The Blues have activated Jaroslav Halak from the IR, sending Jake Allen down. Brian Elliott was not effective last night and Ken Hitchcock did not mince words after the game.

“Not playing very good. Not much I can say. He’s not playing very good. He’d be the first to tell you, too. He’s got to play better.”

Halak will start Monday against the Kings.

If you’re in an average-sized roto league (10 or so teams) and you need a little extra depth in net, keep an eye on what Elliott’s owner does. In a shortened season like this, some crazy things have already been happening and too many poolies are way short on patience. If Elliott is dropped in that situation, where you can afford to stash him on your bench for a time, then snap him up. His game will improve and Ken Hitchcock will have this Blues team in ship shape defensively before you know it.

Even if Halak were to get the vast majority of starts until season's end (which is not a lock in itself), a spot-starter on a defensively responsible contender has value on your bench in those roto formats. Elliott should still be more than just a spot-starter anyway, but that should be his worst-case scenario going forward.

When others panic, that’s when you pounce. There's a big banner to that effect on Championship Boulevard.

*

Dustin Byfuglien should be fine to play Tuesday against the Flyers, which is good news for his owners. The Jets have three games this week, including facing the Penguins and Bruins. Byfuglien has only played six times this season, but already had 3-4-7 with 6 PIM, 4 PPP, and 25 SOG. Oh, and he’s averaging just shy of 27 minutes a game.

*

Michael Leighton has been sidelined with an upper-body injury and will miss at least a week. The Flyers have called Brian Boucher up. The Flyers are back-to-back Monday/ Tuesday (@Leafs/ @Jets) and then Friday/ Saturday (@Devils/ @Canadiens), so he could see a start. FYI.

*

The Penguins have placed Kris Letang on the IR, but retroactive to last Tuesday. He's still day-to-day. Matt Niskanen, in the meantime, is at the two week mark of his 2-4 week timeline. He said Sunday morning he'd like to think he's close to returning, but there are still a few more steps to take. Simon Despres continues to enjoy a higher-profile role with both of those guys out.

******

New Jersey Devils blueliner Andy Greene has quietly collected 2-6-8 over his past five starts with points in each game and three separate two-pointers in that span. He's basically working a PP2 gig there, but still has five of those eight points with the man advantage.

Adam Henrique has been really effective for poolies since coming back into the line-up, which is no small feat after that layoff. He's been skating mostly with Patrik Elias and David Clarkson of late, with points in five of six outings.

*

This was Zach Boychuk's fifth start with the Penguins and fifth time he's started the game on the left side of Evgeni Malkin and James Neal. No points yet. Defenceman Simon Depres is picking up points here and there though and he's chipping in PIM, hits and some PP work for deeper standard league owners.

*

Marc-Andre Fleury is doing his part to help thank faithful fans. The Tribune-Review details how MAF has committed to spending $500 a game to give four student rush program fans "glass seats" — the first row behind the cage he defends twice. The gate price for each seat is $125, and Fleury will spend around $11,000 this season. Not a dime is tax exempt.

*

How great does Jeff Skinner look again this season? Regular box score appearance, like we'd expect from the young talent, but it's been really nice to see him so active on the ice in general after what he went through last year. He has at least three shots in each clash and fired seven of them on net today for the second time this year. In his rookie season, he averaged 2.6 shots/game. Sophomore campaign he bumped it up to 3.3. This year it's already at 4.6 shots/game. He's dynamic, explosive, and even more skillful than we saw when he first burst onto the NHL scene and was a deserving media darling of the league.

*

Brayden Schenn has been strong in February. This was his fifth outing of the month and after today's 1-2-3 effort, he's up to six points in that time. He started the game with Tye McGinn and Jakub Voracek on his wings, but later on Peter Laviolette shifted back to the hit playoff line of Danny Briere and Wayne Simmonds (who was back in action) there. Let's hope that line sticks for awhile and helps get the team going offensively, so not all of the pressure is on Claude Giroux's shoulders.

Girouxhas been a monster in FO circle. Won 67% today (16 of 24) and has won 63.5% in last five games. #Flyers

— Sam Carchidi (@BroadStBull) February 9, 2013

Don't remember if I've mentioned this on DH or not, but the thing for frustrated Voracek owners to keep in mind is that it has been a routinely positive sign that the Flyers continue to generally roll Voracek out on PP1 night after night.

*

They made a note of this on the CBC Oilers/ Wings broadcast, but it bears repeating if you didn't catch the game. There was a play where Taylor Hall was streaking down the left side from his own end. Little did he realize that gaining steam on him was one Pavel Datsyuk. Somewhere around the time the youngster entered the Detroit zone, the 34-year-old Russian legend closed the gap, lifted Hall's stick and broke up the play. Yet another takeaway for one of the NHL's best in that department. Hell... one of the NHL's best in ANY department. It's a treat to be able to watch him perform his magic on both sides of the puck year after year and his performances will resonate for generations to come.

*

Nikolai Khabibulin finally played his first game of the season and from the parts I saw, he looked quite sharp. 28/30, .933. Devan Dubnyk should still see most of Edmonton's starts, but as the team's competitiveness level continues to rise it'll become more conducive to take chances on a back-up spot start from the Oilers when you need to meet weekly quotas or try to sneak in an extra win or two.

*

Sam Gagner's season-long 10-game point streak came to an end and he started the afternoon with Taylor Hall and Ales Hemsky as his wingers, with Nail Yakupov shifting down a line. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who returned to the lineup after getting

in a number of days of work on his shoulder, had Teemu Hartikainen flanking him with normal winger Jordan Eberle as well.

*

With Ondrej Pavelec fighting the flu, Al Montoya was called into action. No sweat. 33-save shutout. He and Ben Bishop (36/37. 973) combined to be nearly perfect.

*

Mike Smith didn’t fare well in January, but this month he has a 3-1-1 mark with a 2.10 GAA and .915 SV% with a pair of shutouts after picking up 1-0 shootout win over the San Jose Sharks. Last year against this same team Smith was 4-1-1 with three shutouts and sizzling 1.98/ .948 splits.

Antti Niemi hadn’t recorded a goose egg this season prior to Saturday, but his stats have been excellent. He also has 20 shutouts in 174 career starts.

*

What's the significant difference between this year's Patrick Kane and versions we've seen in years past? Call it what you'd like, but this quote from him after Saturday's practice speaks volumes.

"Maybe in the past, when I had a good game or two, I was doing real well and maybe I let up the next game. I just focus on every game, every shift and try not to be satisfied, no matter what happens. If I play well and help score goals, we're going to have a chance to win."

The Hawks have started off at a blistering pace with a 9-0-2 mark and naturally the team playing well has helped Kane's chances of success each night. But remember that he has 8-10-18, while his next-nearest teammates (Marian Hossa, Patrick Sharp and Jonathan Toews) "only" have 11 points apiece.

What we're seeing this season (at least so far) is the winger's desire finally matching his high skill level. The key to becoming a truly elite player though, will be delivering this consistency throughout the campaign.

Interestingly, that CSNChicago.com article also recapped how Kane typically begins each season well. Here are the stats from the first 11 games of each year and you can see how he has even improved upon those numbers this time around.

2012-13: 8 goals, 10 assists (18 points)
2011-12: 4 goals, 7 assists (11 points)
2010-11: 3 goals, 6 assists (9 points)
2009-10: 4 goals, 6 assists (10 points)
2008-09: 6 goals, 7 assists (13 points)
2007-08: 4 goals, 10 assists (14 points)

*

The Islanders had to trade for a guy sitting out just to get to the cap floor, but their Ice Girls are on third outfit of night. #Priorities

— John Vogl (@BuffNewsVogl) February 10, 2013

*

Lubomir Visnovsky made his season debut for the New York Islanders. He ran the first power play unit with Mark Streit on the point and played 20:34 overall. Plus-two. Three shots. No points, but he'll have plenty of opportunities for pointage and will find a home as a mid-range defenceman on rosters of any format with upside for more.

Not for nothing, but Brad Boyes (normally NOT someone I'd want on my team) has collected eight points in his 11 starts. A few games back the Isles flipped him from the second line RW slot up to the enviable position alongside John Tavares and Matt Moulson. There is a long list of wingers I'd rather have, but in deeper leagues or as an injury replacement you could do worse. PP1 too, incidentally.

*

Exceptionally cool note from the Blues' TV broadcast tonight. Sergei Zubov, who was on a

number of my fantasy rosters over the years before he retired, is a consultant for the team. Friday he and hotshot rookie Vladimir Tarasenko sat down and went over clips of every single NHL shift the youngster has skated to date, with the elder statesman offering advice on positioning and the like. Not only was there invaluable advice, but also no doubt a different perspective since Zubov has the added benefit of having been an offensive defenceman who can relate to what might work for the young forward at the NHL level.

With Zubov and Al MacInnis available to Blues, that's a pretty incredible tandem when it comes to voices of experience. I still love that story from a few weeks back where MacInnis and Kevin Shattenkirk sat down after the playoffs last year and one of the things the vet told his protégé was (loosely translated) just because Alex Pietrangelo is a stud and "the man" back there, doesn't mean you can't strive to become even better than him. Both Shattenkirk and Pietrangelo are ridiculously talented and Blues fans are and will be spoiled for years to come having both gents on the back end.

*

Jamie Langenbrunner will have hip surgery and will likely miss the rest of the season. He told the media the reason he's doing this now is so that this will not be the end of his NHL career. He will be 38 for the start of the '13-14 campaign.

*

Teemu Selanne's four-point effort against the Blues surprises exactly nobody, but Bobby Ryan coming away with a 2-2-4 showing is a positive sign for his owners. That vaults him up to point-per-game status, which helps to begin to ease the pain of last year's 57-point result. He has remained a valuable asset in varied standard leagues, but he's still generally playing below the regularly stellar level of which he's truly capable.

*

Alex Ovechkin has his first point streak of the season going, which is four-games strong after the Caps whitewashed the Panthers. He also has 27 SOG in his five February starts. While I'd rather see him reunited with Nicklas Backstrom, Ovechkin and Mike Ribeiro (having a very effective season for poolies) are finding each other on the ice and the standard league owners who abandoned ship on Ovechkin will likely regret having done so.

If you're in need of some help in a really deep league, Troy Brouwer has points in four of five with two shots in each of those games. Second line with Wojtek Wolski and Nicklas Backstrom for this one, with first unit power play work.

A shutout is exactly what the doctor ordered for both the Caps and Braden Holtby (27/27).

*

If you kept the faith with a frustrated Phil Kessel, the puck has finally been going in lately. Goals in B2B affairs with six points in his last three games.

It's also been a tough ride for Dion Phaneuf owners, who only had one point to show prior to this affair against the Habs. 1-1-2, 2 PIM, 2 SOG, 5 hits helps defray some of the damage done this season. He continues to see all of the opportunities he normally would as a high-minute defenceman, so his fortunes will turn around before long. Standard league owners in particular, where those gritty peripheral categories come into play, stand to gain the most from sticking with him.

*

One positive of Joffrey Lupul injury, certainly, has been a regular first line spot for James van Riemsdyk. That's a situation that's not without its irony either.

JVR was really more of a depth guy in Philly than he should have been, which, to be fair, can partially be attributed to his development as a young player. He was dinged up last season and never really got things going though either, with only 43 total games played.

Lupul, who played for the Ducks as well as those same Flyers, was notoriously too often used in a third line role when he was with those teams because he was both frequently injured and – as tends to go hand in hand - consistently inconsistent. He had a pretty decent start when he was traded mid-season from Anaheim to Toronto in the ’10-11 campaign, but then fully blossomed the next year.

Now, we’re seeing the same sort of transformation happening with van Riemsdyk. Cool to watch.

*

Devin Setoguchi scored the OT GWG, but talk about someone who has low value in pools

these days. He had two measly assists on the season before finally registering a marker here and this was also the first time he had more than two shots in any game thanks to this five-shot effort. His line assignment has been all over the place this season, but he started against the Preds on a revamped second line with Mikael Granlund and Dany Heatley.

Setoguchi: "Props to Mike (Yeo) for putting me out there" after being in doghouse last few games

— Michael Russo (@Russostrib) February 10, 2013

Granlund, as we've seen, has struggled to adapt to the NHL game early on. All this does is present keeper league owners with an opening to get a future star performer. There is zero doubt in my mind that Granlund has everything required to be a legit go-to threat at this level and once it finally 'clicks' for him, then the shadow of doubt which may currently exist in his owners' minds will vanish more quickly than that mistaken pizza delivery at fat camp.

*

Prior back issues didn't prevent the Vancouver Canucks from signing Alexander Edler to that six-year, $30 million extension in mid-January and if you were one of the fantasy owners who wasn't too worried about his health headed into this shortened season then you have been handsomely rewarded to date. He's been a steady source of scoring summary appearances and he's currently enjoying the best point-per-game pace of his career. The SOG jump we saw last year has continued too, which is a bonus peripheral benefit.

Kevin Bieksa has points in two of three after being blanked in the partial month of January. With him, waiting out any dry spells is particularly worthwhile when your league counts those extras like hits, PIM, or even blocks. You know his plus-minus shouldn't hurt on the Canucks either.

Jordan Schroeder, who has been the pivot on the second line between Mason Raymond and Jannik Hansen, collected his first NHL goals against the Flames and has points in two of three. He saw a lot of power play time too.

*

Martin Brodeur had some grand larceny on Evgeni Malkin at one point, but this is the highlight from the Pens game that'll make you giggle a bit. You can see Marty grinning from ear to ear afterward.

{youtube}FTXg3DHFmWM{/youtube}.

Brodeur said he "had no clue" that the play was off-sides when Malkin hit the post on the empty net and he nearly kicked in rebound.

— Tom Gulitti (@TGfireandice) February 9, 2013

Brodeur: "That's all the work I do in the summer, quick feet and all that stuff. Did you see that

dancing?"

— Tom Gulitti (@TGfireandice) February 9, 2013

*

Twitter: @Nichols_NHLPool NHL news, analysis & fantasy takes with minimal inane babble.

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