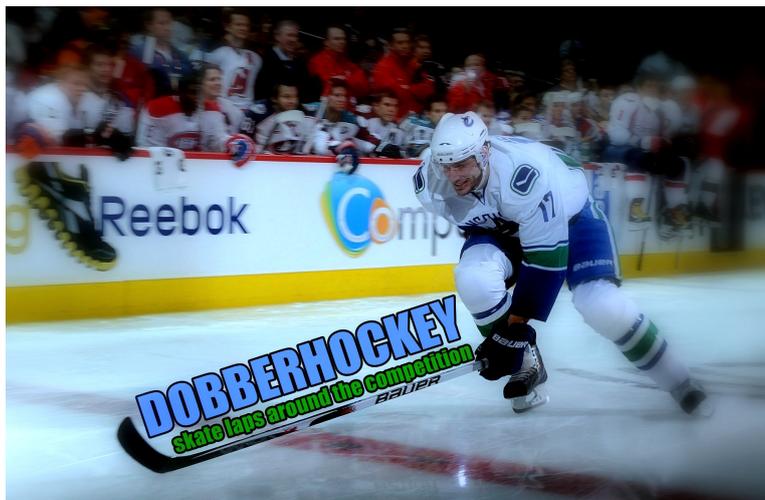


15 Points to Consider – February

Written by Jeff Angus

Friday, 18 February 2011 21:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 20 February 2011 13:24



This week I discuss the Zach Bogosian trade rumors, players to look at for next season, and a late season fantasy hockey strategy to employ.

1. Looking to make a push during the final 20 games of the season in your fantasy hockey pool? Try the following strategy on for size. Take a look at the rosters of teams who are either out of contention or headed in that direction. Decide who will be traded at the deadline – keep in mind a few things about these players, especially what position and role they play with the club. Now look to the AHL roster of that team, and see who could potentially be called up as a replacement.

Teams out of contention will give prospects and young players long leashes to develop/make

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mistakes without worry of being demoted. A great example of this is Bobby Butler in Ottawa. The former NCAA scoring sensation Butler was pointless and minus-11 in his first nine NHL games. If he struggled like that on a playoff club, odds are he wouldn't have made it past game four or five. However, he has recorded consecutive two-point games (and he scored as I wrote this on Friday evening) and should stick on the roster for the rest of the season.

One more name to keep in mind (not so much a prospect) is Tom Wandell. Jamie Benn is still on the IR, and the likelihood of a Brad Richards trade increases dramatically with each Dallas loss.

2. I made this point in my previous column – how much of an impact on player development does winning and losing have? A considerable one, I believe. Any Dustin Penner/Ales Hemsky trade, even if for great picks and/or prospects, wouldn't do Edmonton any good. Having a rich prospect cupboard means nothing if you can't support it with veteran talent and leadership. Edmonton is about two years, three or four defensemen, and a goalie away from being a playoff club. Instead of taking one step back and potentially two forward, I'd advise taking one forward without going back at all. Get some stable, reliable veterans on the back end and up the middle. After Shawn Horcoff, the Oilers are an embarrassment at center in the defensive zone and on the draw.

Jordan Eberle, Taylor Hall, and Magnus Paajarvi have all had pretty good rookie campaigns, all things considered. It is time to insulate them, not expose them for another season.

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3. Travis Hamonic has quietly been one of the best rookie defensemen in the league. He is anchoring New York's top pairing with Andrew MacDonald, and the offense only took 10 or 15 games to appear. Hamonic isn't a great puck mover, but he is adequate. His fantasy value will come from his heavy, accurate slap shot, and his physical edge. Once Mark Streit returns to the lineup (which may be in a few weeks), I foresee a Hamonic-Streit pairing on the top power play unit. With an elite playmaker like Streit alongside him, Hamonic's fantasy upside may increase by 10 or 15 points.

Sticking with young defensemen on Long Island, Ty Wishart should also be in your radar if you are in a keeper league. He has bounced around the league a bit (originally traded from San Jose to Tampa Bay in the Dan Boyle deal), but he should settle in nicely on the quickly-improving Islanders.

4. Michael Grabner's fantastic season in Long Island has been one of the biggest surprises of 2011. He was cut from Florida after a brutal training camp, and the Islanders scooped him off of the waiver wire. Grabner didn't impress at camp because he tried to change who he was. He struggled at previous camps with Vancouver for the exact same reason. Instead of using his speed to create offense, he tried to play defensive hockey and show responsibility at both ends of the ice. Goal scorers need to score. Let the checkers check.

Grabner didn't get off to a fantastic start with the Islanders, and this is something people forget about. New York was able to spend more time developing him at the NHL level (essentially letting him learn on the go and make mistakes along the way). If he were still on Vancouver or another playoff club, chances are he would have been traded/waived/sent down long before he started his offensive break out. Rookies and AHL call-ups often reiterate how hard it is to impress in limited ice time because they often change the way they play in order to minimize mistakes. Grabner was allowed to play his game and it eventually paid off.

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5. What has been the biggest reason for Calgary's turnaround? Secondary scoring. It is amazing how everything falls into place when scoring comes from players further down on the depth chart. Brendan Morrison, Curtis Glencross, and David Moss in particular have really stepped up offensively.

6. Mikael Grabovski has flown under the radar a bit this season, which is surprising considering he plays in hockey's biggest market. I don't see Toronto trading him, nor should they (for the reasons outlined above in point five). People criticize him because he isn't a prototypical top line or checking forward, but he has found a way to get the job done on a more consistent basis than any other Leaf forward. His salary is reasonable, he is young, and he likes playing in Toronto. Draft picks and prospects come with an inherent level of risk – Grabovski doesn't.

7. What kind of player would you say Dustin Brown is? He is among the top 40 in scoring among all NHL wingers, and at times has shown brilliant chemistry with Anze Kopitar. However, watching Brown lately, he is playing more like an elite third line or above average second line winger. He, like most young, physical captains, has changed his game a bit since receiving the 'C'. Brenden Morrow did the same in Dallas, and David Backes will do the same once he gets the 'C' for the Blues. Brown has a great shot and pretty good hands, but he lacks elite hockey instincts required to be a regular on a top line. His production makes him a valuable fantasy winger, and his intangibles make him a valuable real-life winger, but I think he may be a bit overvalued in the fantasy world.

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8. Since being traded from Brandon to Saskatoon, Brayden Schenn has 11 goals and 30 points in 13 games. He will undoubtedly be in Los Angeles next season. One interesting thought – do the Kings toy with the idea of moving him to Kopitar's wing? Both are big, skilled, and very cerebral offensive players. One is more of a shooter (Kopitar), while the other is more of a playmaker (Schenn). Regardless of where he plays in the lineup, Schenn is more than ready for NHL action.

9. Dustin Byfuglien's contract came at an interesting time. Byfuglien has been slumping offensively for the last six weeks. Perhaps the Thrashers management felt it was time to lock him up before he started producing again? He is making north of \$5 million per season starting in 2011-12. Obviously off-ice reasons factor in (showing the fans that the team is committed to winning and is done with rebuilding), but it sure is a lot of coin to give to a player with less than a full season of high-level production under his belt.

10. The single most important type of player to have in the league right now is an agile, puck-moving defenseman. Aside from Boston (before the Kaberle trade) and Tampa Bay, all of the playoff clubs have at least one. If he chooses to head to the open market, there will be teams lining up with a lot of cash to throw at Christian Ehrhoff. He isn't great defensively (especially during in-zone coverage situations), but he creates so much with his aggressive transitional play.

11. I am not going out on a limb here, but I would be very shocked to see a team other than Detroit, Vancouver, Boston, or Philadelphia win the cup. For those of you who are in pools that count playoff stats, time to stock up. I personally have never played in a regular season pool that counts playoff stats, and I can see how it complicates player values tremendously.

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12. It will be interesting to see whether or not Atlanta moves Zach Bogosian. He was requested a trade (I don't think he has demanded one, though). For whatever reason, his development has stalled. He plays a similar game to Jack Johnson – lots of skating, hitting, and shooting. Like Johnson was a few years ago, he is still a bit rough around the edges. The market for a young, physical, puck-moving defenseman should be huge. Atlanta does have a pretty solid defense though, so a Bogosian trade that returns them a legitimate top line forward could be a good short and long-term move.

13. Don't be surprised if Pekka Rinne wins the Vezina this season. Tim Thomas would probably need to lay a few eggs to bring his otherworldly stats down a bit, but Rinne has been just as good for the Predators. He is big, athletic, fundamentally sound, and consistent. I don't pretend to be a goalie expert, but I pegged him as my pre-season Vezina winner and he is not proving me wrong so far. Don't sell high, as he is one of the best goalies to own for the next few years in all pool formats.

14. If you are floundering in a keeper league and looking for players to acquire who could break out next season, here are two: Jamie Benn (75 points), and Victor Hedman (45 points). I really like Dmitri Kulikov, but offensive defensemen not named Mike Green or Keith Yandle need to play with talented forwards in order to produce.

15. In my spare time (which is limited these days), I like to put together DobberHockey themed wallpapers. Check them out (and make any requests for new ones) [here](#).

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Elliott Friedman's weekly 30 Thoughts column on the CBC website is 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. Most importantly, 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.