

M.A.F. for M.V.P.

by Luke Bruss

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Finally, some recognition for Marc-Andre Fleury. After years of being vastly underrated by hockey experts, and occasionally villified by the fans, there's a small but steadily growing stream of Hart (MVP) Trophy talk for the Pens' #1 netminder; even the Vezina Trophy (best goaltender) isn't out of the question. His stats alone (2.30 GAA and .918 SV%) are strong enough to put him into the discussion, but then throw into the mix the

unusually high amount of injuries to the entire core of the team and you get down to what the Hart Trophy is all about. Usually, a team that loses one - nevermind their top three centers like the Pens - is in serious trouble. But, through adversity the Pens jelled and Fleury has solidified into one of the NHL's elite goaltenders.

As of March 25, the Pens have lost 303 man games to injury, including: Sidney Crosby, 34 games and counting; Evgeni Malkin who was lost for the season in early February; and Jordan Staal who missed the entire first half of the season. With such key losses, the idea of the Penguins playing hockey deep into the Spring were starting to wane in the minds of some hockey pundits...and then the Flower began to bloom.

In an interview with the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, Head Coach Dan Bylsma said of Fleury, "I don't think it can be overlooked that he should be in consideration for both of those trophies. He's been the backbone of our team."

In the Stanley Cup Finals of both 2008 and 2009, Fleury proved he was a big game goalie. Now he's starting to develop into a big-name goalie. M.A.F. has been invaluable to the Penguins and without him it's likely that the brand new Consol Energy Center's first spring would surely be a silent one. THAT is what the Hart Trophy is all about, and that is why he deserves to be given serious consideration for one of the most prestigious individual trophies in hockey.