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Anze Kopitar hurt his knee today and it sounds like he could be out for a few weeks. Why does that matter? Well, read on...

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Congrats to team USA for capturing the Gold. They were led by a very mobile defense and a stellar goaltender in John Gibson. I wonder if Jonas Hiller is looking over his shoulder yet?

I thought the best player all tournament long was American defenseman Jacob Trouba. Controlled the play in all three zones whenever he was on the ice.

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Canada and Russia played in an entertaining affair that once again highlighted Canada's deficiencies - defensive zone coverage, size up front, and the ability to stick to a game plan. The defensive play was atrocious from most of the defensemen, leaving both goaltenders out to dry.

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And in some good news, it appears that CBA talks are once again headed in the right direction. If I hear the term 'cautious optimism' one more time, though....

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Columbus prospect Cam Atkinson is currently third in the AHL in scoring with 35 points (trailing only Eberle and Schultz). Atkinson is going to get an opportunity in Columbus to be a go-to player for the team right out of the gate. He's ready for it, and the time in the AHL season this year will benefit him tremendously in the long run.

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Another player having a strong AHL season is Zach Boychuk, who has 15 goals and 30 points for the Charlotte Checkers. Boychuk, after years of stalled development, needed this kind of season in a big way. Since turning pro back in 2009, he hasn't taken many strides forward with his game, leading some in Carolina to wonder about his NHL upside.

He had 21 goals in 64 games last season, and has 15 in just over half that amount in 2012-13. He is benefitting from better quality teammates on the ice, but he is also playing against better opposing players, as well.

And with the news that Tuomo Ruutu is out until May after undergoing hip surgery, the potential opportunity for Boychuk to step in to a top six or top nine role in Carolina increases.

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Canada defenseman Griffin Reinhardt was given a four game suspension by the IIHF. He got his stick up on an American forward, although the play looked accidental to me (and anyone else with eyes).

"As I explained in my review today, as I was tripping I kind of lost balance and my stick rode up his stick and made accidental contact to the head," Reinhart explained. "The referees on the play thought it was a two-minute penalty, a two-minute minor, and I agreed with that.

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Phoenix prospect Andy Miele had just five goals in the first 25 games of the season, but he has now scored five goals in his past seven contests. Miele is playing with Portland of the AHL.

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Bitterness grows as the lockout wait continues, writes Elliotte Friedman. As usual, Friedman says what I want to, but more eloquently (and it saves me from having to write about the lockout once again).

Is it going to be so much better than what it looks like now that it's going to be worth it? And, if this season actually gets cancelled, is whatever happens in six to 10 months actually worth it? Because, if you don't think the damage and hatred from the fans and sponsors and media won't get exponentially worse in the next seven days, you're wrong.

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Washington prospect Filip Forsberg shows off his ridiculous hands with some stickhandling magic.

Forsberg also scored a great goal against Russia that game, as well:

{youtube}Q04-a97PUJk{/youtube}

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Semyon Varlamov hasn't gotten a ton of press (by me, at least) during the lockout, but he has been absolutely dominant in the KHL. The Avalanche could make some noise once the lockout is over. I'm still not sold on their defense, but they are very deep up front, and great goaltender can often mask defensive mistakes. Varlamov was great at times last year, but he relied too much on his athleticism. He'll learn to control that more and more as he gets more experience.

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A nice goal from the KHL – fast forward to the 35 second mark:

{youtube}aJntxNCzXIE{/youtube}

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This week I took a look back at 2012 across the various pro sports leagues over at the PlayNow Sports Blog. Here they are:

NHL (it seems so long ago, doesn't it)

MLB

NBA

NFL

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New Jersey prospect Jon Merrill is ready to return to the Michigan lineup after suffering a fractured vertebrae earlier this season. When healthy, he is one of the best defensemen in college hockey, and a great prospect to boot.

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Injury updates for a few Isles prospects. Brock Nelson and Kirill Kabanov have both been skating, while Travi

s Hamonic
remains off the ice. Hamonic has been out since early December. I did some digging but couldn't find out exactly what is ailing him – he's a huge part of the Islanders defense (one could argue he is their best defenseman).

Hamonic doesn't really have much to prove at the AHL level, and the Islanders could just simply be resting him if/when the NHL returns.

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The Islanders are going to have some great "problems" within the next few years. Tavares, Strome, Nielsen, and Cizikas are all great young centers. Brock Nelson surely factors into the mix, as well.

On the wing, Grabner, Okposo, and Moulson will be joined by the likes of Niederreiter (who as mentioned is having a great season), Kabanov, Ullstrom, and so on. The team has been bad for a while, and one of the outcomes of consistent ineptitude is a lot of draft picks. The Islanders have, for the most part, used theirs wisely.

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