This month, I take a look at Mason Raymond's recovery, Josh Harding, Henrik Zetterberg's struggles, why I hate the shootout, and more.

This column is a part of the month-long contest the Province newspaper is having. Please go to this link and give it the thumbs up!

1. Considering how spotty his defensive play is, it is amazing Marc-Andre Bergeron has been able to make a nice career for himself in the NHL. It just goes to show how potent his point shot is (arguably the best in the league). He is a power play specialist in every sense of the word – Bergeron's shot forces teams to respect it, which opens up ice for the likes of Stamkos, Lecavalier, and St. Louis. What other players around the league have been able to carve a career out of one or two elite assets?

2. The word underrated gets tossed around a lot, but one player who deserves the status is Florida's Jason Garrison. Garrison was the most reliable defenseman on the team last season, pairing with Mike Weaver. He didn't contribute much offense overall (18 points in 73 games), but he did show a few flashes throughout the season. This year, the offense has arrived (five goals in 12 games). His two best offensive traits are his shot and his ability to jump into the play. He doesn't have the vision to be a power play quarterback, but he's developed into a very good top four defenseman who can play in all situations. Oh, and he's an unrestricted free agent next summer. He'll be in line for a nice raise from the current $700,000 he makes. Using Dale Tallon's logic, I'm seeing a four-year, $20-million contract for Garrison.

3. Mason Raymond's training and rehabilitation is going very well. He's been able to do a lot of dry land based stuff, including some explosive lateral movements and Plyometrics (which is great, as it shows his back is able to support external resistance and create power). His skating is still in the basic stages, but he'll be back at 100% at some point this season. He's a restricted free agent next summer, and it will be interesting to see where he fits in to the lineup upon returning.

Cody Hodgson has been very good in the past few games, but he's quite obviously a natural center. Raymond wouldn't likely get tossed right onto the second line, though. Expect him to be

eased back into even strength play on the fourth line, while seeing a regular shift with the second power play unit.

4. Where does Eric Fehr fit in to the Jets lineup once he is healthy? The Ladd-Little-Wheeler line has been decent, but they haven't been able to consistently create offense, which isn't good enough from a top offensive unit. Little is still contributing in other ways, but I'm not sold on Wheeler there. Fehr could give that line a similar look – size and scoring. The second line with Kane, Burmistrov, and Antropov is starting to click, and I don't see Claude Noel splitting them up.

5. Why has Ville Leino struggled in Buffalo? A lot of times players try to do too much when they receive large contracts with a new team. Leino's bread and butter is winning puck battles and creating offense down low and along the half wall. He has looked uncomfortable at center (as many Flyer fans expected he would), and the Sabres have many similar players on the wing.

Because of his contract, he'll be given a longer leash to pick up his play. It isn't fair to other players in the organization, but it is just how these things go. Teams want to show that they didn't make a mistake with a signing or trade, especially early on. Leino, on paper, should settle in nicely as a second or third line winger contributing 15-25 goals and 45-60 points. Is that worth $4.5 million per season? Probably not, but Buffalo knew they were making an overpayment when they signed him.

6. Troy Brouwer's offensive production through 10 games hasn't been overwhelming (five points), but his overall game has been very solid. He leads the entire league in hits, and he's opened up a lot of open ice for Ovechkin and Backstrom thanks to his physicality and strong board play. Brouwer is trending up right now and I'd be looking to acquire him in both one-year and keeper leagues.

7. What is going on with the Islanders goaltending situation? Rick DiPietro made his third straight start last night. Al Montoya served as the backup, as Evgeni Nabokov sat out with a minor injury (although it sounds like is very close to returning). I try to avoid goaltending situations with two goalies competing for one spot, as it is very frustrating to project starts. A situation with three goalies is even more difficult to get a read on.

Nabokov strung together a few very good starts before his injury, and DiPietro is as unreliable as it gets. If I had to pick a goalie for this year, I'd go with Nabokov. If I had to pick one for a keeper league, I'd go with none of the three. I like Montoya, but it isn't a good strategy to wait around for a goalie who may not even be a backup (in his case, due more to circumstance than skill).

8. Why is the shootout so much worse than the penalty shot? This article sums it up nicely:

- *It's not a part of the game.*
- *The other team didn't do anything wrong for you to get that attempt at the net. It's just the way it is.*

- *The goal, if scored, does not count as a goal on the scoreboard. It's some other quasi-scoreboard.*
- *There's the whole "wait, how's this game worth three points when if it ended five minutes ago it'd only be two points?" thing. But that applies to overtime as well.*
- *The rarity of it? There have already been 160 shootout attempts taken in 27 shootouts this year. And it's only early November. There were 1,059 attempts at the net in 149 shootouts a year ago, and those numbers were down from the year prior.*

I wonder how long it will take for the NHL to ditch the shootout and go to 10 minute overtime – five minutes of four-on-four and five minutes of three-on-three? If they end up doing so, I'd try and get Scott Niedermayer to come out of retirement. Imagine him skating around with only five other players on the ice?

9. Anaheim winger Emerson Etem is off to a blazing start in the WHL. Buzzing the Net , one of the best CHL blogs on the 'net, takes a look. Etem has 22 goals in 16 games, and he's been held off the score sheet only once. He has a shot at being the first 60-goal scorer in the WHL in the last 11 years.

"Etem is apparently one of only five players in the past 16 years to be averaging a goal per game this far into the season. Over this time, there has been only one other player with a similar total."

Etem is going to star for the United States at the upcoming World Junior Championships – if you want to trade for him, you better do it quickly.

10. Henrik Zetterberg is off to an awful start this season, with only two goals and four points in 11 games. After a great first couple of games, Detroit as a team has struggled mightily, as well. The two are not merely coincidental – Zetterberg is arguably as important to the success of the Red Wings as Datsyuk and Lidstrom are. Detroit lost two veteran coaches this past summer – Paul MacLean to Ottawa, and Brad McCrimmon to the KHL (McCrimmon tragically died in the fatal Lokomotiv plane crash). Brian Rafalski retired, but Detroit lost no other notable players last summer.

Back to Zetterberg – he's a proven star who had a full summer to train (his first in a while). Detroit is finding out that it isn't easy to win consistently in the NHL. I'd be looking to buy low on him. Obviously basing predictions entirely on the past is far from a perfect strategy, but it is one that proves to be true more than 50% of the time. Apply it consistently and you'll be winning more often than not.

(Zetterberg had a goal and three shots on goal last night after I wrote this.)

11. Josh Harding started his fourth straight for the Wild last night. Has he managed to spark a bit of a goaltending controversy? Nik Backstrom makes $6 million and has a no trade clause, but Harding is letting his play do the talking. I had a chance to acquire him this past summer for a small return, and am kicking myself for passing on the opportunity. He's an injury risk but the talent has always been there. As I mentioned above with Leino, salary often comes before

performance when teams decide their lines and starting goalies, but Harding will play more this season than most people had expected. Hockey Wilderness takes a look:

"The Wild have used a goalie tandem before. Heck, for years it was Manny Fernandez and Dwayne Roloson. Then, Roli the Goalie was traded, and Manny the... um... emotional basket case goalie took the reigns. Even then, Harding was to be the new backup. Then Harding's back injury forced the Wild's hand and they inked Backstrom. It wasn't long until Backstrom outplayed Fernandez and the team was his.

Then, the long term, high dollar contract with the no-trade clause that reads something statistical about him not being able to be traded while he is still the number one in town.

At this point, it is very, very early, but Backstrom is not currently the number one on this team. To think otherwise is foolhardy. Eventually, Harding is going to need a break, and Backstrom will play. What if he shuts out the opponent? Does Harding go back in? Does Backstrom? Is it a "ride the hot hand" situation? Is it now a tandem?"

12. Carolina fans, feel free to chime in. What, exactly, is wrong with Eric Staal?

13. Pekka Rinne's contract is a big one, not only in dollar amount ($49 million over seven years), but also in regards to how it affects the rest of the Nashville lineup. I have a hunch Shea Weber is gone within the next year, and I think that move may be sped up if one of two things happens:

- Ryan Suter signs a big contract extension in the next few months
- Nashville struggles and misses the playoffs

The former is more likely to happen than the latter, especially with Rinne around. Nashville was in a bit of a Catch-22 situation here. They want to prove to their players (like Suter and Weber) that they are serious about winning. Signing one of the best goalies in the world for the next seven years certainly shows that. However, they also committed a significant portion of their salary budget to Rinne, and now there is less of the pie to go to the likes of Suter and/or Weber.

14. If you were in a fantasy hockey pool with the following rules, who would you rank as your top three?

- Only defensemen
- Keeper league
- Only goals and assists count
- No salary cap

My picks (in no particular order) – Keith Yandle, Erik Karlsson, and Kris Letang.

15. Jamie Benn is going to be a contender for the Art Ross Trophy at some point in the next five years. He is the total package.