

Ducks hope playoff success finally starts vs Stars

Written by Administrator
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ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — From the moment Stephane Robidas was traded from the Dallas Stars to the Anaheim Ducks last month, he realized he might end up facing his former teammates in the first round of the playoffs.

Although the veteran defenseman is giving up everything he knows about the wild-card Stars, Robidas realizes his postseason fate rests on the powerhouse Ducks' will, not any special knowledge of an upstart opponent that had Anaheim's number in the regular season.

"There's things that I know, but it's up to the players on the ice," Robidas said. "They really did me a favor to give me a chance to play for a Stanley Cup when they didn't know if they were going to make the playoffs. There's no hard feelings, but they know I really want to beat them."

Anaheim hosts the Stars in Game 1 on Wednesday night.

The Ducks earned the Western Conference's top record and another Pacific Division title, setting records for wins (54), points (116), goals (263) and comeback victories (26) while finishing one point behind Boston for the Presidents' Trophy. None of it means anything to captain Ryan Getzlaf unless Anaheim gets past Dallas, which squeaked into its first postseason since 2008.

Getzlaf, Corey Perry and Teemu Selanne have won just one playoff round together since the Ducks captured their only Stanley Cup title in 2007. Coach Bruce Boudreau has led Anaheim back to the top of the standings, but the Ducks haven't advanced in the postseason since 2009, losing in the first round to seventh-seeded Detroit last year.

"Nobody remembers the team that had the best regular season in franchise history," Getzlaf said. "It's all about winning in the playoffs. I've been here nine years, and the only year we ever talk about is the year we won the Cup."

After five seasons out of the playoffs, the Stars are happy to be playing still, but they've also got

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ample reason to think they can beat Anaheim. Dallas won two of three against the Ducks this season, and its speed is a challenge for Anaheim's defense and goaltending.

"A big thing with the playoffs is you've got to hate the other team, so that's what we're going to be doing right from the puck-drop," Dallas forward Tyler Seguin said.

Five more things to watch in this Western Conference matchup:

DYNAMIC DUOS: The hockey world knows all about Getzlaf's partnership with Perry, but Seguin and Jamie Benn have formed their own formidable tandem in Dallas. All four players finished in the top eight in NHL scoring: Getzlaf was second with 87 points, while Seguin was fourth with 84 points, Perry fifth with 82 and Benn in an eighth-place tie with 79. They're all carrying considerable weight on their shoulders in this series, with Getzlaf and Perry determined to shake off the Ducks' recent postseason woes while Seguin and Benn look to become star playoff performers.

GOALIE GLUT: Boudreau hasn't named the Ducks' starting goalie, and there's a good chance he'll choose a rookie. Frederik Andersen and John Gibson have never played in an NHL postseason, but they took over the crease from veteran Jonas Hiller late in the regular season. Dallas will have a golden opportunity to rattle a rookie netminder, but the Ducks are confident Andersen and Gibson are both ready for the pressure.

SEGUIN'S REDEMPTION: The gifted center and Stanley Cup champion reaffirmed his stardom in his first season in Dallas, racking up monster offensive numbers on his line with Benn and Russian rookie Valeri Nichushkin. Yet Seguin's postseason performance will be scrutinized after he managed just one goal in 22 games last summer for Boston, a performance that likely contributed to his departure from the Bruins. A big playoff run cements Seguin among the NHL's top handful of centers.

COACH'S CHALLENGE: There's little doubt Boudreau is a remarkable regular-season coach after revitalizing the Capitals and the Ducks in rapid succession, winning six division titles in seven finished seasons. But his teams have won just two playoff rounds, and he's under pressure to produce a long postseason run.

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EASY PICKINGS?: Even Boudreau realizes his team is a popular upset pick in the first round, what with its recent playoff results, its lack of a clear-cut starting goalie and a defense likely featuring two rookies. Boudreau doesn't mind lowering expectations, but the upstart Stars aren't expecting an easy time against a heavy, fast opponent. "It's a fun time of year," first-year Dallas coach Lindy Ruff said. "I want to see a lot of our guys who have never been in it and how they react. That's going to be the exciting part."