

**1-1-09**

Happy New Year! I wish nothing but the best for each and every one of you in 2009.

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I just got finished watching the Winter Classic on NBC, and although it lacked the snow we witnessed in last year's contest between the Pittsburgh Penguins and Buffalo Sabres, I thought the product was great. I think someone forgot to tell the Blackhawks there are three periods, though. After Chicago skated into the first intermission with a 3-1 lead, the Red Wings stormed back with five unanswered goals. Nevertheless, a storied rivalry + Wrigley Field + New Year's Day = winner in my book.

I'm split between Toronto's SkyDome and Boston's Fenway Park for next year's game. Too bad I'm not the schedule maker.

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How about Zach Tarkir and Trent Campbell? In last Sunday's and yesterday's games for the Atlantic Division's first-place Portland Pirates, these two 2008-09 Stingrays scored the respective game-winning goals.

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Congrats to our all-stars, Travis Morin, Johann Kroll and Michal Neuvirth, on their selection to this month's ECHL All-Star Game, which will be played in Reading, PA, on Jan. 21.

And speaking of all-stars, a pat on the back goes out to former Stingray Joel Irving (2000-2003, 2005-06), who was selected as a starter for this year's Central Hockey League All-Star Game, to be held Jan. 14 in Loveland, CO. "Swirvin" has 41 points in 32 contests for the Arizona Sundogs in 2008-09, ranking among the league leaders in goals and points.

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With Alexandre Parent's second period power-play goal last night for Mississippi, the Stingrays snapped a streak of 35 consecutive penalty kills. The Rays' power-play unit, on the other hand, has converted just four of their last 41 opportunities (9.8%), including one over their last 21 chances.

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Former Stingrays goaltender Daren Machesney's Team Canada fell to Dynamo Moscow yesterday in the Spengler Cup Final, 5-3. Expected to rejoin the Hershey Bears in the next several days, "Cheese" posted a 3-1 record in the tournament for the silver-medalist Canadians.

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Washington Capitals Senior Writer Mike Vogel put together a great article yesterday on the Caps' timeline from this day in 2004 to the present, and the remarkable turnaround they've had:

<http://boards.washingtoncaps.com/index.php?autocom=blog&blogid=59&>

Keep an eye out for the Rays, who got a nod on their 2008 performance.

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“Win together today and we’ll walk together forever.” – Fred Shero

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-Joe

[joe@stingrayshockey.com](mailto:joe@stingrayshockey.com)

**1-6-09**

Through 32 games played last season Travis Morin had registered 35 points for the Rays. This year he's on pace for 92 points, averaging 1.28 points/game.

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Five goaltenders have seen game action with the Stingrays this season, the most since 1999-00 when Rick Adduono's club utilized six netminders (Kirk Daubenspeck, Jody Lehman, Jason Saal, Forrest Karr, Nolan McDonald and Tom Noble).

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Anyone else looking forward to seeing the Canadiens and Penguins take on the Blackhawks and Ducks at this year's NHL All-Star Game?

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After Saturday's jam session against the Rangers, the Capitals' Alexander Semin should team up with Matthew McConaughy and start a bongo band:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B\\_ydsUCzi2E&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_ydsUCzi2E&feature=related)

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Former Stingrays defenseman Sean Collins is mentioned in this week's Atlantic Division notes on NHL.com (scroll to the last item on the page): <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=401828&navid=DL|NHL|home>

And in case you missed it, here's Collins scoring his first career NHL goal last Thursday:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D0mIRmRFg>

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One of the newest editions to the Stingrays roster, forward Mike Curry, was taken 205<sup>th</sup> overall by Los Angeles in the 2004 NHL Entry Draft. *The very next pick?* That would be last season's ECHL Goaltender of the Year and current Florida Everblades backstop Anton Khudobin, taken by the Minnesota Wild with the 206<sup>th</sup> pick.

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I caught this story on USA Today's NHL section today, about the possibility of having NHL games on Christmas Day: [http://www.usatoday.com/sports/hockey/nhl/2009-01-05-christmas-day-games\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/sports/hockey/nhl/2009-01-05-christmas-day-games_N.htm)

I'm kind of split on this one. On one hand, it could be a great opportunity to showcase some of the NHL's best and brightest players on a day where the NBA typically rules the sports roost. On the other, it's one, if not the only, opportunity players get to go home and spend time with their families during the season.

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Eleven different players have registered game-winning goals for the Rays this season. During the 2007-08 record-setting win campaign, 16 different skaters scored game-winners for SC.

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For those who have money left over from the holidays and dig the old-school Broad Street Bullies-era Philadelphia Flyers jerseys, here's your chance to pick up former Stingrays goalie Martin Biron's game worn sweater: <http://auction.nhl.com/cgi-bin/ncommerce3/ProductDisplay?prfnbr=100714708&prmenbr=12717464&aunbr=101061418>

Better get those bids in quickly, though – the auction ends tonight at 9.

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Former South Carolina blueliner Brad Williamson (2001-2003), currently playing for the Ravensburg Tower Stars in Germany, has six points and 26 penalty minutes in 19 contests this season.

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"I've never had major knee surgery on any other part of my body." – Saku Koivu

\*\*\*\*\*

-Joe  
[joe@stingrayshockey.com](mailto:joe@stingrayshockey.com)

**1-9-09**

It seems the Washington Capitals are a tad miffed only one of their players was selected for this year's NHL All Star Game, and who can argue with them?

[http://www.usatoday.com/sports/hockey/nhl/capitals/2009-01-08-asg-reaction\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/sports/hockey/nhl/capitals/2009-01-08-asg-reaction_N.htm)

Arguably one of the league's top superstars, Alexander Ovechkin, was snubbed by voters but made it as a reserve. Meanwhile, Mike Green and Nicklas Backstrom, two up and coming young stars, were left off. Me thinks the Caps have a legitimate gripe.

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It seems the Chicago Blackhawks/Rockford IceHogs affiliation is already paying dividends for the Gwinnett Gladiators – at least against South Carolina. In two head-to-head match-ups since the marriage was announced, former Fresno players have accounted for 8 points while goaltender Joe Fallon has posted two wins.

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In four shootouts this season, SC skaters have converted just three of 18 opportunities (16.7%).

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By my count, with Tom Maxwell getting traded to the Manitoba Moose, there are former Stingrays on 11 different AHL clubs this season. Add in Martin Biron with Philadelphia, Sean Collins in Washington, and Rich Peverley with Nashville, and it's safe to say Stingrays nation is being well represented in North America's top professional hockey leagues.

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Former Stingrays winger Jarrett Konkle, who registered 21 points in 51 games with SC in 2006-07, is featured in an article by the Tribune-Democrat's Mike Mastovich: [http://www.tribune-democrat.com/sports/local\\_story\\_007231653.html](http://www.tribune-democrat.com/sports/local_story_007231653.html)

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Jarkko Ruutu adds biting to his repertoire: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jpSYce-9DA>

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Ty Morris, who played with South Carolina in 2005-06, is now with the Landshut Cannibals (Germany) after collecting a team-leading 49 points this season with Miesbach TEV.

\*\*\*\*\*

"We have only one person to blame, and that's each other." – Former New York Rangers defenseman Barry Beck

\*\*\*\*\*

-Joe

[joe@stingrayshockey.com](mailto:joe@stingrayshockey.com)

**1-13-09**

First off, a hearty congratulations goes out to the "Voice of the Rays," Josh Heller, who was selected for the radio broadcast team at this month's ECHL All-Star Game, to be held at Reading's Sovereign Center on Jan 21. It's a very deserving honor for one of the top up-and-comers in the business.

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As I noted in my weekly Stingrays update for the Washington Capitals' website, the Stingrays' current three-game slide is the longest in 14 months, when Jared Bednar's club dropped seven straight in November 2007.

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Perusing through the online fish wraps, I came across this tidbit from Gary Lawless, who covers the Manitoba Moose for the Winnipeg Free Press:

*TAKE A CHECK: In the last couple of years it's become verboten for hockey players to throw a clean check. Smoke a member of the opposition and be ready to fight. Tommy Maxwell drilled Iowa's Eric Regan with a legal check on Saturday night and immediately Chops thug Brennan Evans moved in to start a fight with Maxwell. We don't get it. It happens all the time in the NHL now and it's begun to creep into the AHL. Not a good trend.*

The full article can be accessed here:

[http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/football/life\\_is\\_good\\_even\\_in\\_des\\_moines.html](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/football/life_is_good_even_in_des_moines.html)

And since his trade to the Moose last week, Maxwell has garnered a fighting major in each of his three games played.

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I missed this one a while back, but USA Hockey Magazine puts together some pretty cool stories. This article features hockey goaltender turned NASCAR driver Joey Lagano:

[http://www.usahockeymagazine.com/story.php?left\\_nav=0811&article=joe-logano-hockey-0811&right\\_nav=normal](http://www.usahockeymagazine.com/story.php?left_nav=0811&article=joe-logano-hockey-0811&right_nav=normal)

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How about the rookie year Columbus Blue Jackets goaltender Steve Mason is putting together? Not only is the 20-year-old putting together Calder Trophy-like numbers this season, but he's crafting a resume worthy of Vezina Trophy talk. Here's his 2008-09 numbers: 25 games played, 15 wins, 6 shutouts (league leader), a 1.75 goals-against average (league leader) and a .938 save percentage (league leader). Not too shabby for a guy that spent the first month of the campaign toiling in the AHL.

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As Chris Farley once quipped, "That one's gonna leave a mark!"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Oef6darWgw>

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In case you missed this past weekend's transactions, former Stingray Rich Peverley was claimed off waivers by the Atlanta Thrashers:

<http://thrashers.nhl.com/team/app/?service=page&page=NewsPage&articleid=403378>

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Former Stingrays defenseman Mike Gabinet, who registered 14 points in 23 contests last season, scored the game-winning goal – his first marker of the 2008-09 campaign – in Springfield's 4-1 win over Portland Sunday evening.

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"He's the kind of guy who will stab you in the back right to your face." – Former St. Louis Blues superstar Brett Hull on head coach Mike Keenan

-Joe

[joe@stingrayshockey.com](mailto:joe@stingrayshockey.com)

**1-16-09**

So I don't want to harp too much on last night's 4-0 loss, but I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't point out a few things, albeit negative. First, it was the Rays' first shutout loss in the Jared Bednar era, a streak of 128 regular season and playoff games. Second, it was the first time this season SC has dropped back to back contests in regulation. Lastly, it was the Stingrays' largest margin of defeat in 2008-09. Let's hope this is the funk every team goes through in a given season. Better to get it out of the way now then, say, late March.

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The Rays aren't the only ones having a hard time finding the win column. The Washington Capitals recently lost three straight while the Hershey Bears, holders of the AHL's best point total, have been outscored 19-8 in a trio of consecutive defeats. As they say, misery loves company.

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In the wake of a player death in its province, the Ontario Hockey League announced that any player removing his helmet or loosening his chin strap in a fight will face a game misconduct and automatic one-game suspension: [http://www.usatoday.com/sports/hockey/minors/2009-01-15-ohl-rule\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/sports/hockey/minors/2009-01-15-ohl-rule_N.htm)

Now, I'm all for reviewing procedures following such a tragedy, but is this really the answer?

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Jeremy Roenick, one of the NHL's most outspoken players, pontificates on the need for players to speak their minds: <http://www.thehockeynews.com/articles/22402-Screen-Shots-Hockey-players-need-to-speak-their-mind-says-Roenick.html>

On an unrelated note, here's one of my favorite JR clips:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B528T8vBVfA>

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If you're a Montreal Canadiens fan, I think you'll enjoy the coverage ESPN.com has devoted to the franchise celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2009: <http://sports.espn.go.com/nhl/canadiens/index>

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If I hit the Powerball jackpot I'm doing this, too: <http://www.thehockeynews.com/articles/22422-THNcom-Blog-Welltraveled-hockey-fan-finishes-quest-just-in-time.html>

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"Our give-a-crap level was like at zero." – Atlanta head coach John Anderson on Sunday's 4-1 loss to division rival Tampa Bay.

-Joe  
[joe@stingrayshockey.com](mailto:joe@stingrayshockey.com)

**1-23-09**

The second half of the 2008-09 campaign officially kicks off tomorrow night, with the Rays looking to put their recent woes in the rear-view window. Hopefully the three-day break gave Jared Bednar's club an opportunity to recharge the batteries before mushing through the dog days of winter and into hockey's second season.

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Please be sure to keep former NHL coach (and one-time Quebec police officer) Pat Burns in your thoughts. Burns, who led the New Jersey Devils to the Stanley Cup in 2003, is battling his third form of cancer in the last five years: <http://sports.espn.go.com/nhl/news/story?id=3849881>

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Game worn jerseys donned by [Johann Kroll](#), [Travis Morin](#) and [Michal Neuvirth](#) at Wednesday's ECHL All-Star Game are now up for bid.

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The NHL All-Star Game and Skills Competition kicks off this weekend, with Montreal serving as this year's host. Here's one of my favorite ASG moments, courtesy of Owen Nolan: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUEIsh8DC8Q&feature=Playlist&p=F819EC242EE75D1B&playnext=1&index=55>

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I came across some newly-released research findings that I thought I'd pass along: <http://graphjam.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/128768601543025573.jpg>

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Here's a feel-good story out of the Steel City: <http://penguins.nhl.com/team/app/?service=page&page=NewsPage&articleid=405538>

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Is the Boston Bruins' Tim Thomas redefining the goaltender position? He looks like a defenseman knocking his man off the puck: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_JRCVcNVBk&eurl=http://sports.yahoo.com/nhl/blog/puck\\_daddy;\\_ylt=AhT7LbLWQgNe76O4uS2.biB7vLYF](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_JRCVcNVBk&eurl=http://sports.yahoo.com/nhl/blog/puck_daddy;_ylt=AhT7LbLWQgNe76O4uS2.biB7vLYF)

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Ever hear of the saying, "If it ain't broke don't try to fix it"? Here's a perfect example: [http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/story/?id=264137&lid=sublink09&lpos=headlines\\_nhl](http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/story/?id=264137&lid=sublink09&lpos=headlines_nhl)

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Who ever thought you'd hear "hockey" and "Miss America" uttered in the same sentence?  
<http://msn.foxsports.com/nhl/story/9120706/Former-goalie-competes-in-Miss-America>

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Ben Nelson, who began his pro career with the Stingrays last spring, ranks third in the ECHL with 11 power-play goals.

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"This one definitely wasn't a keeper. We'll probably burn the tape of it rather than watch it, but we got two points." – Panthers coach Peter DeBoer on his team's 4-3 win over Tampa Bay last Saturday.

-Joe  
[joe@stingrayshockey.com](mailto:joe@stingrayshockey.com)

**1-30-09**

It might get mixed up in the shuffle of headlines on the main page, but here's the link to this week's Behind the Bench with Bednar: [http://www.stingrayshockey.com/news/index.html?article\\_id=902](http://www.stingrayshockey.com/news/index.html?article_id=902)

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I don't know about you, but I'm ready to turn the page on January 2009...

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Congrats to my former colleague – and one-time Stingrays ticket representative – Mike Bellis, who recently was tabbed General Manager of the EPHL's Jersey Rockhoppers.

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The Stingrays are represented by the hockey hotbed state of Maryland for the third straight season, with goaltender Jeremy Duchesne (Silver Spring) joining the team this week. He follows Stephen Werner (Chevy Chase) and Tim Judy (Bowie), who suited up for the Rays over parts of the last two campaigns.

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One of the things I asked Bedsy yesterday was about the possibility of Grant McNeill returning for a rehab stint in the Lowcountry. Since G-Mac's early-season injury with Hershey, the Bears have signed veteran enforcer Kip Brennan, leaving a guy like Tom Maxwell expendable. Bedsy wasn't sure, though, saying he hadn't talked to Hershey yet, but that "anything is possible."

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I couldn't resist including Alexander Ovechkin's performance in last weekend's Breakaway Challenge in Montreal: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwwkW1PBUCc>

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Note to any equipment managers out there: Don't try putting a hat on Ray Emery: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG6Z40040s>

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Since returning from Europe, Davis Parley has posted a 2-5-1 mark with a 3.80 goals-against average and a .899 save percentage for the Central Hockey League's Tulsa Oilers, owners of the league's second-lowest point total (27).

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"I think he is kind of the hockey cliché, isn't he?" – Colorado Avalanche defenseman John-Michael Liles joking about teammate Ryan Smyth and his mullet, missing teeth and other typical hockey player features.

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-Joe

[joe@stingrayshockey.com](mailto:joe@stingrayshockey.com)