

**September 09, 2012**

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 08 September 2012 21:45 - Last Updated Sunday, 09 September 2012 10:22

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You have until 1pm today to join the free \$250 DobberFootball contest at FanDuel. [Join here](#) . Pick your players for today's games and win a share of \$250 bones! Takes two minutes.

I'm reminded of a funny item someone sent me last year.

*How to start an argument online:*

*1. Express an opinion*

*2. Wait*

Consider this an addendum to the end of this Ramblings, which was posted last night.

The rankings diatribe was a pretty simple point, really. When a set of fantasy hockey rankings is posted here at DH, which is a fantasy site, pretty much everyone who reads them realizes they're based on fantasy criteria before even beginning to pour over them. Will there be differences of opinion on them? Of course. No two people will feel exactly the same about ANY rankings by ANY author.

Hell, I disagree with myself all the time. It makes for some colourful internal discussions during the rankings process.

That's not the problem. That's not where the ignorance or inability to read comes in.

Ignorance isn't disagreeing with someone's opinion. Healthy debate is encouraged, not discouraged.

When you post fantasy hockey rankings on a site where fantasy is only a portion of the content, you'll get a heavy mix of pure hockey fans with fantasy hockey fans. You can set your watch by the fact that a handful of vocal and easily-offended hockey fans will post comments which completely miss the point that these are FANTASY rankings based on FANTASY criteria. You know... despite the fact that the article will be titled something like Top 50 FANTASY Defencemen and will prominently lead with the mentioned "*Rankings Criteria: These*

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*single-season FANTASY league rankings are based on equal weighting for goals, assists, blah, blah, blah.*

So the comment would go something like, "Dan Girardi is twice the defenceman Dustin Byfuglien is, so how is Girardi not even in the top 25 but Byfuglien is so high? These rankings are a disgrace."

Actually, no. Let's be a little more accurate. The comment would actually read along the lines of "Dan Girrardo is way better than Dustin Bufflin. Do you evn watch hockey? U R a disgrace and I bet u can't even skate."

#truth

I believe this is where I throw down the microphone and walk off stage.

See you next week, where we'll know if there'll be a lockout or not.

\*

When Steve Yzerman pulled the trigger to acquire Anders Lindback in mid-June, Tampa Bay Lightning fans generally rejoiced. Lindback is viewed as a goaltender with quite a bit of potential and, as the cliché goes, you can't teach size. He has every chance to be a legitimate franchise netminder.

Generally speaking though, many people have tended to throw Mathieu Garon under the bus pretty quickly with the assumption that Lindback is going to stride in and earn a starting nod 60-65 times right off the bat.

Coach Guy Boucher has thrown cold water on that conjecture, [telling The Tampa Bay Times](#) Lindback and Garon, for now, are Nos. 1 and 1a.

"They're both going to get a lot of ice time," Boucher. "I'm not expecting Lindback to come in here and play 65 games."

On Lindback, Boucher said: "We know he's going to be good, but how good we don't know."

Boucher's summer message to Garon: "Don't come in with a backup attitude."

Garon, for his part, reached out to Lindback and told him they'll be partners and not competitors. Whatever the youngster needs, Garon will be there to help.

Regardless of how the start numbers play out, the acquisition of Lindback was an incredibly astute move by the GM. There will be a healthy competition for starts and, perhaps even more importantly, there should be an improved defensive group to help protect the net. Tampa Bay was dead-last in goals against last year with 281 and the Leafs, who were next-worst, still had 17 fewer mistakes end up in the back of their net.

Adding Matt Carle, even though \$5.5 million per season is a lot, was a really key move. Sami Salo will help the transition game before his first trip to the IR and Victor Hedman will likely take another step in his development. Don't underscore the importance of a guy like Teddy Purcell up front either, if he can build on last year's breakout and help relieve some of the offensive pressure from Steven Stamkos, Martin St. Louis, Vincent Lecavalier and Ryan Malone.

And certainly, the article makes a good point that there's really no upside in Boucher declaring Lindback the outright starter initially. Going this route helps to undercut the pressure on a 24-year-old who only has 38 combined appearances in his two NHL campaigns behind Pekka Rinne. Still though, Garon can play well. He should be a complementary transition piece at least for one more season in Lightning silks. He's slated to become an unrestricted free agency next summer.

\*

Ben Scrivens remains dangling in restricted free agency limbo, but he's also still unsure of where his '12-13 future will unfold. Will he be between the pipes for the Marlies or Maple Leafs? [The National Post tackles the subject](#) , asserting that at this point it looks like he and James Reimer will form the Leafs' goaltending duo. Naturally that would change if GM Brian Burke were to pull the trigger on a Roberto Luongo trade, or just sign one of several competent veteran back-ups still on the market once the new CBA is settled.

Scrivens has made it clear he wants to be in Toronto and that the two sides are obviously talking as far as the contract goes.

In terms of getting ready for the season? He has it handled.

“I don’t need to be told anything. I know what my job is. Guys shouldn’t need to be told what’s going on. You just come prepared and force them to make decisions on you. That’s the best way.”

He may well be ready now to tackle NHL shooters on a regular basis. Ideally though, you’d think the Leafs would want to give Scrivens at least another year of AHL seasoning. His stats in his first campaign were good, but last year he kicked it up a notch and likely really opened some eyes in terms of his potential. No sense in rushing that positively-trending development, IMO.

I also think we’re going to see a completely different Reimer this season; one who should also benefit from more puck-possession time for the Leafs. The impact James van Riemsdyk should have on this team, be it at centre or on the wing, should be noticeable over the coming seasons. That dominant playoff run a couple of springs ago was just a taste of what’s to come for that kid.

\*

Earlier in the summer I had a note somewhere on how we should see marked improvements in Chris Stewart’s game for the coming campaign. Between the Yoda-like wisdom Blues bench boss Ken Hitchcock has imparted (dig in more, you must. Mmmm.) and the desperately-needed renewed commitment to fitness, we should see an upward swing in Chris’s production.

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Honestly, 30 points from that kid (15-15-30 in 79 GP last year) is a disgustingly-low total for someone with his ability.

The reason I bring this up again, aside from making a timely reminder as you think about later round standard league bargains, is that this investment in fitness also made its way to his older brother - Canes forward Anthony Stewart. I tweeted this Friday, but Anthony shed 10 pounds over the summer and trimmed body fat from 17 percent to 11 percent. That sounds like someone who is determined to no longer be a bubble guy. Whether that doggedness translates to on-ice results remains to be seen, but kudos for the off-season improvements. This league is way too competitive to do anything but give it your best at all times.

\*

We're into the second week of September and Tomas Holmstrom still hasn't made up his mind about whether to hang them up or return for another year. Granted, his fantasy stock has continually dwindled along with his role on the team. He used to be a top-six staple, but has mostly been a fourth-line winger for the last while.

That said, the guy is a WARRIOR. His indomitable spirit and ferocious work ethic have carved him a highly-respected NHL career and a place in the hearts of fans across the hockey landscape – not just in Motown.

And poolies in deeper leagues can still find a spot for him because he's been a first power play unit staple for so long. Last season he only had 11-13-24, which represented a 13-point drop from the prior year and nearly half of his points two campaigns ago. BUT Holmstrom still earned 10 of those 11 goals with the man advantage. In larger formats where you're looking at 15-plus teams in the league, that's a big deal.

If Holmstrom does join compatriot Nicklas Lidstrom in calling it a career Johan Franzen would stand to benefit the most with a clear-cut, cemented role on PP1.

\*

This is a developing story as I write this Ramblings so you may have updated info by the time you read this, but a source [tells The Florida Sun-Sentinel](#) that 20-year-old Panthers defenceman Erik Gudbranson may have seriously injured his shoulder while training this past week.

\*

Theo Peckham knows that with factors including the addition of Justin Schultz, it'll be even tougher to keep a regular top-six spot on Edmonton's blueline. So not only has the tough rearguard trimmed down from 239 pounds to 231 with another four pounds to go before the season begins, but he also worked hard on the stairs in the river valley and [dove into his love for paintballing](#)

Peckham says, "This is the best shape I've ever been in."

\*

[The Nashville Tennessean points out](#) that Patric Hornqvist is entering the final season of his three-year, \$9.25 million contract – after which he'll be a restricted free agent. He is saying all the things you'd expect in terms of wanting to play hard all the time regardless of it being a contract year and so on.

The guy is, on the whole, a decent depth producer; especially if your league emphasizes heavier weighting on goals. This year he'll be trying for his fourth consecutive 20-plus marker effort and he has actually tallied seventy eight in the past three seasons. Also leaning in his favour is he's usually a first unit power play option for the Preds.

The problem, as to which any Hornqvist owner can attest, is he is definitively a hot or cold performer. When he starts putting the puck in the net, watch out. But when he hits a rough patch? Ugh. It can get downright horrendous.

In your average 10-team league, the Swede tends to fall right on the bubble of being a useful guy or being waiver fodder. That's the problem. His owners generally spend their time unsuccessfully chasing those hot streaks, while ending up with too many of the useless zero sum games on the books in the process.

\*

Everyone, including Shane Doan, has likely heard enough about Shane Doan's contract situation. But [The Arizona Republic gleans some family insight](#) into why Phoenix's captain has loyalty ingrained in his DNA. Just a first-class guy, flat-out. It's worth the few minutes it'll take to read.

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Speaking of taking some time to delve into the personal side of players, you may have heard Danny Briere lost his mom a few weeks back. [The Courier-Post delivers](#) a heartfelt piece on how painful that was for the Flyers' forward.

He touched on something with which we can all identify.

"You grew up watching your parents," he said. "They're your heroes when you're growing up. They're the people that shape you."

Incidentally, Briere notes he'd consider a return to Switzerland during a potential lockout. He played there before the last CBA was hashed out.

\*

If you're a hockey parent or just care about the growth of the game at the youth level, [The Globe and Mail passes along](#) some info from Hockey Canada.

New membership cards being mailed to registered minor hockey players and coaches this fall will give card holders a break on food, gas and merchandise purchased from the organization's corporate sponsors. This effort is also being linked with decreasing league registration costs, which will be a positive.

Is safety an issue for hockey recruiters, especially related to concussions? Hockey Canada President Bob Nicholson offered this: "I certainly wouldn't hang that out as 'the issue' keeping kids out of the game," he said. "I really do think it is safety, [and] it is cost of the game – ice costs are definitely there. I think the other one is access. When you can play, times that you can play.

"The elite players are finding places. We have to make sure the kids who want to play the game once or twice a week, the easiest way to get them in the rink in a safe, less-expensive environment."

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Boston Globe reporter Fluto Shinzawa tweeted this on Brad Marchand's four-year contract extension:

Marchand pay per year: \$4.5M.

Pay per chirp: 12 cents.

Indeed. His 55 points were good for 70<sup>th</sup> league-wide, but when you throw in the plus-31 playing for a stellar Bruins squad and his pest-driven 87 PIM, his fantasy significance is considerable.

GM Peter Chiarelli [sums it up nicely](#) : "He has an in-your-face game, he sacrifices his body and he's really coming into his own as an offensive player."

Chiarelli, BTW, will have his hands full with other key contracts soon too. Tyler Seguin and

Milan Lucic will each be RFAs next summer. They're going to garner some large stacks of cash overtop of which even Zdeno Chara would have a hard time seeing. Tuukka Rask took that one-year 'prove it' contract for '12-13 and, IMO, he'll be one of the most valuable goalies in pools for the season. His gamble will be rewarded financially. Nathan Horton, who will have to answer some serious health questions on the ice, will be a UFA in a year as well.

\*

I'm wrapping up the week with a hard push on preparations for the annual fantasy rankings on Sportsnet.ca, which has turned into a really self-motivating exercise given the extended lockout chatter. That said, here is how I'd love to (oh, how I'd love to) open them this time around...

**Rankings Criteria:** *These single-season fantasy league rankings are based on equal weighting for goals, assists, plus/minus, penalty minutes, shots and power play points for the '12-13 NHL campaign.*

*But please, demonstrate your ignorance and inability to read an opening sentence by immediately posting your comments below based on your interpretation of a player's real life value – while completely missing the clearly-stated fact that these are fantasy rankings. Go ahead. We're all waiting with bated breath.*

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*Twitter: [@Nichols\\_NHLPool](#) NHL news, analysis & fantasy takes with minimal inane babble.*

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

*Fresh Ramblings each Sunday.*