

SPORTS

NHL 2008 Playoff Preview

Current NHL Playoff Race as of April 3, 2008

Eastern Conf.	W-L-OL	Pts.	GL
1.) y-Pittsburgh	47-26-8	102	1
2.) y-Montreal	46-25-10	102	1
3.) Carolina	43-32-6	92	1
4.) x-New Jersey	45-28-7	97	2
5.) NY Rangers	42-27-11	95	2
6.) Ottawa	43-30-8	94	1
7.) Washington	42-31-8	92	1
8.) Boston	40-28-12	92	2

9.) Philadelphia	40-29-11	91	2
------------------	----------	----	---

Western Conf.	W-L-OL	Pts.	GL
1.) zz-Detroit	53-21-7	113	1
2.) y-San Jose	49-21-10	108	2
3.) x-Minnesota	44-28-9	97	1
4.) x-Anaheim	45-27-8	98	2
5.) x-Dallas	43-29-7	93	3
6.) x-Colorado	43-31-7	93	1
7.) Calgary	41-30-10	92	1
8.) Nashville	41-31-9	91	1

9.) Vancouver	39-31-10	88	2
---------------	----------	----	---

x-clinched playoff berth y-division winner
zz-best record

Who will advance and who will start their golf season early?

By Krista Pugliano
contributing writer
kzpl05@psu.edu

It has been six grueling months, filled with excitement and injuries, but the NHL regular season is coming to end. While some teams already know their destination for next week, whether it is more hockey and seeing the family for the first time since Columbus Day, some are leaving it all out on the line to advance to the NHL playoffs, which start April 9.

In the Eastern Conference, the Pittsburgh Penguins clinched the Atlantic Division for the first time in 10 years and are currently sitting in No. 1 in the playoff race in the East. Thanks to the incredible play of the "Steel City Line" of Evgeni Malkin, Petr Sykora and Ryan Malone, the Penguins offense did not suffer, even when the Pens saw All-Star forwards Sidney Crosby, Gary Roberts and Marian Hossa went down to injuries.

The Montreal Canadiens, who sit at No. 2, clinched the Northeast Division this past week. On a team with a few All-Stars (Alexei Kovalev and Andrei Markov) and a bunch of overachievers (Chris Higgins, Tomas Plekanec, and Mark Streit), the Canadiens have what it takes to make noise in the post-season, even though it will be without captain Saku Koivu, who broke his foot on March 28 against the Buffalo Sabres. The Pens can clinch the top spot in the Eastern Conference with a win on Sunday, April 9, against the Philadelphia Flyers or a regulation loss for the Canadiens.

While the Pens and the Canadiens know that they will be playing next week in the

playoffs, it looks like their opponents will not be decided until the final games finish on Sunday. Currently, only five points separate No. 4 and No. 9 in the playoff race. While the Ottawa Senators, Washington Capitals and Boston Bruins are safe for now, the Flyers are still keeping up with pack, even though their last two games are nothing to desire (New Jersey Devils and Penguins).

The Capitals can move up as far as the No. 3 spot in the East, with the Southeast Title. The Carolina Hurricanes, who currently sit atop on the Southeast Division, are tied with

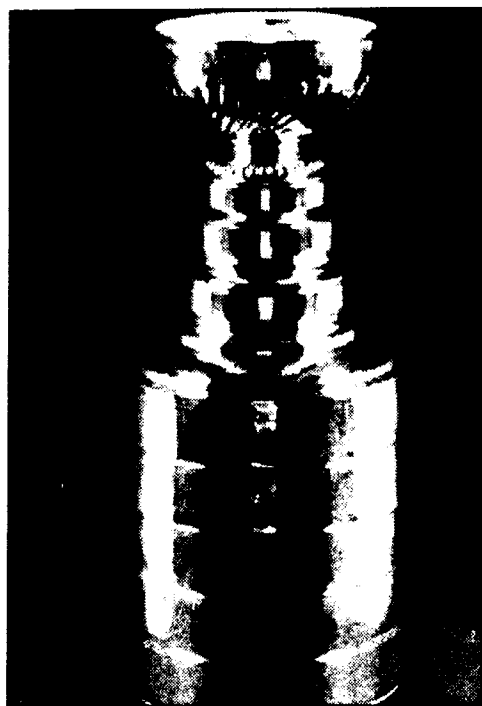
the Capitals, but head-to-head, the Hurricanes have the tiebreaker over the Caps. With only one game left for each team, both against the Florida Panthers, the Caps and the Canes will battle it out for home ice in the first round.

While the Eastern Conference is still wide open, the Western Conference is almost all locked up, with six teams clinched for the playoffs. Leading the way in the West is the Detroit Red Wings, who have been a dominant force throughout the entire year. With their seven Central Division titles and 17 playoffs appearances in a row, the Red Wings are always considered a threat for the Stanley Cup.

Nipping at their heels are the San Jose Sharks, who have been the best NHL team since the trade deadline, going 16-0-2. Even with their recent hot streak, the Sharks do not have a shot at the Presidents Trophy, who is awarded to the team with the best record in the regular season. The Red Wings are currently five points ahead of the Sharks.

The No. 7 and No. 8 spots are the only two available in the West, with four teams gunning for them. Currently, the Calgary Flames and the Nashville Predators sit in the final spots in the West. The Flames can punch their ticket to the postseason with a win or overtime loss in their final game, while the Predators have their work cut out for them. Only holding the final spot by a point, the Predators have the Vancouver Canucks nipping at their heels.

With the playoffs right around the corner and no clear-cut favorite, any of the 16 teams in the playoffs can walk away with Lord Stanley in June.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
The Stanley Cup will be awarded in June

Ultimate Debate: Crosby vs. Ovechkin

While there are many skilled players in the NHL, the Pittsburgh Penguins' Sidney Crosby and the Washington Capitals' Alexander Ovechkin stand out from the rest of the crowd. With multiple trophies and awards for both young players, who is the best out of the two? **Sports Commentary**

The excitement is building to what will inevitably be one of the most skillfully intense post-seasons in years for the NHL. Crosby, Ovechkin, Zetterberg, Thornton, Iginla.

What appear as simple, foreign names to the average eye, appear as heroes, leaders and saviors to the avid hockey follower. These players are playing for more than the love of hockey, even more for the love of their team, but most importantly- they want the cup. No, they need the cup. It's all about the Stanley Cup starting on April 9, but until then, why not tackle the biggest hockey debate of the year. Who is better, Crosby or Ovechkin? Personally, I think it's ridiculous not to include the analysis of another Pittsburgh Penguin- one that has, in my mind, proved himself more than just a terrific hockey player in the Steeltown. This player is, without question, Evgeni Malkin, but let's save that for another time and get down to steel blades on ice.

First off, it is hard to put the biases aside, as I have been a die-hard Pens fan since I remember my first Stanley Cup win in 1991, however with an issue such as this, I will. So I will begin by saying that Alexander Ovechkin is, with no argument, one of the finest players to play in the game. If you are a Pens fan, and constantly swear that Ovechkin is the most overrated player in the NHL, then you are wrong. However, it is very hard to make an accurate comparison between him and "Sid the Kid". They are simply two different hockey players.

Crosby is a leader in his third year. While he continues to highlight his team's games with unbelievable individual moves, he is a team player, an all around hustler, who doesn't mind sticking up for the rest of his team when the game gets rough. If you are the typical Crosby hater (meaning that you constantly pick on Crosby because he's a baby, one of the most common critiques I hear) then it means that you do not follow the game of hockey enough and just love to hate a great man of the game. Crosby has fought. Bravely. He is not scared to fight for his team when they need it. I'm not talking about the Georges Laraque fighting methods, I'm talking about taking on the other side when too many cheap shots occur (which seem to happen all too often against the Pens).

To be a great hockey player is not just to score the most goals in a season. You have to be a team player. That is what truly defines a great hockey player of the game because hockey is based on team play. I understand that Ovechkin does not have the same players to work with as Crosby, but that could just be because he does not give them the opportunity. In 80 games this season, Ovechkin has 18 more goals than assists, has taken 436 shots, which gives him a scoring percentage of 14.7. Crosby has played 53 games, has twice as many assists as goals, has taken 173 shots, crediting him with a 13.9 scoring percentage. Their points per game statistics are almost identical with Ovechkin at 1.38

Sidney Crosby

By Ryan P. Gallagher

and Crosby at 1.36. If you multiply Crosby's average by the number of games he missed, it puts Crosby one point below Ovechkin. A pretty impressive statistic when you take into account who Sid plays with. Which brings me to a slightly off topic point- the brilliance of Evgeni Malkin.

Malkin trails Ovechkin in overall points by a mere four points. An interesting aspect of this statistic, which I found amazing, was the fact that Malkin has taken 173 fewer shots than Alex O. My question is, if Ovechkin is taking so many shots, how could you not expect 65 goals from him, being the athlete that he is? When you take 441 shots, I



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Crosby and Ovechkin have led the youthful dominance that has taken place since the lockout in 2004.

pray to God that at least 65 go in. That's just logic.

In the 1988-89 season, Mario Lemieux shot the puck 313 times, scoring on 85 of those shots, leaving him with a scoring percentage of 27.2. That's impressive. He finished that season with 199 points, and did not record a lower shooting percentage than that of Ovechkin's, until his very late years in 2000-2001. He only played 24 games that year. The reason I brought that up is for one reason, and it's not to brag about the Pens. It's to say this, do not tell me that Ovechkin's the best player in the league because he has 65 goals. Find valid reasons that make Ovechkin a comparable hockey player to Sidney Crosby. Sixty-Five goals on 436 shots is nothing.

If the game of hockey consisted of one-on-one play, Ovechkin may have a chance of beating Crosby, but that is not what the game is about. That is why Sidney Crosby is a better hockey player than Ovechkin. If you do not believe me, I suggest watching some playoff hockey by the Atlantic division champions, Crosby, Malkin, Hossa, Sykora, Gonchar. The intensity is shooting through my head, and I can't wait.

Let's go Crosby, Let's go Pens.

If you were in the Verizon Center in D.C. at all this past week, there would only be three letters that you could hear. M.V.P.

As Alexander Ovechkin scored his 63rd goal, breaking Luc Robitaille for most by a left-winger, it was obvious who the hometown favorite is. Ovie, the 22-year-old Russian phenom, is now the league leader in goals (65) and leads some other Russian that plays for the Pens in points (112 as of April 4).

There has been much debate this past season over who is the better player, Sidney Crosby or Alexander the Great. While both players are significantly ahead of the field in talent, the race for over

Alexander Ovechkin

By Chris LaFuria

He is currently second in points and second in Russians. The acquisition of Marian Hossa just adds to

the strength of Pittsburgh's lines.

Ovie's first professional success came in his first game as a pro. Against the Columbus Blue Jackets, Ovechkin scored two goals in the Caps' 3-2 win. In Jan. of the next year, he scored a hat trick over All-Star goalie Jean-Sebastian Giguere.

The importance of Ovechkin is what makes him important. The acronym M.V.P. stands for "Most Valuable Player." Ovechkin leads the hockey world with 65 goals. The next highest total for a Caps player is Alexander Semin with 25. Hockey fans like scoring. Hockey teams win with scoring. Ovechkin satisfies both needs.

Sidney Crosby will probably go on to become the greatest players since "The Great One." He has the talent and situation to be catapulted into the upper echelon of players. However, the only thing that could keep him from doing that is his health. He has missed 28 of the Pens' last 32 games. Makes Pens fans and bandwagon mates somewhat nervous.

If postseason accolades are any indication of a player's success, Mr. Ovechkin won the Calder Memorial Trophy for the league's Rookie of the Year for the 2005-2006 season. Coincidentally, this was the same season Sid made his premier.

In the race for this year's playoffs, who has been relied on more for their team's success? Crosby, who has become the No. 1 Pittsburgh cheerleader? Or Alexander Ovechkin, league leader in points and moral leader of the entire Washington squad? I believe Ovie is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.



Top 5 favorite Penguin players

- 5.) Brooks Orpik
- 4.) Evgeni Malkin
- 3.) Sidney Crosby
- 2.) Jarikko Ruutu
- 1.) Maxime Talbot

By
Ryan Gallagher

Top 5 worst hockey team names

- 5.) Pittsburgh Penguins
- 4.) Washington Capitals
- 3.) Vancouver Canucks
- 2.) Montreal Canadiens
- 1.) Ottawa Senators

By
Chris LaFuria