

Predictions for the NHL restart

Utku Muratoglu

Health and safety is the number one priority before the NHL restart. The league will return within a bubble similar to the NBA and there will be severe consequences for ignoring the protocols inside the bubble.

In terms of a breach of the protocols, [League does have the ability to levy a large fine against the team or deduct draft picks](#). However, since the NHL takes the precautions seriously, there is a lot of time to just relax and enjoy the NHL playoffs.

[The NHL will return on 1 August](#) with the start of the qualifying round. While everyone is eager for the comeback, let's look at this year's contenders for the Stanley Cup.

Eastern Conference:

Boston Bruins

Well, the Bruins are still clearly one of the favorites for the Stanley Cup. Last year's Eastern Conference Champions were eight points in front of their closest competitive Lightnings in the east before the break. They were also in great form and looking strong. Now the system and the format have changed and they lost their advantage on their rivals, in addition to that the top seed won't get home-ice advantage with the new format. Although this can be seen as a downgrade, the Bruins are still strong with lots of veterans and the good coaching staff eager to get to finals one more time.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Although it was not an ideal season so far for the Lightning, especially in the early season, Lightning is the primary challenger against Bruins for the top seed in the east. They have one of the best goaltending, if not the best, and very strong scoring power. They look good on paper and on the ice and remembering last year's playoff exit, they also have a high motivation to erase the memories of last year's playoffs performance.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins are one of the few teams that can use the news format and break to their advantage. They will play a best of five series against the Canadiens and this can determine whether or not they have what it takes for the Stanley Cup. They have an experienced squad and even though

they were not in a good form before the break, they have a very good opportunity to turn the table around.

Washington Capitals

On paper, Capitals had a good season so far, but on ice, they are not looking so strong, especially not against the likes of the Bruins. So, even though they will be in the playoffs, there is a slim chance that they will go into the finals, but we should not underestimate the heart of a champion.

Carolina Hurricanes

While Hurricanes remain to be one of the unknowns, they have Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov as a major boost to their game and to their squad over other teams. They have a good defense and a good chance of passing Rangers, but they are not really capable of going more than that.

New York Rangers

Rookie Kaapo Kakko, Adam Fox, and Igor Shesterkin are key for the Rangers' success. They are one of the wild cards of this year's playoffs, but it pretty much depends on how they will return after the break.

Western Conference:

St. Louis Blues

The Blues already seemed as eager as last year, if not more to get a back to back championship. Now with a rested squad and more focused on the prize, Blues are once more the biggest candidate for the Western Conference championship.

Colorado Avalanche

Avalanche had a great year apart from the injuries, but it is said that [the roster is fully healthy and ready](#). They are strong and combined with health, there is a good chance of a conference semi-final for Avalanche, the only question for them is if they are good enough to defeat defending champions.

Dallas Stars

This can be potentially Stars' year, they have a very strong defense and they were already so close eliminating the Blues. If they can manage to get conference finals, they are a good contender for the Stanley Cup.

Vegas Golden Knights

Only problem for Vegas is the recent coaching change in midseason. Apart from that Golden Knights have maybe the best squad dept. With a good mixture of talent and experience, they were already a contender, even before the season begin. If the chemistry increases with coach Peter DeBoer, Golden Knight is one of the key contenders for the Stanley Cup.

Edmonton Oilers

With players like Kailer Yamamoto and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and with a head coach like Dave Tippett, you have already had a winning team on the paper, but you need to perform to win the Stanley Cup. Oilers have the potential, head coach, and the players for a run to the championship, but they have a long way in front of them and very strong opponents. If they can survive western conference, they can be champions in the finals.

Vancouver Canucks

Canucks are like the Rangers of the West in this years' playoffs, they are the wildcard here. Honestly, there is a long road ahead for them to reach even to the conference finals, but you may never know. They are certainly the underdog that nobody pays attention to, but they have a very solid roster and they play very decent.