I'm not sure what to make of the latest CBA negotiations, but the fact that the two sides met at 5:30 on a Friday evening has to be taken as a positive.

A look at how a potential lockout (or delayed start) affects the Predators.

Don't forget to "like" my Facebook page - I keep it up to date with my various columns and posts.

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My latest for the Canucks Army - the #3 moment of 2011-12 was Cory Schneider's performance in Game 4 against LA.

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The Bruins extended winger Brad Marchand for four more years, with a cap hit of $4.5 million. Fair deal for one of the more versatile wingers in the league (and his versatility leads to a high fantasy value in many leagues).

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Max Pacioretty checks in at number two on the top 25 under 25 in Montreal. A future outlook:

"PROJECTION: It seems to me that Max can push 40 goals. I don't think he'll get there next year, but I think it's possible. He still hasn't had an outlier season as far as shooting percentage is concerned, and most good NHL players have one or two. Signed to an absurdly cap friendly extension by Marc Bergevin this summer, Pacioretty should be the Habs go to goal scorer for the next 7+ seasons."

I wrote an extensive profile of Pacioretty earlier this summer – I think he has a great shot to be *the next impact forward for a long time in a Habs sweater.*

"Pacioretty has big shoes to fill in Montreal, regardless of who you think he is replacing. Lafleur was one of the best forwards in the history of the sport. Koivu was a very good player on the ice and an even better person off of it during his tenure as Montreal's captain. The most apt comparison for Pacioretty may be Muller, who helped the 1993 Montreal squad to a Stanley Cup."

In terms of fantasy value, Pacioretty is one of the better multi-category wingers around. His PIM numbers may not be up there with the very best, but he should be a solid bet for at least 25-35 goals each season along with 55-70 points (and maybe more, depending on linemates, role on the team, and so on).

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The Fantasy Hockey Geek (formerly the Hockey Pool Geek) is looking for a writer. We have a lot of those on the forums - check out information here if you are interested.

The September Roto Guide is about a week away. I know that Gates is working his tail off on this one - a ton of content, way more than before. This monthly PDF is a great way to go beyond the ramblings and daily columns for fantasy hockey information and insights.

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Made a big trade in my H2H keeper yesterday. I think this is a win-win trade for both teams.

This league is a 12-team H2H keeper. We track: G, A, +/-, PIM, PPP, SHP, GWG, SOG, FW, HIT, and for goalies: GS, W, L, SO, GAA, SA, SV, SV% (lots of goalie categories)

I traded Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Wayne Simmonds in exchange for Brad Marchand, Zack Kassian, and Travis Zajac.

Zajac will get a lot of FW, and is an upgrade on Ott or Little for my #3 spot behind Crosby and Krejci. I think he bounces back in a contract year.

Ekman-Larsson is going to be a stud, but defense is a strength of mine. Even without him, I can start Giordano, Chara, Edler, Karlsson, Hedman, Timonen, and Smith.

Simmonds is a good RW, but I think I sold high on his goal output. And Marchand is a stud with our scoring categories. Was tough to move OEL, but you have to give to get.

Kassian becomes my most NHL ready prospect.

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Dougie Hamilton's main goal is still to make the Bruins this fall, but the lockout clouds the issue a bit.

"To play in the NHL would be a dream come true," Hamilton told NHL.com, "but if there is a lockout then I'll be back in junior and I'll just continue to work towards my goal. I mean, it doesn't really matter where I start the year [because] the goal doesn't change -- it's to play in the NHL and that's what I'm looking forward to."

The comparisons to Alex Pietrangelo are bang on. Not only are both of them smooth skating and towering defensemen, but they also played their junior hockey for Niagara of the OHL. Pietrangelo's offense took a little while to come at the NHL level, and Hamilton's will, too.

Pietrangelo is now considered one of the best defensemen in the league, and Hamilton should be there alongside him one day, as well. I'd temper expectations for anything more than 20-25 points for this or next season, though.

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Evgeni Kuznetsov's first goal of the season ended in him celebrating by doing some pushups. You can't fault this kid for being too conservative, that much is certain.

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Shea Weber has arrived in Nashville, and he spoke with the local paper regarding his busy summer.

"On the prospect of being paired with Roman Josi this season on defense: "I've talked to Roman quite a bit, maybe once a week or every two weeks. He said things are going well. He sent me some pictures of Switzerland (Josi's home country), and I got to see a little of what he's doing this summer. He's a great kid. I know he's working hard. It will be great to see him when he gets back."

I don't see the loss of Suter affecting Weber's offense much (if at all). His overall play may decline a bit, and he may have to play some more defensive minutes (and clean up for whoever his partner ends up being), but he still has the elite shot, the great vision, and the ability to QB an power play from the point.

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Matt Frattin is the fifth best young player in the Toronto organization, according to Pension Plan Puppets. More on Frattin:

“He plays hard, is almost impossible to knock over, has a hell of a shot when he can find time and space, and is more or less ok defensively. He's also 24, if he were a few years younger I might be inclined to rank him higher, but he's not. I don't think it's a stretch to suggest that he'll probably score 20 goals in a season sometime thanks to a favourable shooting percentage, but he's probably going to be a 15 goal guy who can provide some energy, which is great.

He's what people wanted Colby Armstrong to be at a fraction of the price. He's a great story, and I enjoy watching him play, but he didn't show me anything I wasn't expecting to see. His performance in the AHL playoffs was great to see but the kid should be tearing up the AHL at his age if he hopes to make the NHL”

Frattin showed glimpses of top-six skill last season, but he didn’t consistently put up points. I think he has the ability to score 25 at the NHL level, given the right opportunity. The Leafs have a bit of a logjam up front right now (on the wings, at least), so Frattin will have to work hard to earn a spot on the second line behind Kessel.

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The latest Downtime with Biznasty episode from the Score:

{youtube}akkiqCgYjSI{/youtube}

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More on the rebuilding process for the KHL's Lokomotiv Yaroslavl from Puck Daddy:

"On Thursday, one day before the first anniversary of the tragedy, Lokomotiv was reborn, winning their opening game in Novosibirsk against Sibir. The game was sold out and it tickets were impossible to come by, even from scalpers. Emotions surrounding their return were high, even in an opposing arena. Sibir fans welcomed Lokomotiv back with chants of "Loko! Loko!" before the puck was even dropped."

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Yesterday I speculated on some potential line combinations in St. Louis. A reader followed up with how he sees the positions sorting themselves out:

C – Steen, Backes, Berglund

LW – Schwartz, Perron, MacDonald

RW – Tarasenko, Oshie, Stewart

Keeping those positional requirements in mind… what lines would you come up with? I imagine Backes will center the top line along with Oshie and MacDonald (or Perron). Here is one idea:

MacDonald – Backes – Oshie

Perron – Berglund – Stewart

Schwartz – Steen – Tarasenko

It may be a lot of pressure on Steen to carry (well not carry, but support) two rookies on his line. Stewart and Tarasenko could be swapped. Don't forget about Vladimir Sobotka – he is likely destined for a fourth line gig, but in the past he has shown he is capable of more.

Ian R, a Blues fan, weighed in with his thoughts:

Berglund and MacDonald really made each other go last year.

Perron/Steen - Backes - Oshie was typically the first line and Perron/Steen - Berglund - Stewart was the second.

However, Berglund and Stewart never really clicked, so when MacDonald came back, he slid onto the wing on Berglund's line and that's when they both took off.

I'd think based on their expectations for Tarasenko, and last year's chemistry....

Perron - Backes - Oshie

MacDonald - Berglund - Tarasenko

Steen - Schwartz - Stewart

D'Agostini/Reaves - Sobotka/Nichol - Langenbrunner . . . with any of the 4th liners moving up to the third if Schwartz or Stewart struggle.

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The Bruins have come to terms with 2012 1st round pick Malcolm Subban on an entry-level contract.

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Justin Bourne isn't a fan of PIM in hockey. I'm not, either, but I do see some merits of including it (there could better ways to reward power forwards and toughness, though).

"I played with Curtis Glencross in college, and I swear, that dude took more stupid penalties than anyone I've ever played with. He put us down a man with regularity because of either laziness, selfishness or ignorance, and it made our team crazy (though must of us did enjoy his charging penalties. He used to light kids up in college.)

So why would he have higher fantasy value (around 60 PIMS per season lately) than a clean player who doesn't kill his team? I mean, I get that it's fun to have more stats to compare in a week, but shouldn't it work the opposite way? The guy with the least PIMS wins?"

The PIM debate has raged on many times here at DobberHockey. I use it in all of my leagues, but have toyed with the idea of doing different things with it.

Here is my post on the same issue from back in May.

"I participate in a few leagues. Some with PIM, and some without. I think PIM has a place in leagues, provided you have a number of other statistics being recorded. In a keeper league I am in, we track 10 categories. We just started using hits, and I quite like it. Now there are limitations to recording hits, as some arena statisticians are much more generous with what constitutes a hit (Madison Square Garden, for example). With 10 categories, PIM aren't going to be a make-or-break statistic (especially with six 'offensive categories' – goals, assists, PPP, SHP, SOG, and GWG)."

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Some stuff on NHL 13 - less than a week away!

{youtube}7Nt433LKhac{/youtube}