

## 15 Points to Consider

Written by Jeff Angus

Sunday, 09 January 2011 13:34 - Last Updated Monday, 10 January 2011 15:27

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Elliott Friedman's weekly *30 Thoughts* column on the CBC website is 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. Most importantly, 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. Henrik Zetterberg's performance against the Canucks on Saturday night was the best single-game performance I have witnessed from an opposing player against Vancouver all season. He was all over the ice – playing hard against the Sedin twins, setting up the only Detroit goal, and finishing the game with almost 25 minutes of ice time. He also finished above

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50 percent in the faceoff circle, no small accomplishment against the likes of Sedin, Ryan Kesler, and Manny Malhotra. Zetterberg is an underrated player, especially here at DobberHockey. There are two reasons as to why. Firstly, he plays so hard defensively that he doesn't put himself in positions to produce offense on a consistent basis. He is not the type of player to leave his defensive responsibilities in hopes of creating offense. Secondly, he's the type of player who plays better in the postseason, and most pools don't count playoff points.

2. It was great to see Matt Calvert score his first career NHL goal over the weekend. For those who don't know much about the feisty winger, you are about to find out why he is one of my favourite prospects. I was excited to see Brandon play a few years ago. Their top line featured two highly-touted 1<sup>st</sup> round draft picks in Brayden Schenn and Scott Glennie. However, it was their Zach Parise-like line mate who I couldn't ignore. Calvert skated miles that game, and on the ice, he never seemed to be away from the puck for more than a second or two. At 5'9" and tipping the scales at 175 pounds, Calvert is far from an imposing physical presence. Many expect him to develop into a solid third line winger capable of chipping in with 12-15 goals. However, if there is one thing I have learned in my years of watching hockey, it is to never discount a skilled player with a lot of hockey sense and even more heart.

3. Roberto Luongo is many things – elite goaltender, former captain, and a great embellisher (it's the Italian in him). Above all else, he is stubborn. He would never admit that playing less is helping his game, because he has the mindset that playing in 81 games is one too few. However, he has looked as focused, sharp, and confident between the pipes as he ever has since coming over from Florida in the summer of 2006.

4. An underrated part of Vancouver's recent success has been the physical play of the defensemen, especially Dan Hamhuis and Keith Ballard. Kevin Bieksa is also playing his best hockey since his breakout 2006-07 campaign. Having defensemen who can inflict serious damage makes forwards think twice about going in first to the corners. Some video evidence to

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back my claim up:

{youtube}fQQGOYd6F0o{/youtube}

{youtube}Q599OC7UM-4{/youtube}

5. I have always taken Don Cherry at face value – a proud Canadian whose biases often get the best of him. However, I was disappointed with his handling of the Russia/Canada World Junior aftermath. Instead of praising the Russians for playing their hearts out (including team captain Vladimir Tarasenko who finished the game with a serious rib injury), he brings up the drinking on the plane incident. Sure, they aren't "good Canadian kids," but they had just won the most important tournament of their lives in enemy territory with almost zero fan support. I wasn't surprised by Cherry's comments, but a small part of me was foolishly hoping to see a change of face from him.

6. Back to fantasy hockey – Los Angeles defenseman Jack Johnson's keeper league value just went up with the announcement of his seven-year contract extension. The cap hit (about \$4.5 million per season) was below what I was expecting. He's having a fantastic season anchoring a defence that has had its fair share of issues (injuries to Willie Mitchell, Drew Doughty, and Matt Greene). Johnson took a while to find his stride at the NHL level, but his impressive first round series against Vancouver last season (seven assists in six games) was his coming out party. He's found the perfect balance between offense and defence, as his production (on pace

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for over 60 points) and ice time (just shy of 25 minutes per game) indicate.

7. The Blue Jackets need to make a major move. That team has way too much talent to continue to struggle like this. Steve Mason isn't a good goalie, and there is a huge separation between the quick, skilled forwards and the immobile defensive group. If you look around the league, the teams that are struggling all share one common trait (aside from a poor record) – a lack of quality skating and/or puck moving defensemen. Columbus, Edmonton, Calgary, Long Island, Toronto, and New Jersey all have the same issue. Anton Stralman isn't the right fit, Kris Russell is more of a two-way defenseman, and John Moore isn't ready to quarterback the power play yet.

8. Mike Green has six points in six games. He was the best Washington skater on Saturday night against Florida. Green's on pace for 39 points and you can bet your house that he'll end up with more than that. He is an obvious buy low candidate, but I don't see many poolies eager to shop him, even with the miserable first half he has experienced. You may have to overpay (relatively, of course) to acquire him. I'd still toss a few feelers in the water to see what it would take.

9. The Panthers and Tomas Vokoun's agent are talking contract extension. Jakub Markstrom isn't NHL ready yet (and at times this season he hasn't looked AHL ready either). There aren't many teams in the league that could use a starting goalie, and those that could probably wouldn't be able to give Vokoun the money he would want. I think the Evgeni Nabokov situation last summer was an eye-opener for many goalies. Nabokov eventually priced himself out of the league, and Vokoun won't want to do the same thing. Even on Florida he is a very good goalie to own in almost all pool formats. He is a notoriously strong second half player as well.

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10. TJ Oshie is still a few weeks away from returning to the St. Louis lineup. He has been skating but the ankle is still very stiff and his range of motion remains limited. The Blues have fared pretty well in his absence (thanks in large part to the strong play of Vladimir Sobotka on the second line), but he is the straw that stirs the drink offensively. Oshie will never be as good in fantasy hockey as he is on the ice (unless someone finds a way to quantify energy, tenacity, and heart). St. Louis is also a difficult team to emerge offensively on right now because they have such a balanced attack.

11. The Jamie Langenbrunner trade is a pretty obvious sign that Brad Richards is going nowhere this season. Dallas still needs a puck moving defenseman (as do about 15 other teams), but they are getting offense from a variety of players, and strong goaltending from both Kari Lehtonen and Andrew Raycroft. The decision to cut bait on Marty Turco last summer is looking genius.

12. Dobber mentioned in Sunday's ramblings that he is starting to sour on Andrei Kostitsyn. I've *always* been sour on him – he simply doesn't compete on a night-to-night basis. With the skill set he possesses, it's a huge frustration watching him play hockey. I've never owned him in any pool and never will. There is a reason he finds himself in the doghouse of every coach he has played for.

13. Most underrated star player in the league today? This question is very relative, as it depends a lot on what market you are in. In terms of fantasy hockey, I'll toss a vote in for Keith Yandle. Yandle is my favourite defenseman in the league, but he still doesn't carry the value he should. He's right up there with Erik Karlsson, John Carlson, and PK Subban in terms of keeper league value, and Mike Green, Dan Boyle, and Nick Lidstrom in terms of one-year league value.

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Yandle does everything very well, and he possesses a sixth sense that most other defensemen don't. He's on pace for 12 goals and 60 points on a team that ranks 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> in terms of goals for and power play efficiency, respectively. Imagine him on Vancouver or Pittsburgh?

14. Nikita Filatov had a goal and two assists on Saturday night in the AHL. I'd love to hear your thoughts on the enigmatic Russian. I've never been a fan and don't see the 90-point upside. His skill set and athletic abilities are elite, but he doesn't process the game on an elite level. He may learn to do so, but hockey sense is sure a lot harder to develop than a wrist shot is (just ask Ryan Kesler).

15. Don't be surprised to see one or both of Dustin Jeffrey/Eric Tangradi up with the Penguins down the stretch and into the postseason. Tangradi has more upside but Jeffrey is the better player right now. Both are good enough to play regular minutes in Pittsburgh's top nine, but the Penguins don't want to completely gut their farm team (yet).