This week, I take a look at a few prospects likely to crack the NHL next year, the fantastic and underappreciated Miikka Kiprusoff, and more.

1. Emerson Etem is having an incredible season in the WHL. Buzzing the Net compares his season to some of the best single-season offensive outputs in league history. Etem has become the first WHL player to score 50 goals in 50 games since Layne Ulmer back in 2001. Some more perspective:

“The other thing we need to consider is that in 2001, there was an average of 7.1 goals a game in the WHL, compared to just 6.7 this season. These sort of things to make a slight difference, for instance, a 50-goal season in 2012 is worth "just" 48 goals in 2001. Etem's feat will never be able to match up against some of the great performances from the 80s simply because there's less scoring to go around: the game is not as wide open, defensive-minded coaching strategies have taken into effect, and goaltending is vastly better now than it ever was.”

Looking at the list of WHL standouts, and it isn’t a guarantee that Etem will be a great pro. Nigel Dawes, Jeremy Williams, and Pavel Brendl all were unable to become good NHL players. Eric Fehr has shown flashes of it at the NHL level, but injuries have gotten in the way of his offensive development.

Conversely, Jordan Eberle, Joffrey Lupul, and Jamie Benn are all very good NHL players and were all prolific goal scorers in the WHL. Etem has the physical attributes of a Lupul or a Benn (big and strong and a great skater).

2. Anaheim has a number of young wingers who could be in the NHL next season. Perry, Ryan,

Cogliano, and Beleskey are the only top-nine wingers signed through next season. The Ducks will likely bring in a veteran (depending on what happens with Teemu Selanne), but that still leaves a few open spots for the likes of Etem, Devante Smith-Pelly, Kyle Palmieri, Pat Maroon. Smith-Pelly and Palmieri are probably the favorites, but Etem's incredible season is impossible to ignore. Maroon has been a force at the AHL level as well.

3. The Minnesota Wild are getting zero secondary scoring right now, and this piece from Hockey Wilderness
paints a grim picture for the near future. Several very good prospects are on the way for the next few years (most notably Mikael Granlund, but keep an eye on Jason Zucker, Zack Phillips, and Charlie Coyle), but they won't help Minnesota as they continue to freefall down the standings.

"Are there any quick fixes on the horizon?

In a word, no. There are very few players who are actually on the trade market that can produce offense on their own, which the Wild would need. It's pretty clear that the offensive woes require a star player to fix. It took an offensive star like Heatley to snap both Brodziak and Johnson out of scoring slumps, and they fell right back into their black hole once they were separated. The problem is that there are really only two stars on the market: Rick Nash or Jeff Carter
. Nash may not be moved until the season ends, and I doubt the Wild want the next 10 years of Carter's deal."

4. Elliotte Friedman's weekly 30 Thoughts is arguably the best read in hockey. I have also been really enjoying Katie Baker's weekly piece over on Grantland. In her most recent piece, Katie takes a look at Braden Holtby and Michal Neuvirth in Washington, and what the future holds for both of them.

"It's hard to shake the odd treatment of Neuvirth — so publicly cold! — or the bizarre tour of duty assigned (granted?) to Holtby."

5. The KHL is expecting Alex Radulov to honor the final year of his deal with Salavat Yulaev. I personally wouldn't read a lot into the quotes from KHL president Alexander Medvedev. I have a feeling the KHL could be using Radulov as a bargaining chip as they negotiate with the NHL regarding participation at the 2014 Olympics in Sochi. Radulov is far and away the best player in the KHL, and losing him to the NHL wouldn't be good for the league. If I were a betting man, I'd say Radulov is back in the NHL next year.

6. Are the Islanders managing Nino Niederreiter's ice time appropriately? Kevin Schultz takes a look.

"What the coach is trying to do is shield his 19-year old player from those questions and complaints. At the NHL level, the microscope can be very critical of how players perform. Just ask Josh Bailey who spent his first year in the NHL as a 19-year old and has shown both flashes of confidence and self-doubt that can make for a bumpy ride. If the NHL environment is a tornado that can chew up and spit out a player, the AHL is a sunny walk in the park. By playing Niederreiter on the team's fourth line, Capuano is trying to shield Niederreiter from as much of that tornado as possible. With an average time on ice of 9:12 per game, judging Niederreiter on his stats is a lost cause, so you've got to judge on what you see on the ice."

Niederreiter was too young to play in Bridgeport of the AHL this season. I'd expect him there next year, unless he has a really, really strong camp. The Islanders have rushed prospects before (Bailey is a great example of this), and I doubt they want to repeat their mistake with Niederreiter.

7. I linked to Bobby Holik's blog last week, and I am going to do it again this week. A few days ago, Holik shared his thoughts on what makes Detroit so great (could be a three word essay "Lidstrom and Datsyuk", but that wouldn't be an interesting read).

I 100% agree with this:

"One hallmark of the Wings is their ability to identify a player's strength and put him into a position or role to succeed in. This is certainly not always the case with many other NHL teams, where too many teams try to have a player play against strengths. I always try to explain to younger players that long successful careers are not only for top players. Role players with the right attitude, work ethic and good coaching can make impact in the NHL for many years. Tomas Holmstrom is an example of this."

Guy Boucher mentioned it last summer to his players as they left to train on their own. If you are a skill player, practice your puck handing, shooting, and passing. Obviously shoring up weaknesses is a big part of improvement, but don't let it take away from what makes you good.

8. DJ Powers from Hockey's Future takes a look at the top 10 defensemen in the NCAA . At the top of the list is Anaheim prospect Justin Schultz, who could have a Cam Fowler-like impact as a rookie with the Ducks next season. Also of note – Los Angeles prospect Derek Forbort is 6'5" and over 200 pounds already. Forbort turns 20 in March, and could be turning professional in the summer, as well. He's got a very intriguing skill set (known as an offensive guy).

9. Ottawa prospect Jakob Silfverberg (who snuck that 'f' in there?) believes that he is ready for the NHL. Silfverberg on the extra year spent in Sweden:

“"It's a big step to take, and I didn't feel mature enough to take that step. I needed this year to make sure I'm ready for it and now I'm sure. I´m ready."

To the question if he would return to Sweden next season if he got sent to the AHL he answered, "No, my goal is to play in the NHL, if Ottawa thinks I need time in the AHL to reach that goal, thats what I'll do."”

Silfverberg has been compared to Daniel Alfredsson in terms of how he plays the game. He won’t be an elite top line talent, but he will very likely develop into a steady winger capable of playing in the top six. Ottawa has a number of good young forwards who will be cracking the lineup in the next season or two.

10. Alex Pietrangelo is very, very good. I’d be throwing the kitchen sink at whoever owned him in my league right now (not literally, as it would be hard for him to accept the trade while knocked out). Pietrangelo does everything at an elite level, and the offense has arrived in a big, big way. He’s over a point-per-game for the last 20.

11. In 45 games under Ken Hitchcock, the Blues have 11 shutouts.

12. A few years ago, we saw the slow death of the NHL goalie market. It was hard to get full value when trading a goalie, but that is going to change this summer. There are a handful of teams with messy goaltending situations, and the demand to solidify that weakness will lead to higher returns for teams with excess goaltending talent. It will be interesting to see how Buffalo handles the Ryan Miller situation as well (he doesn't seem happy there at all right now).

13. For all of those teams lining up to trade for Rick Nash (I don't think the line is as long as the media is leading us to believe) – save your money and open your wallet on July 1st for Zach Parise. A (significantly) better player. I have a hunch he ends up in Detroit.

14. Don't forget about the awesome (and free) line combinations tool in the Frozen Pool section. You can see who players are skating with for the most recent game or the most recent three games. Tommy Wingels is seeing time with Clowe and Couture on the San Jose second line, and his production has benefitted (two points in three games, playing about 15 minutes per game). Just one example of how to use this tool to nab some short-term fixes.

15. Miikka Kiprusoff’s fantastic season is getting lost in the shuffle a bit. This is the best hockey he has played since the 2004 playoff run. No NHL goaltender has played more games or minutes in the last three years than Kiprusoff. He's a work horse and has carried a medicore Calgary team to a position far beyond where they should be. Very likely the MVP for many fantasy teams out there as well, especially in weekly leagues (he rarely misses games).