

The Gateway looks into the future, sees NHL winners

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Commentary

The U of A's teams have all finished their seasons—some more successfully than others—but there's still plenty of fun to be had in the world of sports. For instance, may I direct your attention to a little organization called the "National Hockey League"—have you heard of it? Apparently, their playoffs are about to begin, and the best teams will compete for a quaint little trophy called the Stanley Cup—fascinating stuff. Anyway, we've been following the league all season long, and are ready to make uneducated guesses and fearless guarantees about this year's post-season.

Nick Frost

I'm not normally one to make predictions based on patterns formed in previous years, but it seems as though the recent trend in the Stanley Cup finals is

to have a Canadian team duking it out against an opponent from the division polar-opposite to them. The Calgary Flames—reppin' Northwest—battled against the Tampa Bay Lightning—reppin' Southeast—and lost in seven games in 2004; post-lockout, the Edmonton Oilers fought and were defeated in a similar divisional matchup to the Carolina Hurricanes in 2006. Last year, the Ottawa Senators were shown the exit in five games by the Anaheim Ducks.

Since those teams have all had their opportunity, it's only fitting that one of the other three gets their turn this year. So, who do we have left? Well, Vancouver technically has a chance, but it's more likely that Roberto Luongo will die of exhaustion and Alain Vigneault will be arrested for playing him beyond the parameters of BC's labour laws. And, of course, there's the Toronto Maple Leafs. Insert your own joke here.

The Montreal Canadiens, on the other hand, seem poised to make a serious run: they're the Northeast Division champions and battling for first-place in the Eastern Conference, they've got the number-one power-play in the league, and Carey Price

has been playing absolutely unreal since his safety net (Cristobal Huet) was dealt to Washington. Not to mention that *les Habitants* have history on their side, as they've won the most Stanley Cups (24) of any team. Most importantly, though, Montreal fits the pattern—they're a Canadian franchise and the second team from the East, to go along with the two from the West.

So mark your calendars—the Habs will lose to the Pacific Division's San Jose Sharks in five games.

Mike Kendrick

There's simply no question how this year's Stanley Cup Final will turn out. Throw your statistics and Vegas odds out the window—all you have to do is look at the history of the Cup in the past few years.

In the 2002 final round, the Detroit Red Wings beat out the Carolina Hurricanes to take the Cup. However, the 'Canes came back in the first year after the NHL lockout to take the prize. In 2003, Anaheim fought a gruelling match against New Jersey, and after the Devils won in game seven, the Ducks came back last year and capitalized on their second chance at the glory. Then,

in 2004, the Lightning took the Flames all the way down to Florida to strip them of the hardware in a seven-game showdown.

Are you seeing a pattern yet?

The Northwest has been one of the most competitive divisions in the league this year. Having run the gauntlet with a new coach and some fresh faces, Calgary's ready to take all the marbles. The years-long trend will end with them after they take home the Cup, however, because I sure as hell don't see the Oilers pulling it off next year. [Full disclosure: Mike Kendrick has a raging Flames boner, being from southern Alberta—Ed.]

Matt Pretty

With the NHL playoffs coming down to the wire, it's awfully tough to do decent predictions when most of the matchups and seeds aren't set yet. That being said, here's a few of my opinions on this year's playoff picture.

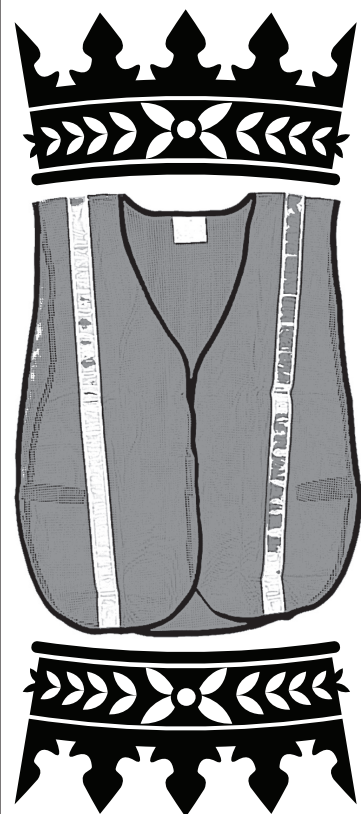
In the West, I think Vancouver will drop out. They've lost five of their last six, and they play the Oilers and Flames to finish up—much tougher opponents than Nashville's remaining two against the Blues and Blackhawks.

In the East, only one team from the Southeast Division is going to make it in, and I think it will be the Washington Capitals. Though Carolina holds the tiebreaker, the 'Canes are colder, losing three of their last four, and the Caps have won their last five. Plus, Carolina is advertising playoff tickets for sale when they haven't clinched a spot yet—one of the worst playoff jinxes out there.

The series I'd most like to see is Pittsburgh against Washington: Crosby and Malkin versus Ovechkin and Backstrom. The amount of offensive talent on one sheet of ice in that one would be unbelievable.

As for upsets, I think Detroit is going to fall in the first two rounds. Just a hunch. I could see Nashville giving them an early exit, or Anaheim or Dallas if they meet in the conference semis. The Wings haven't had the best record as favourites lately, and I think they're going keep that tradition alive.

If it were up to me, Montreal would win it all, but they'll be hurting. So I'll go with Pittsburgh because the chemistry on that team seems to be unstoppable. As long as they stay healthy, I think they have as good a shot as, or better than, any team out there.



Over the centuries, various sports have earned themselves the nickname "the Sport of Kings," including hunting, horse racing, falconry, ten-pin bowling, surfing and actual war. For the record, the real sport of kings is competitive vest-wearing.



GATEWAY SPORTS

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