A few quick thoughts from the past week of hockey from Jeff Angus.

5. Mikkel Boedker 's emergence

I somehow landed on the Coyotes and Wild game on Thursday night when flipping through NHL Centre Ice, and I ended up sticking around and watching most of the second and third periods.

Why? The game was actually really exciting, and Boedker was a big reason for that excitement. The 23-year-old winger was originally drafted eighth overall by the Coyotes back in 2008. And thus far in 2013 he is having by far his best offensive season (four goals and 15 points in 20 games).

The Coyotes play a style of hockey that isn't conducive to offensive production, especially with how they balance their ice time among their forwards. Boedker has emerged as a go-to scoring threat for the team this season, and he is finally seeing sufficient ice time to produce on a consistent basis (18:43 per game). Phoenix was hoping he would have been playing at this level a few years ago, but young players all develop at different rates. Boedker was the most dangerous forward on the ice in a game that also featured Shane Doan , Zach Parise , and Mikko Koivu . His speed is his best attribute, but he is starting to "get" the NHL game too. In the past he wouldn't get much done outside of skating around a lot, but he made a lot of smart plays with and without the puck last night.

4. Will Jamie Benn be suspended for this?

{youtube}DzU-feqQCBY{/youtube}

Benn has been great this season for the Stars, but he came off the rails a bit last night against

the Oilers. Dallas has had discipline issues all season long, and that was something they were hoping to correct from last season. So far, not good, as Dallas has been shorthanded a league-leading 98 times.

Dallas has a young and inexperienced defense, and they can't rely on Kari Lehtonen to bail them out every single night.

3. Ryan Kesler 's latest injury is just plain bad luck.

Kesler has had to undergo some serious surgical procedures in recent years, mostly due to the abrasive and aggressive style of hockey he plays. However, his latest injury (a broken foot) is just bad luck. Kesler blocked a shot in his first game back (against Dallas a few weeks ago) and tried to play through the issue, but a second/third x-ray revealed the fracture.

You could block 30 or 40 point shots and none of them would break the foot – just depends on where it hits, the angle the puck is taking, and how the foot is positioned, among other factors. This may be a blessing in disguise for the Canucks, assuming they can stay at the top of the Northwest Division – Kesler is due back in a month or six weeks, and it would ensure his health for the stretch run and into the postseason (again, assuming the Canucks don't completely fall apart without him).

This is once again a huge opportunity for Jordan Schroeder to prove himself, and Canucks GM Mike Gillis also mentioned on radio that the club may give Mason Raymond a try at center.

2. Advanced stats and hockey.

The debate between advanced stats and the old school approach of watching hockey and making decisions based on what you see continues on. And the annual MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference started today, and that debate tends to crop up there (not really a surprise considering it is an entire conference dedicated to statistical developments in sports).

I definitely see the value to both advanced stats and watching games. There is no one right way to evaluate a hockey player or a hockey situation. Many old school hockey people will shoot down these new stats because they believe that hockey is too fast and fluid to break down into statistical events. And many proponents of these stats will argue that you can break anything down into statistical events. Hockey is harder than football or baseball in terms of breaking the sport down, but that doesn't mean statistical analysis is impossible.

I have yet to attend the conference, but thankfully they post their panel discussions online. And here are some additional notes on the hockey analytics panels from both 2012 (featuring Boston GM Peter Chiarelli and then Leafs GM Brian Burke) and 2011 (featuring Chicago GM Stan Bowman). Give those a read if you are interested by this sort of thing – it will be interesting to see where hockey and statistics head in the near future. Hockey is behind other sports in this regard, and there is a lot of ground to make up.

1. James van Riemsdyk is living up to his potential in Toronto.

The big young winger has been a revelation on the top line in Toronto, replacing the injured Jofrey Lupul. The Leafs were hoping for goals and offense from JVR when they traded for him last summer, but even the most optimistic people in the organization have to be surprised by how well JVR is playing in 2013. With 12 goals in 22 games, the budding power forward is scoring at a 50-goal pace at the moment.

"[He] shown glimpses of this kind of potential before, most prominently during the 2011 playoffs when he emerged with seven goals in 11 games for the Flyers. He continued to scratch the surface last year, storming out of the gate with eight goals and 16 points in the opening two months, only to trail off with just one goal and three points in December. "I think that's the difference between just being a good player and trying to get yourself established into one of those great players is just the consistency of it," he said. "I've had a pretty decent run here to start the season and I've just got to try to be as consistent as possible the rest of the year."

It will be interesting to see if his role changes when Matt Frattin and Lupul return from injury. JVR has opened up a lot of ice for his linemates
Tyler Bozak
and
Phil Kessel
, and he is starting to establish himself as a very good net-front presence on the power play as well.

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