

Rob and Scott's Excellent Predictions

This week, each of us has predicted the Campbell Conference standings for the upcoming NHL season. Just like Siskel & Ebert, he haven't seen each other's picks until press time. Therefore, we won't be able to make fun of each other until next week. But before any of that takes place, the brief predictions:

Scott:

Why is it that every year at this time, every sports writer-type gives his/her predictions for the upcoming NHL season? And why is it that all they do (it seems), is take a look at last year's standings and basically re-hash them into (what they call) predictions? Well, we do predictions because we have nothing better to write about. But I'm here to tell you, friends, I have some surprises for you:

Smythe	Norris
Edmonton	St. Louis
Calgary	Chicago
Vancouver	Toronto
(yes, Toronto)	
Los Angeles	Detroit
San Jose	Minnesota
Winnipeg	

And before you ask - no, I'm not under the influence of any controlled substance. There is method behind my madness (or, at least, 10 minutes of thought)...

Smythe
Edmonton - Hey, with the such an intimidating D (Thornton, Smith, Muni, et al), Edmonton will have a strong, strong team. Who knows what they'll get for Messier? It should be substantial. As a huge Oiler fan (I'm really sorry), I now know how every American feels with the "Quayle Factor" and President Bush's health. I am now the proud owner of the "Ing Factor". Yeesh.

Calgary - Another strong team this year, but it will be tough to win the division without making any dramatic changes from last year's team. Besides, as an Oiler fan, I must despise the Flames and therefore, cannot predict they will win the division (no matter how likely that is).

Vancouver - I dunno, I just get the feeling they can pull it together this year. MacLean and Courtnall have looked good, and their no-name team has nothing to prove. Perfect for the very young teams in the Smythe (except for LA, of course)

Los Angeles - Even with a (maybe) deadly Gretzky-Kurri-Sandstrom line, I think LA is really weak behind the blue line, and I think they may actually even be in danger of not making the playoffs. Unless, of course, they deal for Messier. Then they'll have to

make the playoffs since more than 1/3 of their players will have played for Edmonton (see Oiler fan prediction rule, above).

San Jose - I know, I know. An expansion team in the Smythe will "never" get out of the basement - until this year. The Sharks are probably the strongest expansion team since . . . since . . . Well, put it another way - Winnipeg is still in the Smythe. Besides, Hayward has a really cool mask.

Winnipeg - Quick - name any 5 Winnipeg Jests, er, I mean Jets. They should live up (or down) to their attendance this year. OK, maybe you can name 5 Jets, but the supporting cast for Olczyk, Essenza, Housley, etc. just isn't that strong.

Norris

St. Louis - With Hull & Oates back together, and some strong off-season acquirement, even the loss of Captain Stevens isn't going to slow down the Blues . . . Maybe

Chicago - I can see a major player revolt as Keenan has just about overstayed his welcome. I also foresee a major bad year for Ed "Flop Like A Dead Man" Belfour. But, then again, there's not much competition in the Norris these days.

Trahnnah - Yes! The Leafs make the playoffs! The Leafs make the playoffs! In this,

their 25th anniversary since their last Cup, the mighty Blue & White will utilize Fuhr, although their defence is quite suspect.

Detroit - a sub-par year for the flying wheels, but Stevie Y will take them into the playoffs, almost single-handedly.

Minnesota - I know they made the finals. I know they got some good talent over the summer. I know they surprised everyone last year. But face it. On paper, these guys shouldn't win.

So there. Come April, I'm either going to be revered as the second coming, or people will not be shy about laughing directly in my face (geez, which is more likely do you think?) Sigh . . . The life of a sportswriter . . .

Rob

OK, it's my turn, so let's see how everybody's looking after a summer of recreational (or precreational if you're Grant Fuhr or Pierre Trudeau) sex and lying on the beach (unless they played for their country in the greatest tournament on this side of the galaxy) and how the teams should fair for the upcoming season. Teams are in order of finish.

Chicago - Hey, these guys should win the division all the way, and perhaps be first overall. Yeah, yeah, tell you something you didn't know. As everyone knows Keenan (Hitler) invited enough Blackhawks to

the Team Canada tryouts to make you think it was the Chicago training camp. He's even lucky enough to have a couple Team Yankee Doodle Dandy members Roenick and Chelios. Look for Belfour to be less spectacular than last year. The last year's playoffs showed just how easy it is to score on him (you just have to bring the puck within 30 feet and he turns into a flounder flopping frantically on the ice.)

St. Louis - Oh, Oh!! Where's the defence. They lost three defencemen during the holiday (the biggest being Stevens) but picked up youngster Baron along with Ron Sutter to fill defensive holes. Hull will score lots, but teams should score more and many finally control Hull. I think they'll finish second in the division but probably drop out of the top five.

Detroit - Put Yserman and Federov together and what do you have? Well at least two good scoring lines anyway. Their defencemen are either really old or really young so it could mean lots of goals against if Cheveladae is less than spectacular. Poolers should watch out for Miller especially if he plays on either of the big lines. Hey the Dead wings should make the playoffs if they have no injuries.

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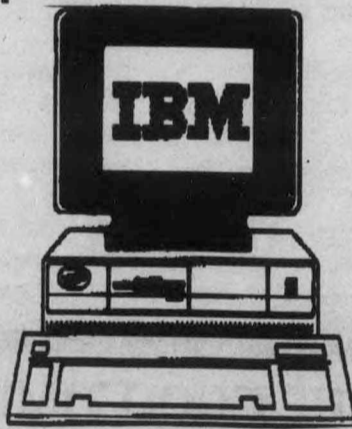
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