

## Senators and Red Wings on top as 2006 NHL playoffs begin

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The first NHL regular season under the new rules negotiated during last year's lockout is giving us some new and surprising match ups going into the playoffs. The St. Louis Blues, a fixture of the playoffs for the last 25 years, not only failed to make the cut this year but also finished dead last in the league. The Tampa Bay Lightning, the last team to win the Stanley Cup, crawled into the playoffs in the eighth and final spot in the Eastern Conference. Despite having a core of talented veteran players including Mario Lemieux, Ziggy Palffy, John Leclair and Sergei Gonchar, the Pittsburgh Penguins ended the season with 58 points, just one more than St. Louis. The Detroit Red Wings provided the only stability, winning their third Presidents' Trophy in the last four seasons for having the league's best regular season record.

The playoffs promise to be wild and unpredictable. In the East, the number one seed Ottawa Senators should have an easy time with the defending champion Lightning. Tampa Bay lost the key to their Stanley Cup success when goalie Nikolai Khabibulin signed with Chicago in the offseason. Ottawa beat Tampa Bay all four times they met this season by a combined score of 16-6. If Tampa Bay is to win this series, they will have to take advantage of Ottawa's rookie goaltender and work to shut down the Senators' offensive juggernaut.

The second ranked Carolina Hurricanes take on the seventh place Montreal Canadiens in the next match-up in the East. Carolina was a huge surprise this year, setting a franchise record with 112 points. Benefiting from some great offense generated by veteran Rod Brind'Amour and youngster Eric Staal, and getting solid goaltending out of Martin Gerber, the Hurricanes look to go far in this year's playoffs. Montreal finished strong after veterans Saku Koivu, Alexei Kovalev and Andrei Markov



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

If Philadelphia Flyers' winger Peter Forsberg can stay healthy throughout the playoffs, Philly has a decent chance at winning the Stanley Cup. Senators and Red Wings currently lead their conferences this year.

returned from injuries and look very strong in goal with Crisotbal Huet being backed up by former Colorado goalie David Aebischer. This match up should be exciting to watch, and the veteran leadership of the Canadiens may make this the least surprising upset of the year.

The New Jersey Devils went on an 11-game winning streak to win their division and finish the season ranked third in the East. In the first round they take on a slumping New York Rangers team that lost five straight games heading into the playoffs

and six of their last ten. The Rangers benefited from an outstanding performance in goal by rookie and Olympic gold medalist Henrik Lundqvist, but don't have much help in front of him besides likely MVP Jaromir Jagr, Martin Straka and Michael Nylander. New Jersey's

potent offense and goaltender Martin Brodeur should stay hot and finish the Rangers in no more than five games.

The final match-up in the East features one of the most underrated teams this season: the speedy Buffalo Sabres. Buffalo quietly went about its business finishing the season nine points ahead of New Jersey. Because New Jersey won their division and Buffalo couldn't overtake Ottawa in theirs, Buffalo is ranked fourth and takes on a much bigger Philadelphia Flyers team. If Peter Forsberg is able to stay healthy, the Flyers should have a great offense to match up against the Sabres' unknown but talented offense. For Philly, the sub par performance on special teams this season will be a problem in this series, and Buffalo looks to reap the rewards of owning the league's best special teams. The real question in this series comes in goal. Buffalo has two young and very talented netminders in Ryan Miller and Martin Biron, but neither has any post-season experience. The Flyers have an experienced goalie in Robert Esche, but Esche is coming off a groin injury and his backup is rookie Antero Niittymaki. Look for the Sabres to use their speed to make Philadelphia take penalties and then bury the Flyers on the power play.

The Western Conference may be even wilder than the East. The top match-up features the Red Wings facing off against the eighth seeded Edmonton Oilers. This series promises to be closer than the rankings indicate. Both teams are fast and experienced. The season series was split 2-2. Both

teams have goalies with playoff experience. Both teams are fast and have solid defensemen. The key to this series lies in the special teams and depth. Detroit has the advantage in both categories, owning the NHL's best power play unit this year, and they will dominate if they can keep it going in the playoffs. Edmonton needs to take this series one goal at a time to improve confidence and will need a huge series out of goalie Dwayne Roloson.

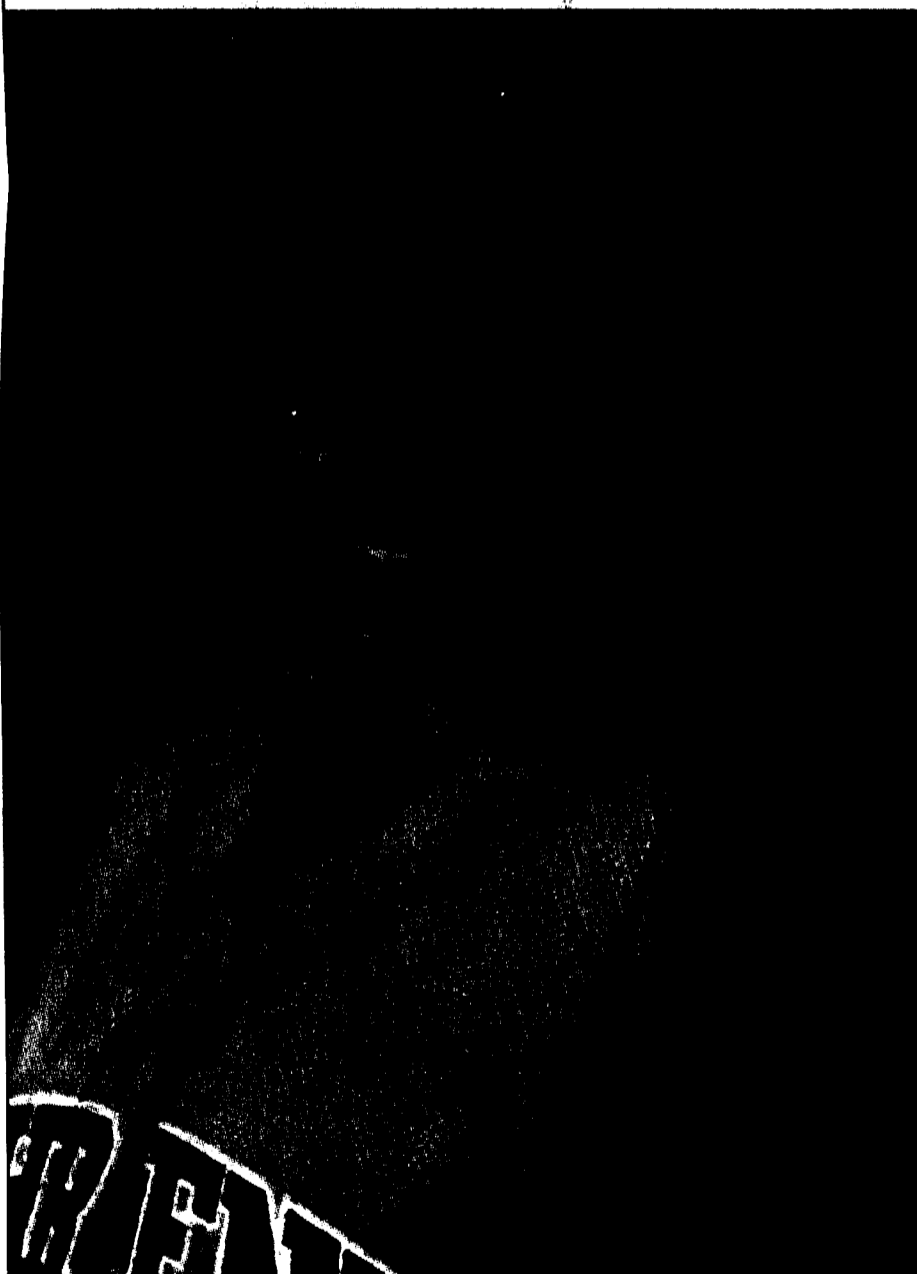
Two traditional Western Conference powerhouses square off when the number two Dallas Stars meets up with the Colorado Avalanche in the first round. While the Dallas lineup is mostly unchanged from two years ago, Colorado has lost its number one forward Forsberg to Philadelphia, gave up its starting goalie to Montreal for Jose Theodore who struggled this season with the Canadiens and lost key defenseman Adam Foote to the Columbus Blue Jackets. Dallas has a little more depth than Colorado, and Theodore leaves the Avs weak in goals. Marty Turco is solid in net for Dallas, and if they can score more than three goals a game and win at home, the Stars should be able to make quick work of this series.

The sixth seeded Mighty Ducks of Anaheim skate into Calgary to take on the three seeded Flames in a series that features two very fast teams. Calgary will want to make this a physical series to match up better against the finesse-style forwards of Anaheim. The Flames will need to avoid the penalty box to avoid giving the Ducks' forwards too much room on the ice. Anaheim took advantage of Calgary penalties in the last game of the season but backs into the playoffs losing three of their last five. Calgary also slide into the playoffs losing three of its last five including the final two. Miiikka Kiprusoff will have to have a great series in net, and the Flames will have to remain disciplined for Calgary to win this series. Anaheim has a great shot at the upset if it can use its speed to capitalize on Calgary's mistakes.

The final match up is between the fourth seeded Nashville Predators and the fifth seeded San Jose Sharks. Until the middle of April this would have been the most exciting match up in the first round. Unfortunately Nashville lost goaltender Thomas Vokoun for the remainder of the season to a condition that caused blood clots to form in his blood stream, seriously damaging the Predators' playoff hopes. San Jose has one of the explosive offensive tandems in the league this year with Joe Thornton and Jonathan Cheechoo. Although Vokoun's backup Chris Mason has been great down the stretch, the San Jose offense may be too much for him to handle. The Sharks should make quick work of the Predators if Nashville can't produce a defensive scheme to keep San Jose away from Mason.

The first round of NHL playoffs in two years should produce some great action and classic match ups. Both conferences are wide open, and the parity amongst the teams should allow for some first round upsets. The playoffs start Friday and will be covered on OLN and NBC.

### HOUSING AND FOOD SERVICES ATHLETE OF THE WEEK



NAME: Kristin Macha  
SPORT: Softball  
CLASS: Junior  
DATE: April 17, 2006

Kristin Macha (Export/Franklin Regional) has been named the Housing and Food Services Athlete of the Week.

The junior first baseman and designated hitter led the Blue and White to a 4-0 week against two AMCC conference foes. Against Medaille, Macha went a combined five for seven in the doubleheader with three runs batted in and a triple. Over the weekend she went three for four in the first game against Mount Aloysius to lead the team to a 17-0 victory. Macha is batting outstanding .500 from the plate and has a .535 on-base percentage, both tops in the AMCC.

The Behrend Lions played Tuesday when they traveled to rival Pitt-Bradford for a doubleheader. The Blue and White then hosted Grove City on Wednesday, before they travel to Penn State-Altoona on Saturday April 22.

Housing and Food Services Athlete of the Week is selected by the Sports Information Staff.

## 2006 NFL Draft brings up questions

By Tommy Phillips  
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With the NFL draft coming up at the end of the month, there are still many questions about what actions will be taken by teams drafting early in the first round. While former USC running back Reggie Bush is expected to be drafted first overall by the Houston Texans, there is much uncertainty over what the New Orleans Saints will do with the second overall pick, as well as in what order the top three quarterback prospects will be chosen.

New Orleans drafts immediately after the Texans, and reports have suggested that they would rather trade this pick for multiple lower picks than use it. Since the Tennessee Titans hold the third overall pick and are interested in drafting former USC quarterback Matt Leinart, other teams such as the New York Jets and the Oakland Raiders may look to trade with the Saints in order to be able to draft Leinart before the Titans take him. However, New Orleans may

decide not to trade their pick and take Leinart themselves or possibly draft former North Carolina State defensive end Mario Williams, who is considered the top defensive prospect in the draft.

Leinart is one of three highly touted quarterbacks who are likely to be picked in the first round. The other two are Vince Young from Texas and Jay Cutler from Vanderbilt. Young has received much hype since his excellent performance in the Rose Bowl, and his combination of passing and running skills has drawn comparisons to Michael Vick.

However, the fact that he received poor scores on a test known as the Wonderlic has raised questions about whether he is fit to be a leader in the NFL. Cutler has drawn interest from teams due to the strength of his arm, but his poor winning percentage in college is a questionable factor. Leinart has none of these doubts surrounding him, which has caused him to be considered

the top quarterback available in the draft.

Although both Bush and Leinart have gained respect from scouts, their former USC teammate LenDale White has seen his draft stock fall recently. White recently tore his hamstring, and he only performed in one drill at the pro-day for USC players looking to enter the draft. He was not helped by the fact that Arizona and Minnesota both signed free

**"Cutler has drawn interest from teams due to the strength of his arm, but his poor winning percentage in college is a questionable factor"**

agent running backs instead of waiting for the draft. He is expected to be drafted late in the first round or early in the second round.

It will be interesting to watch how the first round of the NFL draft plays out. These situations are sure to add intrigue to the early selections in the draft, as fans of the teams that have the early selections in the first round hope that their team will choose the right player.

### Sports Trivia 101

Pittsburgh Penguin Sidney Crosby is the youngest player in the NHL to have amassed 100 points in his rookie season. What NHL player holds the record for most points in his rookie season?

Last Week's answer: The baseball player with the most times having stolen home plate is Ty Cobb with 54.  
(Answered by Dereck Ayala and Stephen R. Oyler).

The answer will be posted in next week's Beacon issue. Email your answers to csl5005@psu.edu. The first person to answer correctly will have their name printed next week. Good Luck!