

WESTERN CONFERENCE PLAYOFF PREVIEW

by Nadeem Hakemi – McNair, Richmond

Favourites: Anaheim Ducks

Although every team in the West is a solid candidate for top spot, a few teams stand out as especially potent. Nashville's banner year demonstrated their offensive strength and ability to win. San Jose proved themselves to be contenders with their strong run last year under the guidance of scorers Joe Thornton and Jonathan Cheechoo. Vancouver's Roberto Luongo will surely take them far, but Anaheim's offensive punch and solid defense give them a slight edge in the run for the Cup.

Dark Horse: Minnesota Wild

Over the years, Vancouver fans have noticed a growing tension between the Canucks and the Minnesota Wild. After the Wild eliminated the Canucks in six games back in 2003, one can only hope that Minnesota will keep quiet this year. However, this may not be the case. This team has proved itself effective in the playoffs during its short time in the NHL. This year may be the year in which young star Marian Gaborik and veteran Brian Rolston lead the team through the ranks of the Western Conference.

Overrated: Detroit Red Wings

Detroit's playoff performance last year showed the flaws in Motown's beloved boys. The 2006 President's Trophy winners failed to make it past the first round, after many speculated that 2006 was their year to win it all. I expect 2007 to be the same. The absence of their longtime captain Steve Yzerman and new acquisition Todd Bertuzzi's inability to adapt to their style of play indicate their weak nature as a team. Although their regular season play has been somewhat consistent, don't expect Hockeytown to be on the map come playoff time in the NHL.

Prediction:

Among the loads of skill and talent in the Western Conference, one team must be the winner. Although Vancouver has a chance at the prize this year, I believe Anaheim will ultimately take home the Western Conference championship. The offensive talent of forwards Teemu Selanne and Andy McDonald combined with the defensive anchors of Chris Pronger and Scott Niedermayer will spell the end for any opponent in the West.



photo: Jeff Vinnick/Vancouver Canucks

From the moment former Canucks' Coach Roger Neilson waved a towel on a hockey stick during a playoff game vs the Chicago Blackhawks in 1982, Towel Power became a tradition in Vancouver and around the NHL.

by Uyen Do –
Windermere, Vancouver

Canuck fans cheer as a bra flies from the stands and onto the ice after yet another phenomenal goal by temporary enforcer-turned-sniper Jeff Cowan. Weeks later, people are still talking about the incident, wondering if this is going to be the beginning of a new Canuck tradition. If history has proven anything, Canuck fans know well that even the simplest gestures can erupt into a nationwide craze.

the next Vancouver game, he printed another 1200, which were sold out 90 minutes before the game began. This hysteria quickly evolved into Towel Power, sweeping across the entire city and catching even Giraud off guard. "At the time until it got going, I had no idea it would

Power will be fueling the Canucks' playoff drive as it did in '82. When asked how he feels about the anniversary, Giraud replies, "Something that started 25 years ago is still being talked about and it's still recognized and it gives me great pleasure thinking that something you did 25 years ago is a part of history. I had a little part in making something

If history has proven anything, Canuck fans know well that even the simplest gestures can erupt into a nationwide craze.

have become such a success."

Norm Jewison, the Canucks' historian, was in the press box when Roger Neilson raised the infamous "white flag." A couple days later when the team was returning home from Chicago, he saw a firetruck racing alongside the plane with towels hanging off of it. That was his first inkling of the towel frenzy that was yet to come. "People were painting old cars in Canuck colours, driving up and down the streets honking their horns, waving towels after each victory. It was like a party atmosphere."

While Canuck flags and decals now adorn many cars during playoff season, there's no question that Towel Power is still alive and well in Vancouver. Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, Towel

happen in the city of Vancouver, and that's kind of fun."

Towel Power is a tradition that has glued Canuck fans and players together through many highs and lows. And with the highs coming every 12 years or so ('82 finals, '94 finals), the Canucks are due to return to the finals once again, backed by a roaring sea of white towels.

Can we expect the bras to keep flying too? Giraud says the bra-throwing incident was "fun and everyone could joke about it... but this wasn't a natural thing. As natural as a bra is, it's not going to hold up."

With only one cup in their sights and no intention of raising the white flag, the Canucks will be happy with whatever support the fans of Vancouver have to offer.

EASTERN CONFERENCE PLAYOFF PREVIEW

by Cory Wright – Burnaby Mountain Secondary

Favourites: New Jersey Devils

Always a favourite to go far in the playoffs are the New Jersey Devils. The fact is that they have proven themselves in the playoffs (three cups since '95) and superstar goalie Martin Brodeur always steps his game up in the post season. Look for New Jersey to ride him once again, and look for them to go far.

Dark Horse: New York Rangers

The Rangers were excusably not very dominant this season because they weren't very healthy. However, now that Shanahan is back, and Jagr and Prucha are scoring goals again, this team is very dangerous offensively. They may not be very high in the standings, but this healthy Ranger squad can compete with almost any team in the league.

Overrated: Atlanta Thrashers

Despite their seeding, the Thrashers have fewer points than

the next two teams below them and virtually no defense. They may have snipers Marian Hossa and Ilya Kovalchuk, but goaltender Kari Lehtonen cannot win the big game (let alone a series) by himself. Look for the Thrashers to exit early.

Prediction:

Goaltending wins championships. There are many teams in the East that can put the puck in the net, but have trouble keeping it out. Look for proven veterans like Brodeur to go far, while others crumble under the pressure. All in all, there is a very good chance that the Buffalo Sabres will play host to the New Jersey Devils to decide who meets the Vancouver Canucks (have some faith) in the Stanley Cup finals.

No matter what happens over in the Eastern Conference, we can all expect to see some good hockey this spring.



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