

Theo6.com freely admits that the Canadiens are the toughest team for us to gauge heading into the 2011-12 season. Okay, the Habs were riddled by injuries last season and we are going to assume that things even out and they will remain relatively healthy for the upcoming campaign and go from there. That is a mighty big "if" when it comes to knee and head injuries on key players.

We'll go on the record right now, before the first preseason game is even played. Carey Price will be the Vezina Trophy winner come next June. He was admirable in the series loss to Boston and many Bruins observers firmly believe he was the best goalie they faced in their Cup run. Then again, when Philly's goalie of the period and the overrated Luongo are part of that equation, it surely doesn't sound as impressive. That being said, the Canadiens are solid in goal and will be for many years to come.

The Habs defense was plagued last season with injuries to Andrei Markov and Josh Gorges. Luckily, charismatic hotshot P.K. Subban was able to step in immediately and fill Markov's offensive void and should continue to put up impressive numbers this season. Markov and Gorges are back along with steady veteran Hal Gill and fellow NHL senior citizens Paul Mara and Brent Sopel. As a whole, this group will be one of the upper echelon defenses in the league if healthy.

So far so good for Montreal fans. Solid goaltending and defense are key ingredients for playoff success and the Habs have those ingredients. Still, teams have to be able to put the puck in the net and that was a problem last season for the team. Enter Erik Cole into the Province of Quebec as the rumored solution to any offensive woes. Well, not so fast on that one. Cole will be 33 this year and is overrated as a lead offensive force. Complementary winger, yes. Problem solver, no.

Center Scott Gomez is aging in dog years but can provide a serviceable season in 2011-12. Tomas Plekanec and the young Lars Eller will have to pick it up a notch and we think that they will.

Mike Cammalleri looks like he's about three holes in to the back-nine of his career and Max Pacioretty looks to be player if he fully recovers from the freak hit (not attempted murder, folks) from Zdeno Chara. Brian Gionta is a flat-out winning player, which is needed to offset Andrei

Kostitsyn being a complete dog.

All in all, it's a crapshoot at forward for Montreal.

How does all this play out come next April? Let's give them the 8th seed in the East and a first round playoff exit, causing management to completely overhaul the roster of forwards for the 2012-13 season.





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