

In a column noting how the Rangers' aura has been remixed this summer, The New York Post also points out that the dependency on Chris Kreider and Carl Hagelin to [accelerate the learning curve](#) is not insignificant. Hence the keen interest in still signing Shane Doan. The Post believes Doan, should he choose to pull the trigger and leave Phoenix, has narrowed his choices to the Rangers, Penguins and Canucks. Excellent alternatives, all three – each of which should be a legitimate contender during Doan's likely final three or four-year contract period.

That whole article had some really intriguing aspects to it, actually, including the postulation that John Tortorella couldn't envision finesse-oriented Tim Erixon fitting into the style he demands. Hence the team not having a major issue including him in the Rick Nash deal.

The flip side of that argument, not mentioned in the piece, is that wasn't Tortorella already the coach when the Rangers made that sweet trade to GET Erixon (when the Flames were faced with losing his rights for nothing in the summer of 2011) in the first place? Seems like a convenient after-the-fact discourse to say Erixon's style didn't mesh well, IMO. Not everyone on the team can be Ryan Callahan, you know? Not that I wouldn't have included him in a heartbeat to get Nash; I just don't necessarily agree with that assessment. Erixon is young enough and Torts is a fantastic teacher.

August 05, 2012

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 04 August 2012 21:56 - Last Updated Sunday, 05 August 2012 10:50

*

We're under six weeks out from the current Collective Bargaining Agreement expiring and only nine weeks away from what we hope will be the beginning of the '12-13 NHL campaign. If there's a work stoppage and it stretches into the middle of winter, Sportsnet will be sending me overseas for an extensive expose aimed at uncovering the seedy underbelly of badminton tanking.

Whether the season starts on time or not, [buy the fantasy hockey guide](#). Aside from the fact that it's lockout-proof, there are sleepers, upsides, projections on a sortable spreadsheet and so much more. It's only \$9.99 (U.S.), so support the cause of a site which gives you so much quality content for free.

Including in the cost is my feature on 15 worthwhile keepers to target. It's not always about looking for discounts - gold is a winning investment too. Shhh. Don't tell the big man. Here's a sneak peek of one of the blurbs...

Sven Bärtschi – LW, Calgary – Consider last year's five-game preview akin to a late night Christmas Eve excursion down the stairs as an eight-year-old, sneaking a peek of your parents wrapping up that highly-coveted tabletop hockey game. The Swiss-born dynamo etched an

August 05, 2012

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 04 August 2012 21:56 - Last Updated Sunday, 05 August 2012 10:50

indelible image in the minds of Flames' faithful in that handful of starts. Not only are his deadly offensive instincts NHL-ready, but he flashed a glimpse of his moxie by fearlessly knocking down hulking Dustin Byfuglien on his first shift. Svensanity is alive and well in The Stampede City and though we should keep first-year expectations firmly in check, his long-term outlook is resplendent.

Back on the subject of labour talks: The NHLPA sent out a [recap of the week's bargaining sessions](#) and the takeaway, from their perspective, was this: The NHLPA's analysis of the NHL owners' initial proposal has revealed that it would result in a massive transfer of money from players' salaries to the owners, in the amount of \$450 million per year, measured against last season's revenues.

You likely heard about Mark Messier's \$6 million arbitration award against the Vancouver Canucks, which was reported Friday in The Vancouver Sun. Who would be responsible for paying that money though: the current owners, the Aquilinis; or John McCaw, who owned the team at the time of the disputed contract? The Sun [takes a look at that very question](#) and while the query remains unanswered, at least for now, it's another insight into the business side of the game and how liabilities can be an integral part of the team transaction process in pro sports.

*

August 05, 2012

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 04 August 2012 21:56 - Last Updated Sunday, 05 August 2012 10:50

The Denver Post's Adrian Dater tweeted Saturday afternoon that he expects the negotiations toward a new contract for Avs center Ryan O'Reilly to pick up again next week sometime, and this time he thinks some real progress toward a new deal will be made. The restricted free agent set career highs in goals (18), assists (37) and points (55); leading his team in assists and points.

The Avs could go a number of different directions with lines, naturally, but it'd be hard to overlook the chemistry that O'Reilly enjoyed with stud rookie Gabriel Landeskog last year. It's too early to tell, but my sense is that head coach Joe Sacco will allow the two a chance to grow into a pairing that could mostly stick together for years to come with a potentially rotating right wing. We've seemingly seen that more and more throughout the league, where a coach likes certain duos and will insert a varying style (finesse, grit, etc.) in the third hole to mix things up and get that new winger and other lines going.

One of the best examples of this philosophy over the past handful of campaigns has been Matt Moulson with John Tavares on Long Island. P.A. Parenteau, who, interestingly enough, signed with the Avs as an unrestricted free agent July 1, was often the other wing on that line. Parenteau not only thrived on that top line, as you'd expect in a plum position, but he also carried the second line when bench boss Jack Capuano needed a spark further down in the order – a critical fact often missed in lamestream media reports of Parenteau's success last year.

*

Tuukka Rask seems to have the right mindset rolling into this season with his long-awaited No. 1 role finally in his grasp. His comments late this week came across as relaxed, humorous and yet still fully prepared for what's ahead. Rask's keeper league owners received a huge gift when news broke of Tim Thomas's planned 'Friends, Family, Faith' reunion tour, which will no doubt be catered by Chick-fil-A. This bumped up Rask's ascension into the top gig by at least one season. Aside from Rask himself being an immensely talented individual, he's just in a great position in which to achieve success. Boston has generally been one of the better defensive teams in recent seasons and Rask doesn't seem the type to wilt under the heat of the spotlight.

A few other things came to mind reading Rask's comments too.

1) Yes, it's still funny that he was traded for Andrew Raycroft in 2006. Didn't seem horrific at the time, but it turned out as a brutally awful deal.

2) Assuming a Roberto Luongo trade is finally consummated before the season gets underway or soon thereafter, it should be particularly cool to see both Rask and Cory Schneider blossom as the main men for their respective team. Each has a boatload of skill and is on a stellar defensive squad, meaning Rask and Schneider should thrive for poolies and warrant fairly early selections among goaltenders at the drafts this fall.

August 05, 2012

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 04 August 2012 21:56 - Last Updated Sunday, 05 August 2012 10:50

3) Even with something in the 20-start range, Anton Khudobin will have the opportunity to be one of the more valuable back-ups this season because he'll be spelling Rask on such a strong Boston club. Depending on the size of your league, he'll either potentially make for a solid game-day spot-starter or he could settle into one of your final bench spots in a roto format as a nice complement to your top two netminders to help max out your yearly start quota. So many people run into problems by throwing in too many forwards early in the season and running up the projected games played totals, so utilizing an extra goaltender can help relieve the temptation to do that very thing. Starting goalie info is so easy to come by these days and it's rare to not know the starter before the puck drops on any given contest.

*

It's never too early for hockey fans to start talking about the 2014 Sochi Olympics, especially with the timeliness of the current London summer games. CSNWashington.com is tackling the potential lineup for Team USA.

They recently [projected goaltenders](#) , with Jonathan Quick deemed "The Lock". They slotted Jimmy Howard and Cory Schneider as "In The Mix", with Ryan Miller and Tim Thomas in the next section of "Thanks For Coming". Craig Anderson, Scott Clemmensen, Ben Bishop and Richard Bachman were listed as "Longshots".

Like I wrote in [Hockey Hearsay](#) at the time, it's borderline ridiculous to have Ryan Miller

August 05, 2012

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 04 August 2012 21:56 - Last Updated Sunday, 05 August 2012 10:50

basically as a write-off and to put Jimmy Howard ahead of him. No slight on Howard, but if Miller –despite his struggles - isn't considered ahead of the Wings goalie right now then I don't even know how to articulate just how asinine an argument I'd be up against. IMO, Miller and Schneider are the most likely candidates to battle with Quick. And as much respect as Quick deserves for his work ethic and results, we're still talking about Sochi being more than two years out. If Miller in 2010 was, as CSNWashington.com contends, 'the best goalie in the world' and is now, a little past two years later, not worthy of a likely spot on Team USA... then why should Quick be anointed as someone who 'may be USA Hockey's No. 1 goalie for the next decade', as the piece speculates?

Yes, Quick is 26. Miller turned 32 last month, which would have made him 29 (?) for that Vancouver Olympic run. But if there's one trap sports scribes and those who want to be them tend to fall into, it's the 'this will last forever' sunshine mentality. A lot can happen in the next season alone, let alone the next two. Or 10.

Hmm. That's a bit more of a rant than originally intended, since I just wanted to set up the fact that the site today handicapped its [list of Team USA defensemen](#) .

Locks: Ryan Suter, Jack Johnson, and Keith Yandle.

Probables: Erik Johnson and Ryan McDonagh

In The Mix: Dustin Byfuglien, Matt Carle, John Carlson, and Kevin Shattenkirk.

August 05, 2012

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 04 August 2012 21:56 - Last Updated Sunday, 05 August 2012 10:50

Long Shots: Zach Bogosian, Alex Goligoski, Jordan Leopold, Paul Martin, Brooks Orpik, and James Wisniewski.

See You In 2018: Justin Faulk, Jake Gardiner, Seth Jones, and Jared Tinordi.

Agree or disagree with their list? Your turn. Seems like a lot of effort writing about a roster which won't do any better than a silver medal, eh? #gocanada

Twitter: [@Nichols_NHLPool](#) NHL news, analysis & fantasy takes w/ minimal inane babble.

Weekday [Hockey Hearsay blogs](#) on Sportsnet.ca, 12 months a year.

Check back each and every Sunday for fresh Nichols' Daily Ramblings.