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A scary thought for the rest of the league - will Ovechkin be better with an improved fitness commitment? It sounds like his current girlfriend has been a great influence on his lifestyle choices.

Ovechkin:

Since Maria [Kirilenko] played at the London Olympics and prepared for them accordingly, I supported her the whole way. It helped me to stay in shape. It's safe to say that I had a workout regimen all summer long.

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Fantasy question of the day. Would you rather own Sven Bartschi and Jonathan Huberdeau or Mikael Granlund and Alex Galchenyuk?

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Corey Pronman offers some great insights on some NHL prospects currently in the AHL.

On the struggling Joe Colborne:

Colborne is one of the more interesting prospects in the AHL because of his high upside. He's a 6-5 forward with good hands and top-end hockey sense. Colborne's issues have always been his physical play, but one AHL scout told me at the start of the 2011-12 season that those issues had come around for Joe as he was starting to repeatedly attack the high-percentage scoring areas. In the first two months of the '11-12 season, Colborne notched 19 points in 10 games, generating a little over three shots a game. He then suffered an injury around midseason, played through it, but it was around that time that his game fell off completely.

The same AHL scout told me, "From last season until now, since the injury, he's gone back to a perimeter game. You see the skill and the fancy plays he can make, but he stays on the outside too much." Colborne remains a very interesting prospect to watch because his upside, but the uncertainty on his projection is quite notable.

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I didn't feel like writing more about CBA discussions for another day beyond a few sentences, so I decided to pull a few questions from the forum for today's ramblings.

On the topic of the CBA discussions – both sides still have a ways to go. Both sides are starting to show signs of frustration with leaked information, but that is to be expected in negotiations with so much at stake. Don't get too high with the good news, and don't get too low with the bad news.

These are smart businessmen and they recognize that a full season lockout would be catastrophic. Following every single Darren Dreger tweet is no way to enjoy one's self (especially with Dreger essentially acting as a mouthpiece for the owners). There will be breakthroughs and setbacks. The NHL isn't up against Bob Goodenow this time.

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Would you trade Jamie Benn , Roman Josi , and Jose Theodore for Jordan Eberle , PK Subban, and Anton Khudobin ?

A really tough trade to evaluate. I like Benn over Eberle quite easily (will contribute in more categories), but I like Subban over Josi by a lot too. The goaltenders are a wash, maybe a slight short term edge to Theodore.

I'd probably make the deal – I think Subban over Josi is enough of an upgrade to offset going from Benn to Eberle.

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Eric Staal or Gustav Nyquist and Jonathan Huberdeau ?

I'd take Staal 11 times out of 10. A franchise center who is still in his prime? Huberdeau has upside to be as good as Staal one day, and Nyqvist is one of the best young forwards in the AHL. But Staal is a proven commodity, and you should never ignore or underrate that.

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Gabriel Landeskog or Nail Yakupov?

I'll make an amendment to by above rule regarding proven talent – when prospects like Yakupov/Stamkos/Crosby are involved, don't worry as much about a lack of NHL experience. Landeskog is a beast, and if you want to win in the next few years and are in a league that counts more than just points, Landeskog makes sense.

But in the long run, Yakupov is going to be a superstar. Landeskog should be a very good two-way leader and his production will be very solid, but Yakupov is going to be a special talent. I think he's the best of the kids in Edmonton (maybe not right now, but he will emerge as the top dog in the future).

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A massive hit from Jets 2012 1st round pick Jacob Trouba:

{youtube}C7VSXS0Gir4{/youtube}

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Pick three for a points-only keeper:

- Gustav Nyquist
- Chris Kreider
- Jakob Silfverberg
- Nick Bjugstad
- Jaden Schwartz
- Filip Forsberg

I'd go for Nyquist, Silfverberg, and Bjugstad. For different reasons.

Nyquist is proving himself against men in the AHL. Silfverberg did so last season in the SEL, where he was absolutely dominant. Now SEL production isn't the be-all end-all (just look at David Rundblad, he wasn't NHL ready last year), but it is hard to ignore in this case.

And Bjugstad – he simply has the most upside of anyone on this list. 6-5 skill forwards don't come around very often.

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Speaking of big, skilled forwards – Joe Colborne is off to a slow start for the Leafs.

I'd consider buying low on him – he may turn out to be a dud, but many times big forwards take another year or two to develop. Colborne has also been rumored to be involved in a Roberto Luongo -to -Toronto trade. Either way, he has a lot of upside. Don't overpay for him, as he hasn't proven a whole lot at the pro level, but he'd be a worthwhile risk to take.

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Grigorenko, Rattie, Neuvirth & a 1st rd prospect pick for Eriksson, Smith-Pelly, Josi & a late prospect pick? Who wins this trade?

I like to take big trades like this and break them into chunks for proper evaluation.

Let's say Roman Josi , Smith-Pelly, and the late prospect pick are equal to Ty Rattie and Mikhail Grigorenko. I'd say that is a reasonable way to value things – I may be overrating Josi and underrating Grigorenko a bit.

That leaves Neuvirth and a 1st for Eriksson. Unless you are desperate for goaltending, that seems like a no-brainer to me, especially with Braden Holtby 's emergence in Washington.

The person who posed this question also has Craig Anderson , Martin Brodeur , and Antti Niemi in goal. Not rock solid, especially in a 10 team league. However, Neuvirth is far from a guarantee in the Washington cage, and Eriksson is as consistent as they come.

Don't underrate consistency.

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Congrats to BowlerCoaster for winning the "Why I Love Fantasy Hockey" contest. He will receive the signed Dustin Byfuglien 8x10 – as for the other finalists (mounD and Axeman – you will receive fantasy team audits from myself or Dobber).

Great work by everyone who entered submissions – I hope the contest was enjoyable, as I wanted to provide a bit of a distraction from the CBA news we are inundated with every day.

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My latest for the CanucksArmy – I take a look at Joseph LaBate's play this season with Wisconsin. The big winger has been skating on the top line with the Badgers, but he has gotten off to a slow start offensively.

LaBate has the skill set and the frame to develop into a top-six forward at the NHL level. Two things are holding him back at the moment – quickness and strength. LaBate is a great skater once he gets going, but like many young prospects, he needs to improve on his first few steps. He also needs to bulk up a bit, which isn't uncommon when you're a lanky 19-year-old. Both issues, thankfully, are quite correctable. What LaBate possesses on the other hand, can't be taught: height (6-4) and hockey sense.

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