

JETS AMONG THOSE WHO COULD CLAIM THE CUP

By Bruce Penton, April 16 2018

Hockey fans who root for Canadian-based teams in the National Hockey League's two-month exhausting run toward presentation of the Stanley Cup have a reduced field this year — but only one of them has a chance to raise Lord Stanley's mug in mid-June. Which brings us to "Chance or No Chance" — the annual look at who could survive the grind and win the Cup. To ease the suspense on the Canadian entries, Winnipeg Jets have a chance to win it; the Maple Leafs don't. Sorry to spoil your day, all you long-suffering Toronto fans.

Here's how it breaks down, team by team. (Remember, other than the fraction of a cent you paid to read this column among the thousands of other words you're offered in this edition, this information is free.)

By conference, starting with the East:

Pittsburgh — Chance — The two-time defending champs know what it takes, and Sidney Crosby's leadership is indisputable.

Washington — Chance — The Capitals' playoff history is spotty, but one of these years, Alexander Ovechkin is going to win more than just a Rocket Richard trophy.

Boston — Chance — The Bruins play a grinding playoff style all year and could wear down opponents. Not to mention their talent overload.

Tampa Bay — Chance — Faded down the stretch, but maybe were just conserving energy.

Columbus — No Chance — The Blue Jackets would need goalie Sergei Bobrovsky to perform miracles for this to change.

Toronto — No Chance — A rising team, for sure, but they're still a 'maybe next year' entry.

New Jersey — No Chance — Taylor Hall's shoulders are sturdy, but not that sturdy.

Philadelphia — No Chance — Like the Leafs, a rising 'next year' team.

Now a look at the West:

Nashville — Chance — The Predators are solid all around, have Mike Fisher back in the mix, and in goal, there are few better than Pekka Rinne.

Winnipeg — Chance — Not a flashy team, but the Jets' top six forwards and top four D are among the best in the league. Their outstanding regular season was no fluke.

Vegas — No Chance — The Golden Knights were an unbelievable success story in their inaugural season, but no way this miracle can carry on through the Stanley Cup playoffs.

San Jose — Chance — The Sharks have come close before and have loads of playoff-hardened vets.

Colorado — No Chance — The Avalanche just squeaked into the playoffs on the final night but are still not among the upper echelon of the league.

Minnesota, Anaheim, Los Angeles — No Chance x 3. These teams all have too many holes to fill and extended periods of pressure hockey will expose the weaknesses.

One suggestion: Please don't wager the mortgage payment or grocery money on the advice offered above. My crystal ball still hasn't completely thawed out.

- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Among this year's Kentucky Derby hopefuls: an England-based thoroughbred named Gronkowski. No problem spotting him: He's the only horse who spikes his jockey."
- **Randy Turner** of the Winnipeg Free Press, on Twitter: "Personally, I'm rooting for a Jets-Leafs Stanley Cup final just so Toronto fans can finally get some much-needed publicity for their hockey club."
- Turner again: "There are only two Canadian teams in the post-season and only one of them is in the centre of the hockey universe. The other is the Toronto Maple Leafs."
- **Bob Molinaro** of pilotonline.com (Hampton, Va.): "The Yankees' **Aaron Judge**, **Giancarlo Stanton** and **Gary Sanchez** are the greatest power trio since the Jimi Hendrix Experience."
- Molinaro again: "Baltimore Ravens were attracted to RG3 after he impressed the team in a workout. But also because at this stage in his career he comes very cheap."
- **Norman Chad** of the Washington Post: "If the future of sports viewing is millennials watching 90-second video clips on YouTube, cricket is in a world of hurt."
- **Jack Finarelli**, aka The Sports Curmudgeon, on televised in-game chats with managers: "Whoever thought this up should be drawn and quartered. Whoever decided to perpetuate this should be boiled in oil."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "**LeBron James**, when asked whom he'd vote for as MVP, said he'd vote for himself. Who's been giving him humility lessons, Newfoundland skip **Brad Gushue**?"
- **Jimmy Fallon** of NBC, on the NCAA basketball final: "Villanova really played great. They beat Michigan 79 to 62. I'm not saying Villanova was cocky, but at halftime all five starters left for the NBA."
- **Jessamyn McIntyre** of ESPN Seattle, via Facebook, on free-spending L.A. adding **Ndamukong Suh**, **Marcus Peters**, **Aqib Talib** and **Brandin Cooks** this offseason: "The Rams are me in college when I got my first credit card and had no idea what 25 per cent APR meant."
- **Tom Verducci** of SI.com, on the odds of the Mets' starting pitchers staying healthy: "Like expecting Lucy to keep the ball on the ground, laces away, for Charlie."

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