

# FLYERS/PENGUINS PREDICTIONS



**ROB PARENT**

Injuries, players playing out of position, players not playing up to par ... and a perceived leadership problem.

All of the fallacies that were so easily attached to the Pittsburgh Penguins early in the season have now found their way into conversation about the Flyers and their annual uphill struggle to leave all Eastern Conference playoff peers behind by late May.

Mike Richards needs to set a firmer tone in the locker room, they say, if only because coach John Stevens can only do so much of that.

Beyond that, the defense hasn't been very defensive, Marty Biron is again being questioned in goal, and the alignment of the scoring lines still seem to be a bit dubious.

Foolish fretting, I say.

Don't worry about the Flyers ... they won't lose this series.

Rather, the Penguins will win it, because Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin and Company are too strong up front, and goalie Marc-Andre Fleury has been warming up to recent tasks.

The Penguins have been on a roll and it'll last through this first round. Besides, the Flyers are always cold in the Igloo.

**Pick: Penguins in 6.**



**JACK McCAFFERY**

Through 82 otherwise unpredictable hockey matches, the Flyers demonstrated one consistent trait: They rarely, if ever, did what was expected.

So now that they are expected to lose their first-round series against the Pittsburgh Penguins, all because they wasted an opportunity to gain the home-ice edge in their final game, it means one thing. They'll win.

Not young, not old, relatively healthy and with 34 years of pent-up motivation, having been to the third round last season and tired of Sidney Crosby's act, not a bad road team, equipped with two capable goaltenders and with a coach who works the film projector and the scouting reports until exhaustion, the Flyers are capable of anything. Winning four times against Pittsburgh, then, is not an outrageous proposition.

Make it a Flyers win, with Simon Gagne as a series MVP, quieting the crowd in the Igloo and, for one more week at least, their doubters.

**Pick: Flyers in 5.**



**ANTHONY SANFILIPPO**

This time it will be different.

There are different players on both teams. The Flyers are healthy. The Penguins are not the same team from last season. Yet, there's something about the Penguins that hangs over the Flyers much like they way the Devils used to hang over the Flyers. It's a mental hurdle that the Flyers will have to leap in order to find ultimate success.

They've proven, for one game anyway, that they can shut down both Evgeni Malkin and Sidney Crosby in the same game on the road. It's something they'll have to lean on if they plan to win this series. But, it'll all come down to one thing — can Marty Biron do what he did last season?

The Flyers hope he can. However, I'm not certain it will happen. It's all about momentum and right now the Penguins have it and the Flyers don't. I think it'll swing like a pendulum a few times, and the Flyers could surprise us all - they've done it so many times before - but I just can't get past how they played down the stretch and still haven't shown a sense of urgency. Because of that, I have to give the edge to Pittsburgh.

**Pick: Penguins in seven.**