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I published a list of essential hockey books to read - did I miss any?

On Tropic of Hockey by Dave Bidini:

*This may be my favorite hockey book, and I genuinely mean that. This book, better than any other I have read, shows why the sport of hockey has captivated so many people. Fans fall in love with the game without knowing the slightest rule or fact about it, and players all around the world (literally everywhere) are united by one thing – their love of a fresh sheet of ice, a puck, and a stick.*

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5 Thoughts from the European hockey leagues - my column from the PlayNow Sports blog on Friday.

On Rask leaving the Czech Republic:

*In eight starts with HC Plezen, Rask has compiled a 6-2 record along with a 1.86 goals-against-average. He will play his last game for Plezen today before returning to Boston. Tough news for the fans of Plezen – Rask is one of the best goaltenders in the world, and he would have ensured that their team would have remained at the top of the league table (where they are right now with 47 points).*

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Success in Europe doesn't always translate back to the NHL, but this is the best hockey Nick Backstrom has played in over two years. He has been dominant on the top line in Moscow along with Alex Ovechkin .

Those two had a new linemate today – Leafs prospect Leo Komarov, who returned to Russia after beginning the season with the Marlies. I can't blame Komarov for the move – who would you rather play with – AHL forwards or Backstrom and Ovechkin?

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Canucks defenseman Jason Garrison has been battling a chronic groin injury, but he appears to be on the road to recovery. It hasn't been all bad for the big defenseman, though – in addition to a $3 million signing bonus he received this past summer, he is receiving full payment during the lockout because of his injury (as are injured teammates Alex Edler and Ryan Kesler).

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In AHL action on Thursday night (I'll get to Friday's games later today), the Senators and Maple

Leafs, I mean the Binghamton Senators and the Marlies, did battle. The Sens emerged with the 3-2 victory.

Ben Bishop was stellar, stopping 46 of 48 shots. He hasn't played a lot this year because Robin Lehner has been very good as well.

Jakob Silfverberg had a goal, an assist, and four shots on goal for the Sens.

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Patrick Wiercioch added a goal as well –he's been solid this season after struggling a bit last year. The 22-year-old defenseman has yet to record an assist this season, but he does have four goals. A bizarre stat line for any player, especially a defenseman.

This is now Wiercioch's third pro season – he has the size and skating to be an NHL defenseman (he moves well for a 6-5 player), but he just needs to continue to polish the rough edges in his game.

His short term NHL prospects improved with the Jared Cowen injury, as well.

More on Wiercioch:

*That Wiercioch is even in the picture is a pleasant surprise considering his largely undistinguished career so far, punctuated by an injury last season that could have been career ending.*

*In a Dec. 9 game against the Norfolk Admirals, a puck off the stick of Admiral defenceman Radko Gudas hit Wiercioch in the throat.*

*Doctors weren't sure he would recover fully and he worried about losing his ability.*

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Love him or hate him, Don Cherry isn't afraid to speak his mind.

*can understand the frustration of the players not gettin' a paycheque because I'm not gettin' a paycheque. But if the players think they're helping themselves by calling Bettman an idiot and sayin' Bettman is a cancer. . . . First, you unfeelin' jerks. How do you think the people with cancer feel? What is the point of stickin' Bettman and the NHL? All you do is make them more determined. Because now, and I agree with Cory Schneider , it's almost gettin' personal. Because I don't care who you are, nobody likes to be called a cancer or an idiot.*

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Montreal fans, get excited about Alex Galchenyuk. And if you are already excited, it is time to get even more excited. The rangy center has been absolutely dominant for Sarnia.

*The point is Galchenyuk is having a MVP-like run, even though it's possible circumstances will work against him earning such year-end recognition. The Sting are sixth in the cutthroat Western Conference, which is commendable, but the OHL's most outstanding player award typically has gone to someone whose team is closer to the top. Regardless, there might be no centre who has been more important to his team.*

*He has factored into 49.3 per cent of the Sting's goals in the games he's played, even though Sarnia's has an above-average strength of schedule. Strome, in contrast, has scored or assisted on an even 50 per cent of the Niagara IceDogs' goals. But the St. Catharines shinny concern has played the OHL's weakest schedule according to Rob Pettapiece's number-crunching.*

I could see Galchenyuk earning a spot in Montreal to start the 2013-14 season.

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A very good video special on Nail Yakupov:

{youtube}a74h8KI4oWw{/youtube}

*

Halifax fans have been treated to some amazing performances from Nathan MacKinnon this season. However, MacKinnon has been outshone on many nights by teammate Jonathan Drouin. Does Drouin have a shot at going 1st overall next June?

*While MacKinnon has certainly done nothing to change everyone's opinion he is a future NHL star, Drouin's game has gone to such an elite level he is now being mentioned in that same context. The independent scouting service Red Line Report recently published what many scouts had already been debating privately.*

*"We'll be the first to put this out publicly: Nathan MacKinnon is no longer the best prospect on his own team — or even his own line, since he is linemates with Drouin," reads the latest entry*

*in Red Line Report. “We believe Drouin is already challenging for No. 1 overall status.”*

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Gustav Nyqvist has dominated in the AHL this year, as many had expected/hoped he would.

*"He produces points consistently, year in and year out," Holland said. "He plays hard. He's got high hockey IQ. The team we've got in Grand Rapids, it's a young league, but we have a real young team. Looking at the guys who make it go, it's guys in early 20s, and Gus is one of those guys."*

It will be interesting to see where Detroit fits all of these guys in. Zetterberg, Franzen, Datsyuk, and Filppula are locks in the top six. Cleary, Bertuzzi? How about Brunner and Nyqvist?

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The Hockey Writers caught up with Corey Perry earlier this week.

*Ted: What is the toughest NHL rink to play in?*

*CP: The one where I get heckled the most is in Nashville. It's fun when you go in there and the fans are all over you.*

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