

SPORTS SLANTS

- By Ray Shank

In case you don't understand that new play-off setup the NHL announced last week -- effective 1974-75 -- it might be an idea to explain it in part of this column.

First, I'll list last year's final NHL standings, with team and points in each division, then it'll be easier to explain.

East: I. Montreal-120; 2. Boston-107; 3. N.Y. Rangers-102; 4. Buffalo-88; 5. Detroit-86; 6. Toronto-64; 7. Vancouver-53; 8. N.Y. Islanders-30.

West: I. Chicago-93; 2. Philadelphia-85; 3. Minnesota-85; 4. St. Louis-76; 5. Pittsburgh-73; 6. Los Angeles-73; 7. Atlanta-65; 8. California-48.

Now, if the NHL had decided to have this proposed new playoff system for the 1972-73 season, and, say, the top six teams would have made the playoffs, five teams from the east division would have made it, and only one from the west ... Chicago ... since five of the teams in the east had more points than the second place squad in the west.

By 1974-75 (next season), the NHL will have 18 teams, with the addition of Washington and Kansas City.

At that time, the league will be divided into four divisions. And 12 teams will qualify for the playoffs. But a team finishing in second place in any one division won't necessarily qualify for a playoff berth.

Only one team from each of the four divisions will automatically qualify for the play-

offs -- the divisional winner. And each one of those four teams will qualify for the quarter-finals.

The other eight contending teams will qualify by total points.

Division I teams will be: N.Y. Rangers, Philadelphia Flyers, Atlanta Flames, N.Y. Islanders.

Division II: Montreal, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles and Washington.

Division III: Boston, Buffalo, California, and Toronto.

Division IV: Chicago, Innesota, Kansas City St. Louis and Vancouver.

Let's say Montreal, the Rangers, Boston and Chicago finish first in their respective divisions--which, by the way, is very likely.

Those four teams automatically draw a bye into the quarter-finals.

The other eight teams will qualify according to the number of points they accunulated during the regular season. The fifth-highest team in the final-standing points column will meet the 12th-highest, the sixth-highest will face the 11th-highest, the seventh will play the 10th and the eighth will play the ninth.

Those playoffs will be two-of-three series.

That will leave eight teams to battle it out in the quarter-finals, and, unfortunately, it hasn't yet been explained just how that will work.

One thing about the new playoff system, though ... only the better teams will make it and the competition, come playoff time, should be exciting to watch.

Don't know whether you realize it, but if continued page 10

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