It's too early to be making big decisions with your squad, but with the first handful of regular season games behind us, reality has already started chipping away at your draft night brilliance.

Perhaps you've been affected by an early-season injury, or that rookie didn't earn that crucial top-six spot like you hoped, or maybe you were just unfortunate enough to draft Sheldon Souray and your league doesn’t count AHL points. Whatever the reason, you might be considering tinkering with your squad - but if you do, make sure you maintain your subjectivity. That's right, I said your *subjectivity*.

A colleague recently said to me, "ultimately, everything that has to do with people is subjective." She's in the harsh business of human performance measurement, and part of her job is to make our organization's assessments of people's performance as objective as possible. It can be frustrating and unpopular work, but I could have used her expertise last month as I was struggling to complete an article for USA Today that was to lay out the top-five players in the NHL today.

While trying to assemble interesting and credible cases for my selected players, I came to appreciate the simplicity of many fantasy formats (at least when looking in the rear-view mirror). In a typical fantasy league, there's no need to compare unlike objects like different major trophies, respective levels of dressing room leadership, or how much better one player makes his teammates versus another in order to make the case for the best players. And as I shuffled personalities in and out of the piece, I yearned for the discrete measurables of fantasy formats. Goals, assists, save percentage, and even questionable categories like penalty minutes, can be laid out in black and white on paper and compared objectively with confidence. Did Steve Downie have more penalty minutes than Matt Carkner in 2009/10? Simple question, simple answer.

But we can't mistake 'simple' for 'easy' - winning a fantasy hockey championship is anything but easy, and despite the numerous measurables that exist that can help us make decisions, my colleague's pointed observation lingers because if you're thinking about grabbing someone off the wire, or making an early swap with a fellow GM, you have to make an accurate assessment of how valuable the incoming player is to *you*. And that can be tricky, because people see things differently.

For example (and I share this anecdote with you only because I'm confident in your utmost discretion), recently my wife and I drove to a small town about 30 minutes south of Montreal. While making the journey from central Ontario to Quebec, my wife (because she is a good person) would reminisce about past events in our lives as we drove past various locales...while I (because I am not a good person) was ticking off OHL franchises in my head and considering

what were the top couple of things I'd do if I was the GM (which the fans would universally revere me for, naturally). Same route, different drive.

Once we arrived in *la belle provence*, I had the opportunity to spend a few minutes perusing the papers and discovered that *La Journal* delighted in the goaltending matchup between Carey Price and J.S. Giguere in the Habs' season-opener with huge colour photos and six-million-point font headlines. Meanwhile, the national media didn't make such a big deal out of the goaltenders.

Was that because of Montreal's love/hate relationship with Mr. Price? Perhaps the fact that Giguere is from Montreal mattered. Or maybe the Quebec media and its readers just care more about goaltending than the rest of Canada does. Maybe all of these are true, but the point is the same. Subjectivity is everywhere in life and in hockey, and you're going to have to wade through it to win.

What Does Your Team Need?

By knowing your squad and knowing what it needs to be more successful, you'll set yourself up for success. Your need might be easy to identify if you've lost a high-profile skater to injury, but it also might be more subtle, like the nagging suspicion that you need more sandpaper in your line-up.

Whatever it is, you first need to identify it. Unlike some NHL GMs in an entry draft, grabbing the 'best available player' usually isn't a viable solution for poolies. You need to grab the best available player to fill the chink that you've identified in your team's armour.

Here are five players that might fill a niche on your roster. Each one is owned in fewer than half of Yahoo leagues (each player's position is as listed by Yahoo), and for fun, I've noted which team in DobberHockey's Expert's league owns the player. Ownerships rates were accurate as of the night of October 12th.

Wayne Simmonds, RW, Los Angeles Kings, Dobber: The 22-year-old Scarborough native put up 40 points and 116 penalty minutes last year. Simmonds should match these numbers without trouble this campaign, and could easily improve his point total, making this 40%-owned winger a nice snatch for a poolie looking for a well-rounded fantasy asset.

Michal Neuvirth, G, Washington Capitals, Maaaasquito Bites: While it looks like a platoon situation in the Capitals' crease this year, the 22-year-old Neuvirth represents a good goaltending opportunity at a 41% ownership rate, especially considering that his competition, Semyon Varlamov, is owned in 84% of Yahoo leagues, and has already been injured this season.

Tomas Fleischmann, LW, Washington Capitals, Lemon's HC: Fleischmann is owned in 29% of Yahoo leagues...which is ridiculous. He's currently centering a line between Alexander Semin and Brooks Laich, and has put up a goal and a pair of assists in the first three games, and is getting time on the Capitals' powerplay. Most believe the 26-year-old is still improving, and while he's had some injury woes, he's healthy right now. Last year he picked up 51 points in 69 games. Experts say he's good for 60 points, and as a Capital, he should finish with a tidy plus/minus.

Matt Carkner, D, Ottawa Senators, Maaaasquito Bites: Carkner amassed 190 penalty minutes last year, and with seven already in the scoresheets for 2010/11, he should provide his owner with plenty of sin-bin time. He's owned in a paltry 12% of leagues.

Todd Bertuzzi, RW, Detroit Red Wings, unowned: I don't like Bertuzzi for a bunch of reason's but as a top-six forward on a rejuvenated Detroit Red Wings' squad, his 20% ownership rate is too low. Bert is playing with the often incandescent Johan Franzen and Valterri Fillpula, and he has started the 2010/11 campaign off with five points in three games. He put up 44 points over 82 games last year and could easily improve on that this year if the Wings stay healthy. He also gives your squad some anger (80 penalty minutes last year) and while he was a minus-seven in 2009/10, the Wings should be better this year.

Fantasy hockey is full of comfortingly hard-and-fast numbers, but those seemingly universal numbers have different values to different GMs. Only by first taking a hard look at what you need, will you know what is worth going after for you squad.

So while its common advice that you need to maintain your objectively in order to make good decisions, you're going to need to take into account what you think your individual needs are.

Ultimately, anything that has to do with people is subjective…or so I've been told.