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We're starting to see some signs of life from Columbus centerman Derek Brassard. The jury is still out on whether Brassard can become an impact fantasy asset or will join the ranks of failed Blue Jacket first-round picks. He's been seeing more ice time as of late, so keep an eye on the 24-year-old Brassard. He absolutely lit up the scoresheet in the AHL a few years back. The ability is there, it's just a matter of consistency at this point. He scored two goals Friday night (including the game-winner in overtime) to lead the Blue Jackets to a 3-2 win over Anaheim, and he has four points in his past five games. I love him as a speculative add in deeper formats.

Jaroslav Halak has been on an absolute tear. The St. Louis netminder notched his fourth shutout in his past seven starts Friday evening in a hard-fought 1-0 victory over the Los Angeles Kings. Halak is a perfect example of why fantasy owners need to remain patient with goalies that suffer slow starts to the season. Halak compiled an .843 save percentage in October, but he hasn't been below .922 for any month since.

I was someone who avoided Sergei Gonchar in any and every draft heading into the 2010-2011 campaign. I felt as if the veteran defenseman would be overpriced due to his 50-point campaign with Pittsburgh in '09-10, his final season with the Penguins. In my opinion, a move to Ottawa

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coupled with Gonchar's ever-advancing age meant his production would drop off. It certainly did, as Gonchar posted just 27 points in his first season with the Sens. But just one year later, I've come full circle on Gonchar. He has been a reliable source of assists, has managed to stay pretty healthy, he's playing with high-scoring Erik Karlsson (who leads all NHL defensemen with 48 points), and he has matched his point total from last year in just 47 games played. Gonchar has proven, for this season anyway, that he's still a productive puck-moving defenseman – even at the age of 37.

Kris Versteeg is just two goals away from tying his career high for a season, as the Florida Panthers winger notched his 20th in a 2-1 win over host Winnipeg Friday night. Versteeg seemed poised to make an impact last season in Toronto (for a Leafs squad that was counting on him to take a step forward in terms of production), but nothing seemed to go his way in Toronto or even after he was traded to Philadelphia. But with a clearly-defined role and a spot on Florida's top line – oh, as well as a little bit of good fortune – Versteeg has hit his stride. He's shooting the puck more (2.55 goals per game this year compared to 2.16 per game for his career), and his shooting percentage is up a bit over his career mark (.158 this year compared to .130 for his career). I expect him to continue to produce at or near his current pace moving forward this season.

Nail Yakupov's going to have to [sit for two games](#) after skipping the CHL All-Star Game.

There are rumors the St. Louis Blues may explore a trade involving slumping winger Christ Stewart. The speculation comes less than a year after the Blues traded former No. 1 overall pick Erik Johnson in a deal to acquire Stewart. Always a high-percentage shooter in the NHL, Stewart has been far less accurate this season. He's also losing ice time and playing on a third line with Jamie Langenbrunner and Jason Arnott. Stewart owners in deep leagues or dynasty formats have no choice but to hang onto Stewart and hope for a bounceback (or perhaps a trade). Something needs to jumpstart the 24-year-old power forward, who was a

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highly-sought-after fantasy asset in drafts the past two years. Those in shallow formats who have refused to jettison Stewart in favor of a more productive option should consider doing so.

It looks like Pittsburgh's Jordan Staal, out since Jan. 6 with a knee injury, could return to action at some point next week. I'll be trying to acquire him in my leagues. I love his skill set and Pittsburgh will need him to see all the ice time he can get with Sidney Crosby out indefinitely. Remember, Staal totaled 30 points in 42 games last year. He's missed a ton of games over the past two seasons, but prior to 2010-11, Staal missed just ONE game in his first four NHL seasons. Buy now or regret it later.

Farewell to Owen Nolan, is expected to announce his retirement after more than 20 years in the NHL. Nolan earned a tryout with Vancouver prior to this season, but failed to make the team. The No. 1 overall pick in the 1990 Draft by the Quebec Nordiques, Nolan finishes his career with 422 goals and 885 points in 1,200 career games.

A prediction from Kent Wilson of *Hockey Prospectus* and *Flames Nation*: Mikael Backlund will score about 20 points in the second half of this season. I think that seems about right. I snagged him in a deep keeper league earlier this year after a frustrated owner got rid of him. If you're looking for a high-upside pickup in a dynasty league, consider Backlund. He'll produce some this year AND offer hope for a future increase in production. He's settled into a third-line role with the Flames and performed well.

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Look who has regained his scoring touch (well, at least lately). Flames defenseman Jay Bouwmeester has eight points in his past 10 games. This sure surprised me. I haven't watched the Flames recently. Has anyone seen anything different from J-Bouw or is he being used differently? Or is this simply a matter of a little good fortune?

Don't count on Brenden Morrow to be in the lineup Saturday or Tuesday. He is headed to injured reserve with a neck/back injury after an abbreviated, two-game return to the lineup.

In case you missed it, the New York Rangers have sent Erik Christensen and a seventh-round draft pick to the Minnesota Wild in exchange for forward Casey Wellman. Christensen was a disappointment in his brief tenure with the Rangers, but the Wild could use some depth at the forward position. Here is the [full breakdown of the deal](#) .

I saw this yesterday on *Puck Daddy* and got a pretty good laugh...

{youtube}MUumD9pd2Hc{/youtube}