I do not hide the fact that I am a fan of the Vancouver Canucks. I (attempt to) remove my bias when helping with player evaluations in fantasy hockey, and to this point I have done a great job of separating my personal bias with how I build my fantasy teams. In my five keeper leagues (I used to be in more, but five is the most I can manage without over-committing myself), I only own one Canuck – Roberto Luongo. I own Luongo in two of the five leagues. I tend to avoid drafting and trading for Vancouver players because I do not want to be clouded by optimism. This has both helped (Steve Bernier) and hurt (Christian Ehrhoff) me over the past few years, but it is a principle that I don't anticipate myself changing.

I read Canuck-related "stuff" on a daily basis, and feel that my understanding of the team and its needs heading into this summer is very strong. I decided to complete a mock off-season for the Canucks, and if time permits I'll get to a few other teams in the days leading up to July 1st.

The Canucks are in a great situation both in the near and long term. They had the league's second best offense last season, they have a fantastic goalie signed to a great contract for the next 12 years (Roberto Luongo's $5.3 million cap hit represents a $1.4 million decrease from his previous deal), and they have a slew of talented young forwards ready to take the next step. There are some glaring holes on the back end and on the bottom two lines up front, but with ample cap space they should emerge this summer as the team to beat in the West. Their two closest rivals in the West, Chicago and San Jose, both face difficult summers. Chicago's team is about to be stripped of depth at all positions due to cap constraints, while San Jose has several key players that may not return.

Vancouver is sitting equally pretty in the once-strong Northwest Division as well. Calgary is aging and their roster contains numerous awful contracts for the next few years. They may have the worst prospects in the entire NHL, even counting Mikael Backlund. Minnesota is a team in transition right now, and is at least another year or two away from contention. Like Calgary, their prospect situation is very bleak. Edmonton should be improved this year, but there are still a lot of question marks there. Colorado presents the biggest challenge both next year and beyond with lots of young talent developing ahead of schedule.

The current roster:

Daniel Sedin	**$6.1 mill**	**Henrik Sedin**	**$6.1 mill**	**Alex Burrows**	**$2 mill**
Mason Raymond	**RFA**	**Ryan Kesler**	**$5 mill**		
Michael Grabner	**$800k**	**Cody Hodgson**	**$1.6 mill**		
Darcy Hordichuk	**$750k**	**Rick Rypien**	**$550k**		

Christan Ehrhoff	**$3.1 mill**	**Sami Salo**	**$3.5 mill**
Alex Edler	**$3.25 mill**	**Kevin Bieksa**	**$3.75 mill**
Aaron Rome	**$750k**	**Shane O'Brien**	**RFA**
Andrew Alberts	**$1 mill**		
Roberto Luongo	**$5.3 mill**		

Cory Schneider	**$900k**

Total	**$48.95 mill**

The Canucks have roughly $10 million in cap space to sign Raymond and Hansen if they stand pat right now (which they won't). This figure also assumes that the cap does indeed rise to $58 million.

My ideas:

Kyle Wellwood has been a fantastic depth player for the Canucks over the past two seasons, but he will probably head elsewhere this summer in search of a bigger offensive role. With Sedin and Kesler tying down the top two spots, there isn't much ice time left for Wellwood on the third line. Prized prospect **Cody Hodgson** is expected to make the jump in 2010-11 now that his back is fully healed, but don't expect the Canucks to hand him a spot.

Both **Ryan Kesler** and **Alex Burrows** played with significant shoulder injuries in the playoffs, so keep an eye on how the two perform at training camp and in the pre-season to see how far along they are in the recovery process.

I'd advocate moving **Bieksa**. The Canucks have a slew of two-way defensemen and need more of a focus at either the offensive end or the defensive end. Bieksa's inconsistent play over the past few years has been extremely troubling, and he does more bad than good when healthy. He needs a fresh start. Bieksa could probably fetch a decent return, and for the sake of this mock I'll assume the Canucks receive a pick and/or a prospect back.

Andrew Alberts

was a disappointment and will be on the trade block this season. He is young and cheap and the Canucks should have no problem fetching a late round draft pick for him.

If healthy, expect **Mitchell** to return. It was reported yesterday that he is only now finally symptom free, but he still needs to undergo tests from Canuck doctors before Mike Gillis offers any sort of contract. Since he spent over 100 days last season on the IR, he is eligible for a one-year bonus-laden contract for 2010-11, which would be beneficial to both sides. It would provide Mitchell with the incentive to regain his form as one of the league's best shutdown defensemen, and it would give the Canucks a strong top-four defenseman at (way) under market value.

1) Sign RFA **Mason Raymond** to a two-year, $6 million extension. Raymond would still be an RFA at the end of the 2011-12 season, so this deal would give the Canucks more leverage at that point in time. He broke out with 25 goals this past season, and $3 million per season for the next two would be fair compensation for that.

2) Trade **Andrew Alberts** to Carolina for a 2010 5th round draft pick. The Canucks originally acquired Alberts for a 3rd round draft pick from the Hurricanes at the deadline in March.

3) Sign **Manny Malhotra** to a three year, $3.9 million contract. Malhotra practiced with the Canucks unofficially last summer before eventually signing with San Jose right before the season began. He has ties to the area (he is married to Steve Nash's sister), and would be a great two-way center for the Canucks, who iced a horrendous penalty kill during the 2009-10 postseason. Malhotra made $700,000 with the Sharks last season.

4) Sign **Zbynek Michalek** to a five-year, $22.5 million contract. Michalek is the best defenseman on the open market this summer (in my humble opinion). Hopefully for the Canucks, he enjoyed his Olympic experience in Vancouver! I'd wager that Ottawa are the frontrunners for him, as playing with his brother would probably be a significant pull factor. Michalek can skate, move the puck, but most importantly, he can log tough minutes against the opposition's top players. The fact that he doesn't even turn 28 until December adds to his value.

5) Extend **Christian Ehrhoff**. He is an unrestricted free agent after the 2010-11 season, and was far and away Vancouver's best defenseman last season. The Canucks will have Sami Salo's contract off the books next summer to help make room for any increase in Ehrhoff's salary. How does four years and $16 million sound?

6) Trade **Jannik Hansen**'s rights and 2010 3rd round draft pick to Boston for **Matt Hunwick** and

Vladimir Sobotka

. This may take a bit more (in terms of pick quantity or value), but the Bruins would love to shed Hunwick's salary, and Sobotka is buried at center behind Savard, Bergeron, and Krejci. Hansen is a very responsible two-way winger with some upside, and he'll come cheap in terms of cap hit. Sign Sobotka (RFA) to a two-year, $2 million contract.

7) Trade **Shane O'Brien** for a draft pick. O'Brien has been a solid depth defenseman during his time in Vancouver, but is too much of an off-ice distraction for his role with the team.

My final roster:

Daniel Sedin	**$6.1 mill**	**Henrik Sedin**	**$6.1 mill**	**Alex Burrows**	**$2 mill**
Mason Raymond	**$3 mill**	**Ryan Kesler**	**$5 mill**		
Cody Hodgson	**$1.6 mill**	**Manny Malhotra**	**$1.3 mill**		
Rick Rypien	**$550k**	**Vladimir Sobotka**	**$1 mill**		

Darcy Hordichuk	**$750k**

Christan Ehrhoff	**$3.1 mill**	**Zbynek Michalek**	**$4.5 mill**
Willie Mitchell	**$2 mill**	**Sami Salo**	**$3.5 mill**
Alex Edler	**$3.25 mill**	**Matt Hunwick**	**$1.45 mill**

Aaron Rome	**$750k**

Roberto Luongo	**$5.3 mill**
Cory Schneider	**$900k**
Total	**$57.45 mill**

This team is only really lacking a right-handed defenseman aside from Salo. The defence is strong in all areas of the game. The bottom six contains lots of skill and jam, and the top six is among the league's best. This roster still leaves almost $2 million of room under the cap, and the Canucks could easily create more by shedding Steve Bernier for a cheaper winger on the fourth line.

Samuelsson and Burrows will switch places often with the Sedin twins. Samuelsson brings more of a shooter's presence and opens up space down low for the twins, while Burrows is fantastic on the forecheck and gets the puck to Daniel and Henrik as often as he can. Both should be good for 20-30 goals, and obviously more time with Daniel and Henrik means a goal total closer to 30 than 20.

If you were Mike Gillis, how would you approach this summer?