

## President's Cup winners gear up for playoff hockey in West

IRVING, Texas (AP) — With the memory of last year's first-round playoff collapse and a looming opponent with a history of giant-killing, the NHL-best Dallas Stars have much to prove against the San Jose Sharks Wednesday.

But this year's Stars insist they are a harder team than the one that embarrassed itself with a Game 7 overtime loss to the lowly Edmonton Oilers. They hope to show it by making quick work of the Sharks.

"I think we're a little more confident, and a little more experienced than last year," said Stars center Joe Nieuwendyk, the team's leading scorer with 39 goals and 30 assists. "We faced a lot of adversity this season."

Adversity came in the form of injuries to key players, but Dallas relied on its depth to finish with a league-best 109 points and the second-fewest goals allowed, 167.

The Stars are quick to say that this year's regular-season numbers haven't bred overconfidence.

"We're not going to be naive," Stars right wing Pat Verbeek said. "Maybe we were a bit naive about Edmonton and the success (4-0 regular-season sweep) we had against them."

The Stars have not had the same measure of success against the Sharks, who are 6-2 against Dallas over the past two seasons. San Jose

has not lost a game in Reunion Arena since Dec. 17, 1995.

Add to that ugly picture the fact that only half of the teams who have finished first in the regular season since the 1942-43 season have won the Stanley Cup. Suddenly, it's not just the Eyes of Texas upon the Stars, it's the whole NHL.

It could explain why Edmonton, Phoenix and San Jose

**"We're going to be a team to be reckoned with."**

**Joe Murphy  
Detroit Red Wings**

wanted Dallas as their first-round opponent.

"I'm sure they've looked at our team over the last little while and they see a little down streak, and they think they can take advantage of it," Stars goalie Ed Belfour said of the teams wishing upon the Stars.

While he did not name names, Sharks winger Joe Murphy made it clear it was Dallas he was talking about.

"We're going to be a team to be

reckoned with," he said. "We're going to give teams everything they can handle."

The Sharks might have reason for their first-round underdog hubris, since they killed off the top-seeded Detroit Red Wings with a staggering upset in 1994. San Jose repeated its spoiler role again in 1995 by downing the No. 2-seeded Calgary Flames.

Since then, the Sharks have added veteran depth that includes six Stanley Cup winners and a seven others who have been to the finals.

By comparison, eight Stars have their names on the Cup, and four others have been to the finals.

"They play a real simple game, they score two or three goals a game, and really buckle down defensively," Stars center Mike Modano said.

That sounds suspiciously like Dallas, who likes to score first and put on the defensive stranglehold.

"Dallas plays more our style," Sharks center Bernie Nicholls said. "They're a defensive team and they work hard. That's what we are."

The goaltending duel is by far the most intriguing of the playoffs. Belfour joined the Stars as a free agent after only 13 games with the Sharks last season, thereby giving San Jose fans a revenge motive in watching him lose.

## Lure of NBA Draft too great for high-schoolers

HOUSTON (AP) — It used to be a rare story line: a high school basketball player is so good, or unable to qualify academically, that he opts to skip college and go directly to the NBA.

Moses Malone did it back in the 1970s and it was a big deal. Now, it happens every season.

Last week, Alief Elisk star Rashard Lewis decided to pass up offers from Kansas and Florida State for a shot at becoming the next Kobe Bryant, who is trying to be the next Michael Jordan.

A week before, Korleone Young decided his career at Hargrave Military Academy was good enough schooling to qualify him for the NBA draft.

Is it good for impressionable teen-agers to take the money, hope

for a big shoe contract and skip the maturation process of spending at least a couple of years in college?

Malone, whose son Moses Jr. has committed to play for Clyde Drexler at the University of Houston, knows what is ahead for high schoolers like Lewis.

His advice: let the kid make his own decision.

Times have changed since Malone went directly from Petersburg, Va., to the old American Basketball Association.

"When I made the decision, they didn't have guaranteed contracts," Malone said. "Now, high school players have guaranteed contracts if they go in the first round and back then, money wasn't like it was now."

Malone went without the

money then and he thinks Lewis made the right decision now to take the money.

"I just wish no one would tell him what he should do," Malone said. "He has to just stay strong. He's going to have a lot of people advising him. He's got to be his own man. He's going to have different kinds of people going at him, people out in the real world, people who will try to make his decisions for him as a person and as a player."

Playing will be even tougher.

"He's just got to prepare himself to face players stronger than him and he's got to prepare himself for the coaches and the travel," Malone said. "He's going to play 25 games and think the season is over."

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