

It's Playoff Time!!!

The First Round According to Stewie

by Nicholas Stewart

Eastern Conference

*Tampa Bay Lightning vs.
New York Islanders*

New York won the season series with Tampa 3-1. Many people are picking the Isles to pull off the upset. Perhaps I'm not giving the Islanders the respect they deserve. So be it. Lightning in Five.

*Boston Bruins vs.
Montreal Canadiens*

This is great, to have these storied rivals face off again. Cam Neely and Patrick Roy may be missing from the rivalry I remember as a kid and Ken Dryden and Gerry Cheevers are long gone, but still - anytime these two teams hook up in the playoffs it will be quite a show. Two years ago, the Habs shocked the top-seeded Bruins in the first round. Will the Killer B's get their revenge? I'd say yes, but remember the Habs have Jose Theodore who is more than capable of stealing a series or two. This one could go either way.
Bruins in Seven

*Philadelphia Flyers vs.
New Jersey Devils*

Bobby Clarke has built some good teams in Philly over the past several years, but he has not been able to find a reliable playoff goalie. Robert Esche isn't the answer when he goes up against 3-time Stanley Cup winner Martin Brodeur. Look for Philly backup Sean Burke to get some action in this series. He could fare better than Esche, but he's still no Brodeur.
Devils in Seven

*Toronto Maple Leafs vs.
Ottawa Senators*

All season long I have said the Leafs could go deep into the playoffs but whenever they face Ottawa the party would be over. This was the year Ottawa would finally have Toronto's number. However, with Eddie Belfour healthy again and the Senators heading into the playoffs with huge question marks in goal, I think I was wrong.
Maple Leafs in Six

Western Conference

*Detroit Red Wings vs.
Nashville Predators*

The Red Wings concern me. They have been upset in the first round in two of the last three seasons, and should have lost to Vancouver in 2002 - thank you Dan Cloutier. If a hot team like Edmonton made it into the show, Detroit could have again faced an early exit. They are lucky Nashville has cooled off late in the year. The Preds may give the Wings a scare, but they haven't been playing well enough for me to seriously think upset.
Red Wings in Six

*San Jose Sharks vs.
St. Louis Blues*

The Blues have turned it on as of late with a strong surge propelling them into the playoffs. This makes it easier for people to overlook San Jose, since you never really hear about them. All I know is that they were supposed to own the basement this year and wound up finishing 2nd in the West. You gotta respect that.
Sharks in Six

*Vancouver Canucks vs.
Calgary Flames*

This should be a great series between two teams on a roll. Everyone seemed to dismiss the Canucks after the Bertuzzi

incident. However, GM Brian Burke and Marc Crawford have instilled a classic 'us against the world' mentality in the Canucks and the team has responded by reeling off 6 straight victories to end the season. The Flames make their long-awaited return to the playoffs after an 8 year absence. Their inexperience is a concern, but they play tough hockey, are well-coached and have Miikka Kiprusoff, who has been outstanding for the Flames between the pipes. If any goalie can break out and carry a team like J.S. Giguere did last year, this is the man. It could happen, but expect the 'us against the world' Canucks to fight like cornered rats.
Canucks in Seven

*Colorado Avalanche vs.
Dallas Stars*

Dallas has played very good hockey in the second half, and in the last month, Colorado has gone in the tank and is primed for an early playoff exit. Beware - if this sleeping giant wakes up, they could go the distance. However, while Dallas has been on Cruise Control, the Avalanche have been on Snooze Control.
Stars in Six