

**August 24, 2012**

Written by Jeff Angus

Thursday, 23 August 2012 20:54 - Last Updated Friday, 24 August 2012 11:51

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The #6 Canucks prospect, and someone who should be on your fantasy radars - [hard-shooting defenseman Kevin Connauton](#).

The NHL.com preview of the Florida Panthers is worth reading, [and not just for the DobberHockey plug](#).

*"According to DobberHockey.com, the Weiss-Versteeg-Fleischmann trio totaled 108 points, ahead of Toronto's Bozak-Kessel-Lupul line (106 points), Montreal's Cole-Desharnais-Pacioretty trio (105), Detroit's Filppula-Hudler-Zetterberg (104), and Pittsburgh's Malkin-Neal-Kunitz (104)."*

[Our 2012-13 Fantasy Guide \(updated as of today, August 24\) is lockout proof](#). What do I mean by that?

Well, if the season starts in December, we will keep things updated throughout September, October, and November. Injuries, trades, late signings, training camp invites, you name it. It is

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our leg up on the competition – because we release the guide as a PDF and not in print, we are able to keep it updated and current.

And it is a great way to support the site by picking one up. We offer a ton of great free content (columns, the forums, the ramblings), and we get our support primarily from Guide purchases. Tell your friends about it if you want a challenge in your pool next year.

[Cody Hodgson](#) has been training with [Gary Roberts](#) once again – this summer, he has been [working on explosive movements](#) to improve his acceleration and speed.

*“But this isn’t your ordinary gym. Roberts and his team of trainers prepare a regimen of hockey-specific exercises for each player, while providing them with organic meals and snacks to fuel their bodies each day. Starting in late May, an all-star cast of players that includes Hodgson, [Steven Stamkos](#), [Jeff Skinner](#) and [James Neal](#) began a three-phase workout plan to prepare them for the upcoming season.”*

[My latest for the Canucks Army](#) – a look at [Aaron Rome](#)’s return to the lineup last season.

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[Flyers Faithful does an inventory](#) of the goaltending in the Philadelphia organization:

“[Niko Hovinen](#) , 24, signed as a free agent in 2011.

2011-2012: 41gp 2.26gaa .920sv%

*As a former 5th round pick in the 2006 draft, Hovinen took a while to put everything together. He bounced between leagues for a while in Finland until he emerged as arguable the best goalie in Finland over the past two seasons. Hovinen will get every chance to earn the starting job for the Phantoms this season and could compete for a spot on the Flyers as early as next season. With Bryzgalov's contract it's doubtful he will ever be a starter for the Flyers, but he could eventually be flipped for assets if he proves himself at the highest level.”*

[Here is Hovinen's DobberProspects profile.](#)

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I'd agree – Bryzgalov is signed forever, but a solid back up behind him would still carry value, and the Flyers would love to plug a rookie in there for the cap savings.

The Hockey News is counting down their projected 2012-13 NHL standings (in reverse order). Yesterday was the number 3s – [Washington and Los Angeles](#).

Washington:

*“Why: After a down year, here’s betting the Capitals take back the reins of the Southeast. To suggest they’re in decline would be to overlook the vast star quality they have. Even though this team still hasn’t lived up to post-season expectations, they’ve proven a more than capable regular season team that nearly won its division during a season in which it stumbled. [Braden Holtby](#) is a clear-cut favorite to assume the No. 1 role in net, which has been a sore spot in recent years.”*

I'll disagree that Holtby is the clear cut goalie (I favor Neuvirth in my projections right now), but I think Washington will be better. Why? A coach that actually fits with the players on the team. I'm looking for the defense to play a big part in the offense, including Green, Carlson, and Orlov.

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Up front, there is a balance of skill, grit, and defensive ability. The Caps need Ovechkin to score 45 (at least) to get back to where they were before, and perhaps he will be reinvigorated by a coach who plays him more than 16 or 17 minutes a night.

The Swedish Elite League is [going to forbid teams](#) to sign NHL players without having them remain there for the full season (in the event of a one or two month lockout, most NHL players overseas would simply return to NHL action).

[Kristian Huselius](#) , who is still a UFA, [isn't happy with how his injury was handled last season in Columbus.](#)

*“As of last week, former Blue Jackets left winger [Kristian Huselius](#) still had not been medically cleared following an injury he suffered last December. But a stranger situation developed this summer, when Huselius stopped returning the Blue Jackets phone calls or other attempts to reach him....*

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*In a story published today in Sweden's Aftenbladet, Huselius said he was forced to return to the Blue Jackets' lineup last season before his body was ready for the rigors of NHL play. Here is his direct quote, translated from Swedish to English via Bing! translator.*

*"I had not a single practice with the team before coming back," Huselius said. "I had one game to get acclimated. Then I went into (the next) NHL game and played 21 minutes. I think they acted wrong against me. My groin broke in the second game. I had not built up muscle mass and was not fit or ready to play."*

It will be interesting to see if Huselius gets a contract. He's a highly skilled playmaker and would be a worthwhile risk to take on a cheap, one-year contract, assuming he is willing to sign one.

[Shutdown Line](#) continues its countdown of the top 25 young players in Carolina:

#5 – Jamie McBain:

*"I have watched McBain closely through this past season and have determined that McBain is roughly in the middle of the two ends of the spectrum. McBain supplied a lot of the Hurricanes offense this year as he was on ice for a little over four scoring chances at even strength per 15 minutes, which is a pretty good rate for a defenseman. The problem? He was on ice for about the same amount of scoring chances against at even strength, so McBain was giving a lot back at the other end, as well. McBain was still the Hurricanes third highest ranked defenseman in even strength scoring chance differential despite that. He also ranked second among Carolina defensemen in Corsi Relative, showing that he was slightly better at driving possession than his teammates."*

My thoughts: McBain hasn't delivered offensively like we at DobberHockey had expected out of him (two years ago, to be exact). However, he is just another example of how hard it is to project young defensemen – they all arrive at different times, and in different ways. With him, he needs to see a steady dose of PP time to "arrive" offensively. With [Joe Corvo](#) and [Joni Pitkanen](#) both ahead of him in that regard, he will have to battle for it.

#4 – [Ryan Murphy](#) :

*"It is easy to make the argument that Murphy has nothing to gain by playing another year in juniors but when you look at the overall picture, it makes a little more sense. Murphy is still a year away from AHL eligibility so the Canes will have Murphy on the big club for the entire year if they decide to keep him, and he likely won't get above the third pairing in his rookie season. If the Hurricanes want to get the most out of Murphy's ELC years, then using him in a third-pairing role with limited ice time on an already crowded defense corps probably isn't the best way to go."*

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*Factor in the concussion and sending him back to junior doesn't seem like the worst decision in the world unless he blows people away in training camp (if there is one)."*

My thoughts on Murphy – a fantastic young talent with elite abilities offensively and in terms of skating. The Hurricanes are pretty deep on the back end and won't rush him, but he should be a very valuable fantasy commodity in a few seasons. I think another year in the OHL would probably be the best course of action, unless he is absolutely lights out at camp and through the first few games of the regular season.

Can [Johan Franzen](#) still be an [elite forward](#)?

*"Franzen, 32, isn't the only enigma in the NHL, and his salary-cap hit is very reasonable, which gives him high value in a potential trade for the top-four defenseman the Wings so badly need. At the same time, if Franzen can play with a touch more consistency in the regular season and return to his old assertive ways in the playoffs, he'd be a great bargain."*

I don't think Detroit can afford to move Franzen right now – who else would supply the top six size? That being said, he would be an attractive commodity for a team looking to win now and add some goals on the wing. I guess it depends how desperate the Wings are to add a top four defenseman – outside of Franzen and [Valtteri Filppula](#), I'm not sure who they have on the

roster to dangle for a defenseman.

[Kyle Quincey](#) thinks Ryan O'Reilly ( [currently unsigned](#) ) deserves a nice new contract:

*"All I know is, he's one of the best hockey players I've played with and by far one of the top five good guys off the ice," Quincey said of O'Reilly, 21. "He's one of my favorite hockey players and hopefully he gets a good deal because he's a huge part of that hockey team. He's by far the hardest worker I've ever played with. He's an unbelievable guy."*

Speaking of top four defensemen in Detroit... [this guy](#) is probably two or three years away, but he could become one for the Red Wings, and he could also become a valuable point producer for your fantasy squad.

*"The 6'3", 185-pound defenseman may still need to fill out physically, but he had no problem filling the scoresheet in 2011-12. Sproul potted 23 goals and 31 assists for 54 points in 61 games for the OHL's Sault St. Marie Greyhounds. Sproul has a point shot that scouts rave about, and his comfort with handling the puck meshes well with what Detroit's system requires of defensemen.*

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*The 19-year-old defenseman has clear offensive upside but needs to work on adding bulk and playing more physical if he wants to become an everyday NHL defenseman. Luckily, there is still plenty of time for that. Sproul will return for one more season with Sault St. Marie before likely heading to the AHL to play with the Grand Rapids Griffins in 2013-14. Sproul could be a point-producing second pair defenseman at the NHL level if he improves his defensive and physical games."*

I like Sproul's game a lot, but he won't be relevant for a while. I guess a good (but very general) rule of thumb – opt for veterans on defense over rookies. The same isn't always true up front, where young forwards are more productive as rookies and sophomores.

Why? Less pressure defensively, and it is easier for coaches to give them favorable match ups and ice time than it is for coaches to do the same with young defensemen.

The birth of the Dominator – well worth watching (if you are a fan of great goaltending):

{youtube}BoPALGVxoi8{/youtube}