

NHL preview: The Campbell Conference



by Frank Denis

In this week's edition we complete our NHL preview with a look at the Campbell Conference.

Norris Division

1. St. Louis Blues

The Blues will surely be a top team this year both in their division and in the league if they can stay healthy. With last year's league leading goal scorer Brett Hull and newly acquired Scott Stevens on defence the team looks strong. Rob Brind'Amour and Adam Oates should also play key roles in the team's success. The only question mark lies in the goaltending department where Curtis Joseph and Vincent Riendeau are both young and have limited experience.



2. Chicago Blackhawks

In the deal with the Canadiens for Chris Chelios the Blackhawks gained more than they lost. They are hoping that Jeremy Roenick only a sophomore will put some big numbers on the board. Steve Larmer is also being counted on as is last season's addition of Michel Goulet. Besides defensively Chelios will also contribute some leadership if he can get along with coach Mike Keenan.

3. Minnesota North Stars

The North Stars were so busy reshuffling their front office this summer they didn't make any player deals. The big problem facing GM Bobby Clarke and coach Bob Gainey is trying to improve upon the team's dismal road record of last season where they won only 10 of 40 games. The team must improve their away record otherwise it could be a long winter and a very short spring.



4. Toronto Maple Leafs

The Leafs ended up having scored the second highest number of goals last year, and with almost all players returning they should be able to put the puck in the net again this year. The problem lies in the goaltending where last year all the goalies spent some time in the minors. They need to trade for a capable and experienced goalie that could help them advance in the playoffs. Somebody like the Canadien's Brian Hayward would fit in nicely as he has asked to be traded.



5. Detroit Red Wings

It's a shame that the greatest sports town in North America has to watch a team with many problems. The firing of coach Jacques Demers did not help matters as he was well respected by his players. Bryan Murray should fit in as both GM and head coach. If he can make some deals that actually help the team, which previous GM Jimmy Develano could not do, they should give Toronto a run for the final playoff spot.

Smythe Division



1. Calgary Flames

The Flames have to be considered a top team heading into the 1990-91 campaign. Being ousted early in the playoffs last year hurt the team mentally and they'll have to restore confidence in some players. Whether or not Joe Nieuwendyk has fully recovered from his leg injury remains to be seen and the same is true for

goalie Mike Vernon and his back injury. However new coach Doug Risebrough is capable of overcoming obstacles and creating a winner.

2. Edmonton Oilers

Many people would believe that the one year suspension levied against Grant Fuhr would seriously hurt the defending Stanley Cup champions outlook for this season. Fact is Fuhr was on the trading block after Bill Ranford established himself as the team's number one goalie in last year's playoffs. With Mark Messier coming off an MVP year and youngsters like Martin Gelinac, Adam Graves and Joe Murphy the team should do well. The Oilers could carry over the momentum from last year and beat out Calgary for first place.



3. Winnipeg Jets

It doesn't matter how well the Jets do in the regular season, they can never advance further than the second round in the playoffs because of the Oilers and Flames. The Jets, one of the most improved teams last year will have a tough time matching their 85 point total now that Dale Hawerchuk is gone. Offensively they have Pat Elynuik and Thomas Steen while defensively the big name is newcomer Phil Housley. They'll make the playoffs with ease but after that it will be tough.

4. Vancouver Canucks

The Canucks missed the playoffs last year by a considerable margin and have been adding talented players since then. With the second overall pick in the draft they selected talented Peter Nedved who defected from Czechoslovakia a few years ago. Goaltending wise the Canucks are blessed with having one of

the best goalies in the league in Kirk McLean. Last year he carried the team on his shoulders and should he be injured this season, the Canucks will suffer greatly.



5. Los Angeles Kings

Believe it, Wayne Gretzky's team will not make the playoffs. Despite having offensive talents like those of Luc Robitaille, Tomas Sandstrom and Gretzky, the Kings are very weak on defense. Steve Duchesne is all

they have back there. In nets Kelly Hrudey disappointed last season by posting a 4.07 goals against average in 52 games. Defensive forward Steve Kasper will have a role but not even he can help (sorry Bruce) After this year, Los Angeles will no longer be a country club for near retirement players.

So there you have it, a complete rundown on all 21 teams and their outlook for this season. However as everyone knows the "real" season begins in April when the playoffs roll around. Who will do well then? A number of teams could be walking away with Lord Stanley's Cup, but we think the champion will be...a "Repeat"

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