Mike Colligan takes a look at the evolution of Malkin.

"As a center in Bylsma's system, a player needs to be strong defensively and fast enough to join the rush after his teammates gain possession of the puck.

In the diagram to the right, the center (yellow dot) and two defensemen position themselves between opposing forwards and the net when the puck is in their own end. The system often breaks down when the center cheats up ice anticipating a turnover, leaving his man uncovered and his teammates scrambling to recover."

Couture and Clowe combined for six points and 10 shots on goal against Tampa last night.

JS Giguere had another strong start for the Avs (37 saves on 39 shots). Giguere has won his last three starts, allowing a combined five goals against over that span.

I watched the DET/VAN game... and here are my thoughts:

Surprisingly chippy game between two skilled teams. Some big hits and questionable non-calls contributed to things escalating later on in the game.

Ryan Kesler was everywhere - he got smoked by Kronwall, he took a run at Zetterberg with his knee, and he was in the face of Datsyuk all game long. An easy player to hate, I am sure. He didn't contribute a ton offensively, but he had a strong game.

Luongo was fantastic. It is mind blowing how much quicker and more confident he looks compared to October and early November. He had a few beauty saves and really controlled the puck around his crease well. He's back, folks.

Edler left the game with an injury in the third (I didn't catch it). He scored a goal and was probably the best skater on the ice for either team.

Detroit didn't create much offensively in the first two periods, but they really turned it on in the third. Datsyuk was great. Zetterberg looks a bit "off" to me, and I am sure he has been like that for much of the season.

Burrows now has goals in five straight games. Another solid performance for Vancouver's top line.

Claude Giroux is playing NHL 12 on rookie mode right now. Four points last night in his first game back after a concussion. He was (obviously) fantastic all game long.

The Dallas/Philly game was pretty chippy as well. Steve Ott got into a shoving match with Peter Laviolette in between periods. Bizarre stuff. The Stars couldn't keep up with Philly's speed or skill, at all. Completely overmatched.

Jagr had a great game - two points in about 14 minutes of ice time. The Flyers are obviously wanting to control his ice time so he isn't burnt out for the stretch run and playoffs.

David Rundblad had an assist in about 14 minutes of ice time for the ‘Yotes last night. Gormley, Yandle, and Ekman-Larsson are all left side defensemen, so don’t worry about the right-sided Rundblad having to contend for PP ice time down the road.

Red Light Ward allowed four goals in 19 shots. Red Light Ward is actually the name of one of my fantasy teams.

Eric Staal was minus-3 and finished with zero points.

19-year-old Justin Faulk led all Hurricanes with almost 25 minutes in ice time. He had an assist and saw almost five PP minutes.

Jay Harrison isn’t usually mentioned in the ramblings, but I was surprised at seeing eight shots next to his name on the box score.

I'll leave the jokes at the door (or would that be gate?) – Martin Havlat is out for six-to-eight weeks after injuring himself making a line change. Partially torn hamstring. With Havlat out, Ferriero is going to get a chance to play (and he scored a goal last night).

Mike Richards has been cleared to play tomorrow. He's the first guy Darryl Sutter is going to try and light a fire under. Asides from actually looking like a normal person, Richards could be a Sutter brother with the way he plays the game.

Cedrick Desjardins is a goalie Justin Goldman really likes. That is more than enough for me. Here's a good read on Desjardins.

""I think (some) people know who he is, but by the end of this year, I think everyone's going to know who he is," said Lake Erie Monsters head coach David Quinn.

"There's no one better in the American Hockey League right now."

The numbers agree: Desjardins, in his first year in the Colorado Avalanche organization, leads the AHL in both goals against average (1.49) and save percentage (.952)."

An interesting Roberto Luongo stat – his save percentage is a perfect microcosm for his season - .869 in October, .924 in November, and .937 in December (before last night).

Interesting quote from Jimmy Howard before the game last night: - " I'll have to keep an eye on Jannik Hansen." Considering Hansen is scoring on nearly 30% of the shots he has taken in December, I'd say Howard is on to something.

Thanks to Anthony Lancione for pointing this gem out (numbers are as of two days ago, so they don't factor in Emery's most recent start):

"Dating back to his comeback stint at the end of last season with Anaheim until now (reg season), Emery's actually now on a run of 16-3-2 with a .923 SV%. Plus only twice in both runs did he ever allow more than three goals in a given game. Also, this current five game winning streak is the second such streak in this 21 game sample, as he took six straight out of the gates last spring."

Die by the Blade projects some numbers for the Sabres.

The Good: Vanek 43 goals, Pominville 88 points, Adam 25 goals, Leopold 15 goals.

The Bad: Stafford 15 goals, Ehrhoff five goals, Boyes 20 points

The Ugly: Leino eight goals, Myers 15 points

Sabres are the perfect candidate for a big shake up trade if they don't turn things around quickly. Too much talent on that team to continue to struggle. Ryan Miller's indifferent play this season would concern me if I were a fan of the team.

Al Montoya is out with a concussion. I wonder if he acquired it through osmosis from sitting near DiPietro for too long? The Isles have recalled Anders Nilsson, also known as the supporting goalie in the Crosby Return (Part I).

Nabokov is healthy and the ball is now his to run with.

Is it time for Peter Mueller to retire?

"*Mueller is one of the unfortunate few, but growing, number of players who has been plagued with concussions and concussion-like symptoms for multiple seasons. Sadly, at only 23, he's already spent nearly 1/3 of his 5-year career out of the line up because of head injuries. With a history like that, the time comes when one must think about walking away from the game for the sake of quality of life and life itself."*

Hope you listened when I mentioned Carl Hagelin earlier this month in my 15 Points to Consider. He's skating with Richards and Callahan right now, and isn't looking out of place. He scored a beauty short-handed goal the other night, and he's using his assets (speed and shot) in a big way. 33 shots in 13 games is great production for a rookie with limited ice time.

Marc Staal is planning on skating hard today, and if he can do so with no symptoms, he could return to full practice after Christmas or early in 2012.

Puck Daddy takes a look at the top 10 shootout goals from 2011 . I love that Ribeiro move – the guy could have quite the list by himself.

Kronwall Kronwall's Kesler. Leaves his feet a bit but a pretty nice hit:

{youtube}CX4dzE1wles{/youtube}

Great shot from Hodgson:

{youtube}3_6WUK2BLc8{/youtube}