Roberto Luongo stopped 27 of 28 shots, including Toews, Kane, Sharp, and Leddy in the shootout. He was sensational last night.

Corey Crawford was also very good. The two teams didn't give much defensively. Some quick thoughts:

Brandon Saad was the most dangerous Chicago forward. By far. Both a good and a bad thing.

Marian Hossa is a beast. He was making plays all over the ice, disrupting the Canucks outlet, and so on. A lot of stuff that doesn't get noticed on the stat sheet.

Jordan Schroeder scored the lone shootout goal - he was really good all game long. Looks to have some chemistry with Mason Raymond - two speedsters who gave Chicago some problems. He has really impressed me with his game thus far this season.

Ryan Kesler was seen taking one-timers at practice - he's about two weeks away. David Booth may be closer.

*

Kyle Palmieri potted a pair for the Ducks, but he only played 12 minutes.

The Ageless Wonder had three helpers. Finnish Flash also works - both are great and very applicable nicknames.

*

Oliver Ekman-Larsson was a monster last night - 28 minutes, two points, involved all game long physically.

Martin Hanzal was the best Coyote forward - two goals, used his size to control the puck down low, and he was great defensively too. He's one of the more underrated forwards in the league.

Dallas continues to make due without Derek Roy. Cody Eakin had a helper in 20 minutes of ice time - he is making the most of the top six center opportunity. Eakin is going to be phenomenal on the third line once Roy returns.

Mike Smith returned to the Phoenix lineup - allowed three goals on 24 shots. Wasn't great, but was solid enough to give his team a chance to win.

*

The Winnipeg Jets are quickly becomming the team to watch in terms of pure entertainment. 11 goals were scored last night as they dropped an 8-3 decision to the Lightning. Pavelec, of course, struggled mightily in the loss.

Al Montoya came in and allowed three goals on 11 shots. Not much better.

Paul Postma and Tobias Enstrom each had three points from the Winnipeg back end.

For the Lightning, Cory Conacher's great start continues. Three points including two goals, and he played only 14 minutes (Tampa Bay was spreading the ice time around after they got out to a 6-0 lead).

Stamkos had three points, as did Lecavalier. The Tampa PP was deadly - St. Louis acted as the top of the umbrella and he was feeding Lecavalier and Stamkos on their off wings for one-timers.

*

The Gordie Howe hat trick for Dallas defenseman Brenden Dillon last night. I interviewed Dillon last summer and followed his career during his time in Seattle in the WHL - has some offensive upside, and plays a nasty game on the back end. Paired with Robidas on the shut down pairing right now.

*

Boston prospect Ryan Spooner is inching closer to NHL duty. He had a goal and three assists last night for the Providence Bruins - Spooner is a dynamic forward - not really sure where he would fit in with the Bruins right now, but he would add a lot in a depth scoring role and on the power play.

*

Great multi-cat game from David Backes, who was tossed for a hit to the head on Kent Huskins (bad call). Backes ended with one assist, five SOG, and 12 PIM.

Shattenkirk played 25 minutes for the Blues and had one of the goals - he has emerged as the best player from that St. Louis/Colorado trade with Chris Stewart and Erik Johnson also in it.

Wade Redden played only 14 minutes and finished with zero points.

Jonathan Ericsson the good showed what he can do last night for Detroit - two points, including an incredible outlet pass to spring Zetterberg for a breakaway goal.

Speaking of Zetterberg, he finished with three goals and five points.

Johan Franzen had three helpers - it was the best game I have seen him play in quite some time.

Check out this effort for the hat trick:

{youtube}biVY8fl4yro{/youtube}

*

The Senators are targeting a trade deadline return for Jason Spezza. Last night against Carolina, Spezza's ice time seemed to be spread across Turris, Zibanejad, O' Brien, and Zack Smith. The team struggled to generate much offensively.

Carolina rode their big guns to victory. Justin Faulk logged over 25 minutes on the back end. Pitkanen was just behind him at 23 minutes played. Semin and Eric Staal each played 20 minutes, and Jordan was just about a minute behind. Great news for their poolie owners, not so much for the likes of Corvo, Dalpe, and Bowman.

Dan Ellis made 33 saves for the shutout victory. The Hurricanes made a smart move scooping him up from the AHL.

*

Without Simmonds (more on him below), the Flyers fell short 3-2 to Washington. Interesting notes from that game:

Couturier was pointless, but saw 20 minutes of ice time (including 2:30 on the PP).

Tye McGinn had a helper in about 15 minutes of ice time for the Flyers.

Luke Schenn had a tough game on the back end - I still don't get that trade for Philadelphia.

No points for Ovechkin, but he had seven SOG. Backstrom had five SOG and two points for the Caps, including a beauty breakaway tally.

Wojtek Wolski scored, and he needs to continue to score if he wants to remain in the Washington top six. Not really on my radar right now unless he strings a few solid performances together.

Mike Green continues to see a ton of ice time under Adam Oates, and he's looking really good, too. Seems to be playing with his swagger that was missing over the past few years. Production has been OK - not great, but on the right track.

*

New Jersey's new top line: Henrique-Zajac-Kovalchuk. Loading up, and great news for poolies who own any of the three of them.

*

Interesting note from Wisconsin blogger Andy Johnson:

Forward Mark Zengerle is the second player in Badger history (under coach Mike Eaves, at least) to record 100 points in less than 100 games. The other - Joe Pavelski. Zengerle is undrafted and undersized, but he will get an NHL contract this summer. Keep an eye on him.

*

Gabriel Landeskog was retroactively placed on the IR. Still no word on when he will be returning to the Colorado lineup. He has been out with an injury after getting rocked by San Jose's Brad Stuart last week.

*

Zack Boychuk will skate on a line with Malkin and Neal tonight. Plan your lineups accordingly if you acted quickly and scooped up Boychuk after the waiver move on Thursday

*

Wayne Simmonds took a nasty elbow from John Erskine last night and didn't return to the game. Erskine is sure to hear from Brendan Shanahan for the hit.

*

My Friday Five for the PlayNow Sports blog.

There were some rumours during the lockout that Edmonton had expressed interest in Roberto Luongo, but Dubnyk has quieted those trade winds – for now. The Oilers would love nothing more than for him to emerge as a bona fide starting goaltender. He would be able to grow and develop with the young core, and his reasonable salary cap hit would give GM Steve Tambellini some flexibility when it comes time to re-sign the likes of Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Justin Schultz.

*

First of the season for Backstrom - nice move on the breakaway:

{youtube}-S0YtPgYGCI{/youtube}

*

Thanks to DobberHockey reader Scott for sharing a fantastic read on staged fighting.

I count myself among those who believe fighting has a place in the sport. There are many reasons a player might drop the gloves: To stand up for a teammate, for instance, or to change the momentum of a game when his team looks sluggish. If nothing else, it's a sort of pressure-release valve in a sport in which guys move at upwards of 25 miles an hour while carrying a stick that could be used as a weapon.

Those of us who are generally pro-fighting can justify the fisticuffs in our minds because we usually see fighting as an attempt to nudge a team in the direction of victory.

A fight alone can't win a game, but it can certainly affect it. There's strategy involved, and players routinely drop their gloves for the good of the team.

I tend to agree with the above take – just look at the impact John Scott had on the Boston/Buffalo game in less than five minutes of ice time.

*

Don't forget to check out DobberBaseball – we have some great new writers in the fold over there, and spring training is quickly approaching.

*

The Coyotes ownership situation is a mess, and for that reason alone I'd be very wary to own any Coyotes outside of Ekman-Larsson, Yandle, and Smith. The players can say they are focused on playing hockey, but a distraction that big would be impossible to ignore. You have to feel for everyone involved – coaches, players, management, fans, and team employees.

*

Here are 10 fitness tips for February.

Gary Roberts on in-season training:

Particularly in light of the shortened season, my warm ups would be an integral part of my workout and pre game and practice routine. I would include a good 20 minute warm up focused on foam rolling, dynamic movement and mobility exercises, neural activation through foot work, and lastly activation of key muscle groups such as the glutes, shoulders and core.

*

Devan Dubnyk has firmly cemented himself as the starter in Edmonton with a strong start to the season.

That guy in goal is Devan Dubnyk, who proved to an awful lot of people Thursday, that he can

be a starting NHL goalie. I know it's only seven games into this 48-game season but Thursday's game with the unbeaten Sharks (7-0) was an acid test for Dubnyk because he had beaten the Phoenix Coyotes 2-1 in overtime one night earlier and was probably tired. Dubnyk stared down one of the best teams in the league on short rest and was stunningly good, early and late, before Michal Handzus worked his shootout magic for the Sharks. Handzus is 18 for 34 lifetime on shootouts.The Zamboni might be faster in five-on-five situations but Zeus might be the best shootout player ever with his ridiculously long reach.

*

Logan Couture with some 'Kaepernicking' after his goal against Edmonton on Thursday evening:

{youtube}u-d9SNBi7V4{/youtube}

*

Raffi Torres is playing tonight for Phoenix. Will he be able to change his game like Matt Cooke did in Pittsburgh?

"[I'm] just focusing on instead of going for the big hit, just kind of rubbing guys out and trying to take the puck at the same time," Torres explained. "[Head coach Dave Tippett] showed me a bunch of clips where I was thinking puck first and hit second and it worked out, where I got a lot of scoring chances out of it.

*

A very solid read on the PK Subban contract situation.

In determining who and what was similar, I limited my search to defencemen who signed two year contracts covering the two seasons immediately following the expiration of their ELCs. For the purposes of ensuring salary cap neutrality, I restricted my focus to contracts signed after 2010, when the upper limit was $59.6 million.

Here are the top 5 most expensive contracts of this type by AAV. Subban's contract tops the list:

P.K. Subban (Montreal Canadiens): 2 years/$5.75M ($2.875 AAV)

Erik Johnson (St. Louis Blues): 2 years/$5.2M ($2.6 AAV)

Michael Del Zotto (New York Rangers): 2 years/$5.1M ($2.55 AAV)

Dimitri Kulikov (Florida Panthers): 2 years/$5M ($2.5 AAV)

Zach Bogosian (Winnipeg Jets): 2 years/$5M ($2.5 AAV)

*

Dustin Byfuglien missed his second straight game with a lower body injury last night for the Jets.

*

Don't be afraid to fire me an e-mail if you want something mentioned in the ramblings. Here are a few prospects that a reader wanted my take on (I had to do a bit of digging):

Jimmy Vesey - Nashville Predators.

Vessey currently plays for Harvard and had a great WJC tournament last month. He's off to a fantastic start at Harvard this season with 10 goals in 14 games. The Crimson lost a few players due to a cheating scandal a few months ago (including Canucks prospect Pat McNally). Vesey has picked up a lot of the scoring slack.

Tyler Graovac - Minnesota Wild.

Graovic is having a fantastic season in the OHL - he was recently traded from Ottawa to Belleville, and he has 24 goals in 39 games split between the two teams. Minnesota has a ton of quality forward prospects (Granlund, Zucker, Phillips, Coyle), and they can be very patient with players like Graovac. Here is some more information on him - a very intriguing prospect.

Artur Gavrus - New Jersey Devils.

Gavrus spent last season in the OHL with Owen Sound, but he decided at the beginning of 2012-13 to remain in Belarus to play. He had a change of heart at the end of December, reporting to Owen Sound. He has no points in seven games with the Attack this season - a far cry from the 15 goals and 37 points he had in 45 games last year. He's currently day-to-day with an upper body injury.

*

Have a great hockey-filled weekend.

*