Marian Hossa, 33, is having a pretty damn good season and would like to play into his 40s like Teemu Selanne and Nicklas Lidstrom. Keeper league owners are always anxious to get a read into their players' mindsets when it comes to predicting future campaigns, so this should give his poolies some peace of mind.

Speaking of the Hawks and players' mindsets, what are we supposed to make of Patrick Kane and his alleged off-ice exploits through the years? What's fantasy and what's reality? He addresses the issue
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"I think you grow up every year, every day," Kane told The Chicago Tribune. "You learn something new and try to really worry about what's important in life. When you're 18, 19 you think you know everything but you have no clue about anything. I feel way, way more grown up than I used to be."

Martin Brodeur is seemingly leaning toward playing at least one more year, but it doesn't change the fact that the Devils are still facing their annual question: who the hell is going to replace the legend ? Good

luck with that one.

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All-Star weekend.

It’s a chance to revel in the experience of some relaxed NHL players having a bit of fun for many fans and why the heck not? It’s actually nice to see the guys goofing around in the skills competition.

For me though, this break is a chance for five straight nights without live blogging so I tend to take full advantage of it by not watching anything hockey-related. Every night has been doing something with friends and while I have a recap show of the skills display going as I write this, we actually had some people over tonight for an evening of good food and our annual guys against the girls Trivial Pursuit game. #nerdolympics

So the Sidney Crosby news, as I read it, seems to be that within the past few days he was diagnosed with an old neck injury that has already healed. The neck is fine. The spine is fine. This injury was (emphasis on past tense) in addition to the concussion and it's still the concussion symptoms preventing him from playing.

It seems not clear if the neck injury was a fracture or something else. It's also not clear why this was missed in the first place. We should get more info on that situation this coming week.

He is still skating. That's a good sign. He is still working out. Another good sign. While there is no timeline for his comeback, his agent says Crosby remains hopeful he will play again soon. Whatever that means.

Crosby owners shouldn't necessarily be any more worried about his health than they were prior to this news, although that would be the natural reaction in an already tenuous situation. Whether he plays again this season or not remains to be seen (they certainly seem hopeful he will), but by this point it seems like we'd have to consider any further '11-12 contributions gravy.

Hopefully he can be 100% for the start of next season, but with the unknown nature of concussions and given how precarious his particular concussion scenario has been to date... will there ever be a 100% for Crosby again? There just are no good answers, unfortunately. It's extremely frustrating having such a wildly fluctuating value tied next to arguably the best player in hockey and pools, but c'est la vie for now.

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So if you're still in the conversation for your league's title as we near an end to January, the All-Star break is a pretty good time to really step back and look over the standings. Do a CSI-worthy evaluation, category by category and see where your both your strengths and weaknesses lay.

It's also worthwhile in roto leagues to double-check your games played paces and see if you need to slow down in some areas. Or maybe you've been banking some injury games for your final few months. If so, kudos. Not many seem to have the patience to successfully maneuver that potential minefield.

Does your league have a trade deadline and if so, how important will it be to your team's chances to address a potential Achilles' Heel? Trades don't necessarily happen overnight, especially given how lame some people can be to responding to offers and emails. So even if your deadline isn't until the actual NHL trade deadline, you may want to staying laying the groundwork for a deal right now.

It can't be said often enough when you're talking turkey with a fellow owner – honesty and practicality will go a long, long way. As a poolie, my skin crawls when I get one of those fake-ass "Hey buddy, how ya doin'?" proposals that more often than not will involve players I have no interest in trading for assets I'd have no interest in acquiring. Or, as will often be the case, I'll be offered a skater who may be decent but at a position at which I'm already set.

Just take a few minutes to think. Look at the rosters of your potential trade partner. If you need goaltending and they already have Henrik Lundqvist, Jonathan Quick and Tim Thomas (Why do I imagine Mel Gibson's painted face yelling "Freedom!" when I see Thomas post-White House debacle?), then you're probably barking up the right tree by talking with that owner. Maybe their defence has been decimated by injuries and that's an area where you're overflowing.

Put yourself in their shoes before you send the offer. Is that something you'd realistically consider?

Keeper leagues, especially deeper ones, offer the most flexibility at this time of year for owners who are gunning for No. 1. Teams lower in the standings can create a bidding war for those older stars among the top few squads and perhaps squeeze out a high draft pick or, depending on the age of the star, perhaps even a top prospect that can be nurtured in a farm system and will blossom right around the time that star retires.

Over the years I've made some doozies to get just the right fit to push hard down the stretch and more often than not, it paid off handsomely with another title. In real world talent I easily gave up too much when you sit back and look at it, but fantasy sports is all about ending the season as the top dog. I'd sacrifice blue chip prospects without a moment's hesitation if it meant securing a win that year and I've done it virtually every single season.

If your league is deep enough to support a farm system on top of the active roster, then the onus is on that championship owner's scouting acumen to keep his minor team stocked with attractive bait. You may not pick in the top of the draft class each summer if you're winning, but it doesn't mean you can't land excellent prospects if you're willing to put in the hours of homework it takes to mine gold in the later rounds.

The bottom line in all of this is that while there are so many factors that are beyond your control in pools- injuries, bad luck, awful seasons and more – hard work and attention to details can help to overcome quite a bit in this hobby we love so much.

Dedication pays off. Truly. It's not always rewarded, but the cream rises to the top more often than not when you're willing to invest yourself in something.

It's as true in life, actually, as it is for something as relatively trivial as our adoration of fantasy hockey.

Should you be so inclined, you can follow me on Twitter .