

# SPORTS



# RAP

## Offsider

**P**hil Esposito's Tampa Bay Lightning is anything but the usually expansion team for one main reason: the team is actually winning. Norris Division play may not be as high-scoring as the Smythe or Patrick Divisions or as tight as the Adams, but it is not an easy division. Why, then, are the Lightning doing so well? What is Esposito's secret?

General Manager Esposito has managed to put together other teams' misfits into a cohesive unit that may be changing the way we see first-year NHL teams. Many of the players were not well-liked by their teams last season: Marc Bureau, Ken Hodge, Anatoli Semenov. Others were not needed this season because of a surplus of players in their old teams: Rob Zaamuner, Rob DiMaio, Adam Creighton. Some were simply not given enough time or responsibility to prove themselves: Peter Taglianetti, Joe Reekie, Matt Harvey. Others, like Chris Kontos, were never given the chance. Somehow Esposito has taken this odd group, added a great goaltender in Pat Jablonski, and produced a winning team. Watch for the Norris Division to have an inside-out year marked with many changes in the standings.

Two NHL teams who might not be doing well in the standings but who look good on paper are the New York Islanders and the Winnipeg Jets. Neither team has had much success in recent years, but rebuilding and the addition of key rookies make coming success a possibility for each.

If only the Islanders as a team had the dedication and courage of its goaltender Mark Fitzpatrick faces not only losing his hockey career, but also his life because of a strange, incurable disease. Last season, Fitzpatrick was the deserving winner of the Masterton Trophy for his dedication to hockey and perseverance. Other players who may soon make a big difference for the team are Vladimir Malakhov, Darius Dasparaitis, Marty McInnis, and Scott LaChance. All five will certainly influence the future of the team.

The Winnipeg Jets have been taking a lot of flak this season for

their high number of non-Canadian or non-North American players. Talent such as American Keith Tkachuk and Europeans Teemu Selanne, Evgeny Davydov, and Alexi Zhamnov should not be judged on the basis of their nationalities; these young hockey players may add to the excitement for Canadian teams, draw more fans, and improve the reputation of low-market teams such as Winnipeg. One day it shall all click together.

The Hockey Panthers finally won their first game this season in front of a good crowd against the also-winless Mount Allison Mounties on the tenth of November. Now that was a hockey game. Both teams wanted to win and played as if they wanted

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to win. If the Panthers could play every game like they played the first period, they would have no problems in any game. They played a great game.

Last weekend, the Panthers managed a tie but also a loss in Fredericton against the UNB Red Devils. UNB is a rough team; the tie should not be taken lightly.

The Panthers play in Mount Allison on the twentieth and finish the first half of the season at home against Moncton on the twenty-fifth and St. Thomas on the 28th and 29th. Things are looking better for the second half of the season. ■