

# The NHL as Rob and Scott See It

**BY ROB ELLISON and SCOTT SIMPSON, OK,** here we go with another long and drawn out set of predictions before the regular season starts (Hopefully we don't end up over 3 pages this week.) we both hate the Wales Conference but here's our wild and wacky predictions for the Year

**MONTREAL:** Ok, we admit it, we hate the Habs but having Muller instead of Richer is great move for the Canadiens no matter how many goals Richer can score. Muller fits right into the Habs scheme of things. Montreal has always been a boring tight checking team and if Roy can stop flopping and letting in bad goals like in the playoffs, Muller, Savard, Courtnall and Corson should take care of the scoring. Hey, don't think twice about the defence, they were young and green last year but this year can only be better.

**BOSTON:** The only reason we didn't pick Boston for first is that we wondered who was gonna score goals for this team until Neely gets back. We know it won't be Christian (in St. Louis) or Kevin Stevens (back in Pittsburgh, probably soon to be traded elsewhere if anyone shows any interest). If Bourque would've showed to Team Canada and had the extra step in training he might have been able to do it, but he probably won't be in full flight until Neely gets back. Besides, we're still bitter about him not playing in the cup. (Stinkin weasel...) Jamney will be virtually pointless until Neely gets back. So unless Moog can rack up some shutouts Boston could be too far back to catch the Habs (and, of course, the only reason I like him is because he used to play for Edmonton [see Oiler fan prediction rule in last week's Bruns...]).

**BUFFALO:** Can Buffalo do it with two top rate centers? Will Puppa start playing goal and stop trying to act like superman so he can stop some pucks? How about that Hawerfella who showed just how good he is in the Canada Cup? Hey who knows. On paper this team should be solid. Can they put it together for a good season? What about the playoffs? Another first round exit would spell doom for this team and trades could be rampant. Good team, but lets see how good. There are just too many question marks for this team to place first (there's five. I just counted. Remember, I don't get out much. Yeah, like Rob does...)

**HARTFORD:** Depending upon the status of the hold outs this team could score a lot of goals. The problem is who is playing defence for this team besides Zalapski and they need to find a top notch goaltender. Reaugh had a fine rookie campaign behind Sidorkiewicz but that's not good enough in this division (but then again, he did play for Edmonton...). Look for Brown, Cullen, Dineen and Verbeek to put lots of points on the board but you may be looking for the Whaling season to end early this year.

**QUEBEC:** Lots of good players here, but will they settle down and play a team game and make some progress this year? Sakic, Sundin, Morin, Miller are all good players and will put up good totals. the defence is experienced (at least internationally) and if Fogarty stays at least semi-arid he may be one of the top ten scoring defencemen this year. Tugnut stood on his head last year and may not be in for as many 40+ shoot nights this year. Of course the stupidest thing is Quebec not trading Lindros for a bunch of quality

young players and within a few years the Cup would be theirs. But leave it up to Quebec to put it's stubborn nose up in the air and look even more immature than Lindros. If they trade him now while the market value is high, they get more (probably more than Lindros is really worth) If they let him sit out two years, they get nothing. (I swear Parizeau must be pulling the strings of the Nordiques and therefore both the province and the team will suffer. (There, there Rob, let's not start an incident. On the lighter side of the coin (whatever the Hell that means), I, with the fine traditional Francophone last name "Simpson", happened to attend last week's Montreal-Quebec pre-season game at the Forum and noted that the English part of the anthem was applauded loudly, much to the chagrin of (the pro-Separatist renegade terrorists sitting all around me. Like an idiot, I was wearing a Team Canada sweater. Bad move. Oh yeah, Kordic trashed Sylvain Odelein and pummelled Shayne Corson. Good fights, too. Oops, forgot that as a journalist I'm supposed to deplore violence in hockey. Yeah right...))

**N.Y. RANGERS:** Hey Nielson will bring back first place for the Rangers, or at least come pretty close. Richter is a little over-rated anyway. He's fine in the regular season but when it comes to the playoffs (NHL and Canada Cup) he always lets in the big goal. If Richter continues to hold out look for "The Beezer" to have a Vezina type year. Turcotte and Leetch are probably their best offensive players with Nicholls starting to fade but still dangerous (News flash from Scott: I'll just bet three of my minor body parts that Bernie, Steven Rice, Lou DeBrousk and a cool \$5 million go to Peter Puck in Edmonton for Messier and maybe Chris Joseph. Geez,

if it really happens, maybe I \*am\* the second coming...). Lock for them to be first or second, but to take their early exit south in April as they collectively have been hypnotized to think they belong in Texas playing ball.

**PITTSBURGH:** Hey who knows what could happen, but the odds are they will never come close to last years performance. If Lemieux is healthy he will lead all scorers including Recchi and Stevens and Mr. Maxwell House. If not, who knows. Don't expect them to play like they did in the playoffs though, and God knows how Barrasso can get so much credit for playing as bad as he does between the pipes. We know he had personal problems, but the man looked like he was trying to stop a cross between an Oopie and an Indian rubber ball. (Scott's Insider Note: the, er, "cool" thing is that Scotty Bowman is (or soon will be) the new head coach, and he and Barrasso were the two to have problems in Buffalo together. They both say they're beyond petty grudges, but remember: these guys are involved in professional sports where the only thing that matures is their arimuties and stock options...) But hey, just on scoring prowess they'll be there.

**WASHINGTON:** These guys are more likely to get scoring from the blueline corps as anywhere else. Hatcher, Iafrate and Johansson will rack up the points. Besides, Ciccarelli and Druce no one can pull the trigger up front. Beaupre is looking very solid and could be a Vezina candidate. So look for the Caps to play their old boring defensive games. These guys are probably in the top five least entertaining ice hockey teams in the world to watch (after Jamaica, Thailand, South Africa, Egypt and Iraq.).

**PHILADELPHIA:** The question in Philly is "Can Hextall play a full season and will he be consistent?". Hextall needs to concentrate more on playing net and leave the goal scoring to guys like Tocchet, Duchesne and Quim. Mark Howe is back, but for how long? Look for Philly to hit a lot more to regain the old Spectrum magic and they should be much better defensively with Duchesne and Quim being exceptions. Whether they make playoffs and how far they go rests squarely on Hextall's shoulders (and glove hand... and stickside...)

**ISLANDERS:** Lafontaine will be gone (another boring inside note from Scott: the big wigs even sent out faxes on Lafontaines availability to \*all other\* 21 teams to see what interest there is around. This seems pretty desperate, as they initially wanted him somewhere outside the division. But, he was drawing about as much attention as Madonna naked at a strip show (now what the Hell does that mean? I wrote it and I don't even know)). No matter who they get, the offence is now reduced to Sutter and he just can't score like he used to. Healy is proving himself as a steady goaltender and Fitzpatrick is lost again, perhaps for good. As unlikely as it seems the defence may be the best part of this team with Norton, Reekie, Kurvers and Green on the blue line. The loss of Lafontaine and no experienced backup for Healy means no playoffs for the Isles this year.

**NEW JERSEY DEVILS:** With the likes of Kirk Muller, Sean Burke and Brendan Shanahan all gone no one knows what to expect. Stéphane Richer and Scott Steeves should contribute greatly to the cause. Top gun John McLean is out for at least 8 weeks and his absence will be missed. We'll all have to wait and see.



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