Jimmy Howard tells Michigan Live if nothing is settled CBA-wise in the next few weeks he'll begin exploring European opportunities. He doesn't want an entire year to go by with no game action.

The bulk of the story was his reaction to HBO's 24/7 being a casualty of the Winter Classic's axing. Like most of us, it's something he looks forward to each season as we get an inside look at the 'different characters' on each team.

This quote made me smile though.

"I was curious to see how guys were going to react with the cameras all around, considering how many Europeans we have and how after games they're sort of like water bugs, the way they just run out of the room," Howard said. "I was curious to see how all the guys would be reacting when there's cameras everywhere."

*

Slava Malamud tweeted Sunday that Tampa Bay Lightning No. 1 pick Andrei Vasilevski spoke to Ves Sport agency. Says he will definitely come to North America next year.

*

Neither the league nor the locale matter – the results stay the same. If Zdeno Chara hits you, you may need a quick visit to BodyParts.com. Movember means mo savings if you enter the coupon code OUCH.

Matias Strozyk tweeted that Chara hit Miroslav Satan hard twice today. The second hit caused Satan to leave the ice and not return anymore. No word on injury.

*

Fantasy nerds may enjoy an upcoming special to air on Discovery Channel Canada. It will examine the physics, chemistry and even statistical analysis going into the game of hockey these days.

The Toronto Star interviewed host Jay Ingram and he explains what it's all about. It mentions what seems to be a pretty intensive look at Bauer's skate design right at the factory in Quebec, including how the weight of skates has become so much lighter over the years. A meeting of the analytics team for the Edmonton Oilers is also attended.

All in all, it looks like the show will be a worthwhile watch. Not like we have any NHL games to occupy our time these days.

*

Sens coach Paul MacLean admitted to The Ottawa Sun that this lockout has killed the momentum that was expected to fuel his team to a fast start in 2012-13. Although he does remain confident in the group that'll lace them up whenever the madness ends, he believes the 'window that's there to grab that momentum is gone.'

He also made a point of saying the team will start whatever brief training camp there is with a 23-man roster, with the team potentially 'ferrying people back and forth quite a bit' between Binghamton and Ottawa in-season.

Lockout aside, is this time during the lockout really any different than the summer months? Momentum, schmomentum.

*

Brief Q&A with Pittsburgh Penguins coach Dan Bylsma from The Tribune-Review . He touches on the Pens/Flyers playoff series from the spring, as well as the importance of coaching rhythm and how that is lost during the lockout.

*

Szymon Szemberg tweeted that Zug is looking to acquire Jonas Hiller or Cory Schneider, who is dual CAN/Swiss. They need a Swiss to be able to play all their four imports.

Schneider, for his part, told The Vancouver Sun just shy of a week ago he was looking into a Swiss option but that it was 'nothing serious at this point.'

Various goalies interviewed in the past few months have mentioned that one of the negatives of playing in Europe can be the difference in rink sizes, since you'd have to get used to the sharper angles again once you're back on North American ice. We hear that all the time when goalies first come from overseas, actually.

Really though, that brief lockout situation should be considered a wash at worst compared with goalies who are only basically playing shinny with virtually zero game action. Ramping back up to NHL game speed is also an adjustment, so it's seemingly more or less a battle on equal footing between the two sides.

*

Patrick Kane had a two-point game Saturday, giving him 2-5-7 in his three starts. I was really looking forward to seeing his offensive development take a step forward this season, although his more interesting storylines tend to take place during the summer.

*

For the most part, I've recently been skipping over CBA articles with players talking about the issues because I honestly just don't care what they have to say. I'm not 'pro-owner' either – it's just that with a few exceptions, the owners have been forced to steer clear of the subject so there haven't been those articles to avoid.

That said, there's a certain human interest conflict element to this which CSNWashington.com tackled by asking Capitals forward Troy Brouwer this:

Q: Players always say this is a business but it can also get personal. Does going through a labor war like this put a strain on a player's relationship with an owner? Ted Leonsis sat in on the last negotiating session.

A: "I understand he's running a business and he's trying to make money for himself, but he has to understand the players are also trying to do the same thing. We want to play hockey and fortunately for us we get paid very well to play hockey. Going forward you can't really take too hard feelings but at the same time you can't ignore what's happening around you and what's happening to your livelihood. I guess that will be seen in the future, when and if a deal gets done."

*

The Markham arena project may be losing steam, according to The National Post . The deputy mayor has withdrawn his long-standing support and there could soon be a majority of council members opposed to the deal.

*

Another casualty of the Winter Classic's cancellation was the outdoor game slated for December 30 between the Toronto Marlies and Grand Rapids Griffins. The AHL axed it, moving the contest to the Griffins' normal home arena instead of Comerica Park.

*

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch takes a look at Ian Cole and Jaden Schwartz, who are doing what they can to make improvements in the AHL while the lockout drags on.

The article notes Cole was ticketed for a spot on the Blues' opening-day roster and, at age 23, had a chance to be among the top six defensemen. Cole is striving to become more consistent, which is certainly the bane of any young player's existence.

Really astute observation from Peoria Rivermen coach Dave Allison. He likes Cole's abilities, but believes his talent will shine when his awareness of on-ice situations develops.

"People want more than the game gives them," Allison said. "When you play within what the team needs and you've got talent, you're a pretty good player. But you have to match your

wants with what the team needs. I'm not saying 'Colesie' doesn't do that, but I think that's part of his growth. It's got to be shift after shift after shift."

Schwartz, by the way, was a gym rat over the summer. He bulked up 14 pounds, which is no small feat for a guy of his stature at 5-foot-91/2. The STL PD points out he has played wing and center down there, and he's been assigned to the power-play and penalty-kill units.

*

Cody Hodgson did not play for the Amerks tonight. Kevin Oklobzija tweeted the centre had a splint on his right hand afterward. "Could be a week, could be two," coach Ron Rolston said.

*

Blake Geoffrion notched two goals, bringing his yearly totals to 4-2-6 and Brendan Gallagher's two-point effort also leaves him with six points (3-3-6) in all.

*

Sean Couturier (1-2-3) and Brayden Schenn (0-2-2) combined for five points and earned second and third star honours, respectively, in tonight's 4-0 win over Albany. In nine games Couturier has 2-8-10 overall, while Schenn has 4-7-11.

*

Nino Niederreiter had a pair of assists, pushing him to 4-4-8 in his seven affairs. This strong early showing has no doubt been invaluable to restoring his confidence.

*

Peter Holland (2-1-3) and Kyle Palmieri (1-2-3) teamed up for six points between them. Holland (5-5-10) and Palmieri (3-7-10) have ten points each in their eight starts.

*

Tomas Totar (0-2-2) added two more points to his ’12-13 totals, leaving him with 4-6-10 in nine outings. He’s ahead of his AHL pace from the prior two years, where he was at 58 and 57 points.

Petr Mrazek turned aside 29/30 in his AHL debut in that one. He had three ECHL starts under his belt from this season with impressive 2.02/ .944 splits.

*

I was really hoping Cam Barker would at least begin to revive his NHL career with the Oilers last year, but not so much. Now, with the Texas Stars in the AHL, he has just 1-0-1 in eight tries after producing another donut tonight.

*

Big night for Kyle Beach (1-2-3) and Brett Lebda (0-3-3), helping to spark Rockford to a 6-3 win over Lake Erie. Brandon Pirri (1-1-2) is up to the point-per-game mark (5-5-10) overall.

*

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins was back in the line-up for OKC and he delivered 1-1-2, with Jordan Eberle exploding for 2-1-3.

And yes, of course Justin Schultz produced. All he has done is deliver so far. Two more helpers here, giving him 15 points in nine games. 32 shots as well, which puts him on pace for 292 over a full season. Huge help in standard league pools, so that’s another area to keep in mind when looking at his NHL potential.

*

Quick OHL note to wrap up just because I really, really like this kid: Mark Scheifele had a hat trick (3-1-4) for the Barrie Colts. He has racked up 11-16-27 in only 16 GP, which gives him a 1.69 points-per-game pace. To give you some perspective, he is now in his third junior season. In his first year he was at 1.14 and then he jumped up to 1.34 last year. He is CRUSHING it on the ice this season.

Boone Jenner (14-14-28) and Ryan Strome (11-17-28 with a dominating 1-4-5 Saturday) are tied for the league lead, but Scheifele and Sean Monohan (8-19-27) are just one point back and they've actually played in two fewer games. Nick Cousins (8-19-27) also has 27 points.

*

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