I have a few general rules when it comes to building a team in a fantasy hockey keeper league. One of the more important ones is to not plan beyond a two or three year window. You are not building a real NHL club, and too often fantasy hockey poolies place an emphasis on youth and prospects over proven veterans with gas still left in the tank. So using my general rule, take a look at your team(s). Can you realistically say you will have a shot at winning the league at some point within the next two or three seasons? If not, time to scrap the rebuild and start adding proven NHL talent.

Keeping my rule in mind, I have compiled a list of the top ten keeper league left wingers to own (assuming standard keeper league rules and scoring categories). Using the two or three season scope, I had to balance proven production with young players on the verge of breaking out. I hope you enjoy!

1. Alex Ovechkin – Washington Capitals

Age: 24

Contract: $9.54 million/season, signed through 2020-21

Ovechkin is arguably the best fantasy hockey player in the world, and unarguably the best left wing. He scores, he shoots, he takes penalties, and he is always a plus-player as well. He has scored over 50 goals in four of his five seasons in the league, and has failed to break the century mark in points only once. Ovechkin has averaged 54 goals and 79 games per season so far in his NHL career. Say he plays 10 more seasons at an elite level. That would leave him with 809 goals at the age of 36 (or, about 80 goals less than Wayne Gretzky). Expecting him to score 54 goals every season for the next decade may be something only Bruce Boudreau sees as a possibility, but it is interesting nonetheless. Simply put, he is a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ kind of player. The question of him breaking 70 goals in a single season is when, not if.

One year upside: 120 points

Three year upside: 120 points

2. Ilya Kovalchuk – New Jersey Devils

Age: 27

Contract: 2010 UFA

Kovalchuk is currently a man without a home for next season. He was surprisingly acquired by the New Jersey Devils at the trade deadline back in March, but failed to push them over their recent stumbling block – the first round. Kovalchuk was by no means bad during his tenure with the Devils, but 12 goals in 32 combined regular season and playoff games won't cut it for the kind of coin he is chasing. The "sexy" rumour has Kovalchuk going to the Kings, who have a lot of cap space (for now, both Drew Doughty and Jack Johnson become restricted free agents next summer), and a glaring need for an elite winger to pair with Anze Kopitar. Where do I think he ends up? Don't sleep on St. Louis. The Blues have lots of cap space, and would obviously love to add a game breaker like Kovalchuk. The most assists Kovalchuk has ever recorded in a single season is 48, so don't expect him to be contending for the Art Ross any time soon unless he has a 60+ goal season.

One year upside: 100

Three year upside: 110

3. Daniel Sedin – Vancouver Canucks

Age: 29

Contract: $6.1 million/season, signed through 2013-14

Just when you thought you had Daniel (and Henrik) pegged as solid 75-85 point players; they both emerge as two of the game's best forwards in 2009-10. Technically Daniel only had 85 points this season, but he missed close to 20 games in October and November with a broken foot. His point-per-game total (1.35) was third in the league, trailing only his brother and Ovechkin. His numbers from 2009-10 project to 38 goals and 110 points in 82 games. Before this season, Daniel had only missed one game in five seasons, so to expect 82 games out of him would be far from a stretch. There are many reasons as to why the Sedins experienced such a dramatic spike in production. One, they are both faster and quicker than in years past, and this has enabled them to be equally dangerous off the rush compared to their patented cycle game. Two, Vancouver has finally insulated them with potent secondary scorers. Vancouver had six 20+ goal scorers this season, second only to Washington's seven. The 268 goals scored by the Canucks again trailed only the 313 put up by the Capitals.

One year upside: 105

Three year upside: 105

4. Zach Parise – New Jersey Devils

Age: 25

Contract: $3.125 million/season, signed through 2010-11

A lot was made of the Jacques Lemaire hiring last summer in New Jersey. In his time as an NHL coach with Montreal, New Jersey, and Minnesota, Lemaire never had a player on his roster record over 90 points. In fact, Lemaire has only had one player break the 80-point mark (Marian Gaborik put up 83 in 2007-08). Why does this relate to Parise? Well, he was fresh off of an impressive 94-point campaign in 2008-09, and many were expecting him to push closer towards the century mark. However, those who noticed the Lemaire trend were on to something. Parise's point total regressed to 82, and he scored only once in New Jersey's five playoff games. He never really looked comfortable once Kovalchuk joined the team, as both patrol the left side and like to play a lot and shoot a lot. With Lemaire gone and Kovalchuk probably headed for greener pastures, look for Parise to return to the 90-point mark in 2010-11.

One year upside: 90

Three year upside: 95

5. Dany Heatley – San Jose Sharks

Age: 29

Contract: $7.5 million/season, through 2013-14

Many were expecting Heatley and Joe Thornton to be the most exciting duo to hit California since the Olsen twins. Thornton, the dazzling assist machine who turned Jonathan Cheechoo into a 56-goal scorer, and Heatley, the sniper who could score goals with his eyes closed from behind the net. Heatley scored “only” 39 goals, the exact same total he finished with last season in Ottawa. Since recording back-to-back 50-goal, 100-point seasons in 2005-06 and 2006-07, Heatley has failed to keep pace with the NHL’s elite. Like Thornton, the knock on him has often been effort level and intensity. He is signed through the 2013-14 season, so don’t expect the Sharks to move him this summer. However, one of Thornton or Marleau may be on the way out if San Jose fails to get past the Red Wings in the second round. Heatley will always have the potential to break the century mark – he is arguably the deadliest forward in the league around the crease. However, until he ups his consistency, expect his production to fall somewhere in the 80-90 point range.

One year upside: 105

Three year upside: 105

6. Bobby Ryan – Anaheim Ducks

Age: 23

Contract: 2010 RFA

After failing to crack the Ducks roster for three straight seasons after being drafted in 2005, some were wondering if Ryan would simply become the answer to the trivia question – who was the player picked immediately after Sidney Crosby? However, he has blossomed into one of the league's best young scorers since making the move to the NHL full-time to begin the 2008-09 season. He was more of a playmaker in junior, recording 52 and 64 assists in his final two seasons with the Owen Sound Attack. At the NHL level he has played the role of scorer, with 31 and 35 goals in 2008-09 and 2009-10, respectively. He doesn't play with Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry as much as you would expect, at least not at even strength. There are rumours that he has already rejected a contract offer from the Ducks, but expect the two sides to get something done before July 1st. Ryan's combination of speed, size, and skill is awesome to watch for fans and terrifying for opposing defensemen.

One year upside: 80

Three year upside: 95

7. Henrik Zetterberg – Detroit Red Wings

Age: 29

Contract: $6.08 million/season, signed through 2020-21

Much was made of the struggles of Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk this season in Detroit. Datsyuk's production dropped from 97 points in 2008-09 to only 70 this season, but Zetterberg only recorded three less points than he did a season ago. He hasn't played more than 77 games in a season since the lockout, and had his best season in 2007-08 with 43 goals and 92 points. He still has many prime years left, and the Wings iced one of their weakest squads in recent memory this season. Significant injuries to Johan Franzen and Niklas Kronwall didn't help matters either. Zetterberg and Valtteri Filppula have formed a dynamic duo on Detroit's second line, and some believe Filppula is just scratching the surface of his offensive potential. He doesn't shoot the puck very well but he plays the game a lot like Zetterberg. If Filppula, who had only 35 points this season, increase his production next season, expect Zetterberg's numbers to rise as well. Zetterberg's value is high in fantasy leagues because of his dual

position eligibility (LW/C). Unlike a few who hold the distinction of the dual eligibility, he actually plays both positions.

One year upside: 90

Three year upside: 90

8. Rick Nash – Columbus Blue Jackets

Age: 25

Contract: $7.8 million/season, signed through 2017-18

It pained me a bit to include Nash on this list, mostly because he hasn't done enough in his career to warrant it. He has never scored more than 41 goals or recorded more than 79 points in a single season, numbers that should both be much higher for a player of Nash's skill level. He is dominant at best-on-best international tournaments and seems to have a few extra gears that he doesn't bother to use when playing for the Blue Jackets. His massive $7.8 million/season extension kicks in this fall, so expect the pressure on Nash to only increase in Columbus. Many point to a lack of a first line center as a reason for his struggles, and Derek Brassard looks to be the long-term fit alongside Nash on the top line. In the meantime, Nash has found chemistry with Kristian Huselius, a fellow left winger playing out of position on the right side. Columbus has a lot of cap space, but they operate with an internal budget – perhaps they take a run at Patrick Marleau this summer? Like Kovalchuk, Nash will never contend for the Art Ross because of his goal-heavy production.

One year upside: 80

Three year upside: 90

9. Thomas Vanek - Buffalo Sabres

Age: 26

Contract: $7.1 million/season, signed through 2013-14

Vanek's 28 goals in 2009-10 was his lowest total since he scored 25 during his rookie season back in 2005-06. He averaged 40 goals during the three seasons in between, though. Most of Buffalo's core is locked up long-term, but after another disappointing playoff performance, will there be some significant changes this summer? Tyler Ennis looked great for the Sabres after a late-season promotion, and he will get a chance to play with Vanek on the top line. Derek Roy is out of place on the top line, but Buffalo pays him like a first line center and they probably won't chase a legitimate star center this summer. Vanek will get his goals regardless of who he plays with, but his assists will fluctuate dramatically. Good linemates means more assists, all other things being equal.

One year upside: 75

Three year upside: 85

10. Alex Semin - Washington Capitals

Age: 26

Contract: $6 million/season, through 2010-11

I initially was going to leave Semin off of this list, but I just couldn't bring myself to it. There are numerous young talents that I wanted to slide in here in the final spot (more on them below), but Semin is a proven 40-goal scorer in the NHL. It was really, really hard to simply ignore that, even with his abysmal first round against the Montreal Canadiens. The threat of the KHL always looms large for Russian NHL players, and Semin is no different. I could definitely see him bolting back home after next season if he doesn't get the contract offers he hopes/expects from NHL clubs. Washington gave him a one-year extension earlier this season, as they are apprehensive to commit term and money to Semin past 2010-11. They also have to extend Nicklas Backstrom this summer, and he won't come cheap. If this list took more of a long-term approach, Semin probably wouldn't make it. But if you want to win your pool at some point over the next three seasons, he is worth owning over the following players.

One year upside: 90

Three year upside: 95

Honourable mentions:

Jamie Benn – Dallas Stars: Dallas toyed with the idea of moving him to center, which may happen if one of Brad Richards or Mike Ribeiro is dealt.

Mike Cammalleri – Montreal Canadiens: Cammalleri is making many GM's look foolish for passing on him during the 2009 summer. Perhaps he only wanted to go to Montreal, but he was a very solid investment by Montreal at $6 million/season. He had a fantastic first round against the Capitals, playing with an edge and intensity that he doesn't often display during the regular season.

Wojtek Wolski – Phoenix Coyotes: Wolski is a restricted free agent this summer, but expect the Coyotes to bring him back. He could score 30 next season in the desert.

Ryane Clowe – San Jose Sharks: The big winger is having an awesome playoffs (so far). Needs to play with an edge and use size on a more consistent basis. Dominant along the boards and has soft hands for a big guy. PIM number jumped from 51 in 2008-09 to 131 last year – if Clowe can keep improving offensively, he could find a spot in the top ten.

Scott Hartnell – Philadelphia Flyers: One of the biggest fantasy busts in the league this season. He was one of the best combo guys last season with 30 goals, 60 points, and 143 PIM. His PIM total rose by 12 this season, but he scored only 14 goals. Hartnell has only broken the 48-point mark once in his career, so maybe last season was more of an anomaly than a trend.

Alex Burrows – Vancouver Canucks: Burrows and his golden ticket are in jeopardy of being shut out of Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory (also known as the third wheel with the Sedin twins) next season, thanks to Mikael Samuelsson's emergence as a top line scoring threat. Burrows is a 30-goal, 130 PIM guy with Daniel and Henrik. Without them, he is probably an 18-20 goal, 150+ PIM guy.

Nikita Filatov – Columbus Blue Jackets: It was hard to pass over Dobber's favourite, but Filatov is way too unproven to crack the top ten right now. He will be back in the NHL this fall. Hopefully the new coach in Columbus gives him more than 15 seconds of ice time per game. He'll find his way onto this list very, very soon.

Patrick Sharp – Chicago Blackhawks: Sharp has developed into one of the most versatile scoring-line forwards in the NHL. He can play all three positions and can fill the role of goal-scorer or checker, depending on the situation. He is a candidate to be moved by Chicago this summer, as they need to shed some money to fit in under the cap. Sharp's value could actually increase leaving Chicago, as he would most likely be going to a team that will play him more.

James van Riemsdyk – Philadelphia Flyers: JVR is at least a year or two from cracking the top 10, but he should be on it at some point in the near future. He is big, fast, and very sound offensively. The Flyers are taking it slow with him.

Evander Kane – Atlanta Thrashers: Kane had a very solid season for an 18-year-old budding power forward. Look for him to reach the 20 goal mark in 2010-11. He has the potential to be a 40-goal, 150 PIM guy in his prime.

Taylor Hall – 2010 Draft Eligible: Hall has the potential to be the most dynamic forward since... Stamkos? Ovechkin? He already is fast enough to blow by NHL defensemen, but he needs to get stronger. Expect a modest rookie season followed by a huge sophomore campaign. The 'Stamkos' path of development, if you will.

James Neal – Dallas Stars: Neal started off the 2009-10 season with a bang, scoring eight goals and adding eight helpers during the month of October. He faded down the stretch, scoring only three times in the final 21 games. Dallas is rumoured to be shopping one of their high-priced centers, and if Richards gets moved it could impact all of their young wingers (Benn, Neal, Eriksson) negatively.

Loui Eriksson – Dallas Stars: Eriksson is one of the best two-way wingers in the game already. He will settle in as a 25-35 goal, 65-75-point winger. With Richards passing him the puck, expect him to be closer to the higher end of those two ranges.

Ray Whitney - Carolina Hurricanes: If you want to win next year, Whitney could be considered as one of the best left wingers to own. However, he is about to turn 38 and his production dropped from 77 in 2008-09 to 58 this past season. Carolina's youth movement is

set to begin in 2010-11, but the Wizard will still play a big part in their offense.