

Hepditch's hockey hankerings

BY SCOTT HEPDITCH

Hello hockey fans.

It's hard to believe the NHL regular season will begin on October 6th, with the New Jersey Devils in pursuit of their second straight Stanley Cup. There have been a lot of changes occurring around the league and hopefully the following updates will help everyone become familiar with the new faces on their favorite teams. I will also give my predictions for the upcoming season. This issue I'll deal with the Eastern Conference and next issue I'll take a look at the Western Conference.

Boston Bruins

What's New: Much-needed offence has come to Boston in the form of Kevin Stevens. He will likely play on left wing with Adam Oates and Cam Neely, and thus will take some of the scoring pressure off Neely. Also this year, the Bruins will start to play in a new arena, the Shawmut Center, so expect them to open up their game a little, something that was hard to do in the old Garden. Steve Kasper takes over behind the bench.

What's Needed: Defence. After all-star's Ray Bourque and Don Sweeney, the Bruins are thin on defence, especially with the probable retirement of Al Iafate. I guess this is why Harry Sinden drafted two defencemen in the first round last year. The Bruins could also use a proven goaltender. Blaine Lacher started last year like a house on fire, but he cooled down to show everyone that he was human.

Prediction: Fourth place in the Northeast.

Buffalo Sabres

What's New: Ted Nolan has taken on the head coaching responsibilities to allow John Muckler to focus on his duties as general manager. Gone is sniper Alexander Mogilny, who was traded to Vancouver for future star Mike Peca.

What's Needed: There is going to be an obvious decrease in offence with the departure of Dale Hawerchuk (to St. Louis) and Mogilny because of their combined contribution of 60 to 70 goals per season. The team will need to have people step in and make up for the loss. Also, the Sabres will have to find a backup goaltender for Dominik Hasek who can't be expected to play all 84 games.

Prediction: Sixth Place in the Northeast.

Colorado Avalanche

What's New: The team is now in a new location (Colorado instead of Quebec) and they also have a new name and team colors. Last year's playoff MVP, Claude Lemieux, was acquired in a deal that saw Wendel Clark go to the Islanders.

What's Needed: Another big year from people such as Joe Sakic, Owen Nolan, Mike Ricci, and super sophomore Peter Forsberg. A proven goaltender will be needed if this team is serious about winning the Cup.

Prediction: First Place in the Northeast

Florida Panthers

What's New: The team has a new head coach, Doug MacLean. After two years under the command of Roger Neilson, the owners thought it was time for a change. Neilson's defensive style was not to the liking of the management and players, I guess, even though they have been very successful in their first two years.

What's Needed: Defensive support for John Vanbiesbrouck, and it looks as if the team has taken a step in the right direction with the signing of Ed Jovanovski, the teams first-round pick two years ago. However, Jovanovski will not play for six weeks because of a broken finger. If the team could get some more goals from the likes of Rob Neidermayer, the team should be able to win some more games.

Prediction: Sixth Place in the Atlantic.

Hartford Whalers

What's New: The team has a new captain in the form of Brendan Shanahan, a former fifty goal man with the St. Louis Blues. Also new in town is Gerald Diddiuk, who should help solidify the hole left on defence with the departure of Chris Pronger (who was traded to St. Louis for Shanahan).

What's Needed: More help for Sean Burke. The team will need big years from the likes of Darren Turcotte, Andrew Cassels, and Shanahan to have any chance of making the playoffs.

Prediction: Fifth Place in the Northeast.

Montreal Canadiens

What's New: I feel that the Canadiens will get away from their total commitment to defence this year because of the offensive weapons that they now have. (Mark Recchi, Pierre Turgeon, and Vincent Damphousse). High performance is also expected from rookie Saku Koivu. If these players play up to their potential, the Canadiens will be back in the playoffs after missing them for the first time twenty or so years.

What's Needed: Patrick Roy has to rebound from a sub-par season if the Canadiens are to get back in the playoffs this year. The defence also has to play better.

Prediction: Second Place in the Northeast.

New Jersey Devils

What's New: A Stanley Cup Champions banner hanging from the rafters. I also expect a different style of play from these guys since the NHL has changed the rules to cut down on the amount of open ice grabbing and hooking (neutral zone trap) that the Devils used last year in their championship season. Steve Thomas was obtained from the New York Islanders in the three-way deal that saw the Devils lose Claude Lemieux.

What's Needed: Offence. This team does not score a lot of goals, and to survive in this day of open hockey, goal scorers are needed. Valeri Zelpukin is a type of player that could score goals for this team, so it would be wise for Jacques Lemaire to turn this guy loose. A set-up man would also be nice —

Stephane Richer could become a fifty goal man once again.

Prediction: Third Place in the Atlantic.

New York Islanders

What's New: Mike Milbury has taken over bench duties. Wendel Clark is an Islander. Kirk Muller and Mathieu Schneider should play a big role in this team's turnaround. Last year's first pick, Wade Redden, is a player that will help the team for many years to come.

What's Needed: Someone to fill in for the departure of Ray Ferraro, and the team is hoping that Brett Lindros will take on some of this responsibility after a horrible rookie campaign. The team is also in need of goaltenders since Tommy Soderstrom and Tommy Salo are not the type of goalies that will take the Islanders back to the playoffs. The team could also use some centers — after Muller there are no recognizable names at this position.

Predictions: Fifth Place in the Atlantic.

New York Rangers

What's New: There are a lot of new names that will help make the Rangers Cup contenders again. These names include Luc Robitaille, Ulf Samuelsson, Ray Ferraro, and Bruce Driver.

What's Needed: Mike Richter must return to the form he showed in the '94 Cup run. Alexei Kovalev, Brian Leetch, and Mark Messier will need to have big years for the Rangers to become a threat to win the Cup.

Prediction: Second Place in the Atlantic

Ottawa Senators

What's New: The Senators will move into their new home

this year. The team also has picked a big name on defence in the form of Steve Duchense.

What's Needed: Almost everything. A break-through year for Alexandre Daigle and Radek Bonk would be nice. Management should also either sign Alexi Yashin or trade him for some veterans that could really help the team.

Prediction: Last Place (7th) in the Northeast.

Philadelphia Flyers

What's New: The team has signed some players that should help them make a serious run at the Stanley Cup. These people are Joel Otto and Kjeil Samuelson. Bobby Clarke has also tried to help the goaltending with the signing of goaltender Garth Snow from the Avalanche.

What's Needed: Another big year from the Legion of Doom (Lindros, LeClair, and Renberg). The young defence must also be solid again this year, and another big year from goaltender Ron Hextall could possibly put this team in the Stanley Cup Final (where it has not been since 1987).

Prediction: First Place in the Atlantic

Pittsburgh Penguins

What's New: Mario Lemieux will be back this year, and is expected to play 40 to 70 games. His presence could make any team a Stanley Cup contender. Glen Murray and Bryan Smolinski came over from Boston in the Kevin Stevens trade. The Penguins also traded for Sergei Zubov and Petr Nedved. Zubov should help make the Penguins' powerplay one of the best in the league.

What's Needed: Jaromir Jagr must have a repeat of last year to take some pressure off of Lemieux. Defencemen shouldn't roam, and Ken Wregget must have another stellar season.

Prediction: Third Place in the Northeast

Tampa Bay Lightning

What's New: Not much has changed in the Tampa Bay arena. The team is still getting fans used to the game of hockey, and this could be a breakthrough year for both the team and the fans. Management realized that offence is needed, so they went out and got Brian Belows from Montreal.

What's Needed: Chris Gratton needs to play like the first round draft pick he was a couple of years ago, and Roman Hamrlik needs to keep improving like he has since he has come into the league. If Darren Puppa could return to the form he displayed in Buffalo, this team could possibly make the playoffs this year.

Prediction: Last Place (7th) in the Atlantic

Washington Capitals

What's New: The uniforms. Nolan Baumgartner should make the jump to the big leagues from junior and could be an instant success on the blueline.

What's Needed: Jim Carey has to play like he did last year when he was a Calder Trophy candidate. Peter Bondra, last year's leading goal scorer, and Mikeal Pivonka have signed to play in the IHL with the Detroit Vipers. This has to put pressure on people like Joe Juneau and Mark Tinordi to shoulder most of the offence.

Prediction: Fourth Place in the Atlantic

Test your limits with mountain biking

BY MARIANNA GAJEWSKA

So you're interested in getting into the world of mountain biking (MTB). You have a bike and you are itching to go where no biker has gone before, to get mud all over yourself (even on your underwear), and to test your limits, all in the peaceful surroundings of the great outdoors.

Your only problem is that you have no one to bike with. Don't go irate just yet because you are like half of the potential MTB-er population. You have decided to convert yourself into a gymaholic anyway. Don't do it!

It is not a good idea to do extreme sports on your own, i.e. MTB-ing. You knew this and this adds to the problem. Besides, who else is going laugh at you when you fall off your bike because you did not see the ditch!? Well, here are some ideas that will get you rolling.

If you are interested in hard-core off-roading, you can get information by calling around to some bicycle stores. Most are listed in the handy yellow pages under BICYCLES. Most stores have their own MTB groups, so ask about those. The groups meet once a week or so at the store and they all go riding together.

For girls though, this could cause a problem because such groups can be made up of big, powerful, no fearing, adrenaline-hungry guys. A sight like that is enough to scare any newcomer.

Have no fear because there is an awesome group, just for girls, that meets once a week and accommodates all levels of riders. The person to contact is Suzie Ketene at the Slickrock Cycle store.

Some stores send out a newsletter with all kinds of information concerning upcoming events, places to ride, groups you can join, etc. Ask if you can get on their mailing list so you can get a copy sent to you for FREE. Slickrock Cycle also offers one day MTB clinics. These are perfect for beginners and for those bikers who just feel like they want to know more.

If you are interested in touring, there is the Velo Halifax Bicycle Club. You can pick up a brochure at just about any bike store.

If you still have not yet found what you are looking for, there is always the Dal Outdoors Club. Stephen Simm, the president, said that he "will be happy to organize trips and weekly biking days if at least 5 to 6 people are interested."

Have \$20 handy because you will need to become a member. The best thing to do is check out one of their meetings.

If all else fails, advertise yourself through the Net or on a bulletin board at one of the stores -The Lonely Rider- and hope that someone grateful will contact you.

If racing is your thing, you lucked out. The last race was this weekend at Wentworth, but there are always the Cycle Cross races which are starting up now. They are for those who really want to tire themselves out and run before they bike! If this is not your thing, there's always next year.

Thankfully the season is not over yet. If you are a devoted MTB-er, there are those of us who bike all year! Just remember, wear a helmet, leave the trails as you found them, and never sit on your seat going down a steep hill!