Carey Price tells Dave Stubbs at The Gazette he won't be looking to head to Europe unless the NHL season is cancelled.

"I want to maintain a bit of hope & optimism that we'll play"

Price's fantasy worth for '12-13, should a season be salvaged, stands to be somewhere in the middle rung of starters. There have been so many changes from top to bottom with this team, so his value will be a moving target early on. On the whole though, he'd make for a strong second goalie in almost any format.

He and another mid-level netminder could also be your Nos. 1 and 2, while helping you steal the show if you want to take a few offensive stars in your first few rounds. My preference is generally always going offence first, although passing on Henrik Lundqvist is something I just am not equipped to do.

*

Quick mention of a former Habs star. Mats Naslund is living in Malmö and he's working part-time as a carpenter. Kind of cool.

"Not a lot of people know this, but I was one before moving to Montreal a while back. I'm not involved with hockey anymore. I've been involved with it for so many years, that now, I just want to spend more time with my family and go golfing more often!"

*

Now onto my next stop... Switzerland! Excited to be the newest member of Ambri-Piotta! Can't wait to get there and get started #ForzaAmbri

— Matt Duchene (@Matt9Duchene) December 9, 2012

You'd imagine Duchene, who will turn 22 next month, would have to be so hungry to get this NHL season underway. Last year was an unmitigated disaster, between his health and his overall play.

His value is currently somewhat watered down in leagues separating out centres from wingers because there are just so many decent pivots out there. He may have dual-eligibility carried over from last year since he spent some time on the wing, but that'll just depend on your particular set of rules.

But if you're in, say, a 10-12 team keeper league where you just count forwards he should be considered a particularly good get right now. He'll also make for a solid late-round draft pick in single-season leagues.

Again, it's just one of those cases of a guy's perceived worth falling low enough that the profit margin will be virtually guaranteed to be built in with his selection.

With the Avs, chances seem decent we'll see three separate sets of forward 'pairings' as the lines unfold. Ryan O'Reilly with Gabriel Landeskog again. Why break those two up? Duchene with newly-signed P.A. Parenteau. Paul Stastny with Milan Hejduk. The other winger on each line (Steve Downie and David Jones likely to be two of them) could remain an interchangeable part, depending on how the line was performing.

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Jets head coach Claude Noel took a few moments with The Winnipeg Free Press to outline some time compression issues coaches may face when the lockout finally ends. He also reveals that the addition of Perry Pearn to the staff has been a catalyst for change. Pearn will take lead roles on both the power play and penalty kill, while Charlie Huddy will continue to work with the team's defencemen and the penalty killing. Pascal Vincent will remain hands-on with the power play.

Pearn is a coach of particular interest because he was actually the bench boss at NAIT at the same time I was in classes there. So seeing his jump to the NHL and the progression since then has been really cool. He's become a really well-respected name in hockey circles.

Two threads there.

One, I was the sports editor of the college newspaper. As written in the SN bio, “Hockey content has never been or will ever be as high. In fact, I’m fairly sure the coaches for the other sports thought the newspaper stopped printing for a season since nobody ever came around to cover them.”

That’s really only partly hyperbole. There was a LOT of puck coverage in the paper when I ran sports.

Anyway, I crossed paths with him a handful of times doing post-game interviews. I just remember him being a no-nonsense kind of guy, but with really astute observations. Honestly though, it was a lot more fun to interview the players so I generally ended up going that route.

Secondly, and perhaps more amusing to you: since I was in the Radio and Television Arts program there, I was all over the fact that we could do radio broadcasts for the hockey team. So I did. Play-by-play mostly, with a few games doing colour.

And in my garage, right now, there are several recordings (cassette tape, since this is circa 1992) of me calling games. In a word? Comical. I mean, it's not horrible... but let's just say it's a good thing writing pays the bills these days.

So many memories though. We had to push a cart with all of the equipment across campus and lug it up to the top of the rink's broadcast location. Every. Single. Time. Small building, but still a pain in the ass.

There's a story I can't completely share because it's in extremely poor taste (and yet that's what made it so funny), but it involves me getting punked on-air about the name of a player on the other team who wasn't listed on our game sheet. My colour guy got me bad and we still laugh hard about it anytime we catch up.

It's worth noting that colour commentator is now none other than the long-time radio/media guy for the Red Deer Rebels too. One of the nicest guys you'll ever meet with a story for any occasion. Think the hockey version of Jerry Seinfeld and that's Cam.

I'll cut it off there, but that time at NAIT helped launch me into a few radio gigs (briefly as a DJ and then longer in news) and put down some of the ground work for my eventual career in hockey writing. I think I actually shared the hockey writing ascension angle last year here at DH.

*

As poolies, we have been smitten with possibility after possibility in the past handful of seasons when it comes to potential top-six wingers to play with Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

When established players are moved onto one of the top two lines, we scramble to add them as free agents.

When prospects are drafted or acquired by the Penguins, we're all madly trying to predict potential and assign keeper league value to these guys.

That's why this take from The Tribune-Review on Beau Bennett was inviting. The 21-year-old rookie is being called 'the most creative player to come through Wilkes-Barre in years.'

“A lot of the best offensive players, they’re one step ahead,” Baby Pens coach John Hynes said. “They feel pressure as it comes, and they know how to make the quick-release plays. That’s what he can do.”

The best part of the article is the realistic approach to Bennett’s developmental timeline though. Hynes has some worthy quotes.

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Ryan Nugent-Hopkins will be headed to the Canadian junior team selection camp, as announced by his agent on Twitter.

"I had a really good week of strength and conditioning my shoulder,” he told the Oilers’ team feed. "It's a good chance to play for my country. It's going to be awesome to have that opportunity. We want to come back with the gold."

We touched on the benefits of him playing for Team Canada last weekend, so no need to rehash. Let's just hope Nuge and the Oilers are doing right by his shoulder in the long run. There should be no reason to worry, and yet the fact that he had this past week to 'strengthen and condition' his shoulder plants doubts on some level in the back of my mind as to just how healthy his shoulder really is now.

This is a quality read on the Oilers youngster which is centred around the WJC. He says not making the team in 2010 may have helped his game and he received some advice from both Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle for this tournament as well. Good stuff.

The Edmonton Journal , incidentally, grades RNH at an 'A' for his work in Oklahoma City this season, observing 'more defensive competence and awareness.'

Moot point now, but at the end of September – before the NHL season should have started – there was a Ramblings blurb on the high fantasy rankings anticipations for Nugent-Hopkins entering '12-13. This was even for standard leagues and even with his weak peripherals. This kid's vision and passing haven't even begun to reveal themselves to their full potential.

*

Back to the subject of Team Canada though and one Dougie Hamilton. Friday's Hockey Hearsay had a piece on how Bruins GM Peter Chiarelli fully expects the 6-5 blueliner to make the NHL team when the lockout ends.

Burn a year on his entry-level contract in a shortened season? Really? Yep.

"Because I think he's ready to play."

You know the deal with developing defencemen – it usually takes longer and more patience is generally required. But this ninth overall pick from 2011 looks like he's ready to make the jump already as he continues to put up ridiculous totals with the Niagara IceDogs. Let Bruins coach Claude Julien speak to Hamilton's strengths.

"The thing I like about Dougie is he moves the puck well and he'll carry it, but he's not a Danny Boyle-type that will try to go end to end and behind the opposing net," Julien said in using a comparison with the Sharks' All-Star defenseman. "What he does well is he supports the play and because he supports the play, he's got a good gap. Offensively, he carries the puck up the ice, but he makes plays. He's not trying to go end to end. And that to me is what brings his offensive game up to our liking right now. And he's 6-foot-5. It's not like he's 5-foot-10 and he

can sneak around players. But he does have that great vision of moving the puck up the ice and even if he skates it up to the far blue line, he can make plays.

“Even if he doesn’t carry the puck, he’s right up there behind the forwards supporting the play so if the puck gets turned over, he’s got a tight gap. It’s something that’s really impressive in that kid. From what I’ve been able to see, there’s no laziness in his game.”

Needless to say, Hamilton is poised to become an offensive fantasy force on the back end. He’ll go into this shortened ’12-13 campaign likely being classed as a free agent pick-up in most pools, with an ever-increasing single-season draft rank as each year passes and a current gold rating in larger keeper leagues. The kid is legit.

*

One more Friday HH note, since it bears significant relevance to fantasy owners once the lockout is over. Braden Holtby, who will battle toe-to-toe with Michal Neuvirth for the Caps’ starting gig, is looking like he’ll be ready to do his best to lay claim to his title as the No. 1 goalie.

“We were a little worried about his mindset coming back to Hershey,” associate goaltending coach Olie Kolzig said. “But he’s been so focused and dialed-in and it just seems there’s another level of maturity to him this season.”

Holtby and Neuvirth are each fine netminders, but FWIW my long-term money was on Holtby even when the Caps had the troika of those two with Semyon Varlamov. Holtby has ‘it’ and will become a franchise goaltender. We certainly saw how effective he can be last year, but the foundation was there long before.

*

The Ottawa Sun projects the Senators will likely pluck between 3-5 players from their AHL affiliate’s roster if the lockout ends before it kills the season.

Ben Bishop may get the call in net since he has the one-way contract, but it would also give Robin Lehner more of a chance to play nearly every night. Andre Benoit, Mark Borowiecki and Patrick Wiercioch are the leading contenders on D. Jakob Silfverberg up front. The Sun notes Mika Zibanejad has recently been sidelined by the removal of wisdom teeth and a throat virus.

Derek Grant, incidentally, was singled out for praise by coach Luke Richardson as a guy who'll 'be a great checking forward.'

Back to Lehner briefly. He is the guy on which you should have your fantasy money in Ottawa in the long run. Big-game talent who will, without question, rise to the top with the Sens as a goalie around which they can build before all is said and done. No slight on Bishop intended, but Lehner will be the man for this team.

*

Do you feel more and more ambivalence creeping in toward hockey on a daily basis? I do. That said, this tweet drew a smile Saturday.

NHL hockey, I miss you so damn much, I miss being with you. I miss being near you. I miss your laugh, I miss your scent, I miss your musk...

— Daryl Reaugh (@Razor5Hole) December 8, 2012

*

If you read one lockout-related story today, make it this one from The Tribune-Review . An inside look at how Mario Lemieux and the Penguins tried to save the season.

*

Kevin Westgarth, who has a degree in psychology from Princeton, tells The Los Angeles Times he saw owners attempt to use some psychology against the players during the talks last week.

*

The Minneapolis Star Tribune has a quality feature Saturday called ‘Faces of the NHL lockout’, which includes a video. As owners and players fight over millions, the lockout is wounding those who might be forgotten in the rhetoric... Worth a read and watch.

*

TV networks have had to go a few months without hockey programming now, so what have they been doing? The New York Times takes a look.

“It’s frustrating,” said an exec with FoxSports Detroit. “People want live hockey again.”

A rep with Comcast SportsNet Chicago says there have been some positives to showing classic

Hawks clashes.

“A lot of people send us messages saying: ‘Thank you. I’ve been telling my kids what Bobby Hull was like, what Stan Mikita was like, and now they can see them.’ ”

CBC and a sports bar in Pittsburgh are also noted.

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

Weekday Hockey Hearsay blogs on Sportsnet.ca, 12 months a year.

Fresh Ramblings each Sunday.