

A First look at the Canadian NHL teams

There is a lot of excitement around a good portion of the Canadian NHL teams this year after 5 of them made it to the playoffs last season. With only 6 or 7 games into the season I will be looking at each team and how they have started. Keep in mind there are 82 games in a season and that it is still very early, but this is about my first impressions of each team and how I think they will do this year.

I will be using these standard statistics to give a better understanding of how well or poorly the team has started:

GF: Goals For (How many total goals the team has scored)
GA: Goals Against (How many total goals the team has given up)
GF/GP: Goals for per game (The average amount of goals the team scores per game)
GA/GP: Goals against per game (The average amount of goals the team gives up per game)
PP%: Power Play percentage (The average amount of times the team scores on their power play)
PK%: Penalty Kill Percentage (The average amount of times the team doesn't let the opposing team to score on their power play)
*The stats are from October 19th 2017 on NHL.com

Toronto Maple Leafs

The Toronto Maple Leafs have had a very good start to the season, with only being one point off of first place in the entire league. One thing that sticks out about this team is that they have no trouble scoring goals. Their scoring doesn't come from one line either; every line is able to create offense. 13 players on the Leafs have 4 or more points in 7 games. It is clear that the Leafs offense is one of the best in the league right now as other teams have a lot of trouble with their speed, and I believe it will be like that for the entire year. One thing the Leafs need to work on going forward is defense. Leafs have been able to win because they can score almost 5 goals per game, but that will not last. They need to find a way to reduce their goals against if they plan on staying in the top 10 in the league.

Record: 6-1-0 (2nd out of 31 teams)
GF: 34 (1st)
GA: 22 (24th)
GF/GP: 4.86 (1st)
GA/GP: 3.14 (18th)
PP%: 30% (1st)
PK%: 84.4% (7th)

Montreal Canadiens

Record: 1-5-1 (30th)
GF: 10 (30th)
GA: 27 (29th)
GF/GP: 1.43 (31st)
GA/GP: 3.86 (29th)
PP% 7.7% (27th)
PK% 76.9% (25%)

The Montreal Canadiens have been off to a very poor start, which does not surprise me. One of their biggest challenges so far has been their ability to score. If you compare the Leafs GF (35) vs the Habs (10) you can see what I mean. Scoring however is not their only problem. The biggest surprise is that their star goaltender, Carey Price, has not been the brick wall that he usually is, causing them to also give up a lot of goals. I don't think that it will stay this bad for the Habs, once their star goal scorers start performing and Carey Price returns to his usual self they will improve. However, I'm not sure that they will improve enough to make a playoff spot this year. After being

first in their division last year, this could be a very disappointing year for the Habs and their fans.

Ottawa Senators

Record: 3-1-3 (9th)
GF: 23 (9th)
GA: 16 (7th)
GF/GP: 3.29 (12th)
GA/GP: 2.29 (4th)
PP% 18.9% (18th)
PK% 95.2% (2nd)

Last year the Ottawa Senators surprised everyone when they made a deep playoff run until the Pittsburgh Penguins won in overtime, on game 7 in the conference finals to end their season. This year they have stuck to their game plan, which had gotten them so far last year, and have had a really good start. Their strongest area on the team is their defense. They do a very good job of forechecking and keeping the opposing team from having the puck, which can frustrate the other team.

The most impressive part of their start is that they missed their top defender, and many would say the leagues best defenseman, Erik Karlsson, for the first 5 games. Now that he is back in the lineup the Senators will be a hard team to win against.

Edmonton Oilers

Record: 2-4-0 (27th)
GF: 13 (26th)
GA: 20 (17th)
GF/GP: 2.17 (27th)
GA/GP: 3.33 (21st)
PP%: 19% (17th)
PK% 74.1% (30th)

There have been a lot of high expectations for the Oilers this season after going to the second round of the playoffs last year. Their team is led by captain Connor McDavid, who led the league last year with 100 points. Despite all this, the team has surprisingly been off to a very bad start. A team that is seen as one that can score a lot of goals is not doing so. I believe that all of their big offense players including McDavid will get back on track and start scoring. However, a problem that they could face all year is getting scoring from other lines besides McDavid's. The Oilers rely heavily on one line, and if that line is not on its game then the team will have trouble scoring. Teams that win the Stanley Cup have a lot of offensive depth, which means they can count on all their lines to put up points, the Oilers don't have that yet. Despite this however, I don't think this poor start will continue and they will get into the playoffs once again.

Calgary Flames

Record: 4-3-0 (15th)
GF: 18 (tied for 18th)
GA: 19 (12th)
GF/GP: 2.57 (24th)
GA/GP: 2.71 (12th)
PP%: 19.2% (15th)
PK%: 88.6% (3rd)

The Calgary Flames made the playoffs last year, but got swept in the first round. This year, with some improvement in goaltending they are expected to make the playoffs again and hopefully go a bit further. So far they have had a decent start, being right in the middle of the league. So far their biggest strength is their defense, in particular their penalty kill. A team's power play and penalty kill are a very important part.

This year there has been a huge increase in penalties called, so if their penalty kill is good, it can take you a long way. It is hard to say right now if the Flames will be good enough to make the playoffs. They will have to score more goals if they want to do so.

Winnipeg Jets

Record: 3-3-0 (21st)
GF: 18 (tied for 18th)
GA: 23 (25th)
GF/GP: 3.00 (16th)
GA/GP: 2.71 (12th)
PP% 10% (26th)
PK% (29th)

The Winnipeg Jets were one of two Canadian teams last year that didn't make the playoffs. This year they are expected to be better, but they still might not have done enough in the offseason to get to the playoffs. They do have some good offensive players like Patrik Laine and Nikolaj Ehlers that will need to keep playing well if the Jets hope to get in. One thing that clearly needs to be improved is their special teams (power play and penalty kill). They also seem to be having trouble keeping leads early on. However, it is still very early in the season and therefore hard to predict whether or not they will make the playoffs.

Vancouver Canucks

The Vancouver Canucks finished second last in the league last season and expectations are not much higher this year either. Right now they are in a rebuilding faze, which means they are drafting young players in hopes that within the next couple years they can play on the team. There once star performers Henrik and Daniel Sedin are now 37 and do not score has much as they used to. You can clearly see that their offense has dried up because of this. This year, it would be best to continue to develop their young players and end the season in the bottom 5 so that they have a chance at a good draft pick in the next NHL draft.

Record: 2-3-1 (23rd)
GF: 15 (24th)
GA: 19 (13th)
GF/GP 2.50 (26th)
GA/GP 3.17 (19th)
PP% 12.9% (25th)
PK% 77.8% (22nd)