*

For those of you asking questions about our Draft App (for the iPhone and Android), we will have informaton posted later on today.

*

My Canucks fantasy hockey preview for Nucks Misconduct.

*

Look for Brian Campbell to have a similar impact on Dimitri Kulikov as he had on Jason Garrison last year (16 goals). Campbell is one of the best passing defensemen in the league.

*

Colorado needs to sign Ryan O'Reilly as soon as possible. If you are wondering why, read this.

*Turning to history to help plot his career path, the list of the most statistically comparable players at his age actually include Mark Messier and Joe Thornton. The closest match is probably Troy Murray, a strong defensive-minded, penalty-killing, playmaking, faceoff-winning forward for the Chicago Blackhawks throughout the 1980s, who won the 1996 Stanley Cup with the Avs in the twilight of his career.*

*Murray, who was far more physical and had a much better shot, won the Selke Trophy as the league's top defensive player at age 23, something we wouldn't be surprised to see matched by O'Reilly.*

*

"When should I pick a goalie?" Without a doubt, that is one of the most common questions I get asked pertaining to fantasy hockey. There is no one answer, but I have tried three different strategies over the years.

1) Draft early. Load up on a superstar goalie and another really good goalie. This means two goalies within the first three rounds. This strategy may cost you some player categories, but it usually gives you top of the league goaltending. The downside is the year-to-year fluctuations that come with goalies (which is what makes the consistent guys like Luongo and Lundqvist so valuable).

In a shortened season, I'd highly advise to grab two elite goalies. Goaltending is going to be so important this season.

2) Wait until the run on goalies starts, and then join in. The upside to this - you can usually get a good goalie later than if you started the goalie run yourself, but you also may end up with a goalie you don't really have all that much faith in.

3) Ignore goalies until the end of the draft. This may work for some people, but not me. I hate having bad goaltending. I also trust my ability to spot waiver wire bargains at forward and defense way more than my ability to do the same with goaltenders.

*

Say you are picking fifth overall in a one-year league. I'd advise picking Lundqvist (assuming Crosby, Malkin, and Stamkos are gone), grab a forward on the way back, and then go for another goalie in round three. Just an example, of course.

*

The Panthers have reportedly extended training camp invites to Alex Kovalev , Marek Svatos , and
Andrei Kostitsyn
. Those three would join an already large collection of forwards in Florida.

Some potential line combinations:

Versteeg-Weiss-Fleischmann (the top line stays together)

Mueller-Huberdeau-Kovalev/Svatos/Kostistyn (lots of options)

Upshall-Matthias-Kopecky/one of the invites

And that still leaves Jack Skille , Drew Shore, Mike Santorelli, and others to fight for the remaining ice time.

*

Consider this official – Brendan Smith is my fantasy hockey sleeper for 2012-13. I'll have more on him in a post next week.

*

Marian Gaborik used the lockout to completely recover from off-season shoulder surgery.

*"I feel good. My shoulder feels fine," Gaborik said yesterday, before turning around and giving his quick musical appeasement to the hockey gods. "It's good to get back here and get ready to start playing."*

*

Your guess is as good as mine with regards to the Rangers lines, but there are a lot of options for John Tortorella:

Rick Nash – Brad Richards – Carl Hagelin

Chris Kreider – Derek Stepan – Marian Gaborik

Taylor Pyatt – Brian Boyle – Ryan Callahan

Pretty nice looking top nine right there.

*

Will Alex Galchenyuk make it beyond game six ? The NHL has shortened the time that a

prospect can play in the league before getting sent back down from 10 games (during a regular season) to six games (during the condensed season).

I think Galchenyuk will make Montreal's roster in some capacity. How about you?

*

Keith Ballard and Paul Martin kept busy during the lockout:

{youtube}IeQZMJrYHy4{/youtube}

*

Fear not, Isles fans – Lubomir Visnovsky will report if he has to, according to his agent. Have to love that loyalty!

*“His preference is stay in Bratislava, but if the KHL says he can’t play there, he’ll come and play for the Islanders,” Sheehy says.*

*

Damien Brunner will skate on a line with Datsyuk and Zetterberg at training camp. Yes, you read that correctly. Does that make Brunner one of the better fantasy sleepers for this season?

*Brunner and Zetterberg were on the same line in Switzerland and formed an immediate bond. Zetterberg's 32 points in 23 games was a lower PPG pace than Brunner's, but having a player of Zetterberg's caliber on his line probably boosted Brunner's production.*

*Will that translate in the NHL? One thing Brunner will face with Datsyuk and Zetterberg is the opponents' best defenders night in and night out. Datsyuk and Zetterberg have shown countless times that they are up to the task, but is Brunner?*

*

More on Brunner here – Zetterberg raves about him, as the two skated together in Switzerland.

*"He's obviously a goal scorer, but he has more qualities than that," Zetterberg said. "He's a good skater and he sees the ice very well and he wants to win. He hates losing, and that's a good quality to have.*

*

Andrew Ebbett may be a solid short term solution on Vancouver's second line. And in deep one-year or keeper leagues, he may be a solid option too.

*He clearly has some scoring touch, as he has posted 225 points in 239 career AHL games. That includes 21 for the Chicago Wolves this season, which puts him just behind Brett Sterling (an AHL lifer) for the team lead. Obviously AHL production doesn't necessarily automatically translate to NHL production, but he has actually shown an ability to produce at the NHL level in the past too.*

*

It's a start – the Penguins offer free concession items and half-off merchandise for the first four home games of 2013.

*

A look at the Toronto Maple Leafs as they head into the 2013 season with a new GM at the helm. This is a really comprehensive look at how Toronto stacks up at every position. An excerpt:

*The other great hope at center was Joe Colborne who was picked up from Boston in the Kaberle trade. At the time I didn't know much about Colborne but when I looked at his numbers I was underwhelmed but lots of people thought he had a ton of potential so I kept an optimistic view of him. But two years later and he is struggling big time with the Marlies and his status as a prospect center for the top 2 lines is all but gone. The only hope for Colborne now is he can learn to play defense and become a big, strong, defensive third line center not unlike what Manny Malhotra has done with his career but that is probably being too optimistic.*

*

I did another fantasy hockey season preview, this time with the Jackets Cannon (a Blue Jackets blog).

***What can we expect from Cam Atkinson from a fantasy perspective?***

*A perfect segue way from the previous question. Atkinson is arguably the most offensively gifted player on the Columbus roster, and he proved both last season in the NHL and this season in the AHL that he is ready for prime time minutes. He isn't very well-known around the league yet, but that won't last long. It is difficult to make projections in a lockout-shortened season, but Atkinson will benefit from a huge opportunity for ice time, as well as the fact that he has been playing competitive hockey all season.*

*We have him pegged for 15 goals and 30 points in 47 games.*

*

Will Dallas begin this season with or without Jamie Benn ? The star forward is still without a contract.

*Because of health risk, and because it allows the Benn camp to put pressure on the negotiations, Benn will not join practices until he is signed. While that will drive Stars fans crazy - especially if he is not ready for the start of the 48-game season Jan. 19 - the Stars seem to be ready to wait, if that's necessary.*

I really don’t see this contract situation dragging out (Benn is too important to Dallas both on and off the ice), but it bears watching over the coming days (and hopefully not weeks).

*

A good read on why Brian Burke was fired, from James Mirtle of the Globe & Mail.

*"Did the four years of missing the playoffs [under Mr. Burke] factor into the conversation with the shareholders? For sure it did … but at the end of the day, it was really looking for a different voice and a different leadership approach."*

*

As someone who witnessed first-hand in Vancouver the same situation playing out (Burke butting heads with ownership, and Nonis taking over), I don't think there will be a ton of changes for Toronto. Nonis made it his priority to stabilize Vancouver's goaltending situation, which makes the Luongo rumors intensify.

In terms of overall playing style, the two men are quite similar in their philosophies. Nonis is also familiar with Randy Carlyle, who he hired to coach the Manitoba Moose a few years ago. Nonis is more soft-spoken and a bit more patient than Burke, as well. He made reference to this patience during his press conference, and I wonder if it was a subtle way of saying he wouldn't have made the Phil Kessel trade?

*

I take some Canucks-related questions in **this mailbag edition** of my Canucks Army weekly piece. My thoughts on Luongo, the second line, and the overall expectations for the team in 2013.

*Fans are entering the season with a "Cup or bust" mentality, and I don't blame them. The Canucks are a talented team at all three positions, they have experience in big games, and they will be playing a lot of games against the weakest division in hockey in 2013. So many factors go into postseason success (namely health and goaltending), but Vancouver should be considered a cup favourite once again.*

*

And for the PlayNow Sports blog, **I tackle four big questions in the West** - replacing Lidstrom, the Wild as playoff contenders, the Kings as repeat winners, and Edmonton's window to win.

*The Oilers boast the best young talent in the game. And they are going to surprise some people this year with their ability to generate offense against very good defensive clubs. Their success is going to hinge on two things, though: their ability to play team defense, and the level of goaltending they receive. Nikolai Khabibulin has been a colossal disappointment as an Oiler, and he enters the final year of his contract.*

*Devan Dubnyk is fresh off of helping Canada win the Spengler Cup, and he played quite well last season given the team he played behind. There have been a few Luongo-to-Edmonton rumours circling around, and he would obviously make this a playoff club pretty quickly. Don't discount the potential impact that Dubnyk may have, though.*

*

{youtube}jHMVbuxugJ0{/youtube}