

July 12, 2012

Written by Jeff Angus

Wednesday, 11 July 2012 18:04 - Last Updated Thursday, 12 July 2012 13:03

[My latest for the CanucksArmy](#) - Kevin Connauton is getting closer to NHL duty.

Interesting story in Vancouver – [Dan Ellis](#) [emailed a reporter](#) with a local paper with reasons why he would be a good back up behind

[Cory Schneider](#)

. Can't fault him for thinking outside the box.

"I would love to back up Cory if the spot becomes available. Helping young goalies get to their full potential is fun to be a part of. Sometimes just lightening their load makes all the difference in the world."

The [Peter Mueller](#) sign is another worthy risk by the Florida Panthers. Does it signal a trade? Not necessarily, but it does open up a forward to be moved in any Luongo deal (the Canucks would love to add [Kris Versteeg](#) , while the Panthers would probably be more willing to move [omas Kopecky](#) [Scottie Upshall](#) or [I](#)).

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The Wojtek Wolski contract is fantastic for the Caps. At such a low cap hit (well below \$1 million), there is essentially no downside. Wolski has been training for the past two summers with Stamkos and the Gary Roberts crew - didn't translate into success last season, though. It will be interesting to see how he is utilized in Washington. He needs to be in a top six role to thrive.

Good news for [Mike Smith](#) owners – the Coyotes have extended his goalie coach, [Sean Burke](#), for another three years. Burke will also assist GM Don Maloney.

Buffalo's two 2012 1st round picks – Zemgus Girgensons, and Mikhail Grigorenko, have been playing together at developmental camp.

Girgensons is committed to the University of Vermont for next season, but he hasn't ruled out turning pro with a strong training camp.

Girgensons played in the USHL last year (and not the CHL), which makes him eligible to sign with Buffalo and play right away (either at the NHL or AHL level).

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This week has been the biggest for my blog – [my Alexander Semin post](#) has generated a ton of interest. Thanks to all of those who read it. Semin is far from a perfect player, but many of his warts are overemphasized. He's a very solid two way forward, and hopefully will get a chance to prove that in a situation that attempts to maximize his assets next season.

“Almost all of his linemates have had better goals-against ratios while playing with him compared to playing without him (excluding Ovechkin in 2010-11). Only one of 14 linemates from the past three seasons performed significantly better defensively without Semin than with him. Some saw almost no difference with and without Semin on the wing, while others saw a significant improvement in their defensive play. He may lack grit, heart, intensity, and a “motor that doesn’t quit,” but Semin has been a very strong defensive forward in recent years. Read that out loud a few times, now.”

If you ever want me to take a deeper look at a team, player, or situation, fire me an email. Always looking for column topic suggestions.

The Hurricanes have inked Marc-Andre Gragnani to a one-year, two-way deal. As I wrote on Twitter yesterday, this is the only time you will see “Gragnani” and “two-way” in the same sentence.

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A big reason why Parise/Suter went to Minnesota, aside from the hometown factor and the ability to play together – Minnesota's future. The Wild have arguably the top group of prospects in the entire league (Granlund, Coyle, Dumba, Brodin, Phillips, Zucker, and so on). A 13 year commitment is a long time, and the two stars obviously wanted to go to a situation where the chance to win would exist for more than just a few years.

Marc-Edouard Vlasic is a Shark for the next six years. He signed a five-year extension with a cap hit south of \$5 million. Not much fantasy value directly, but he's a rock defensively and helps the value of the goalie behind him and the defenseman partnered with him.

And my blog isn't going to take away from my work at Dobber at all. I'm working on my final top 10 list – goaltenders. Should be published in the next few weeks. Busy with 2012 Fantasy Guide stuff at the moment, too.

[Who will Buffalo's number one center be?](#)

"The talk of a number one center has been tops around here for a while now but all along we might have already had 1 on the roster. [Tyler Ennis](#) and [Cody Hodgson](#) will both be on this year's roster and one of these guys is going to be centering the top line I believe. The question will be who? Ennis showed many people during the 2nd half of the season he can definitely open up more ice and create when he plays center. Hodgson I believe didn't have enough time to progress with his teammates. Starting this year with more practices under his belt, playing on

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a steady line and also more experience should hopefully help him have a good season.”

Hodgson isn't good enough defensively to play top line minutes (right now). Ennis looked good there last year. I think Buffalo has to bring a veteran center in at some point, but they could take a chance and go with the young guys up the middle on the top two lines.

Dallas prospect winger Alex Chiasson sounds like he is the closest among their forwards for an NHL roster spot. [Matt Fraser](#) (a goal-scoring power forward) is also in the mix.

[Scott Glennie](#) can't be forgotten either, but he has been a bit of a disappointment since getting taken in the top 10 a few years ago. It is much too early to write him off, and the Stars are going to give their kids every opportunity to earn roster spots out of training camp.

[Shane Doan](#) isn't going to sign before July 16 – he and his agent have said that day is the deadline for the Phoenix ownership situation to sort itself out.

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Doan is a very solid player (although his playoff track record is far from spectacular), but it is going to be awfully risky to give a soon-to-be 36-year-old a long term deal (which is what he wants. I'd be comfortable going two years with him, but I am sure he wants at least three or four. And since he is over the age of 35, his cap hit will count regardless of whether he retires or not.

There will never be a shortage of ramblings, even when there is a shortage of NHL news. Read on – lots to chew on today.

[Cam Charron takes a look at long term contracts.](#) Are the Flyers still getting value for [Daniel Briere](#) ?

“Either way, the original Briere deal served its purpose. It got the Flyers their man, paid him a terrific amount of money early on and gave Philadelphia a chance to compete for four of the five productive years of the deal. It made other superstars tougher to find, as well, as these deals take the best players off the market during their best years. The goal of general managers will be, unless some of these contracts are rolled back, will not be to evaluate talent in the years ahead, but to draft, develop and lock up talent before talent hits its unrestricted free agent years.”

Current Panthers prospect [Sergei Shirokov](#) gave a [pretty insightful interview](#) on his time in North America, and if he plans on returning to the NHL.

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“VS: *Do you remember how you met Mike Keane?*

Shirokov: *I was at the airport in Winnipeg, the GM picked me up, drove me to hotel and said: ‘Keane is going to pick you up tomorrow.’ I heard about him but didn’t exactly know who he was. Mike came the next morning, brought me a cup of coffee, told me about the team. He’s an incredibly positive man and he lives hockey. We hung out quite a bit at his place. He’s got a cabinet, which is like a mini-museum where he displays his trophies. There’s a lot of stuff to see.”*

[A great read on the effects of confidence](#) , and [Mark Streit](#) and [Blake Comeau](#) are used as examples for the good and bad.

“Anyone who watched [Blake Comeau](#) for the entirety of his time in the Islanders organization could reasonably conclude that his on-ice mix of moments of brilliance with moments of facepalming is not the reflection of a player who only "shows up" on certain nights, but rather that of an inconsistent young forward going through growing pains. Awkward stages where he's still figuring out what he can do at this level -- and still assembling the confidence that those things are worth the try.

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For Islanders fans who grew frustrated watching Comeau, it wasn't for a lack of effort or work. Decision-making, possibly concentration and possibly hockey I.Q., but not effort. And quite possibly confidence. (Note that despite a humiliating year and a 50% pay cut from the Flames, the confidence appears back: GM Jay Feaster openly expects something less from Comeau, but Comeau thinks he really is a 24-goal scorer.

Comeau has been and can be a contributing NHLer, but I will bet my dog that it's more in the identity Feaster sees in him than the role Comeau sees for himself.)”

Elliotte Friedman on why scrapping long-term contracts in the new CBA would [be a bad idea](#) (and I agree).

We don't know what the free-agency rules are going to be in the new CBA, but we do know this: the Nashville Predators need to find common ground with [Shea Weber](#) . And, next summer, the Pittsburgh Penguins are going to have to do the same with

[Evgeni Malkin](#)

. And, if there is a shorter term limit for contracts, franchise players like Weber and Malkin are going to have no choice but the start the negotiations with one sentence.

"I'll take the max."

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[A Sports Law blog](#) takes a look at some of the important issues of the upcoming CBA negotiations.

“Free agency

Under the old CBA, players became unrestricted free agents (UFA) at the age of 31. Now players become UFAs at the age of 27 or if they have played 7 years - whichever comes first. That’s why it’s called the 7/27 rule.

The new UFA age of 27 is a problem for NHL teams. A big problem and one that perhaps is undervalued in its importance. By dropping the UFA eligible age by 4 years, teams are faced with the potential of losing really good players when they hit their prime. So what teams have been doing is signing players in their mid-20s to long-term deals – which include buying up UFA years.”

Have any of our readers been attending the various developmental camps?

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More Pavel Bure highlights, because, well, why not?

{youtube}HPLWImdVYTQ{/youtube}