

# Autumn sees Leafs fall

By Ryan Miller

With hockey season back in full swing, pundits professional and amateur alike have been eager to expound endlessly on the six Canadian teams, both as to the sources of their woes and the reasons for their successes. While teams such as Montreal and Ottawa see themselves as the toasts of the league, teams who were confident in their success this season such as Vancouver and Toronto are left grasping at straws to address their numerous faults. Here is a breakdown of each team in the league, from best to worst:

**Ottawa Senators:** Early season success has seen this team draw comparisons to legends such as the 1975-76 Canadiens, a team that featured the likes of players such as Guy Lafleur, Larry Robinson and Ken Dryden. Are the Senators good enough to lose fewer than 8 games this season?

Certainly not, and factors in the thinly distributed talent in the modern league. The Senators are an excellent team and have done well to survive injuries to Spezza and Emery early on, and although the team will have an incredible season and almost doubtlessly finish in first place, they are bound to lose more than 10 per cent of their games.

**Best Player:** Talk of Heatley, Spezza and the Sen's superb goaltending tandem often tends to leave Alfie out of the spotlight. It seems the only time attention is paid to the Swedish captain is

when the team is losing, but Alfredsson's team leading 20 points at press time and his consistent play earns him top spot on this team.

**Montreal Canadiens:** In a similar fashion to last year, Montreal has come out to a roaring start. With a terrifying goaltending tandem of Huet and newcomer Price as well as a resurgent Alex Kovalev and the dedication of a plethora of young forwards, the Habbies have been turning a few heads in the east. Even Patrice Brisebois, the former whipping boy of the Bell Centre faithful, has been solid in his play.

**Best Player:** Despite the fact that Captain Koivu is one pace for another career year, Andrei Markov has been outstanding at both ends of the ice. Leading all defensemen in the league in points and staying on the plus side, Markov has been fingered by some as a potential dark horse in the Norris running.

**Calgary Flames:** Sitting on a .500 record is not making new head coach Mike Keenan happy, and neither is Mikka Kiprusoff's play. On a team that has relied on Kipper as their crutch for a few seasons now, the Flames are suffering with his showing as a mere mortal to this point. In order to become a winning team again, the Flames are going to need the Finnish netminder to step it up a notch.

**Best Player:** This one is a tie. Alex Tanguay and Jarome Iginla have combined for forty points thus far in the season. Although

there has been talk of the French Tanguay going to Montreal in exchange for Kovalev, their difference in age and Tanguay's chemistry with Iggy will cause his stock to go up, undoubtedly making the cost more than one moody, skilled Russian.

**Toronto Maple Leafs:** To this point, the Leafs have been mad-deningly inconsistent, drawing the ire of their fans and the media. Raycroft has finally taken a back-seat to Toskala, who played magnificently in two outings against Montreal but has also been victimized by weaker opponents. Toronto's last victory against the Habs was lucky, and in spite of the supposed revitalization of the team following the win, they were soundly beaten by the Senators the night after. Toronto - and specifically, Toronto's defence - is going to have the work cut out for them if they wish to squeeze into the playoffs. The additions of Mark Bell and Kyle Wellwood, from suspension and injury respectively, seemed to do little to spark the team.

**Best Player:** Nik Antropov has been a pleasant surprise, but Captain Courageous Matt Sundin has been absolutely unstoppable, posting 21 points in 16 games. Keeping the pace may be difficult for the 36-year-old, but it certainly warrants at least all-star consideration at this point.

**Vancouver Canucks:** Prized acquisition Roberto Luongo has been horribly ordinary so far this year, and his play only goes to further showcase the difficulty the

Canucks have scoring goals, as they are no longer to win the tight defensive games they once dominated while relying on a franchise goalie. Vancouver's situation is comparable to that of the Flames, only some Calgary players can score goals, and Iron Mike Keenan would never stand for a losing record like the Canucks have at the moment.

**Best Player:** While the Sedins have been consistent offensively and have been the Canucks' best players, the fact that they are both in the minus column should draw the attention of Coach Vigneault. When the two top goal scorers on a defensive team are unable to stay on the plus side, the system needs to be revisited, Alain.

**Edmonton Oilers:** Edmonton is currently one of the worst teams in the league, and although their youth shows some promise, there is little excuse for this team to be as bad as they are. Injuries to defensemen Sheldon Souray and Joni Pitkanen have played a factor, but the season only seems to go downhill from here for the unfortunate Oil.

At least fans can count on seeing Ryan Smyth a few times a year in divisional matchups.

**Best Player:** Injecting some hope into fans of the bronze and blue are Andrew Cogliano and Sam Gagner. Gagner's -5 is something to balk at, but he'll do well to keep it from hitting double digits before December. Cogliano only has a point more than his youthful counterpart, but his +1 is a lot prettier to look at.

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