My kids just received their grades for the first quarter of school. All you ask of your children is that they do the best they can, but when it comes to NHL players, giving their best effort just isn't good enough for fantasy poolies. They are not paid millions of dollars to try, they are paid to produce. So with the first quarter of the NHL season, I'll give out some grades to notable fantasy players and provide an insight on their outlook for the remainder of the school year …er… NHL season.

A+

Patrick Kane has surpassed everybody's expectations in his rookie season thus far. He hasn't gone two consecutive games without a point and has 6 multi-point games. In a keeper league, I'd give up just about any player except maybe Sidney Crosby to get my hands on this guy.

Vaclav Prospal currently sits in 12th spot among in the NHL scoring race. Of course much of the credit belongs to the guy who occupies the number one rank, Vincent Lecavalier and to Brad Richards who's bouncing back from a disappointing season. Nonetheless, Prospal deserves high marks for bouncing back from his own horrible season. His 12 goals are just two shy of the 14 he scored in the entire 2006-07 season. He won't finish among the leagues top 12 in scoring, but you can count on him reaching the 80-point mark.

Rick Nash fell very low in fantasy drafts this season, very few people expressed confidence in the former overall first round pick. Well, not only has he bounced back in a huge way, he's on his way to his first 50-goal season. A plateau he certainly has the talent to reach, particularly if Nikolai Zherdev continues his emergence.

Mike Ribeiro's career highs are 20 goals and 65 points, both achieved in 2003-04. He's on pace for 37 goals and 93 points. You also see how unreal his numbers are when you look at his shooting percentage, which is at the incredible level of 42.1 percent, that's close to a goal for every two shots that he takes. A 20% shooting percentage is considered outstanding so you can expect Ribeiro's grades to take a drop next semester.

Even though we've covered it thoroughly, the **Carolina Hurricanes'** offense has been too incredible to pass up on the report card. You can't expect their numbers to remain this high for the entire season, but they have plenty of room for a drop off to keep an A grade for the season.

B

Mike Comrie is averaging a point-per-game so earns a B grade because he's a career 60-point player. But if you take away the six points he scored in the first two games of the season, he's merely producing as expected, so don't expect him to maintain a B average for the season.

Paul Stastny is following up his surprise rookie season with a very solid sophomore year. He would have earned an A+ had he kept up the early season production that saw him score 14 points in the first seven games, but his 8 points in the last 12 games are much closer to what you should realistically expect from him.

Ryan Getzlaf was signed to a five-year contract extension this week and it was fully deserved. He has become the Ducks' leader and should be a 90+ point player for years to come.

Nik Antropov was on his way to an A+ after the first 12 games of the season, but with only one goal and four points in the last 9 games, he has to settle for a B grade. It will be difficult for him

to maintain a C average for the remainder of the season.

Tomas Plekanec is big reason for Alexei Kovalev's resurgence this season. He provides the Habs with the first solid second line center since Ribeiro was traded. He'll be prone to droughts, but he has been quite valuable for a player who went undrafted in most fantasy leagues.

C

Daniel Briere was given a huge contract to go to Philadelphia, but he has been merely average during the first quarter. The fact that Simon Gagne has missed nearly half the season with a concussion has hurt Briere's production so if Gagne can come back at full speed, we should see fireworks from these two.

Pavel Datsyuk is actually playing pretty well, but following two straight 87-point seasons, fantasy owners are hoping for more out of him, particularly in the goals scored department. Datsyuk who has scored between 27 and 30 goals the last three years is on pace for a mere16 goals. Expect him to make up for a slow start in that area.

Brendan Shanahan was on his way to an F after ten games with only one goal and three points. However, like the Rangers as team, Shanny has been hot since, scoring 5 goals and 10 points in the last 11 games. Considering he'll turn 39 years old in January, he'll earn a B and maybe even an A by season's end.

Joe Thornton is doing badly, but you expect him to score close to 120 points and be in the top 5 league scorers so his 94 point-pace is merely average. The Sharks have been playing badly for the most part, so you should expect Thornton to explode once they turn things around.

Nicklas Backstrom was hailed as the top rookie prospect entering the 2007-08 season, but he was eased in slowly at the beginning of the season and didn't see over 16 minutes of ice-time in a game until the 14th game of the season. He has only one goal nine points to his credit, but he has been playing with Alexander Ovechkin lately and seeing 20 minutes of ice-time per game, so you can expect him to perform much better for the remainder of the season.

D

Jaromir Jagr, unlike the team as a whole, has not been playing very well lately. He has scored only nine points in the last 15 games, giving him a total of seventeen points on the season. In itself, it isn't so bad, but when you consider that he only has four goals, it's quite disappointing

and makes him deserve a D for the first quarter of the season. Jagr does tend to be inconsistent so you should still be confident that he'll bring up his grades in the months to come.

Brian Gionta is on pace for 20 goals and 45 points, which are pretty much the numbers he posted last season. However, he missed games last year so his performance is extremely disappointing. We'll never see 48 goals from him again, but we expect at least 30 goals and 60 points.

Slava Kozlov suffered mightily from Marian Hossa's early season struggles. However, he has scored 10 points in the last 10 games so expect his grades to be much better from now on.

Tom Poti was brought in to be the quarterback for a young and improving offense featuring such talent as Ovechkin, Semin, Nylander and Backstrom. Unfortunately, Semin has missed much of the season, Backstrom didn't start off very well and Poti himself has missed several games. Were it not for his injury, Poti's grade could have been a flunking one. The outlook for the remainder is promising though with Semin back at full strength and Backstrom starting to assert himself.

Tuomo Ruutu has been healthy this season so why isn't he producing? After staying relatively healthy last year, Ruutu was expected to take a big step offensively this season. It hasn't happened and nothing points to it happening anytime soon.

F

Jonathan Cheechoo, Patrick Marleau, Milan Michalek and Matt Carle have a total of 14 goals and 32 points between the four of them so it's quite amazing to see the Sharks in first place in their division. They are too talented to struggle this much all season and when they turn it on, the Sharks will look like the Ottawa Senators.

Jay Bouwmeester: 2005-06: 8 points in first 29 games, 38 points in last 53 games. 2006-07: 10 points in first 29 games, 32 points in last 53 games. 2007-08 season: 6 points in first 22 games. So flunking the first quarter isn't anything new for Bouwmeester, but history tells us that he can turn an F into an A+ for the second half of the season.

Chris Drury was paid the big bucks by the Rangers after becoming a free-agent following a 37-goal season. Despite getting the opportunity to play with Jagr, Drury has put a mere 3 pucks in the net thus far and was recently demoted to the third line so he'll have to work very hard to improve his grade.

Jason Blake's 40 goals last season were an aberration for a guy whose previous high was 28. So while no one expected him to repeat such a feat, his two goals this season are also an aberration. I'm not that confident that he can get a passing grade for the season, but he will pick

up his production.

Michael Ryder is coming off two straight 30-goal seasons. He's on pace to score 12 this year and has been dropped in many fantasy leagues. He was recently demoted off the top line in Montreal and responded with a goal. He was being asked to shoot more on net and he has done so in the last few games. He's now back on the top line next to Saku Koivu and you can expect him to go on a hot streak

Questions for the Frog

I'm in a rotisserie league that scores G, A, +/-, PPP, PIM, and GWG. I've got Kovalchuk and Gagne as my LW with Vanek as a bench LW player. I have Gaborik and Demitra at RW with Kovalev and Afinogenov as the bench RW. At center I have Datsyuk and Briere with Saku Koivu and Marc Savard as the bench C players. I have Demitra on IR right now and since he's on IR I picked up Mikko Koivu. What should I do when Demitra returns? Trade 2 Centers for a solid RW? To replace the Kovalev's hot streak and the injury struck Gaborik? I also have Souray, Markov, Visnovski on D with whom I am pretty pleased. My goalie situation is Huet, Giguere, Lehtonen with Hedberg on my roster while Lethonen is IR. Who should I trade and what should I go after? I don't really want to drop a player when Demitra gets back off IR as in my opinion my team is fairly solid. Should I upgrade the goalie? Or go after a dominate RW? – Nathan (Canada)

FROG: You have a very solid roster with great depth. I'd first and foremost to acquire a top goaltender. You are set on RW since I believe that Kovalev is for real and will have a great season, he looks motivated game in and game out. You can use Savard and Huet to upgrade between the pipes, now is the time to trade Huet with Carey Price is seeing more and more ice time.

Once Havlat comes back I will have to drop one of Havlat, Jason Blake or Mats Sundin due to salary cap. My depth in the positions is comparable. I am in a deep (16 teams, 4 players per forward position) Roto league counting G, A, +/-, PIM, PP, SHP, GWG. Also, how bad do you expect Antropov to perform rest of the season as compared to his hot start? Yes, I know, I have by far too many Toronto players. – Florian (Sweden)

FROG: Don't count too much on Havlat, he's extremely injury prone while Sundin is extremely solid. Blake is another issue altogether, he's been struggling lately and we don't know how much his illness is affecting him. However, he's on pace to score 8 goals and you know he'll do better than that. Nevertheless, Blake wouldn't never get drafted amongst the top 64 players so I wouldn't have a problem dropping him, knowing you can get pickup another player who'll do as well as Blake when Havlat goes down again. I don't expect Antropov to be anything better than a 50-60 point player which means I expect him to score between 60 and 70 points thanks to his hot start. So, Florian from Sweden, any insides on Forsberg coming back ;-) ?

Wondering who to pick-up? Who to trade? Who to keep? Write to the Fantasy Frog at fantasyfrog@dobberhockey.com and you could see your fantasy hockey question answered in Croaks from the Fantasy Frog. Please indicate where you are from.

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