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My weekly European hockey update for the PlayNow Sports blog - Backstrom, Tarasenko, and more.

If you aren't familiar with the name Vladimir Tarasenko, it is time to start paying attention to Russian hockey. The dynamic young forward (and St. Louis Blues prospect) is tearing up the KHL as a 21-year-old. He has 10 goals and 23 points in 16 games (through Thursday night). The Blues have a solid group of forwards, but no superstar talents (David Backes is very good, mind you). Tarasenko will change all of that if and when he decides to come to North America.

Been working on this for a little while - a comprehensive list of the best hockey books. Did I miss any?

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Here is an early look at the forward group for Canada at the World Juniors.

One can't help but specifically notice the incredible depth that Canada could potential have at the centre position. That would start with the Edmonton Oilers Ryan Nugent-Hopkins , who is currently playing for the AHL Oklahoma City Barons. If the lockout isn't settled and the Oilers agree to let RNH participate, he would anchor their top line and powerplay.

From the same column, the potential top six forwards:

Huberdeau – Nugent-Hopkins – Rattie

Strome – Scheifele – MacKinnon

Canada has a wealth of talent up the middle – Strome and Huberdeau have been moved to the wing in this case. It will be interesting to see where Hunter Shinkaruk factors in to this team – he has the skill to be a top six player, but do the Canadian coaches want more experience?

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Oliver Ekman-Larsson has been, unsurprisingly, excellent in the AHL this season . The Coyotes are happy (and lucky) that OEL decided to forego playing in Europe (and more money) in order to stick around with the club (at least with their AHL affiliate).

“It’s been really good,” GM Don Maloney said of OEL’s time in Portland. “He’s been really good and the reason for that is just his attitude. He wants to be there. He wants to improve. He’s working hard.”

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I have made this point before – consistency is an attribute/skill that many people overlook or ignore.

It doesn't deviate too far from the conclusions found by Eric T. at NHL Numbers about older players playing a lot of games. I think the players who make it to 36, 37 years old in the NHL have bodies developed enough to continuously handle the grind of a season. You can think of a few players (the most prominent being Kyle Wellwood , but I made an argument for Cody Hodgson last season) who are fairly effective until they hit a certain minute threshold and they fall off the wagon.

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Tuukka Rask will leave his team in the Czech Republic to return to Boston. Rask has been dominant for HC Plzen, compiling a 6-2 record to go along with a 1.86 GAA and a stellar .936 save percentage.

Rask apparently is returning to get ready for an NHL return. I guess he hasn't been watching TSN at all over there.

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An economics professor at Vanderbilt University in Nashville shared his thoughts on the current status of the CBA negotiations.

How far apart are the sides?

John Vrooman: "The current sets of proposals are not really that far apart, and they further rectify the cost issues of the league, but the revenue-sharing proposals by the league are inadequate.

"Players' share of (hockey-related revenue) should be set at 50 percent, and this was obvious from the beginning. The spread began when the owners wanted to cut the players share from 57 percent to 43 percent and then revised to 47 percent when the players dropped to 53 percent.

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My piece this week for the CanucksArmy looks at five prospect in the organization , and how they are faring early on in their respective 2012-13 campaigns.

One of them is Harvard puck-moving defenseman Patrick McNally:

McNally's 2011-12 season went about as well as anyone in the Canucks organization could have imagined. The swift-skating defenseman played a large part on one of college hockey's best power plays (finishing the season with 28 points in 34 games). However, McNally has experienced some bouts of poor play this season at both ends of the ice.

Now a sophomore, he has more pressure and expectations to produce this season (especially considering Harvard's 2011-12 leading scorer, Alex Killorn, is now playing pro hockey in the Tampa Bay organization). Through seven games, McNally has a single goal and two helpers. His power play partner, defenseman Danny Biega, isn't faring much better. Biega has zero goals and three helpers in those seven games, after scoring 10 goals and finishing with 35 points in 34 games last season.

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Good on Roman Hamrlik standing by his comments – I am tired of people saying things and then retracting them a day later, blaming a poor translation or an error on the part of the interviewer.

“This is nothing against any of the players,” Hamrlik told the Globe and Mail. “I stand with them. We are all together in this. And we want a great deal. A fair deal. Everybody’s losing in this right now. Owners, players, fans.

“The fans are the reason for hockey. Some cities won’t be able to recover their fans for future seasons. I just want to say I’ve been in the league for 20 years and faced three lockouts and there’s only 14 other guys that have done that. I believe I’ve earned the right to say what I think.

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A much younger Hamrlik back in 1992:

{youtube}3ysK8wrI6I8{/youtube}

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Dallas prospect Jamie Oleksiak is settling in nicely down in the AHL this season.

"As the games go on, I am a little more confident in my abilities to play with players at this level," said Oleksiak. "With that confidence, you have to be careful not to try to do too much. Obviously, I want to do what I can to help the team win. I am a defenseman first and I have to watch my defensive responsibilities first and not get out of position too much. I like jumping in the play and making something happen."

For a 6-7 defenseman, Oleksiak has decent offensive upside. A lot of it will depend on the role he is asked to play by Dallas once he eventually earns a spot in the NHL.

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A great post comparing the careers of Alex Ovechkin and Brett Hull – some interesting similarities, and Hull is excited at the potential impact that Adam Oates will have on Ovechkin in Washington.

"I'm excited about it but I'm also not really excited about it because he's going to break all the records," Hull said with a laugh. "It's crazy. He's going to thrive under Oates. There's just no question. When I played, Adam was my coach. He told me what we were going to do, when we were going to do it, how we were going to do it and it always worked. He'll be able to do the same thing with Ovechkin and [Nicklas] Backstrom too."

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All Hull with a heavy side order of Oates:

{youtube}oJt0yU6INZg{/youtube}

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Jeff writes the daily ramblings for DobberHockey every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. You can find him on Twitter @AngusCertified , or on Facebook (AngusCertified).

Check his sports/fitness blog out here .