Elliotte Friedman's weekly *30 Thoughts* column on the CBC website is currently the best read in hockey. Friedman is insightful, articulate, knowledgeable, fair, and most importantly, interesting. He has sources and contacts in the hockey world that most could only dream of. He has an ability which is rare in this day and age - providing a balanced and reasonable opinion on the league, the players, and all 30 of the clubs.

Each week I will post my own observations (I couldn't completely steal Friedman's idea so I'll pick a number other than 30) – with a heavy emphasis on the fantasy side of hockey, of course. Prospects, goalies, sleepers, busts, it will all be covered each week.

1. With 10 goals through 36 games, Nick Lidstrom is on pace for a career year. He has already surpassed his goal output from last season (nine). He looks to be in line for his seventh Norris

Trophy, and he has the Wings at the top of the Western Conference once again. It will be interesting to see how the team performs with Pavel Datsyuk and Dan Cleary out for extended periods of time. Lidstrom's style of play is one reason for his stellar performance at the age of 40 – he simply doesn't put himself in areas where he has to absorb physical contact. Oh, and he's a fantasy hockey monster – on pace for 23 goals, 75 points, 40 power play points, and 185 shots on goal.

2. An underrated move in the summer was Florida's acquisition of Mike Santorelli. It is hard to make a name for yourself in the hockey world playing in cities like Nashville and Miami, but Santorelli has found his way onto my radar. He's on pace for 24 goals, a feat even more impressive considering who he lines up with most of the time (Steve Bernier and David Booth). His assist total is far from impressive, but Santorelli bears watching in most league formats.

3. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. The motto didn't work for Darryl Sutter and Olli Jokinen, but it appears to be working in Los Angeles. Various coaches have tried many a time to unite Dustin Brown and Anze Kopitar on the top line, but their efforts have been met with a glaring lack of chemistry between the team's two best forwards. For whatever reason, Kopitar and Brown are clicking this season. Kopitar is one of the better playmakers in the league, and Brown has better hands than most (even himself, at times) realize. Brown set career highs in 2007-08 in goals (33) and points (60). Look for him to smash both of those marks in 2010-11.

4. Very astute acquisition by Montreal in James Wisniewski. He is tough and capable of logging important minutes at both ends of the ice. His presence hurts the short-term value of PK Subban a bit, as both defensemen shoot right and play the right side. Wisniewski is a great defenseman to own in all fantasy leagues, and his plus-minus should return to non-Islander numbers in no time (he currently sits at minus-18). This trade makes no sense for the Islanders, but I've given up trying to analyze what that team does from a decision-making perspective.

5. I mentioned Steve Kampfer a few weeks ago in the ramblings, but after scoring his first career NHL goal the other night, I figured it was time for another reminder. He was tearing the AHL apart before getting the call up to Boston earlier this month (16 points in 20 AHL games as a defenseman). Kampfer isn't a noted goal scorer (in fact he hasn't scored more than three goals in a season dating back to his 2005-06 high school campaign).

6. Paging Nathan Horton… paging Nathan Horton…. The big winger has three goals in his past 29 games. The same issues that dogged him in Florida are back – lack of drive, motivation, desire, consistency. It is frustrating to see a player with such an impressive skill set do so little with it.

7. Tough break for the Swedes, as they will be without Gabriel Landeskog for the remainder of the tournament (high ankle sprain). In addition to having an awesome name, Landeskog is a heck of a prospect. He's the best player to come through the Kitchener system since Mike Richards. Without trying to stereotype against Europeans, Landeskog quickly endeared himself to his North American teammates with a few fights in his first couple of OHL games. He's big, gritty, responsible, and very talented with the puck. I'm not a prospect expert but I would consider this guy a dark horse for the first overall pick next summer.

8. I'll put on my contrarian hat today – unlike Dobber, I haven't been impressed with Zack Kassian all that much. He is playing pretty good hockey, but he isn't dominating like an almost 20-year-old should. Brayden Schenn has looked pretty good too, but again, he should. He's

played at the NHL and AHL and has the size and strength advantage over most of the opposition. I do like Kassian from a fantasy perspective though, especially with Buffalo craving a gritty forward who can produce.

9. The Americans as a team have been underwhelming (so far). One player has really impressed me though – defenseman Justin Faulk. Faulk was drafted by the Hurricanes in the second round last summer. He has 15 points in 18 games with Minnesota-Duluth this season, and he skates and moves the puck with confidence. He's probably two years away from NHL action.

10. The Canucks are winning almost 58% of their faceoffs. Tough to compete with that. Dating back to the mid 90's, I can't find a team that was so proficient in the faceoff circle.

11. Calgary's situation is bleak, but it isn't a disaster. Two reasons: they have their own first round pick in 2011, and the summer of 2012 (no, the world is not ending) opens the roster up. The Flames will clear about $17 million in bad contracts, and at that point the only players with deals still remaining are Kiprusoff, Giordano, Regehr, Bouwmeester, Stajan, Backlund, and Bourque. The tough part – a farm system thinner than Ryan Getzlaf's hair, and trying to build through free agency (simply doesn't work). I don't think Jay Feaster is the right man for the job (he got Tampa over the hump, but he struggled trying to retool/rebuild), but he has a half-season job evaluation ahead of him.

12. Back to the World Juniors – the two most impressive Canadians have been Ryan Johansen and Jaden Schwartz. Johansen is more physical than I had thought, and Schwartz is a magician with the puck. I've made mention many times of the "it" factor that certain players possess (essentially hockey sense and a few other intangibles) – Schwartz possesses it in spades. Now isn't the time to acquire these two in keeper leagues (lots of media/hype right now). Wait a few months and then toss a few feelers out.

13. There are players who are better in fantasy leagues than they are in real life (Mike Green during the past few years, for example), and there are players who are better in real life than they are in fantasy leagues (Jonathan Toews). Toews has the skill set to be a 90+ point player, but he plays such a responsible and dependable game for Chicago – not sure he hits that total for a while.

14. I'm struggling in the DobberHockey Experts League, but it isn't for a lack of trying. Drafting Rask in a weekly league killed me for a few months – I finally bit the bullet and overpaid for Tomas Vokoun, a notorious second-half monster. My IR is pretty full as well – Callahan, Staal, Parise, and Okposo.

15. If I owned Brayden Schenn, I'd think about selling high over the next few weeks.