Update on RNH - 7-10 days with a sprained shoulder according to TSN.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins left last night's contest in the third period after aggravating his shoulder injury. It was a "precaution" and he'll be re-evaluated. Regardless, I think the point totals are on the way to a big dip now that Sam Gagner has taken his spot on that big line. Gagner with another point last night.

Matt Duchene skated on his own (finally). Also in that blog was news that Peter Mueller was back in practice, so maybe it really was the flu (phew) this time.

I know a lot of people were upset at Ken Campbell's piece on how Sam Gagner only had seven points in that game and not eight, but I think it's a brilliant way to bring in reads. First of all, what he says is true. Secondly, it's the flavor of the week – he can't sit on this observation for a month and then say it. Has to be now, and the story will be passed around like smuggled chocolate bars at fat camp.

It would seem that the Leafs are unstoppable right now. The first line is red hot. The second line is even hotter. This is the ‘zone’ that teams dream of being in and don’t often get there. But Grabovski is playing like an 80-point player right now and has been for a month. Meanwhile, Lupul and Kessel are playing like 90-point players, like they have pretty much all season. The Leafs ate up the Hemsky/Smyth/RNH line for lunch – they were a combined minus-10. Throw Barker and Whitney in there too (minus-3 each).

James Reimer’s shutout string ended… 21 seconds into the game.

I don’t trust Mike Smith’s consistency late in the season and have been quietly shopping him. But perhaps I should just shut up. The guy has been fantastic in three of his last four games and is keeping his numbers – SP and GAA – in the top portion of the league. And he’ll get 31-36 wins, which is nothing to sneeze at.

Joey MacDonald is stealing the backup job from Ty Conklin. Conklin is on thin ice and if he blows it next game, I think Joey Mac will be a nice fantasy asset for about two or three weeks before Howard returns.

Matt Stajan.

As you can tell from the paragraph above, every once in awhile I'm going to try to squeeze in a joke of the day. Put a smile on your face while you sip your morning coffee. Naw, I'm hard on Stajan. He's a player that I really liked and can remember when he transitioned from a checker to a top-line player in Toronto. And after all – he's outscoring Scott Gomez (although not out-pointing him, but let's keep this positive). Oh, another positive – he sleeps on a big pile of money.

As you've heard by now, Sidney Crosby skated and practiced with the rest of his team. The coach played it down, saying that Jordan Staal and Simon Despres were ready to practice with them and he didn't want Crosby skating alone. But I wouldn't be surprised to see him in action next week. Wouldn't put money on it, but wouldn't be surprised. Just a feeling. And I think he'll be a little more tolerant with any symptoms now that he knows it was the neck and not the head.

Here's an interesting look at the offensive zone starts for the Dallas Stars and how they've changed over the past week. Essentially, the scorers are taking more offensive zone faceoffs and the defensive guys are taking much fewer. That should bode well for the likes of Ribeiro et al.

After going pointless in his first game back, Alex Tanguay has points in three straight (four points total). He played with Jokinen and Iginla, which pushed Mike Cammalleri with superstars Blair Jones and Krystofer Kolanos. Cammy owners – my fingers are crossed for you that this won't continue for long.

Aaron Ness has been recalled by the Islanders because Travis Hamonic suffered a broken nose Saturday.

My Puck Daddy column from yesterday is here . My THN column – where I give you my take on Tavares vs. Hall vs. Nugent-Hopkins vs. Seguin – is here .

Also a reminder that the DobberBaseball Fantasy Guide was released yesterday. Pick it up! And please stop by the forum over there, as there have been some pretty good new members come on board.

Some interesting players put on waivers yesterday – Anthony Stewart, Andrew Murray and Zach Hamill. There will be a lot of this over the next three weeks as teams try to push some of their extras off to other teams and clear what room they can. Or failing that, then the player gets off the books via the AHL.

Mikko Koivu took practice with some contact yesterday .

It looks like Nikita Nikitin, James Wisniewski and Mark Letestu will all be back next week for Columbus. But Kristian Huselius may be out for the season.

I also wanted to remind you that you can get the latest line combos for free right here , and some great volunteers from the forum have done a fantastic job of keeping up with the news throughout the day – and
summarizing it here
.

Remember James Sheppard? He's with San Jose now and is skating . Target date is March 1 for a return, although you can expect two weeks in the AHL for conditioning I'm sure.

Five to 10 days , that's the word on a Jordan Staal return to action.

Straight out of the text book, from tic-tac-toe to the give-and-go :

{youtube}J8x8BW6ZKSE{/youtube}