Elliotte Friedman's weekly *30 Thoughts* column on the CBC website is currently the best read in hockey. Friedman is insightful, articulate, knowledgeable, fair, and most importantly, interesting. He has sources and contacts in the hockey world that most could only dream of. He has an ability which is rare in this day and age - providing a balanced and reasonable opinion on the league, the players, and all 30 of the clubs.

Each week I will post my own observations (I couldn't completely steal Friedman's idea so I'll pick a number other than 30) – with a heavy emphasis on the fantasy side of hockey, of course. Prospects, goalies, sleepers, busts, it will all be covered each week.

1. Ryan Van Horne and Matt Bugg will be releasing comprehensive World Junior preview

columns this weekend. The American team is big, fast, and talented. Chris Kreider, Jerry D'Amigo, and Jeremy Morin (if Chicago chooses to release him) should all be among the top scorers at the tournament. The Canadian forward I am most looking forward to watch play is Brett Connolly.

2. Keep an eye on the Sharks in January – they need a top four defenseman badly. A few possible fits out there include Pavel Kubina and Francois Beauchemin.

3. Erik Karlsson is playing tremendous hockey – I wonder what kind of point totals he would be putting up if he were on a good offensive hockey club? He has eight points in his last seven games and is now on pace for just under 50.

4. Corey Perry is a fascinating player to watch. How he is able to be so dominant offensively while going out of his way to annoy every single person on the ice at the same time (refs, teammates, opponents) is extremely impressive. He doesn't get enough credit for how hard he works – I remember him in the OHL, and he was one of the worst skaters in that league. Kudos to him for turning a weakness into a strength in only a few years.

5. Andrej Meszaros bears watching with Chris Pronger out. For whatever reason he didn't fit with the Lightning, but he is a solid defenseman and is capable of playing a bigger offensive role with the Flyers than he has to date – Pronger's absence is his opportunity to do that.

6. Mike Green is caught between a rock and a hard place right now. He looks completely uncomfortable trying to change his game to fit with the more balanced system Bruce Boudreau is attempting to employ this season with the Capitals. Green probably listened to the media too much during the summer – he had a difficult postseason, but he is at his best when he is playing like a fourth forward.

Sure, he may not be great in his own zone, but his offense more than makes up for it. I really don't get what Washington is trying to do – are they caving to outside pressures? Stick with the system that worked last season.

7. Many were confused when the Penguins spent all of their available cap space this past summer on two defensemen instead of a winger. Right now that decision is paying off in spades, for a few reasons. The defence has been stifling all season long (especially from Zbynek Michalek). More importantly, having mobile defensemen like Michalek, Goligoski, Martin, and Letang who can both skate with and move the puck very efficiently makes things that much easier for the forwards.

Look for Eric "Big Dog" Tangradi to get the call up soon, he has been tearing up the AHL of late.

8. Evgeni Malkin is back. Whatever injury he was dealing with in October and November (looked to be knee) appears to be a thing of the past. He is producing, but the biggest difference is how physically engaged he is. Malkin is at his best when he is playing with a bit of an edge.

9. New Jersey is a great example of a team lacking the mobility/passing ability from their defence. Up front, the Devils have a plethora of talent and offensive ability (on paper, at least). However, a car only runs if there is gas in the tank. Andy Greene has been disappointing, Matt Taormina was good for a while but he's been out with an injury. Henrik Tallinder can skate but he is far from an offensive defenseman. New Jersey needs to add a quality defenseman to help with the transition game.

10. One player to get on your radar now – Ryan Murphy. He's one of the most dynamic prospects I have ever seen. A small defenseman is something to be concerned about, but his hockey sense and skills are through the roof. I'd look at nabbing him early in keeper leagues – I wouldn't be surprised to see him sneak into the top three next summer at the Entry Draft.

11. HBO's 24/7 is amazing. The quality of footage combined with the amount of access given… I wish the NHL did something like this every season. The NFL has had great success with its Hard Knocks series (each summer it follows one team through training camp), and something similar in the NHL would be awesome. I realize this isn't fantasy hockey related, but you need to find a way to watch this show!

12. Classic sell-high example: trading Patrick Sharp for Patrick Marleau. A friend of mine was debating this deal in a standard rotisserie league. Logically you must assume that both players have no goals and no points right now. Sharp has 18 and is on pace for 41, while Marleau has 11 and is on pace for 27. Say both score 30 goals – that means 12 moer for Sharp and 19 for Marleau. A very simplistic example, but it highlights my point.

13. Anze Kopitar/Brayden Schenn down the middle is going to be quite the sight to see for the next 10 years in Los Angeles. Both are big and extremely gifted with the puck – it's easy to fill out a scoring line with playmaking centers with size. A great foundation is in place for all of the young wingers in the Kings system as well (and poolies who own any of these wingers). You are going to be hearing Schenn's name a lot over the next few weeks…

14. This Datsyuk injury is a huge opportunity for Jiri Hudler to get his season on track. Hudler plays a lot like Datsyuk (nowhere near as good, but both like to operate off of the half wall on the power play), and because of this I think he'll get a crack at playing on the top unit (even if Mike Babcock hates him).

15. Michal Neuvirth is starting his fourth straight tonight. I own him, but he is my third goalie. I wasn't prepared to roll with the frustrations that come with the territory of a goalie platoon this season. I have stated this many times – Neuvirth is the better goalie in Washington. In the long run, I think he will emerge as the starter. The organization seems to favour Varlamov (I think him being Russian has a lot to do with it), though.