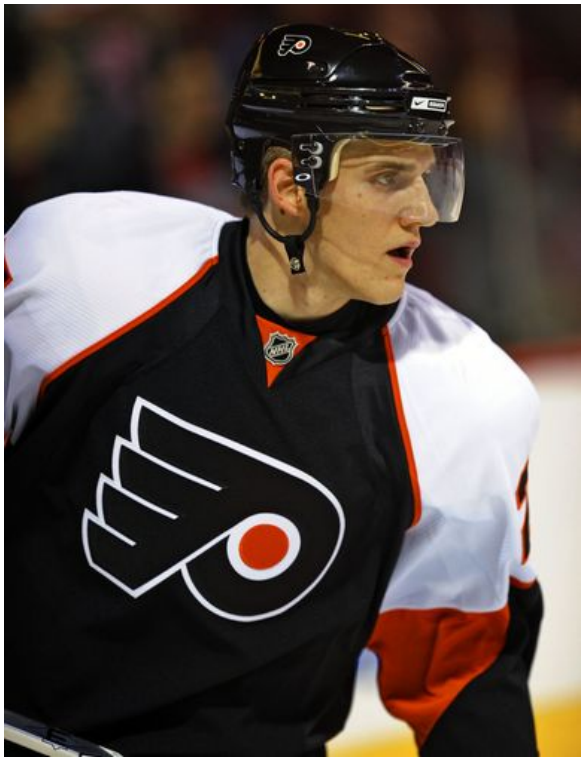

As reported in the Toronto Star recently, Ken Holland circles the American Thanksgiving on his calendar every year in red ink. By then, he says, a team has established its true winning percentage.

Not everyone takes so long a view of things as the Red Wings GM, but even on teams where an October overhaul is needed, many NHL GMs and coaches still often say they like to wait ten or twelve games to get a feel for their players.

These experienced hockey professionals wait to pass judgement on their roster because they know the risks of reacting too quickly. They know that over-analyzing early results often leads to bad decisions.

Similarly, what separates the fantasy GMs who are destined to swim in the lower half of their pools from those who are angling for the top spot, is partially how they handle the early season temptation to make big moves in the hopes of finding a breakout performer.

Every year, bizarre trends appear early in the season. Angus has already pointed it out in the Daily Ramblings section, but if you missed it, check out James Duthie's humourous article on "premature evaluation", at TSN.ca.

Nicolas Chabot has an excellent column in The Hockey News called, *Inside the Numbers*. This past issue, he compared last season's top scorers at the two-week mark with the final list. Of the top twenty scorers after two weeks, only four remained on the list by the end of the season. Some, like Paul Kariya and Paul Stastny, had their season derailed by injury (fairly predictable in Kariya's case), but consider Aaron Voros who "had the best 15 days of his life" according to Chabot back in October 2008 and occupied the 9th spot on the scoring list. You may remember how that story ended…by April he ranked an inglorious 408th.

The always entertaining Janet Eagleson at rotowire.com pointed out in her latest article that after his recent four point night, Matt Carle ownership in Yahoo leagues shot up from 8% to 47% . Some of these acquisitions might have been quality decisions (possibly by some desperate former owners of Andrei Markov), but many of these folks may have been dumping higher quality players because of a slow start in favour of what they think is a quick fix.

Are these folks just picking up another version of Voros? Only time will tell. But Carle may have already had his best game of the season.

Don't Take Yourself Out of the Running

Every year there are poolies who are smart (or lucky) enough to grab the few sustainable breakout surprises in October, but I guarantee you that at this time of year, there are many *more* people who seriously handicap their seasons by making knee-jerk decisions.

That's why so many people preach patience when it comes to making early season changes.

But every October, many poolies start the roster-surgery, convinced (or afraid) that they know how the season will play out after only a handful of games. Be aware that if you do decide to play this high-stakes game, it won't go unnoticed – the savviest and most dangerous of GMs will quietly watch your moves only to turn around and gut you with them. It's the fantasy version of the Great One's famous quotation, "a good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be."

Some players, like Roberto Luongo, have had horrible starts, but because of their pedigree you're not worried (yet). But here are a few less blue-blooded players that might have you wringing your hands and thinking about a change:

Player	Yahoo Position	Yahoo O-Rank	Yahoo Rank

(Tuesday, October 13, 2009)

Jason Spezza

C

33

501

It's still not clear yet how the post Heatley era in Ottawa will affect Spezza, but if Mike Fisher continues

Jonathan Toews

C

35

253

Toews tends to start a bit slowly, and the European trip probably didn't help. The young captain will ran

David Backes

C

54

585

Backes is ranked higher by Yahoo than he should be, but Backes was a big part of the Blues) a cha

David Booth

LW

58

465

The whole top line in Florida is struggling to score. Now, I'm no Nobel prize winner, but didn't Booth's

David Krejci

C

80

321

As pointed out by Dobber, Krejci is still getting warmed up after missing the entire training camp due to

Olli Jokinen

C

70

169

Jokinen will pick up the pace (because I can't see him off Iginla's line any time soon), but I think Yahoo

Nathan Horton

C, RW

121

478

Ditto Booth's entry.

Dennis Wideman

D

136

325

Like a number of Bruins, Wideman has not hit the season running, and the recent shoulder injury isn't g

Lastly, if you want to know how seriously some fantasy hockey GMs take the annual early season panic? Check out this fascinating article written way back in October of 2007 describing how to fake a “panic trade” in order to improve your team
.

Fantasy hockey GMs are a vicious lot, and if you can’t see the sucker at the table, well… you’ve been warned.

Your Fantasy Take-Aways

Here’s how to navigate these tumultuous early days:

1. Do yourself a favour and wait until your players have had 10-12 games under their belts before you pass judgement (obviously this doesn’t apply to seriously injured players like Johan Franzen or Markov);

2. If you absolutely feel the need to make big changes this early, consider limiting them to your bench players. Have some confidence in your draft choices and give your high-priced players a chance;

3. Be aware that other owners in your league may not display the same level of poise, and be ready to take advantage of their panic.

You don’t need to emulate Holland by waiting until late November to consider a major overhaul to your team. But do yourself a favour, and give your lads another week.