What can you say about the Detroit Red Wings? This team keeps its core together every year and seems to never be fazed by any depth changes.
This will likely frustrate teams yet again in 2011-12.

Coming in

Forwards: None.

Defensemen: Mike Commodore, Ian White.

Goaltenders: Ty Conklin.

On the outs

Forwards: Kris Draper (retired), Mike Modano (unsigned).

Defensemen: Ruslan Salei (Lokomotiv Yaroslavl)*, Brian Rafalski (retired).

Goaltenders: Chris Osgood (retired).

*Sadly, Ruslan Salei perished in the Lokomotiv plane crash on Wednesday, September 7.

2010-11 team statistics

NHL standings: 1st in Central Division, 3rd in Western Conference, 6th in NHL.

Goals for: 2nd in NHL (3.13 GF per game).

Goals against: 23rd in NHL (2.89 GA per game).

Power-play: 5th in NHL (22.3%).

Penalty-kill: 17th in NHL (82.3%).

Same 'ole Red Wings

As stated above, this team just never seems to have a major overhaul. Why would they?

The Red Wings have finished 1st in the Central Division in nine of the last ten seasons. Last year was no exception; Detroit finished with 104 points, just 5 points ahead of the Nashville Predators and 7 points ahead of the Chicago Blackhawks.
It is very easy to see why when looking at the individual accomplishments from last season:

- Henrik Zetterberg finished the season with 80 points, tying him for 8th in the NHL. His 56

assists also placed him in 5th for total assists.

- Defenseman Nicklas Lidstrom, who turned 41 years old in April, placed 2nd in the NHL for scoring by a defenseman with 62 points. His 16 goals tied him for 5th among defensemen as well. These numbers helped him win his 7th James Norris Memorial Trophy as the league's top defenseman.

- Pavel Datsyuk, Detroit's marquee center, still had a strong season despite injuring his hand in December and not returning until late in the season. Datsyuk registered 59 points in 56 games, which means he would have scored about 86 points had he been healthy all year.

- Four players had 20+ goals on the roster last season, including late-bloomer Danny Cleary, who netted 26 goals. Cleary was a career third-liner before joining the Red Wings, scoring 41 goals in seven NHL seasons (with Chicago, Edmonton and Phoenix). Since putting on the red sweater in 2005, Cleary has amassed 98 goals over six seasons.

Loss of Rafalski Brings in New Relief

Brian Rafalski, a three-time Stanley Cup winner, announced his retirement earlier this summer, leaving quite the void in the Red Wings' defensive corps. Already finishing 23rd in the NHL in goals-allowed, the Red Wings and GM Ken Holland knew they had to make a few moves on the blue line. Enter Mike Commodore and Ian White.

Commodore, 31, is not known for his scoring ability. Racking up 104 points in 454 career NHL games, Commodore will instead punish opposing forwards with his hits and intimidating play in front of his own net. This is a style of defense that the Red Wings have been very familiar with in the past and something that Rafalski lacked. Commodore's lack of foot speed may be the most undesirable quality, as it was definitely a big contribution to his -8 plus/minus rating last season.

White, 27, is a steady defenseman who can fill in on any defensive pairing. He will not score many goals either (2 goals in 62 games last season for the Flames and Sharks), but he also knows how to stay out of the penalty box (only 20 penalty minutes last season).
White will likely fill in as a sixth or seventh defenseman, giving some more playing time to youngster Jakub Kindl.

Net Presence

On any other team, allowing 2.89 goals-per-game would be a blinding problem. Not on this roster.

Still, if a team expects to make it to the Stanley Cup Finals, they will need a solid goaltender to backstop them when the goals just are not coming easily. The Red Wings are hoping to get that out of 27-year old Jimmy Howard.

Howard was not exactly what the Red Wings were looking for last season. Recording a 2.79 GAA, Howard finished 35th among goaltenders who played in over 25 games last season in the statistic.
His .908 save percentage ranked him 33rd among eligible goalies.
As a team, the Red Wings did allow 30.7 shots against per game (16th in the NHL), but Howard simply has to be better to keep the Red Wings as an elite team in the West.

Injuries will not be a Problem

As the Red Wings have shown time and again, injuries will not stop these guys from winning more often than not. As one of the smartest organizations in sports today, the Wings have a system of maturing their talent in the AHL to a much later age than most.
When these players get a call-up to the NHL roster, they have already seen every key situation as a member of the Grand Rapids Griffins.

Last season, the Griffins had four players finish with 50 or more points (Ilari Filppula, Tomas Tatar, Jamie Tardif and Francis Pare). This is quite the accomplishment considering it is a rarity to see more than five players crack the 70-point plateau in the entire AHL.

Simply put: this team will always have a player to plug-in if one of the stars go down with a long injury.

Always at the Top

Don't be surprised to see the Red Wings finish at the top of the Central yet again. This team rarely shows any signs of weakness, so when they actually do the other teams in the league will have to capitalize.

The Red Wings saw three players retire with one still on the fence (Modano), so the only thing that may slow this team down is age. Don't count on it though; the Wings have been hearing that since the lockout but still manage to dominate every season.

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