During the lockout, the coverage on DobberHockey has been fantastic. That's not a pat on my back (it's Dobber writing this), but a hat tip to the columnists. The quality that they have churned out despite no NHL hockey has been... almost shocking. It's been that good. I want to recognize the 10 best. Does a particular piece stand out in your mind? Give me your feedback, and find a list here .

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According to several reports, the NHL has agreed to allow each NHL team up to two buyouts before next season (the buyouts won't count against the salary cap). This is obviously dependent on the rest of a CBA getting hammered out.

That being said… who would you pick for your team?

I could see the Canucks buying out Keith Ballard potentially… $4.2 million for a solid defenseman isn't a bad contract, but he hasn't fit in at all with the Canucks since coming here a few years ago.

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I got caught up with Canada and the US this morning. Overall, an impressive effort by the Americans, from goaltender John Gibson out.

Calgary prospect John Gaudreau continues to impress - he scored a beauty of a goal and was shifty and dangerous all game long for the Americans. Gaudreau bears watching in all keeper formats - he isn't very big, but he scores like no other.

Defenseman Jake McCabe had two of the five American goals. The blueliner has been solid for most of the tournament, and he was dominant for the Americans against Canada.

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My fears were that Canada was too small - that didn't look like a huge issue yesterday, but they simply didn't have the tenacity that the Americans displayed. They lost puck battles and races to loose pucks, and those kinds of things add up over the course of a 60 minute contest.

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The Gold Medal game is set - USA vs. Sweden. The Swedes defeated Russia in the other game that was on last night/this morning.

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The NHL and NHLPA met yesterday. I'll have further updates on CBA-related stuff throughout

Thursday morning.

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Nail Yakupov hasn't had a great WJC tourney, but he hasn't been awful, either. That hasn't stopped some (in the Edmonton media, most notably) from blasting him. In this piece, Russian great Boris Mikhailov offers his take on Yakupov, and from what I infer it appears that the translation was taken out of context.

Sergei Mikhalev says it's too early to think of comparing Yakupov to Pavel Bure, even though he's a very useful player for the team. What do you think?

Nail's as far removed from Bure as I am from the moon. There's only one Bure. That's how it's going to stay. Our junior team's captain has been so far Yakupov, that's all.

For whatever reason, the Edmonton media seem to be all over Yakupov already. I see nothing wrong with Mikhailov's answer – Bure was one of the greatest scorers ever, and Yakupov is still an unproven prospect.

The kid is 19 years old, and people are already saying he has an attitude problem, acts like a prima donna, and so on. I haven't seen him play as much as others I am sure (perhaps five or six games, and of course a lot of clips and highlights), but his work ethic and tenacity have always impressed me. The WJC, while a great tournament, is short. Using small sample sizes to make evaluations is rarely a smart thing to do.

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After starting the year off in the ECHL, Canuck prospect Darren Archibald has impressed with his play in the AHL. Archibald was called up to Chicago last month , and he has quickly become a go-to forward for the Wolves.

While Archibald has scored most of his goals from directly in front of the net while screening the goalie, he did score one beauty off the rush that bore a striking resemblance to the goal he scored at the Canucks' prospect camp. Archibald will need to start scoring in more varied ways, while continuing his work on the powerplay, if he wants to continue impressing Canucks' management.

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Taylor Hall is looking fantastic down in the AHL according to the Edmonton Journal.

But Hall has healed up well and relatively quickly. He now looks to be recovered from his own shoulder woes. In the past three games, he has three goals and five assists, which has moved him into fifth place in American Hockey League scoring for 2012-13. He is high in the rankings despite missing the first month of the season in his recovery.

Most impressive was Hall's play against the San Antonio Rampage last Friday. He got two assists, but chipped in on an incredible 22 scoring chances.

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The lockout gave Hall more time to recover from off-season surgery, and playing in the AHL has allowed him to dominate at the pro level. Both are great things for the Oilers.

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Could Ryane Clowe be a cap casualty in San Jose?

But a few notables will be looking for their next contract.

That includes Ryane Clowe , who was set to make $4 million this season headed into unrestricted free agency. The Sharks would like to re-sign the 30-year-old Clowe, probably before he hits the open market, but a reduced cap next season may make that difficult. It's hard to predict what kind of salary Clowe would command as he's coming off of a down season in

2011-12 that included a concussion, but the club would surely like to keep one of its heart-and-soul players and fan favorites.

It remains to be seen what the salary cap would be, but there would likely be more than a few teams willing to give Clowe a long term deal at $5 million or so. He is a versatile player and can contribute in a lot of ways, and he could have more offense to give if given more ice time and responsibility.

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Jordan Eberle recorded a hat trick in less than three minutes the other night. Yeah, he's pretty good.

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Tuomo Ruutu will be out until early May after sustaining a hip injury. If the NHL does return in a few weeks, this opens up a top six spot in Carolina. For whom, you may ask? Well, there are a lot of options. Assuming Staal, Semin, Staal, and Skinner are locked in, that leaves two spots for the likes of Jussi Jokinen (although he may remain at center), Drayson Bowman ,
Zack Boychuk,
Jiri Tlusty
… and so on. Lots of opportunity for Carolina's young forwards.

Ruutu further cements his place as a member of the Band-Aid Boys committee.

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Here is Part II of my Year in Review for DefendingBigD.

At the end of the day, Dallas is a city that celebrates winners. The Stars haven't been there in over a decade, and their fall into irrelevancy has been expedited thanks to a lack of stable ownership and massive improvements by the NBA's Mavericks and MLB's Rangers. It remains to be seen how the current team performs on the ice, but things are finally headed in the right direction, lockout or not.

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