

SPORTS

Edmonton Oilers are not hopeless

by Mark Spector

What can be said about the Edmonton Oilers that hasn't already been said? In a city that reviews their hockey team more thoroughly than Athletic Services screens their secretaries, no stone has been left unturned in the quest for a solution to 'The Slump.' I refuse to discuss this reference to the horrendous style of play exhibited by the Oilers over the last 12 or 13 games. Let's look at where they stand entering this year's 16 team, 'Olympic-sized,' post season playoffs.

No longer can the Oilers hope to settle into the playoff mode over the last 15 games. Or 10, or five games for that matter.

Sather and company have dug themselves a hole, there is no question about that. And with as few as four regular season games remaining, the Oilers appeared to be still at the bottom of that hole; perhaps with shovel still in hand. But a 7-3 victory in a Sunday matinee at the Arena in Chicago is a sign that the club is indeed scaling that pit.

Although consistency is the key, the victory over the Blackhawks has many redeeming features.

—First and foremost, Edmonton received 60 minutes of solid goaltending from Grant Fuhr for the first time in a while; and above all, it's solid goaltending that allows teams to win playoff series; ask Richard Brodeur.

—Every player knew his role in this game, and played it accordingly: Gretzky and Coffey had five points apiece, and in the ring, McClelland, Pouzar, and a rusty Mark



Messier took turns at performing cosmetic surgery, en route to three lopsided decisions on Rod Phillips

card. —Edmonton displayed that seemingly forgotten ability to take over control of a close hockey game,

scoring five goals in a span of 6:20 in the third period to break apart a two-all tie.

It must be noted that these things

were accomplished in the home of a team which recently ended this seasons longest two winning streaks held by Winnipeg and Philadelphia. Chicago was hot. But Edmonton shut them down—both physically and fundamentally. That is if you consider scoring goals to be a fundamental aspect of hockey. If you do, you will also agree that consistency qualifies as well.

Many Edmontonians were heaving great sighs of relief after a sloppy 7-6 win over Detroit two and a half weeks ago. That was followed by a tie and a loss. Then, after a 6-4 win over Chicago, the 'real experts' celebrated the Oilers return to form. Edmonton promptly tied Toronto at home, and lost two of the next three.

Don Horwood, Bears' basketball coach, will tell you, Rome was not built in a day and a slump does not end with one well played game. Although the Oilers have but three games to do it, they have to show consistency heading into the playoffs. Three games against the other Smythe division playoff combatants are all perfect opportunities for Edmonton to both give their own game that much needed spring tune-up, and effectually let the Kings, Flames, and Jets know where they stand with the blue and orange.

Once Edmonton battles out of a tough Smythe division, expect them to run their streak to 12 and 0 against the Norris division playoff representative. After that its the Oilers in six, losing twice in the Spectrum to the Flyers, but claiming Stanley at the Coliseum.

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