Versatility is a trait which can not only increase a player's chances of success at the NHL level, but can also accelerate the speed at which he gets that opportunity in the first place.

Such is the case for Ottawa Senators prospect Mika Zibanejad, who got his feet wet in the NHL last year with nine games before returning to Djurgarden in the Swedish league. The Sun relays that the Sens have elected to place him as a left winger in Binghamton so that when the lockout finally ends, he can be used there in the big leagues. With Daniel Alfredsson returning, the article supposes Zibanejad, Jakob Silfverberg and Mark Stone will battle for a spot on the left side in the top six.

Zibanejad, for his part, is completely fine with the move. He 'played left, right and centre at the world juniors' and 'half-and-half back at home', so he doesn't mind switching around.

The deeper your league, the more dual-position eligibility becomes a tremendous asset and this move by the Sens is something which can only help his potential value moving forward. While he's not likely to see much movement off the free agent pile in average-sized single-season fantasy leagues this year, the positional shift could make a positive difference in larger formats

right away... especially if he lands inside the top six off the hop.

*

The Washington Capitals announced that head coach Adam Oates will serve as co-coach of the Hershey Bears during the lockout, which is a pretty fascinating approach for the organization. Good way for him to keep an up-close eye on the development of talent while we wait for the NHL to start up again, while also being able to take a hands-on approach and familiarize himself with some of the players for which he'll be responsible.

A lockout isn't the ideal way for any new coach to begin his tenure, but this way at least he should be further ahead of the curve than had the Caps not made this decision.

The flip side of the choice, which the Caps surely weighed, was how this move would impact Hershey coach Mark French. Just my two cents, but I don't see it as a big deal. French has been with the team for a number of years now. He's enjoyed more than enough success. Oates is a pro's pro who has been around the game a long time. There is no threat here... it's just an organization trying to make the best of a bad situation with the lockout and a new NHL head coach.

Updated: Read more about what seems to be a pretty healthy symbiosis between the Caps and Hershey when it comes to wanting the same system flowing through both levels.

*

Sportsnet's Gene Principe spoke exclusively with budding Oilers superstar Ryan Nugent-Hopkins. The eight-minute segment is worth a watch and covers quite a bit of ground, including how the slight centre gained 10 pounds over the summer.

"I wanted to come back stronger and I definitely have."

He ambitiously notes the desire to be continually working on face-offs and his defensive game, saying, "...something I want to be known as is a two-way player and I think you've got to be good in all aspects of the game and both ends of the ice, so I'm going to keep working on that."

Although his peripherals are on the weak side, Nuge is set to place relatively highly on the upcoming SN fantasy forward rankings – which will be released with all of the rest (goalies, defencemen and Top 100) once the CBA nonsense is settled.

There's little doubt in my mind RNH will surge past the point-per-game mark this season and be a strikingly-valuable asset in his sophomore campaign. I can't spill the beans on where he's placed yet, but it's higher than many better-known poolie options – including several guys who finished in the Top 25 in points last year. Just my opinion.

*

Joffrey Lupul wrote 'An NHL player's unadulterated opinion on why there's a lockout' for AskMen.com.

He leads with: "Let's get this straight: This is not a PR piece. You've seen enough of those and, frankly, I don't really care to attempt to sway public opinion. The fact is you are pissed at all of us. Owners, players, commissioner, everyone. And I would be, too."

Let's see. A prominent member of the Leafs in the quiet little media market known as Toronto dares to speak his mind. This should go well for him.

FWIW, good for him. I'll always be in favour of players honestly speaking their minds, even if we don't like what they happen to be saying.

*

Slava Malamud , Foreign Correspondent for Sport-Express in Russia, tweeted this Saturday night: "Igor Larionov tells me that Andrei Loktionov will be playing in the AHL, but once the lockout ends, a trade will be asked for. # **LAKings** "

*

A huge sigh of relief for all concerned with New York Rangers winger Rick Nash, who reportedly only has a bone bruise on his shoulder after being hit into the boards Friday in his Swiss

League game. The MRI showed no structural damage, so the Blueshirts avoided a potential crisis there. How pissed would you be as a fantasy owner if the NHL and NHLPA finally resolved their differences, only to know your star winger was going to start the season on the IR because he was hurt overseas?

If you're a critic of Nash on the ice – and there seem to be a number of them - you're barking up the wrong tree with me. Ken Hitchcock made this guy a legitimate all-around threat and once the bright lights of Broadway shine on the winger, more people will see it. John Tortorella is going to love having this power forward on his roster and so will poolies again.

*

Brad Richards of those same Rangers spoke with The Times. Were you wondering how he's going to approach Year Two in New York?

Q: Were you satisfied with your play with the Rangers?

A: I really deep down was only happy with my last 20 games and the playoffs. That being said, I was hard on myself and

tried too hard at times because of coming to New York. Now I am more prepared after a year.

Even though the article was published Saturday afternoon, the impression seems to be the interview was done before his new winger, Nash, was hurt in Switzerland. So it's interesting that Richards said during the lockout he's going to "... skate and train through the week and just be tested and 100 percent healthy when the time comes to start."

*

Courtesy of the USA Hockey twitter feed, here are the line combos from Saturday night's inaugural CCM/ USA Hockey All-American Prospects Game.

Team Housley: Louis-Compher-Hartman; Motte-Malone-Olsson; Vatrano-Kelleher-Allen; Tringale-Merchant/ McCoshen-Santini; Downing-Thompson; Savage-Corbett/ G McAdam starts in the cage, Miska in at the half

Team McClanahan: Cammarata-Johnson-Fasching; Farley-Shore-Lodge; Lane-Fitzgerald-McCarron; Montgomery-Cassels/ Butcher-Jones; Lewis-Hamilton; Ausmus-Mermis/ G Cowley starts in net, Petersen takes 2nd half.

Final Score: Team McClanahan 5, Team Housley 2

Ryan Fitzgerald, the son of Tom, was the MVP with his three-assist game. See a full rundown.

*

6-3 goaltender Robin Lehner checked in to Binghamton Senators training camp Friday at 215 pounds, which in and of itself doesn't seem too noteworthy. Until you learn he came to camp last fall in the 250-pound range! That's a lot of goalie. Good read from The Ottawa Citizen on how the youngster is continuing to learn his lessons and mature.

He's already cancelled his membership at 'Get Buff With Dustin' Fitness Centre, so don't worry.

Sens goaltending coach Rick Wamsley addresses the competition issue and the Swede rising to the occasion with this quote which you'll love as a Lehner owner: "Last year, Robin's best nine games were the nine games after we acquired Ben Bishop."

Lehner has all the tools to become a star goalie in the NHL and we can slowly see the adolescence wearing off. The deeper your keeper league, the easier it would be to justify investing in this kid now – before his stock takes off. He's the real deal. And then some.

There's no slight intended on Bishop either. Lehner's potential has been particularly intriguing to me since he was drafted though. There's just something about him.

*

Sabres' back-up Jhonas Enroth's Saturday tweet:

Anyone need a goalie? # **willstoppucksformoney**

*

In a story which just won't die (or a franchise, some would cite), a revised arena lease agreement for the Phoenix Coyotes will go before the Glendale council Tuesday. The gist of it, according to The Globe and Mail, seems to be that the original 20-year lease was front-loaded with $97 million going to Greg Jamison and his partners in the first five years. The new proposal calls for that total to be reduced to $72 million in those same five years. Not to worry though. The final 15 years of the deal would consequently be jacked up to keep the overall cost of the lease at the $324 million. The actual vote on this revision won't come until October 9 because nothing in government can ever be done quickly.

Zzz-zzz.

Once Shane Doan finally put pen to paper, I pretty much stopped caring what happened with that whole mess. As long as Dave Tippett and Sean Burke are still there, all is good in Coyoteland.

Coyoteland, incidentally, was the worst theme park idea ever. The first and only #FidoFriday was an unmitigated bloodbath. Lawsuits are still pending.

*

Two Bruins' related notes from The Boston Herald. The paper believes forward Jordan Caron is the best bet to make the big club whenever the lockout ends.

GM Peter Chiarelli offered this: "Year to year with these young guys, if they do the work you can tell by the way that they handle themselves and the way that they look off the ice. I've seen that with Jordan and so far, so good."

Caron had 4-9-13 in 17 GP with Providence, while tallying 7-8-15 in 48 starts with the Bruins with an average of 11:31 TOI.

The B's will be able to recall top prospect **Dougie Hamilton** from the Niagara Ice Dogs for training camp, thanks to the agreement reached between the NHL and CHL. Chiarelli also said the team could recall goalie
Malcolm Subban
, the team's first-round draft pick last June, from the Belleville Bulls "if there's a 'catastrophic' injury to one of our goalies."

Aside from seeing how Tuukka Rask handles the undisputed No. 1 role (*hint* Exceptionally well, likely), I'll be particularly captivated to see how Tyler Seguin fares. We don't know how many games will be played in the '12-13 campaign, if any, but I think Seguin will increase his point-per-game output over last year's 67 in 81 outings.

*

Fire & Ice tells a tale of Bobby Butler's search for a fresh start with the New Jersey Devils, although he'll have to settle for the Albany Devils for now. He skated on a line with Mattias Tedenby and Jacob Josefson during the first practice session Saturday.

*

As much as Devils defenceman Adam Larsson would rather be gearing up for his second NHL season, he explains to Fire & Ice there was no doubt it would be Albany for the lockout and not back to Sweden.

“I decided right away I’m going to stay over here and play. I think that’s better for me to really feel comfortable on the small rinks to play over here. Here is where I wanted to play.”

For the most part, Larsson was used as a second unit power play option last year. Eight of his 18 points on the season came in November alone, including a five-game point streak in that stretch. He had one goal with no assists in his five playoff starts.

When it comes to young blueliners like Larsson who are high picks (fourth overall in 2011) with plenty of fantasy upside, the best time to make a play for them in those deeper keeper leagues is at least a season after their draft year. The hype tends to be pretty substantial at the time they’re taken, but since most defencemen take awhile to develop there will usually be a lull of sorts in the interest levels of many owners once that initial fascination wears off.

Similarly, you can also strike during that same period if the youngster's owner has a win-now roster and mentality. They may be more willing to deal away future potential for current contributors if it'll mean increasing the odds of a championship run. I've certainly fallen into this category on more than one occasion. You could form several All-Star teams filled with prospects I've dealt, but it's all worth it when you glance down at those championship rings.

Ok, technically we didn't actually give out championship rings. But in my mind, my fingers are glistening with bling. Sweet, sweet bling.

*

CSNWashington.com recently did an extensive four-part interview with new Capitals bench boss Adam Oates. The takeaway for poolies from the final section concerning Oates' thoughts on Alex Ovechkin jives with what we've all pretty much been hearing since the move was made.

"I think he'll like the way we play."

Indeed. Strange to say it for someone of Ovi's stature, but chances are good that he'll end up being somewhat of a bargain in most drafts this time around. He has been an interesting case when it comes to ranking forwards and doing the overall Top 100, I'll tell you that much.

*

We saw Ottawa Senators rearguard Erik Karlsson rack up 78 points on his way to a Norris win, but for now we'll have to settle for the slick Swede piling them up for Jokerit. Here's his first goal.

{youtube}m5-X-aNEFIM{/youtube}

Twitter: @Nichols_NHLPool NHL news, analysis & fantasy takes with minimal inane babble.

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