



Randal Smathers says Tom Barrasso is the key to Buffalo's season.

Canucks won't pass fourth until Dale Hawerchuk retires. Key player: the fans who may or may not buy enough tickets to keep this team in B.C.



**Adams Division**

**Boston Bruins** — Big, tough, talented. Terry O'Reilly for God, or mayor, or something. Defence hurting without Larson and Kluzak. Key player: Glen Wesley.

**Montreal Canadiens** — The Habs have been winning under Jean Perron's discipline. Will they continue to win after the players fired the coach? Frank...er, Pat Burns, will have to fight for respect. Key player: Bob Gainey, who can make or break a rookie coach in the dressing room.



**Patrick Division**

**Philadelphia Flyers** — Can Paul Holmgren coach? Is Bobby Clarke ugly with his teeth out? The D can't skate, but they can fight. Flyer orange is getting big and bad again (oh yeah, oh yeah). Key player: Ron Hextall.

**New Jersey Devils** — Their first line average over 80 points and 140 pim. Look for more goals from the defence, and better goaltending. Key player: Sean Burke.

**Washington Capitals** — Wow, can Scott Stevens ever fight! Wow, can Scott Stevens ever hit! Scott Stevens is easily the best defenceman in the NHL! If the rest of the team wasn't so stinking dull to watch, everybody else would know it too! Key player: Scott Stevens!

**Pittsburgh Penguins** — With the addition of Zarley Zalapski on the blueline, the old double-P's will have what they've been missing since they traded Randy Carlyle — a dominating defenceman. Just what Paul Coffey needed to allow him to concentrate on being the fourth forward. Key player: get real.

**New York Islanders** — The questions continue as the dynasty retires... Bossy, Potvin, how long for Trottier? The Isles have depth, but do they have talent? Key player: Brent Sutter.

**New York Rangers** — Hell, your guess is as good as mine. By the time you read this, the entire New York Giants front seven

might be wearing a different variety of red, white, and blue and learning to skate. Lack of continuity will hurt. Key player: Phil Esposito.



**Norris Division**

**Detroit Red Wings** — The Wings won't be the *Dead Things* this year, but they'll drop a mile. Too much dissent from last year's playoffs is carrying over to 88/89, but in the Norris, it'll be enough for first. Key player: Steve Yzerman: this team needs a leader.

**Chicago Black Hawks** — Can Keenan do miracles? Nope. Can Denis Savard? Yep. Going with a goaltending tandem that have one year of NHL experience between them is risky, but just might work. Key player: Troy Murray, who has to take some of the heat off number one center Savard.

**St. Louis Blues** — Who knows? I think Calgary's a good enough club that their farm team should make third in the Norris. Key player: Rob Ramage. No, Doug Gilmour. No, Rick Wamsley. Joe Mullen? Brett Hull, 50 goals or flop.

**Toronto Maple Leafs** — Let's put it this way. The Leafs are my number-one favorite sons. I've picked them first for twenty-one years running. This year? Fourth, but a solid fourth. Key player: Jamie Astaphan.

**Minnesota North Stars** — A winter version of the Baltimore Orioles. Pierre will be a short Page in Minnesota history. Key player: Curt Fraser. Why not?

I've been picking the Leafs to finish first for 21 years running. — Smathers

**Hartford Whalers** — Team Flounder of last year, but if they show some porpoise early in the year, they could be barracudas late. Sorry, allow me to rephrase. A young team, needs to play together for a while. If they get a little confidence early, they could surprise. Key player: 25-year old captain, Ron Francis.

**Buffalo Sabres** — Last year, the underachievers became semi-achievers. They'll likely slip to semi-underachiever states. Still without a dominating leader. Key player: Tom Barrasso.

**Quebec Nordiques** — Golden Bear alumnus Brent Severyn will lead this team to glory...just not this year. Question marks, everywhere, the Nords need a miracle to avoid *le sous-sol*. Key player: Gord Donnelly.

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