The Panthers settled down after a rough first period. Sean Bergenheim and Kris Versteeg scored their goals, but they weren't able to square the game up before regulation time expired.

Mikael Samuelsson had a pair of helpers – he was always a strong playoff performer in Detroit and Vancouver.

Erik Gudbranson is a beast physically, but he needs to improve is game defensively (as most young players do). He's going to be a good one in a couple of years, though.

Kudos to Shea Weber for answering the bell with a scrap against Todd Bertuzzi last night. The issue seemed to be over with after that. Stupid and dangerous play, but Detroit is the last team to spend an entire game seeking retribution.

Gustav Nyqvist played seven minutes – not a lot, but he did look good. Now isn't the time for Mike Babcock to experiment with ice time for rookies, but it says a lot that he trusts Nyqvist in a playoff game already.

Alex Radulov led the Preds with four shots on goal, and he also had an assist. He had a very involved game, once again. Phenomenal stick handler.

Another iffy start for Pekka Rinne – three goals allowed on only 17 shots faced. He made some great saves, but some of the goals he let in were definitely questionable.

So… How about that Flyers/Penguins game? Where to begin?

Claude Giroux had one of the best stat lines you will ever see – three goals, three assists, plus-4, and 10 shots on goal. I don't even know what else to say. **The guy makes the postseason his domain.**

Sean Couturier had a hat trick and a helper – Jaromir Jagr afterwards said he was the best young defensive forward he has ever seen (compared him to former linemate Ron Francis – high praise, indeed). Couturier has been amazing through two games, going head-to-head against Evgeni Malkin .

Jake Voracek had two assists – he played a really involved game. He's a great skater and is hard to knock off the puck once he has it.

Chris Kunitz scored twice, but finished with a brutal minus-5 rating. Good thing most playoff pools don't count plus-minus (James Neal was minus-4).

Sidney Crosby scored again – 15 seconds into the first period. The Penguins need to stop scoring so many early goals.

Pascal Dupuis extended his ridiculous point streak to 19 games. When was the last time a depth scorer had this kind of run going?

Roberto Luongo may not start game three, but it won't be for his performance through the first two games. Vancouver's ineffectual offense (due in large part to Jonathan Quick) had many chances to win them the game, but they couldn't muster anything.

Dustin Brown was great, as was Anze Kopitar . LA's top line carried the load after their second line did the same in game one.

Brown scored two short-handed goals, as did Giroux. I believe it was the first time since 2006 that a player scored multiple shorties in a playoff game (and it happened twice last night).

Jannik Hansen had a goal as he got promoted to Vancouver's top line.

The Canucks reunited their American Express line with David Booth , Ryan Kesler , and Chris Higgins
. Kesler was a beast on the puck all game – he took a careless penalty late in the game after taking a run at
Mike Richards
, though.

LA played another really strong road game – timely goal scoring and good goaltending. Quick

stopped 46 of 48 shots – the Kings had 26 on Luongo.

As I wrote above, I think the Canucks go with Cory Schneider in game three. Just a hunch.

More thoughts on the Wings/Preds and Panthers/Devils coming later this AM.

Rhys Richards asks if the double standard has returned. I'll counter with another question – did it ever leave?

"Shanahan suspended players based upon their activity on the ice, not their status as a journeyman or superstar. He suspended players guilty of infractions regardless of whether the player on the receiving end was a fourth-line forward or third pairing defenseman or a top forward, defenseman, or goalie.

He suspended players regardless of who their upcoming opponents were. He quite simply reviewed the play in question, applied the rule and doled out the appropriate suspension as dictated by precedent, the offending player's past discipline and to some extent, whether the play resulted in injury."

The Pens inked prospect Beau Bennett to an entry-level contract yesterday. Bennett was a project pick when the Pens selected him out of the BCHL back in 2010 (20th overall), and he still has a ways to go before making the NHL. I am surprised he is turning pro already – he has 13 goals in 47 career games in the NCAA (split over two years).

Bennett played only 10 games this past season due to injury, but he did finish with 13 points.

Lighting prospect Cory Conacher has been named AHL MVP for the 2011-12 season. He could be the next Martin St. Louis (the comparisons exist beyond lack of size). Often times young scorers are compared to St. Louis if they battle size-related adversity.

Like St. Louis, Conacher plays a fiesty, gritty game. Like St. Louis, he is equal parts scorer and play maker. With a strong training camp, he could find his way into Tampa's top six as early as next season.

Buffalo GM Darcy Regier hopes to make the Sabres tougher to play against next year. As I wrote a few days ago – Derek Roy is likely on the way out. He and coach Lindy Ruff continue to butt heads, and Tyler Ennis is sure looking good at center.

What can the Sabres do? Obviously the emergence of Marcus Foligno will help, but he can't be counted on (just yet). Relying on unproven rookies is far from a safe strategy. If he continues his strong play, the Sabres should consider it a bonus.

It seems the Sabres are perpetually looking to get tougher and more physical with little success. They have a lot of good skaters and skill players, but I'm not sure how well their current group would stand up in a seven game series against anybody. Will be interesting to see who they target, either through free agency or the trade route. From Sabres president Ted Black:

"It's often talked about that the Sabres need a top six center, but Black said there is another need, "We need to be a tougher team to play against. I'm sure that's one of Darcy's action items in the off season."

Edmonton needs to add a few defensemen this summer – this is news to nobody. But who, exactly, will they target? Copper & Blue takes a look at some potential secondary targets here. I concur that Justin Schultz should be top priority. He's young, extremely talented, and most importantly of all, won't cost anything (aside from his salary) to acquire.

*"#1 - **Justin Schultz.** One of only two possible free agent signings of the group. There has been some buzz that Schultz may have a realistic shot at landing in Edmonton, primarily based on **Bob McKenzie suggesting the Oilers as a potential destination** on an episode of the NHL on TSN Quiz. I don't know if it is likely, but the guy is limited to signing an entry-level deal, so if I'm the Oilers, I offer him the best deal you can and try to make the compelling argument that he'll have elite offensive skill to play with and immediate opportunity to play. He's a Western Canadian kid, so you hope that opportunity and the chance to play close to home is enough to convince him to sign with the Oil. For those unaware, Schultz was taken in the same draft as*
Jordan Eberle
, but has been in the NCAA since that time. He now has the option of taking advantage of a clause in the CBA that allows him to become a UFA this June at the age of 21. Schultz is a smooth, puck moving powerplay quarterback and happens to be a right-handed shot, which the Oilers are in dire need of. That fact pushes him to the top of my list."

Both Carl Gunnarsson and Andrej Sekera make a lot of sense too. Sekera for the point I made above – he's redundant in Buffalo, and could be a breakout candidate in Edmonton (great skater, moves the puck well, could slide in on the top PP unit).

Ryan Callahan is the prototypical hockey player, captain, and leader. Glad to see he is getting the recognition he deserves – he's played the exact same style ever since breaking in with the Rangers a few years ago, but now he's doing it with much more off-ice responsibility, and on a bigger stage.

Radim Vrbata played two shifts on Thursday night before leaving the game. He seemed to be in discomfort after a hit from Chicago's Andrew Shaw .

Vrbata was the first Coyote to score 35 goals in a season since Tkachuk score 36back in 1998-99. Needless to say, if he is out for any period of time, they will really miss his offense.

Neate Sager takes a look at the possibility of Alex Galchenyuk (can finally spell his name without having to look it up) going 1st overall to Edmonton over on Buzzing the Net.

"This is no slight on Yakupov. He is going to be a damn fine NHL player and one should reasonably expect that when he turns 19 on Oct. 6, he'll be waking up in a big-league city rather

than in Sarnia. But keen observers have noticed that the points didn't come so easily following the knee injury he suffered in the world junior gold-medal game. There were extenuating circumstances, surely, and you can't put a ton of stock in junior point totals since you don't know how many of them were hard-earned, but he counted just 21 in 22 games after rejoining the Sting on Jan. 27. That couldn't really just be put down to injuries, as Yessie noted:

"Nail has dropped off in his intensity and production. He has had a rough go at it this season suffering 3 injuries, and playing more hockey than he ever has in an intense World Junior Championship, as well as helping Sarnia make the playoffs for the first time in three seasons. He appeared to benefit more from playing with Alex, than Alex did playing with Nail. With this said, Yakupov is still an extremely talented prospect, and will be second to his teammate Alex in terms of his projection as a key NHL prospect for the 2012 NHL Entry Draft."

Whoever gets Galchenyuk, even he's the No. 6 overall choice, will also be getting a huge asset. He's not playing in this week's IIHF under-18 championship, the springtime scouts' delight where Yakupov cemented himself as the top prospect coming into this season. The workouts he

has with NHL teams before the draft ought to be his proving ground."

In a huge surprise, the Devils owner regrets moving the team to Newark.

""I was told chapter and verse 'Don't go there. Don't step foot in that city,'" he said. Asked if he was sorry he came, Vanderbeek said, "Right now, I have to be." But in the same breath, he said he has no intention of leaving. "We plan on being here. The mayor can say whatever he wants," Vanderbeek said. "I'm a big boy."

What a pass... what a goal:

{youtube}DaS9C5UmIkA{/youtube}

Dirty dangle from the AHL last night:

{youtube}XhBOQED0hVc{/youtube}