The season got off to a slow start last weekend in Europe. Despite the quality of the four teams involved, the games lacked in quality and entertainment value. But hey, it is early in the season and all the kinks aren't ironed out yet for several teams. However, despite the limited action there was some important information coming out of last weekend's games plus the late training camp cuts and here is an overview of the impacts on fantasy hockey.

Alexandre Picard (and Filip Kuba) – Who the hell is Alexandre Picard you ask? Well, he's nobody just yet, but he's become a deep sleeper to watch. A third round pick in 2003, Picard

went through Philadelphia and Tampa Bay before coming to Ottawa. A defensive liability, he's put up pretty good offensive numbers registering 28 points in 86 NHL games the past two seasons. Now he finds himself a member of the top power play unit in Ottawa alongside Dany Heatley, Daniel Alfredsson, Jason Spezza and Filip Kuba. Unfortunately, things didn't quite go so well during those two games, but if he's given and extended look on the top unit with a man advantage and starts producing Picard will be worth a pick up in most leagues. For now, just keep a close eye on him. Now, about Kuba, I wouldn't be the least surprised to see him score 45 to 50 points as the Sens quarterback. Don't forget that he did score 15 goals and 37 points two years ago in Tampa Bay despite being the second option behind Dan Boyle and was limited by the defensive system in Minnesota before that.

Steve Stamkos – He didn't receive much playing time in the first game as he was on the ice for a mere total of 8:25 minutes, but things changes in the second game as he saw almost 15 minutes of action. These are the kinds of minutes you should expect him to receive all season and I think it's only a matter of time before he's part of the first power play unit. I'm very confident he'll soon start producing regularly.

Nikolai Zherdev – I was really disappointed to see that Zherdev was not a member of the top power play unit in New York, well okay in Czechoslovakia, but it won't be different in North America at least for the short term. Chris Drury is the guy getting the time that should go to Zherdev. Hopefully the Rangers will soon realize they'd be better off with Zherdev, but until that happens Zherdev will have a hard time living up to his 35 to 40 goal potential.

Pittsburgh's offense – I'm worried about the Penguins. The absence of Sergei Gonchar and Ryan Whitney really looked to affect them as they had trouble getting plays going. While they will produce top notch numbers, this will not be the season we will see Sydney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin attain a new plateau. I originally expected Crosby to challenge the 140-point mark and Malkin the 125-point level, now I'm lowering those expectations by 20 points for each of them.

Ottawa goaltending – The goalie controversy is already starting in Ottawa. Martin Gerber was weak in the first game of the season while Alexander Auld was very solid in the next game. I you own Gerber, you better grab Auld right now if you haven't already if he's still available in your league. While he's not in immediate danger of losing his starting job, the Sens won't be very patient with Gerber.

Bobby Ryan and Cam Barker – Two of my favorite sleepers of the season (I own both in Dobber's expert league) were sent to the minors before the start of the season. These guys were due to break out, but now are victims of the salary cap. My gut feeling is that they'll be back within a month since their teams would be much better with these guys around so if you have the availability on your roster, hang on to them for a little while.

Need some tailored advice, write to the Fantasy Frog at fantasyfrog@dobberhockey.com to get personalized croaks, also available en français.