The list is back! Hopping back on the Hodgson bandwagon, the Jets top line, Weber and Parise, Yakupov, my 2011-12 sleeper of the year, and more....

1. Cody Hodgson has been and still is a very polarizing figure within the Canucks organization. He was hyped (for good reason) as a prospect heading into the 2008 Entry Draft. His OHL and international track record is nearly flawless. He was a leader and scored huge goals in key situations. A back injury in the summer of 2009 clouded his NHL future, and seemed to create a bit of a wedge between the Canucks and Hodgson (and his agent at the time, Don Meehan, who wouldn't be someone Mike Gillis sends Christmas cards to). Both sides never came out

and fully admitted it, but it wasn't hard to read between the lines to sense the tension. Hodgson has changed agents to Rich Winter since that time.

However, something happened last season. The two sides got together behind the scenes, and since that time there has been nothing but positives in the media from camp Hodgson as well as the Canucks organizaton. The biggest news of the past few months is Hodgson's return to 100% health. He's been busting his butt training with Gary Roberts and the BioSteel crew back East. He has the skill to be a very good top six forward, and now he has the health, too.

As I have said before, skill is often half the battle. The other is opportunity. Last season, Hodgson didn't have much of one with the Canucks. The team was deep at center (even after Manny Malhotra's injury), and Hodgson saw spot duty in a fourth line role. He looked more and more comfortable with each shift, but it is tough to do a whole lot offensively when you are playing with chip-and-chase wingers. This season, the opportunity is huge. Not only is second line center Kesler out for a few weeks to begin the season, but Raymond is also out for a while. Hodgson may shift over to the left wing, or he may temporarily replace Kesler. Whatever happens, he needs to be once again put in the discussion with other good prospects with legitimate NHL careers ahead of them. I soured on him over the past two years because of what I perceived to be a sense of entitlement (at least that is how it seemed), but his promising career appears to be headed in the right direction once again.

2. The recent news of Dustin Byfuglien's weight gain unfortunately isn't all that surprising. Byfuglien has struggled with motivation off the ice for his entire career (he played at close to 280 pounds during his time in the WHL). His weight fluctuated between 245 and 255 during the final season in Atlanta, but he was recently weighed in at close to 290 pounds after getting arrested for boating while intoxicated. With a big contract now tucked in his back pocket (as well as a Cup ring on one hand), where is the motivation to come from?

3. An interesting read on the true importance of Steve Ott to the Dallas Stars (hint: he is very important). Ott is a very good player and should see some consistent minutes in the top six this season. His production from 2010-11 is extremely impressive considering his zone starts (he started off in his own zone at an inordinately high rate). His offensive totals should jump back to north of 40-45 points if he plays some time with Benn and Eriksson on the second line.

4. I've made this point a few times this summer, but I am still surprised that the Rangers, a team with cup aspirations, are going with so much youth on the back end. Aside from Steve Eminger, who won't play more than a sixth or seventh defenseman role, Dan Girardi is the elder statesmen at 27.

5. The hot ticket at the trade deadline last season was Brad Richards (much ado about nothing). The hot ticket at the 2012 trade deadline could very likely be Shane Doan. The future in the desert is still up in the air, and the Coyotes are going to struggle mightily in the tough Pacific Division. Doan is an unrestricted free agent next summer, as well. The move wouldn't be popular in Phoenix, as he has been with the franchise since its move from Winnipeg, and is the leader on the ice and in the community. Still, good business sense doesn't always agree with feelings and emotion. How would a package including Cory Schneider sound? Phoenix doesn't have any sure things between the pipes for the future, and Schneider would be a guy they could build around for the next decade.

6. For those of you in fantasy leagues that count PIM, keep an eye on Vladimir Sobotka at your

draft. A natural center, Sobotka moved to left wing last season at times, and looked pretty good there too. With David Perron's return questionable, the Blues have a hole on the left side in the top nine. Scott Nichol was signed to center the fourth line, and Sobotka has the talent to play more of an offensive role than the fourth line role would entail. He had 29 points and 69 PIM in 65 games last season. With a slight bump in ice time, he could be a 40-point, 80-90 PIM winger. Nothing earth shattering, but solid depth for those of you in deeper leagues.

7. Rich Peverley impressed the heck out of me during Boston's Cup Final victory over the Canucks. Two things stood out – his creativity and his versatility. Like most of Boston's forward group, Peverley is a natural center. He shifted over to the right wing seamlessly, a move he'll have to make on a full-time basis with Krejci, Bergeron, and Seguin up the middle. Peverley is a fantastic playmaker and he'll see lots of power play time with the Bruins. Additionally, the right side has two vacancies with Recchi retiring and Ryder signing in Dallas.

Peverley had 55 points one season ago in Atlanta, playing 18:40 per game. He had only seven in 23 games with Boston last season, playing just over 15 minutes per game. He won't see 18 or 19 minutes unless Nathan Horton gets injured, but he should see an increase to 16 or 17 minutes. He'll make the most of it, too.

8. I am fully convinced that Nail Yakupov is the best prospect in the hockey world since Sidney Crosby. That includes Tavares, Kane, Stamkos, Toews, Backstrom, Hedman, Nugent Hopkins, and Hall. I don't advocate tanking in fantasy pools, but he may be worth the one year sacrifice.

9. Justin Goldman is going to rock the Goalie Post . He is starting to gain some much deserved acclaim for his (crazy) passion regarding the position of goaltending. A regular piece on NHL.com is going to open up the mainstream hockey world to his opinions. Personally, I am most looking forward to a reliable email each day with the starting goaltenders. I probably lost five or six wins last year because of this (I employ a strategy in a few leagues where I own the starter and his back up on the same team).

10. Dobber made the point regarding the Flyers in the 2011-12 guide – on paper, they seem to be more of a "team" now. There isn't a top line center on the wing on the third line (Giroux or Carter). There isn't a top line center on the right wing (Carter), either. Players fit where they should. Another team with this kind of structure is Los Angeles. Mike Richards is a fantastic player, and he sets up the rest of the forward group. Jarret Stoll goes from mediocre second line center to very good third line center. Dustin Brown has a legitimate center to play with. The Kings also have three puck movers (Doughty, if he ever re-signs, Johnson, and Martinez) and three defensive defensemen (Mitchell, Scuderi, and Greene) with clearly defined roles.

11. Shea Weber and Zach Parise are both slated to become free agents next summer (Weber restricted and Parise unrestricted). Both will command at least $7-8 million in the open market. Not-so-bold-prediction: Nashville will likely trade Weber if they can't get him to re-sign. As things stand right now, Parise looks more likely headed to the open market than he does extending his contract with the Devils. Both players want to win. A team with a decent history of winning may somehow be able to afford *both* of them…

The Red Wings are going to clear over $20 million in cap space next summer (including Nick Lidstrom). The year after, they are going to clear another $6 or $7 million. Imagine one of/both ending up in Hockeytown? I would say that the rest of the West would be in for a world of hurt, but we don't even know which conference Detroit will play in next year. Food for thought.

12. Who is your pick to come last in the NHL this coming season? Much to the chagrin of my Canadian brethren, my pick is the newly re-minted Winnipeg Jets. A lot of unknowns up front, a defense that thins out behind Tobias Enstrom, and an untested young goaltender. However, my main reason for picking them to win the Yakupov sweepstakes is the ridiculous travel schedule. Six games against Carolina, six games against Tampa Bay, six games against Washington, and six games against Florida. Unless the judge court orders the Oilers to start Khabibulin in 50 or 60 games, the Jets should be the unfortunate favorite here.

13. That being said, I see career years coming from all three of Winnipeg's big line – Ladd-Little-Wheeler. On paper, the line seems to have all of the elements to complement each other well. Little has to adjust to center coming from the wing position, and Wheeler has to play with more consistency. If those two issues can be sorted out, I don't see any reason why the trio can't combine for 150 to 170 points.

14. My pick for the 2012 Calder is Gabriel Landeskog. Three reasons: 1) He's NHL ready. 2) He has little competition on the wing in Colorado, and the competition he does have is from three band-aid boys (Mueller, Jones, and Hejduk). And 3) forwards generally win the award.

15. I've tabbed a "sleeper of the year" for the past four seasons, to mixed results. My last four picks, in order, have been: Parise (2006-07), Brent Burns (2007-08), Steve Bernier (2008-09), and Peter Regin (2009-10). Hitting .500, still more than enough to earn the batting title in baseball. (How good can a sport really be when hitting successfully three out of every 10 times

is considered a success?)

My pick for 2011-12? Patrik Berglund.

My line about baseball was in jest, I love the sport.