

15 Prime Cuts

Written by Jeff Angus

Monday, 16 January 2012 18:42 - Last Updated Monday, 16 January 2012 23:43



This week, I take a look at Toronto's best player (spoiler alert, look above), a sleeper in 'Big D', some prospects to target for next season, an unknown AHL star in the making, and more.

1. New Jersey center Adam Henrique has had a very impressive rookie season. He took full advantage of the injury to Travis Zajac, and he has refused to give the Devils any reason to take him out of the top six. Henrique had only one point in his first six games, but since then, he has been remarkably consistent. 14 points in 14 November games, 14 points in 15 December games, and six points in six January games (to date). Having wingers like Parise and Kovalchuk hasn't hurt, either.

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2. With Mike Ribeiro out until February (MCL injury), look for Tom Wandell's production to increase dramatically. Ribeiro has already missed the last three games, and during that time Wandell has been centering Loui Eriksson and Brenden Morrow. Unsurprisingly, his ice time has increased, as well. In the three games before Ribeiro was injured, Wandell played 12, 10, and nine minutes, respectively. In the most recent three games, he has played 18, 14, and 15 minutes, respectively. If you are looking for a short-term offensive fix, Wandell is a great choice right now.

3. Really, really nice to see Peter Mueller back again. The Avalanche took a huge risk when they traded Chris Stewart away last year, and having Mueller on the shelf for most of the season compounded the lack of depth on the wing. Mueller is a really talented player who has been battling serious concussion issues over the past few years. Adrian Dater of the Denver Post [wrote a really good piece](#) on Mueller and the struggles he has faced.

"And yet, Mueller has come back again, when everybody doubted it would happen. Still, he could be right back in a dark world of pain and uncertainty with the next hit. It takes guts to keep coming back to live a dream."

4. Nashville's management and coaching staff is really high on prospect Gabriel Bourque, and for good reason. Bourque has supplied energy and offense in spades since being called up last week (two points in three games). He's been skating on a very effective third line, featuring Nick Spaling and Jordin Tootoo. After scoring 18 goals last season in the AHL, he had only two this season through 25 games. He was never a significant offensive producer in junior, but he looks like another solid and reliable forward churned out by the Predators organization. Now if they could get a game breaker or two.... (Did someone say Radulov?)

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5. Sticking with the good news, Edmonton prospect Taylor Fedun is slated to begin skating soon. Fedun suffered a broken leg after falling awkwardly into the boards chasing down an icing during the preseason. He was looking like one of Edmonton's better defensemen at the time too, which made the injury even more awful. The Oilers, as we all know, have a porous defensive core. Fedun is still a ways away from even being healthy, but this is a huge step on the road back.

6. Back in August, I posted by yearly [fearless forecasts for the season](#) . Some are looking good... others, not so good. Went out on a (long) limb on many of them, but that was the point of it. Matt Gilroy scored a goal yesterday, and now only needs 19 more to make good on my projection for him.

7. Mark Barberio, a 21-year-old defenseman playing for Norfolk in the AHL, is having a tremendous season. He has 35 points in 37 games, along with a solid plus-20 rating. The Lightning could use a puck mover or two on the back end. Barberio was drafted in the 6th round back in 2008, and he had three double-digit goal seasons in the QMJHL for Moncton before turning professional. Keep an eye on him.

8. Dale Tallon took a gamble when he traded for Brian Campbell this past summer, and Campbell is making him look like a genius. We often struggle with separating a player from his cap hit, and Campbell got a lot of criticism for failing to play like a \$7 million defenseman each night. He's a really good top two/three defenseman on most teams, and the Panthers are

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leaning on him heavily from an offensive standpoint. He's on pace for over 60 points while playing close to 27 minutes a night. Maybe not \$7 million numbers, but you could do a lot worse.

9. John Tavares has 26 points in his last 20 games. He's on pace for 82 points, but I wouldn't be surprised to see him flirt with 90-95. He's turned his game up another gear over the past six or seven weeks. There aren't many players better with the puck around the net, and he's established terrific chemistry with Matt Moulson. In the most recent poll, I asked whether people would trade Crosby for a Tavares/Eberle package in keeper leagues, and the answer was a resounding yes.

10. Speaking of Moulson, he's on pace for 41 goals and has 28 points in his last 22 games. He depends on Tavares for his production, but it isn't a feast-or-famine situation – he's quietly developed into one of the better goal scorers in the league.

11. Caught most of the Penguins/Lightning game yesterday... Evgeni Malkin looked possessed. He really, really wants it this season, and it shows with his play. He ended up with five points, and could have finished with six or seven. Taking the over in Lightning games seems to be working out quite nicely for the betting recently, as well. I wonder how well Steve Yzerman is sleeping right now? The Lightning currently sit in last place in the Eastern Conference, only seven months after being one game away from the Stanley Cup Final.

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12. Kris Letang is getting close to returning. He has been cleared for contact, and now it is just up to the team to decide when they want to put him back into the lineup. He'll have a huge boost on Pittsburgh's power play. I doubt many poolies out there would be looking to trade him right now, but I'd do my best to try and acquire him before he suits up for his first game back.

13. Mike Green is out for at least a month after undergoing abdominal surgery. Crosby and Green were once the premier players at their respective positions... how quickly things change. Green's injuries are/were due in large part to his reckless playing style, and it is something he will have to change if he ever manages to get healthy again. In the meantime, expect Dennis Wideman to continue his solid offensive season (on pace for 15 goals and 59 points).

14. If you have decided to throw the towel in for the rest of the season, here are two players I'd do everything possible to trade for – Ryan Johansen, and Cody Hodgson. The way Hodgson has looked this season, I wouldn't be surprised to see the Canucks move Kesler to right wing next season (looking ahead, I know). Johansen is big and strong and really skilled – if/when the Jackets get some talent on their roster, he's going to be the guy carrying them. I bet he hits 80 points before Rick Nash does.

15. It is rare that a player in Toronto could be considered underrated, but Mikael Grabovski is exactly that. He had 58 points last season (in 81 games), and is on pace for 56 points this season (in 82 games). Consistency to say the least, and it is even more impressive considering the struggles of his linemates from last season (Clarke MacArthur on pace for 47 points after 62 last season, and Nikolai Kulemin on pace for 34 points 57 last season). Grabovski is the engine that drives Toronto – he's their best defensive forward, and on many nights their most physically involved as well.