Written by Jeff Ponder	
Friday, 09 December 2011	05:45

A St. Louis Blues – Winnipeg Jets game does not sound too appetizing now, does it?

Give it about 3 years.

By December 9, 2014, the Blues and Jets will have played each other anywhere from 13-16 times. This is not even including any playoff matchups that may have occurred.

Under the new NHL alignment strategy, there will be four conferences with two of these conferences sporting seven teams and the other two conferences featuring eight teams. Within the seven-team conferences, each team will face-off six times throughout a season. In the eight-team conferences, each team will face each other five or six times, working on a season-by-season rotating basis.

Here are the four new conferences under the new alignment plan:

Conference A (8 teams): ANA, CAL, COL, EDM, LAK, PHO, SJS, VAN

Conference B (8 teams): CHI, CBJ, DAL, DET, MIN, NAS, STL, WIN

Conference C (7 teams): BOS, BUF, FLA, MON, OTT, TBL, TOR

Conference D (7 teams): CAR, NJD, NYI, NYR, PHI, PIT, WAS

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This is where I think that the NHL did a genius job putting together each conference; some rivalries will stay intact. These include Anaheim – Los Angeles, Chicago – Detroit, Boston – Montreal and Philadelphia – Pittsburgh.

The biggest question mark came in Conference B; the Detroit Red Wings have been pushing to move to a more East-based schedule due to having to play along the Pacific Ocean at least ten times a season. This was a problem for the Wings because their Michigan fan base could not start watching the games until at least 10:00 pm EST. Worries among current Western Conference teams were that they would lose big home games against a bitter rival, possibly hurting television ratings and home attendance.

"We played a lot of road games in the playoffs last year in San Jose and Phoenix, and the games were on at 10 or 10:30 at night," Detroit General Manager Ken Holland told NHL.com. "I would talk to fans and they would watch one or two periods and wake up in the morning to get the score.

"Six months ago our thought was we wanted to be in the East, but after looking at this alternative...we felt it was a great compromise and I would say that we're happy."

Detroit now can allow their fans to stay awake for most of their road games, since they will only be traveling to cities like Phoenix and San Jose once a season and then only in the playoffs if necessary.

In addition, teams like Detroit can continue their inner-division rivalries with the Chicago Blackhawks and St. Louis Blues. They also have the opportunity to rekindle with the Dallas Stars, who were a hated rival of Detroit throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The Nashville Predators and Columbus Blue Jackets still have the pleasure of hosting Detroit, while the aforementioned Dallas has joined the party. The Minnesota Wild and Winnipeg Jets will also be crashing in to current Central Division arenas three times a season.

This makes it very easy for each team to find some new rivals. Columbus is still a young franchise that was placed into a very tough division in which to play (Central Division with CHI, DET, NAS, STL). It has been very hard for this team to find its swimming feet and make rivals

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very quickly. Playing six teams six times a season can only help the Blue Jackets claw into a bitter rivalry.

Say what you will of the new alignment. One thing that you have to admit is that by grouping teams into four conferences as opposed to six divisions will create more rivalries. This is an aspect of realignment that can be viewed only as a positive.

Quotes courtesy Dan Rosen of NHL.com .

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