG, @WSH, WPG, MTL
Phoenix (4.25) - 4 Games: ANH, @ANH, STL, DAL
Chicago (4.25) - 4 Games: MIN, COL, @COL, EDM

Steer Clear

Minnesota (2.71) - 3 Games: @CHI, @NSH, VAN
Dallas (1.81) - 2 Games: @LA, @PHX
Buffalo (2.90) - 3 Games: @CAR, @NJ, @PHI
Ottawa (1.81) - 2 Games: @TOR, @NYR
Calgary (2.90) - 3 Games: SJ, @ANH, @LA

Monday, March 11

Best Bets

Detroit (4.41) - 4 Games: COL, EDM, @CLB, CLB
Los Angeles (4.36) - 4 Games: STL, DAL, CGY, CGY
Florida (4.31) - 4 Games: WPG, @WSH, WPG, MTL
New Jersey (4.36) - 4 Games: TB, BUF, @CAR, WPG
Chicago (4.25) - 4 Games: MIN, COL, @COL, EDM

Steer Clear

Dallas (1.81) - 2 Games: @LA, @PHX
Nashville (2.05) - 2 Games: EDM, MIN
Minnesota (2.71) - 3 Games: @CHI, @NSH, VAN
Ottawa (2.75) - 3 Games: @TOR, @NYR, BOS
Toronto (2.85) - 3 Games: OTW, @BOS, PIT

o Tuesday, March 12

Best Bets

Washington (4.40) - 4 Games: FLA, @NYI, NYR, CAR
Florida (4.25) - 4 Games: @WSH, WPG, MTL, TB
Los Angeles (4.21) - 4 Games: DAL, CGY, CGY, @PHX
Phoenix (4.15) - 4 Games: @ANH, STL, DAL, LA
Columbus (4.10) - 4 Games: VAN, DET, @DET, VAN

Steer Clear

Dallas (2.75) - 3 Games: @LA, @PHX, NSH
Ottawa (2.75) - 3 Games: @TOR, @NYR, BOS
Buffalo (2.90) - 3 Games: @NJ, @PHI, NYR
Minnesota (2.96) - 3 Games: @NSH, VAN, ANH
Carolina (2.99) - 3 Games: MTL, NJ, @WSH

Wednesday, March 13

Best Bets

Washington (4.40) - 4 Games: FLA, @NYI, NYR, CAR
New Jersey (4.36) - 4 Games: BUF, @CAR, WPG, PHI
Florida (4.25) - 4 Games: @WSH, WPG, MTL, TB
Detroit (4.25) - 4 Games: EDM, @CLB, CLB, @CGY
Los Angeles (4.21) - 4 Games: DAL, CGY, CGY, @PHX

Steer Clear

Chicago (2.10) - 2 Games: @COL, EDM
Dallas (2.75) - 3 Games: @LA, @PHX, NSH
Ottawa (2.75) - 3 Games: @NYR, BOS, MTL
Buffalo (2.90) - 3 Games: @NJ, @PHI, NYR
Toronto (2.95) - 3 Games: @BOS, PIT, @WPG