

More hockey picks from Hepditch

BY SCOTT HEPDITCH

Hello again everyone, I hope that you enjoyed my preview of the Eastern Conference two weeks ago. I know that not everyone agreed with my picks but hey I can't please everyone. I'm back this week to give a preview of the NHL's Western Conference.

Anaheim Mighty Ducks

What's New: This team stayed relatively quiet during the off-season and did not sign any big name free agents. The team won't have offensive-minded Stephan Lebeau this year who left the team for more money in Switzerland.

What's Needed: First and foremost the team needs someone who will be able to play on a line with sophomore Paul Kariya. If the team could get such a player then they would score more goals and win a few more games.

Prediction: 5th place in Pacific Division

Calgary Flames

What's New: Like the Ducks the Flames stayed relatively quiet in the off-season. I guess management focused most of their efforts on signing free agent Theo Fleury, which was a good idea. The team did pick up David Ling to replace Robert Reichel, who left to play in Germany.

What's Needed: For this team to go far they will need Gary Roberts to return to a 40-goal scorer. Also, the team has to get Joe Nieuwendyk back playing. Joe is too valuable to Calgary to have him sitting on the sidelines.

Prediction: 3rd place in Pacific Division.

Chicago Blackhawks

What's New: This year the team has a new captain, Chris Chelios, to replace retired Dirk Graham. The Hawks did dip into the free agent market and came up with Kip Miller, Brad Werenka and Andre Racicot.

What's Needed: Jeremy

Roenick has to return to the form he had before last years knee injury. I fully expect this to happen since he had a successful playoffs last year. Ed Belfour must have another stellar year if this team expects to return to the finals.

Prediction: 2nd place in Central Division

Dallas Stars

What's New: The team picked up Bob Bassen from Colorado and Nikolai Borschevsky through the free agent market, and also traded for one of coach Bob Gainey's protégés, Guy Carboneau.

What's Needed: Mike Modano must have a big year if this team has any hope at all. The team could also use a young goaltender because Andy Moog is past his prime.

Prediction: Last (6th) in Central Division

Detroit Red Wings

What's New: This team, who went to the finals last year, stayed pretty much together. The team lost only Terry Carkner and Mark Howe. Since the team did stay together don't be surprised if they make a return visit to the Stanley Cup Finals.

What's Needed: This team seems to have weapons at all positions, but if the team was to get something I would suggest a goalie that won't disappear when he is needed the most.

Prediction: 1st place in Central Division

Edmonton Oilers

What's New: This team made one of the biggest trades over the summer when they were able to get Curtis Joseph and the rights to Mike Grier from St. Louis. With Joseph and Bill Ranford this team may have the NHL's best 1-2 punch in goal.

What's Needed: Patience. This team has a lot of young, talented players who will need a couple of years to mature into NHL players. The defence is the most

pressing need and the management should try and get a couple of veteran defencemen to prevent the goalies from becoming shell-shocked.

Prediction: Last place (7th) in the Pacific

Los Angeles Kings

What's New: Goalie Brian Dafoe and winger Dmitri Khristich came over from Washington. Dafoe will be expected to fill the hole left by Grant Fuhr, and Khristich should help the team score more goals since he is playing on a wing with Wayne Gretzky.

What's Needed: Forwards that can score and take some of the pressure off of Gretzky's line. Also the team could really use a big year from Gretzky, who had his worst professional year last year.

Prediction: 6th place in the Pacific

San Jose Sharks

What's New: Again this team stayed really quiet during the off-season and did not really shake up the core of the team. What they did get was Jeff Batters and Geoff Sarjeant from St. Louis.

What's Needed: For the team to play, during the regular season, like they have in the playoffs during the last two years. If they could play like this, the team could be a real force. The Sharks also need another big year from goalie Arturs Irbe.

Prediction: 4th in the Pacific

St. Louis Blues

What's New: Quite a bit. This team was one of the busiest during the off-season both with trades and in the free agency market. Some of the new names in St. Louis are Grant Fuhr, Dale Hawerchuk, Brian Noonan, Geoff Courtnall, Jay Wells, and Chris Pronger. This should vastly improve this team, but in such a tough division will it make a difference?

What's Needed: After all of

the moves that Keenan made during the summer the team is hoping it has filled all of its holes. If the Blues do need something it will be a goalie since I don't think Fuhr is the man to bring this team to the Stanley Cup.

Prediction: 3rd place in Central Division

Toronto Maple Leafs

What's New: The team has picked up some players they hope will help them get back to the level they were a couple of years ago. New faces in town include Sergio Momesso, Larry Murphy, Dimitri Yushkevich, and Rob Zetter.

What's Needed: Players such as Doug Gilmour and Felix Potvin need to have years like they had two years ago. Mats Sundin needs to pick up his game and make an impact on this team like he was brought in to do last year.

Predictions: 4th place in Central Division

Vancouver Canucks

What's New: The Canucks were involved in one of the biggest trades in the off-season when they acquired sniper Alexander Mogilny from the Buffalo Sabres. With Mogilny in the lineup it reunites two-thirds of one of the best junior lines ever (Mogilny, Bure, Federov) and it should make for some exciting hockey on the West coast.

What's Needed: Pavel Bure

must have a big year like the ones he had when he scored 60 goals two years in row. Goalie Kirk McLean must have a big year since this team seems to be committed to offence not defence.

Prediction: 2nd place in Pacific Division

Winnipeg Jets

What's New: The team knows it will be their last season in Winnipeg. This was another quiet team in the off-season when it picked up Jeff Finely and Darren Turcotte from Hartford. The team has a new captain this year in Kris King.

What's Needed: Teemu Selanne, Keith Tkachuk, and Alexei Zhamnov must have big year if this team expects to make it back to the playoffs. Bob Essensa must also get some help from his defence to have any chance of being playoff contenders.

Prediction: 5th place in Central Division

All of the attentive readers out there may have noticed I did not pick a division winner in the Pacific Division and the reason for this is because I think the Colorado Avalanche will win this division. The reason I didn't do a preview on the Avalanche in this article is because I didn't realize this team had switched divisions when they moved from Quebec so I inadvertently did a preview on the Avalanche when I did an Eastern Conference Preview.

10¢ WINGS!

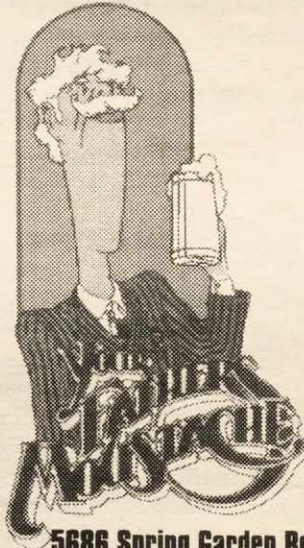
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