



A drastic realignment is on the horizon for the National Hockey League thanks a measure approved by 26 of the league's 30 owners this past weekend in Boca Raton, FL. The NHL Players Association still has to approve the changes, but the league expects little resistance as the new format is friendlier to travel and puts an emphasis on bitter rivalries.

As with any solution, this one is not perfect nor is it foolproof. There are plenty of pros and cons to the new structure of the league, many of which addressed by Greg Wyshynski of Yahoo's Puck Daddy blog in [this piece](#) .

For those who want a simple recap of the new changes from reading my article, they are as follows:

Here are the conferences:

East

West

Conference A

Conference B

Conference C

Conference D

Carolina

Boston

Chicago

Anaheim

New Jersey

Buffalo

Columbus

Calgary

New York Islanders

Florida

Dallas

Colorado

New York Rangers

Montreal

Detroit

Edmonton

Philadelphia

Ottawa

Minnesota

Los Angeles

Pittsburgh

Tampa Bay

Nashville

Phoenix

Washington

Toronto

St. Louis

San Jose

Winnipeg

Vancouver

Teams will play two games against the teams outside their division (note: currently, the divisions are being referred to as conferences). Each team will have one game at home and they will make up 44 of the 82 scheduled games. The remaining 38 games will be played within the division.

The top four teams in each division (or conference) will play each other in the first two rounds of the playoffs. For example, A1 would play A4, B1 would play B4, etc. After the first two rounds, the final four teams left standing will play for the right to go to the Stanley Cup. The pairings for that semifinal round are not set in stone yet.

### **How will this impact the Blue Jackets?**

In terms of who benefits the most from the format, the Blue Jackets are one of the biggest winners. They will only have to travel out west one time rather than the two or three trips that are currently required. All 28 games against the Eastern Conference will be 7 pm puck drops, except the occasional afternoon/early evening start time, which will help TV viewership immensely.

There is still an outside chance that the Blue Jackets move to either Conference A or B depending on if the Phoenix Coyotes are relocated in the near future. This format leaves the door open even more for that scenario.

### **Who are the biggest losers?**

Easily, Florida and Tampa Bay. They lose their closest geographic opponents in Washington and Carolina and have the [longest average distance to travel](#) for their games.

Another loser in all of this is the Boston Bruins. While they maintain rivalries with Original Six teams Montreal and Toronto, they will only play the two New York teams twice and have just one home date against both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. I have to imagine that one of the no votes came from the Bruins.

The Carolina Hurricanes may have been another no vote in all of this. Despite having a raucously passionate fan base, the team has fallen on hard times and their struggles have affected attendance and interest. Now, they're thrown into a division with four really good teams and the pesky New Jersey Devils. Teams that their little market of Raleigh will have a very hard time contending against.

### **Future prognosis?**

One issue that has been brought up quite a bit is that the playoff matchups are going to grow redundant very quickly.

Another issue is that the fifth best team in one division might be decidedly better than the fourth place team in another. Because of the format, the fifth place team who is better will be sent home for the playoffs. Not having the top eight teams in the playoffs is a bad business practice.

Renewed rivalries will make the regular season far more interesting and create for some serious

drama as the calendar flips to March and April.

In a league with several financially-suffering franchises, the realignment makes sense. It alleviates travel and has almost an interleague play sense to it, similar to baseball. In the unbalanced schedule, fans could go a few years without seeing a team in the opposite conference. Now they'll have the chance to see that team every year. Teams in southern California will be happy to see Philadelphia every year.

Overall, it will be a wait-and-see approach to this new format. The flaws are out in the open and so are the positives. Many pundits believe that the positives outweigh the negatives. Apparently 26 owners agreed.

For those of you hoping Columbus would get shifted to the Eastern Conference, there's always a chance that Phoenix relocates to Kansas City.