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Rink Report: Countdown to the All-Star break

Top games of the week:

- **Carolina Hurricanes at New York Islanders (Monday, 2 p.m. ET):** With the Atlanta Thrashers losing again Sunday, Carolina has a chance to build its Southeast Division lead.
- **Minnesota Wild at Vancouver Canucks (Monday night, 10 ET):** The Wild and Canucks are one point behind Calgary for first place in Northwest Division.
- **Washington Capitals at Pittsburgh Penguins (Monday night, 7:30 ET):** Washington (21-21-5) has won three in a row. The last time it was at .500 was Oct. 24 (4-4). The Capitals are 15-7-4 since **Bruce Boudreau** took over as coach on Nov. 22.
- **Minnesota Wild at Calgary Flames (Tuesday):** With four teams scrambling for the Northeast lead, division games are crucial.
- **Detroit Red Wings at Anaheim Ducks (Wednesday):** Is this a preview of the Western Conference Final? These two teams now seem like the best in the west.
- **All-Star Game at Atlanta (Sunday):** 30 days until the trade deadline after the All-Star break.

Pond champs:

Led by MVP **Dave Shute** of Richfield, Minn., Wright's Home's Almost 40 beat The Whiskey Bandits 8-4 Sunday to win the open division of the third annual U.S. Pond Hockey Championships on Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis.

The four-on-four competition, which featured four divisions, was held over three days. There were 225 teams and more than 1,400 players from 34 states competing. Both teams in the open finals were from the Twin Cities area.

Shark hurt:

San Jose Sharks center **Curtis Brown** went on injured reserve and left wing **Tomas Plihal** was recalled from Worcester (Mass.) of the American Hockey League to replace him.

Brown injured his hand in the Sharks' 6-3 loss to Detroit Saturday. Brown has one goal and three assists in 24 games this season.

Plihal made his NHL debut in three games with San Jose last season. He spent the first two months of this season on the Sharks' injured list with a shoulder problem before scoring 11 points in 20 games in Worcester.

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Around the rinks:

During Sunday's game between the New Jersey Devils and Toronto Maple Leafs, the Prudential Center in Newark showed the competing NFC championship game between the New York Giants and Green Bay Packers on televisions throughout the arena. Fans were invited to remain after the hockey game to watch the remainder of the football game on the center-ice scoreboard screens. ... Edmonton Oilers defenseman **Matt Greene** returned Sunday after missing 34 games with a broken ankle. He sustained the injury on Nov. 30. ... Rangers defenseman **Marek Malik** was scratched Sunday after taking two of New York's eight penalties in Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss at Boston. ... Tampa Bay's **Johan Holmqvist** hasn't allowed a goal in more than 121 minutes, the Lightning's longest shutout streak of the season. ... Colorado Avalanche forward **Paul Stastny** was placed on the injured list Saturday, two days after he had his appendix removed. Stastny, who had been chosen for Sunday's NHL All-Star game, could be sidelined for up to three weeks. He has 17 goals and a team-high 49 points in 46 games this season. ... Florida's **Jacques Martin** became the 10th coach in NHL history to reach 500 victories after the Panthers rallied for a 2-1 win Friday at New Jersey. He is tied for ninth on the all-time list with Hall of Famer **Toe Blake**. ... Chicago Blackhawks forward **Jason Williams** will be out at least six weeks after surgery Friday to repair a sports hernia. He scored seven goals, including two game-winners.

Contributing: Kevin Allen, staff and wire reports

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