

## SPORTS

## 1991/92 NHL preview

## League finds parity in seventy-fifth season

BY STEVE MILLS  
AND SUZY KOVINSKY

The NHL's seventy-fifth season is barely a week old, and so the time has come to speculate on what the year will provide. After last year's Stanley Cup playoff upsets and outcome, almost any team could surprise hockey fans. With a summer of exciting trades, player's association hassles, and the Lindros fiasco behind, we will now give you a league overview and final standings prediction. Due to space limitations, we can only focus on the Wales Conference this week and will preview the Campbell Conference in the next issue.



## ADAMS DIVISION

**BOSTON BRUINS:** Last year's Adams division champs are strong in all areas. The goaltending team of Andy Moog and Rejean Lemelin is top-notch; the defense, headed by Ray Bourque, is tough both offensively and defensively; they are strong up front with Cam Neely

and Craig Janney. Neely, however, will be sidelined until November with an injury and the lack of his presence could create a large scoring gap. Sophomore centre Ken Hodge jr. and Vladimir Ruzicka proved their worth last season and could take up the slack. Mike Milbury has moved upstairs and Bruins fans might wonder if new coach Rick Bowness can lead the team to a third consecutive 100-point season.



**MONTREAL CANADIENS:** With contractual problems behind him, captain Guy Carbonneau will be aiming for a 60-point season. This combined with gunners Russ Courtnall, Denis Savard, Stephan LeBeau and Kirk Muller will make for a devastating offense. Goalie Patrick Roy claims he is healthier than ever and, barring another injury, will have another stellar season. Rookie John Leclair will have a successful season if he continues the pace set at the end of last sea-

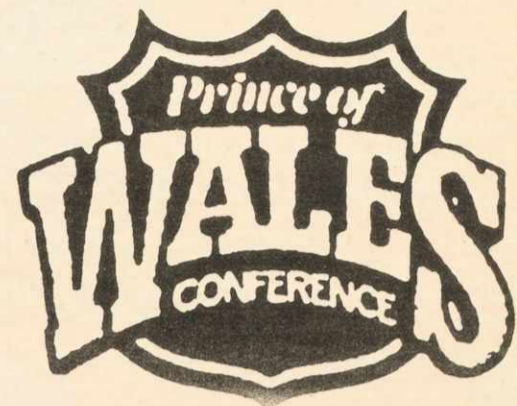
son, and "Hanson brother" Lyle Odelein, with 252 penalty minutes last year, is developing into an effective defenseman as well as team enforcer. The Canadiens' defense is young, but is talented and steadily improving under the guidance of coach Pat Burns.



**HARTFORD WHALERS:** Centre John Cullen was one of the league's top scorers last season, and together with Pat Verbeek, who is on the verge of a 50-goal season, will form the core of the Whalers' offense. Other than Cullen and Verbeek, the team doesn't have much up front, though Mark Hunter, who came over from Calgary, was second in playoff scoring last year for Hartford. A shaky defense, plus the loss of veteran defenseman Dave Babych won't help Hartford keep opponents away from goalie Peter Sidorkiewicz, who is solid but not outstanding.



**BUFFALO SABRES:** Aside from playing in Buffalo, the armpit of America, the Sabres lack two key ingredients: leadership and team chemistry. Once again this notoriously underachieving team has, on paper, all the components necessary for a successful season. If a chemistry is found between centres Dale Hawerchuk and Pierre Turgeon, and wingers Dave Andreychuk and Alexander Mogilny, the Sabres could gain some ground in the Adams. If Turgeon returns to another 100-point season, the rest of the Sabres



may be inspired to play to their potential. Unfortunately, he has the potential to be inconsistent (like the team), a trait shared with brother Sylvain



**QUEBEC NORDIQUES:** The young and talented offense, led by Joe Sakic and Mats Sundin, can only improve as second-year players Owen Nolan and Stephane Morin become more comfortable in their roles. Morin, who had a plus-6 rating on a team who's leading scorer (Sakic) was a minus-26, had 40 points in 48 games in his rookie season last year. Goalie Ron Tugnutt posted a .885 save percentage last year despite facing 1851 shots on goal in 56 games (In contrast, the North Stars' Jon Casey faced 431 fewer shots in 55 games). If the generous Nordiques defense can reduce the number of shots on goal, Tugnutt will show a marked improvement. Quebec made a grave mistake this summer by not trading Eric Lindros while he was at his optimum value. Considering their embarrassing record, and Lindros's adamancy about not playing in Quebec, failing to make a trade for the team's benefit was stupid and illogical.



## PATRICK DIVISION

## PITTSBURGH PENGUINS:

The reigning Stanley Cup champs have all the ingredients to repeat. The offense, which once relied solely on Mario Lemieux, has come into its own with forwards Mark Recchi, Kevin Stevens and Jaromir Jagr, plus the addition of Scott Young and Ron Francis from Hartford. Paul Coffey and Ulf Samuelson, who has quelled Don Cherry's ravings about Europeans being wimps, solidify a strong Penguin defense. Their goaltending is also solid with former Vezina winner Tom Barasso now a Cup winner as well, and backup Frank Pietrangelo providing a strong supporting role. The Penguins' weakness lies in the uncertainty of Lemieux's health. His day-to-day status could undermine the team's confidence as he could wind up being a spectator at any given moment.

**NEW YORK RANGERS:** Acquiring Mark Messier could be exactly what the Rangers need to propel them past the first playoff round. His winning record and playoff experience should inspire Mike Gartner, Darren Turcotte and Brian Leetch to accept nothing short of excellence. A recurrence of Messier's knee injury, though, could once again leave the team aimless. The addition of veteran Tim Kerr will also add scoring punch. Goalie John Vanbiesbrouck will have to regain the momentum lost at the end of last season when his ability faltered and Mike Richter had to take the reigns. The addition of soviet player Sergei Nemchinov may also add a dimension that the Rangers previously lacked. Defenseman Brian Leetch, the team's leading scorer last year, is well on his way to having a 100-point season.

## CAPITALS CAPITALS CAPITALS

**WASHINGTON CAPITALS:** The Capitals are a team that relies almost solely on defense. Somehow coach Terry Murray works wonders with mirrors as this goal-starved team finished third in the division and ousted the Rangers in five games in the first playoff round. Dino Ciccarelli is a potent offensive force but had the worst season of his career last year. Ciccarelli, combined with Randy Burridge who came over from Boston, will be the Capitals' offensive core if Burridge can avoid injury. Defensemen Kevin Hatcher and Al Iafrate are also offensive threats but need to improve on their +/- records. If Goalie Don Beaupre matches his GAA of last year, an impressive 2.64, the Caps will have a shot at finishing second or third in the division.



**NEW JERSEY DEVILS:** The addition of Stephane Richer has proven successful in the first week of play. Last year's scoring leader, John MacLean, is out with an injury so Richer will be serving double duty until his return.

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## SUZY'S PICKS

## PATRICK DIVISION

1. Pittsburgh Penguins
2. New Jersey Devils
3. New York Rangers
4. Washington Capitals
5. Philadelphia Flyers
6. New York Islanders

## ADAMS DIVISION

1. Montreal Canadiens
2. Boston Bruins
3. Buffalo Sabres
4. Hartford Whalers
5. Quebec Nordiques

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## Axettes end unbeaten streak

BY DEREK NEARY

What a difference a goal makes. On Saturday, October 5, the top-ranked Acadia Axettes and their bump and grind style of soccer rolled into town to take on the Tigers. A few hours later they left with two more points and smiles on their faces.

Sounds simple, but it wasn't quite that easy.

The Dal squad relies on their speed and finesse to rack up wins. The fact that the two teams use such differing strategies made for an interesting game.

The game was fast-paced from the start. Both teams fought fiercely for the ball with neither budging an inch. It wasn't uncommon to see a player sprawled out on the field as a result of a collision or the slick, muddy field conditions.

Acadia controlled the ball early, but it was the Tigers' Stephanie Johnson who came up with the

first good scoring chance of the game. She released a shot which the Axette keeper bobbled, but regained control of before any damage was done.

The Axettes turned the game back in their favour by using a very physical approach going for the body instead of the ball. In the words of Tigers' coach Darrell Cormier the Axettes tactics were "atrocious."

All the while, the referee seemed oblivious to the unjust action taking place around him.

Neither crew managed to score in the first half but Dal looked primed at the beginning of the second half as they assumed control of the ball early. But once again Acadia turned the momentum back in their favour by using a rough-house approach.

Trish Wilson was making her first start in goal for the Tigers in place of the injured Angie McLeod

and she was nothing short of spectacular as she was forced to make a number of diving saves and kept Acadia off the scoreboard.

Just when it seemed that another scoreless tie between the two teams was inevitable, an Acadia forward lifted a shot which soared high over Wilson and just under the crossbar. In that one moment Dal's perfect goals against record and undefeated season came to an end.

Coach Cormier put things in perspective. "The goal wasn't as a result of the officiating. We had some hard luck out there, and we lapsed for a few periods."

What about the effect of the loss?

"It's not a good feeling to lose. I think the team will come out on fire [for the next game]. Our goal is to remain as a unit, win the rest of our games and to win the AUA [championship]."