

NHL set for unpredictable year

BY MATT THOMPSON

The NHL season starts on October 4th and although many of the league's perennial powerhouses are still at the top of their games, free agency and off-season trades may result in some surprising performances by teams ranked lower on the NHL totem pole.

This week's preview of the Eastern Conference is the first of a two-part NHL preview.

Northeast Division

The Boston Bruins will benefit from the stalwart defense of Ray Bourque and the playmaking of centre Adam Oates, but the retirement of power forward Cam Neely leaves the likes of Rick Tocchet with big shoes to fill. In 1995/96, goaltending was a major problem, but last year's late addition of Bill Ranford should help remedy the situation.

The Buffalo Sabres have new uniforms, a new arena, but no new talent. Stars Pat LaFontaine and Dominic Hasek are returning, but the team's lack of offensive and defensive depth is a big problem. It's too bad penalty minutes don't count toward league points because Buffalo's trio of Rob Ray, Brad May, and Matthew Barnaby could be the best goon line in hockey.

The Hartford Whalers don't have new uniforms, nor do they have a new arena, in fact pretty soon they may not even have a team. They're young but their best player (Brendan Shanahan) wants out. The goaltending of Sean Burke may be the only bright spot in an otherwise dismal season.

The Montreal Canadiens will have a middle of the road kind of year. The Habs have the offensive firepower to win their fair share of games, especially with the reacquisition of former 50 goal man Stephane Richer, but their usually strong defense, having lost the services of Patrick Roy and Lyle "the human punching bag" Odelein appears suspect. Goalie Jocelyn Thibault can expect to see a lot of rubber this year.

The Ottawa Senators are improving. They're still the worst team in the league, but they're improving. Young guns Alexandre Daigle, Alexi Yashin, and Calder winner Daniel Alfredson are poised to have a big year, and the young defense can only get better.

If the Pittsburgh Penguins don't win this Division there is something wrong. The Pens have a potent offense anchored by such stars as Mario Lemieux, Jaromir Jagr, Ron Francis, and Petr Nedved. The acquisition of hard-hitting defenseman Kevin Hatcher will help the team go as far as the goaltending of Ken Wregget and Tom Barasso can take them. With Mario's talk of retirement at the end of the season, the Penguins had better do it this year.

Atlantic Conference

Last year's Stanley Cup finalists the Florida Panthers are living by the maxim, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." A well bal-

anced attack, with strong defensive strategy makes this team hard to handle, especially if John Vanbeisbrouck is at the top of his game. Second-year defenseman Ed Jovanovski is also poised to pick up where he left off, checking people into next week.

The New Jersey Devils have arguably the best defense in the game. With Scott Stevens, Scott Neidermayer, and newly acquired Lyle Odelein, it's close to where it was when they won the Cup in 1995. Unfortunately, the offensive power is not there. Defense does however win championships, so don't be surprised if they make a strong run in 96/97.

The New York Islanders stand to suffer through another year of mediocre hockey. Coach Mike Millbury knows how to build a winner, but this very young team needs experience and steady goaltending before it can expect to go anywhere. Zigmund Palfy could be the only bright spot.

The Rangers are in for a good year. The "Great One" Wayne Gretzky, along with former Oiler teammate Mark Messier and former LA King teammate Luc Robitaille, will help immeasurably. Defensively, the Rangers look good with the likes of Brian Leetch and Ulf Samuelsson protecting one of the strongest goaltending tandems in the NHL. They could have a shot at the Stanley Cup.

The Philadelphia Flyers are looking more and more like the

Broad Street Bullies of the mid-70's. With the tough play of forwards Eric Lindros and John LeClair, and the scoring touch of linemate Dale Hawerchuck, Philly should have another good offensive year. The defense is solid, but goalie Ron Hextall needs to play well if the Flyers are going to make it to the Cup Finals.

The Tampa Bay Lightning have a good balance of youth and experience. The above average offense is led by veterans Brian Bradley, Brian Bellows, and Dino Ciccarelli, while Russian Alexander Selivanov is showing flashes of stardom. The defense is centred around former first overall pick Roman Hamerlik and underrated netminder Darren Puppa.

The Washington Capitals will have a great year in 1996/97. Jim Carey and Olie the Goalie Kolzig are unbeatable when they are at their best. Forwards Petr Bondra (the league's highest goal scorer over the last two seasons) and Michal Pivonka will lead the way again in scoring, but centre Joe Juneau will be out for up to eight weeks with a broken arm. Their strong defensive core is led by Mark Tinordi, Calle Johanson, and youngsters Brandon Witt and Nolan Baumgartner. Phil Housley should give their powerplay a boost.

Matt Thompson is the Gazette's resident NHL prognosticator. Watch for his Western Conference preview in next week's issue.

Predicted Eastern Conference Final Standings (1996-1997)

Atlantic Division

Pittsburgh Penguins
Boston Bruins
Montreal Canadiens
Buffalo Sabres
Hartford Whalers
Ottawa Senators

Northeastern Division

Washington Capitals
Philadelphia Flyers
New York Rangers
Florida Panthers
Tampa Bay Lightning
New York Islanders

Division Champion Washington Capitals

intramural schedule

October 3 - October 9

Remember to Check Dial-a-Rec on the day of your game to confirm your Game time. 494-2588

THURSDAY OCT. 03

Men's A Soccer

7:00pm The Dingos vs. DABS
9:00pm Med Pulses vs. The Outsiders
10:00pm Panhellenic vs. Clippers
10:00pm Law vs. Dentistry

Co-ed Flag Football

7:00pm Wild Raiders vs. Bronson/Smith
8:00pm MBA vs. Lawbusters
8:00pm Physio vs. Red Tape
9:00pm The Football Team vs. Computer Science
10:00pm Eliza/Studley/Old Eddy vs. Law

Co-ed A Broomball

10:00pm Physio vs. Law
11:00pm Law De Da vs. Med Pacers

SUNDAY OCT. 06

Men's B Soccer

7:00pm Miracle Strip vs. Purple People Eaters
8:00pm MBA vs. Commerce Killers
9:00pm Med Heartbeats vs. Pharmacy

Co-ed B Broomball Div. 1

8:30pm Bronson/Smith vs. Dentistry
9:30pm Girl Guides vs. OT
10:30pm Chemistry vs. Eliza/Studley/Old Eddy

Co-ed B Broomball Div. 2

8:30pm Computer Science vs. Pharmacy
9:30pm Wild Raiders vs. Med Shooters
10:30pm Killer Cod vs. MBA

MONDAY OCT. 07

Ultimate Frisbee Div. 1

8:00pm Purple People Eaters vs. Miracle Strip
9:00pm MBA vs. Law

Ultimate Frisbee Div. 2

No games

Co-ed A Soccer

7:00pm
8:00pm
10:00pm Wild Raiders vs. Eliza/Studley/Old Eddy
10:00pm Killer Cod vs. Med. Pulsers
10:00pm Law vs. Pharmacy

Men's A Hockey

10:00pm Commerce vs. Dukes of Hazard
11:00pm Ultimate Rascals vs. Dentistry
12:00am Physio vs. Med Dominators

Men's Res. A Hockey

8:00pm Killer Cod vs. Raiders
9:00pm Bronson/Smith vs. Eliza/Studley

TUESDAY OCT. 08

Men's Residence A Soccer

7:00pm Eliza/Studley vs. Killer Cod

Men's Residence B Soccer

8:00pm Bronson/Smith vs. Henderson

Women's Soccer

7:00pm Chaters vs. Bronson/Smith
9:00pm Shirreff vs. Law

Men's B Hockey

10:00pm Purple People Eaters vs The Chiefs
11:00pm The Duffs vs. DABS
12:00am Kings vs. 420 Runners

WEDNESDAY OCT. 09

Co-ed B Soccer Div. 1

7:00pm Killer Cod vs. Nursing
8:00pm Eliza/Studley/Old Eddy vs. DAPS
9:00pm Carpet Sharks vs. Girl Guides
10:00pm Bronson/Smith vs. MBA

Co-ed B Soccer Div. 2

8:00pm Wild Raiders vs. CS Strikers
8:00pm OT vs. Purple People Eaters
9:00pm Glengary vs. Geology
9:00pm Ultimate Rascals vs. Law
10:00pm Chemistry vs. Commerce

Men's Res. B Hockey

8:00pm Raiders vs. Eliza/Studley
9:00pm Killer Cod vs. Bronson/Smith

Men's C Hockey

10:00pm Pharmacy vs. Med Blasters
11:00pm Law vs. Tupper Lab Rats
12:00am Dentistry vs. Physio