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Don't forget to check out the daily fantasy hockey picks contest we are putting on - submissions are due on Friday before puck drop. Details here.

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Steve Sullivan recorded a hat trick for the Coyotes last night, and stud defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson added a pair of goals.

Ekman-Larsson also played 25 minutes of airtight defensive hockey. Could be in the mix for the Norris this year - he is that good.

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Zack Kassian had a very impressive performance for the Canucks last night. The rugged winger scored a nice goal early on in the game, created a number of chances while playing on the top line, and he capped off Vancouver's first win with a beautiful move in the shootout.

Kassian played close to 20 minutes last night.

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Jordan Schroeder made his NHL debut, playing 15 minutes. He didn't stand out offensively, but he played a solid two-way game considering it was his NHL debut. He also saw some ice time late in the game, which shows that the coaches had confidence in him.

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Cory Schneider rebounded nicely after a poor opening night performance. He didn't have much of a chance on either Calgary goal, and he made some big saves along the way to keep Vancouver in the game.

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Calgary received goals from Backlund and Tanguay. Backlund, in particular, looks really good early on this season.

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And on that note – my fantasy mailbag will be open until Saturday night. Ask any and all

fantasy hockey-related questions here!

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The TSN panel speculated that the Subban/Montreal standoff is going to end in a trade. Apparently the two sides are far apart on both term and dollar figure. This is unfortunate – Subban is going to be a dominant defenseman for a long time, and Montreal won't get full value back for him in a trade.

That being said, what teams would have interest in Subban? Philadelphia is an obvious one.

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Washington forward and a personal favorite of mine, Mathieu Perreault , has asked for a trade. The Capitals have given him a shot at a top six spot, but he has failed to stick there. If you were to ask his camp they would say that he hasn't been given enough opportunities.

I like the energy he plays with, but at this point I am not sure he is a full-time top six forward at the NHL level.

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I caught most of the Penguins/Leafs game last night. Some of my thoughts:

The Leafs played as well defensively as I have seen them play in quite some time. The Randy Carlyle effect.

Nazem Kadri was OK - the Leafs are sheltering his minutes a lot (the right thing to do with a young forward), and he did draw a penalty. I expect he will draw his fair share of penalties over the course of his career.

Joffrey Lupul took a shot off the hand and left the game. It didn't look good at the time and he went straight to the dressing room. And early reports are saying that he has a broken forearm - likely out for a while.

James van Riemsdyk was deadly with the puck on his stick - he finished with two goals, including an absolute laser of a wrister for his second of the night. Those kinds of goals - against the flow of play - are so vital, and they are something that has been lacking in Toronto in recent years (outside of Kessel).

Nikolai Kulemin looked a lot like 2010-11 Kulemin last night. He was a beast on the puck all night and finished with three helpers. If Lupul is out for any length of time, Kulemin is one of the wingers who stands to benefit.

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Dougie Hamilton belongs in the NHL, just in case anybody was still wondering. He was really good on the PP for Boston last night. He's only 19 years old, but made great plays all night - and he has a great ability to get pucks through to the net. One of those shots resulted in a goal for the Bruins, too.

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The Rangers are, in my estimation, the best team in hockey. They have the best goalie in the game, a solid and balanced defensive group, and an unmatched mix of skill, grit, speed, and size up front. The Nash-to-Gaborik play on the first goal of the night was simply magical.

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It is official – Scott Gomez has inked a one-year deal with the Sharks, worth $700k (prorated because of the short season, of course). It will be interesting to see where he slots in – he proved last year he can still skate, but the rest of his game wasn't there. Was it just a confidence issue? Does he bounce back now with a huge chip on his shoulder?

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In my latest for the PlayNow Sports blog, I pose 10 questions from the NHL's opening weekend.

ARE THE DUCKS FOR REAL?

The Ducks have scored 12 goals through their first two games of the season (both wins), dominating both Vancouver and Calgary. This season could be a perfect storm of sorts for the Ducks – they have some young players playing important roles who have been playing in the AHL during the lockout (including Nick Bonino and Kyle Palmieri), and Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry are both playing for new contracts.

Obviously Anaheim needs to find a way to get their two superstar forwards inked to new deals, but having the motivation of a contract year should be the catalyst to get the duo (and particularly Getzlaf) back on track after a disappointing 2011-12 campaign. Keep an eye on mobile defenseman Cam Fowler – the Ducks brought back Scott Niedermayer in a coaching role, and there are many similarities between the two players. Can Niedermayer help Fowler take another step forward with his play?

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Canucks GM Mike Gillis gave a really insightful interview a few days ago. Here are some of the more interesting clips:

Zack (Kassian) has an opportunity to be a big-time player. If he continues to grow, it opens opportunities for other people to be moved around in the lineup that improves the rest of the lineup. When we get (David) Booth and Ryan (Kesler) back, we don't have secondary-scoring issues.

And on the Detroit model:

The one organization that I followed very carefully when I was an agent was Detroit, and Ken Holland, who I think is as good a GM as there is in sport, and leaving players in the minors longer does a couple of things for you. One, it lets them develop. And we have quality coaching there. And two, it helps with your salary cap, because coming out of an entry-level deal where they're prepared to make the step into the NHL, they are still in a position of having to earn their (second contract).

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According to Bob McKenzie, Steve Downie 's knee injury could be a torn ACL. Not good – if true. It would mean Downie is done for the season and the playoffs.
And here is some more confirmation from Mile High Hockey.

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Justin Goldman offers a very in depth scouting report of Dallas goaltender Cristopher Nilstorp.

By finishing with 30 saves on 31 shots, his near-flawless NHL debut left me with one lasting impression: He is proof that the process works. This process, which is simple by design, is never easy to execute, let alone execute successfully:

Let a European goalie develop in his homeland until he's a more mature and consistent performer in his mid-20 s. Then sign him as a free agent for a cheap short-term deal, start him

off in the AHL, and give him a few months to get comfortable on the smaller ice.

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Steven Stamkos shares the secret to his success.

On finding more ways to score than just with the one-timer:

I think you have to evolve your game and you have to find different ways to score. You have to go into those areas where it's sometimes not fun to score, but you realize a goal is a goal. Just because you don't make the highlight reel doesn't mean the goal doesn't help your team win. That's something I learned. Obviously I'd love to score more power-play goals. Our power play struggled a lot last year. But teams are so smart now with watching video and taking note of your tendencies that you have to find different ways to score. I was able to do that and be consistent at that last year, and that's why I took a big step, I think.

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I caught the entire Dallas/Detroit game on Tuesday (my first full game of the season), and I came away very impressed with Cody Eakin . He centered the second line, and didn't look out of place playing against the likes of Datsyuk and Zetterberg. Eakin isn't very big, but he is a great skater and really strong on the puck. He likely slides down to line three once Jamie Benn is signed to a new contract, but Eakin should still find a way to produce in a checking role.

Kari Lehtonen was spectacular for Dallas, and he's a big reason why I think the Stars will surprise some teams this year.

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Why did the Wild pursue Zach Parise so hard last summer? Here are a few reasons:

"The first time I talked to Zach was to give him the fax number," Fletcher told ESPN The Magazine. "And true enough to form, it took an hour to get back to me because he was working out."

The guy had agreed to the biggest contract of his life -- and celebrated with a workout. That might be the best indication as to why the Parise and Suter gamble could pay off huge for the Wild, who are off to a 2-0 start thanks, in part, to three points by Parise. Minnesota looks to stay perfect during Suter's first game against his former team, the Predators, Tuesday night.

And:

"Day in and day out," said Hall of Famer Larry Robinson, who coached Parise in New Jersey. "That's what makes great players unique, that they're not just great on nights when you get to see them. ... You come to practice and you see a guy like Zach working his tail off, you almost feel embarrassed if you're not doing it."

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My Prime Cuts will be making a triumphant return to the site soon… I am aiming for a weekly piece but may start with monthly and go from there.

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Some ESPN hilarity:

{youtube}ybZiaSp-RzM{/youtube}

Some cool video footage from Oilers practice – Yakupov's one-timer release is incredible:

{youtube}DcB9zY43lQQ{/youtube}

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And my latest fitness post – a look at the differences between offseason and in-season training (not just for pro athletes, but the average weekend warrior too):

There are some significant differences in how NHL players (and other professional athletes) train during their season compared to the offseason. The wear and tear that comes with playing games means that players are unable to push their bodies as hard as they do in the summer. But that doesn't mean that training during the season is any less important than during the summer. In fact, it can go a long way to prevent injuries, improve recovery time, and in turn improve performance.

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