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My look at five NHL clubs underperforming in 2013.

St. Louis Blues (6-5-1, 18th overall in the NHL)

The Blues were tabbed by many as the best team in the Western Conference, but they haven't played like it through the first quarter of the season. Brian Elliott has struggled mightily as the starting goaltender (Jaroslav Halak remains out with a groin injury), and the normally stingy Hitchcock-led defense has allowed 40 goals in only 12 games.

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Entries for the 2XU/DobberHockey Fantasy Hockey Contest are due today at 3pm EST/Noon PST. Info here!

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Kari Lehtonen stole another two points for the Stars last night - he stopped 35 of 36 shots, and gave Edmonton shooters fits all game long.

Ryan Smyth and Ryan Whitney were both healthy scratches. Whitney is simply not an NHL defenseman right now, while Smyth has taken bad penalties in recent games.

Hall scored the only Oilers goal and also had an impressive nine shots on net.

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Brandon Saad scored his second career NHL goal and led Chicago in SOG with six. He continues to play really well in Chicago's top six.

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Darcy Kuemper was very solid in his NHL debut against the Canucks, but his team only gave him one goal of support.

Jonas Brodin was rock solid on the top pairing along with Ryan Suter - his transition to the NHL has been seamless.

Mason Raymond's bounceback season continues - he was creating chances with his speed and hands all game long, and he made a terrific toe-drag move on the Jannik Hansen game winner.

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Both Ryan Ma and I are struggling in the Dobber Experts League - we pulled off a trade this morning. I sent Ma Parise and Grabner, and in return I received Derek Roy and Martin St. Louis. Fills needs for both teams.

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The BJ's have made it official - Jarmo Kelalainen is their next GM. He becomes the first European GM in NHL history.

In the bigger picture, Kekalainen's biggest challenge -- also shared by Davidson -- will be to convince players, especially free agents, to want to play in Columbus. The only way to lure top-end free agents so far as been to grossly overpay them and that's no way to build a team.

"We want to send a message loud and clear that we're in a position of change," Davidson said at Wednesday's news conference. "We're going forward the right way. This is about changing a culture and getting it to where I need to get it to."

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According to Adrian Dater, Ryan O'Reilly's days in Colorado are over. Trade? Offer sheet? What a disaster for Colorado fans.

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Cam Ward was really good for Carolina (I caught most of this game). I have been enjoying the Hurricanes a lot this year, they play an exciting brand of hockey.

Jiri Tlusty's hot streak continues - he had two goals and three shots on goal for the Hurricanes last night. He is making the most of his top line minutes this season.

Justin Faulk had two helpers. He's arguably the best American defenseman in the league (after Suter), and he has so much hockey ahead of him. What a find by Carolina. Faulk could be a 50-60-point d-man if he wasn't as good defensively as he is (the Hurricanes give him the tough defensive assignments).

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Carl Hagelin is playing some great hockey as of late - he scored again last night and gave the B's fits all game long with his speed.

Dan Girardi and Ryan McDonagh combined to block 14 shots.

Patrice Bergeron continues to be Mr. Everything for the Bruins - face-offs, goals, defensive play, you name it and he does it. He's on my 2014 Canadian roster, which will be unveiled in the next week.

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Almost 10 minutes on the PP and another goal for Karlsson - he appears to be the only Senator who will be unaffected by the Spezza injury.

42 save shutout for Craig Anderson… too early for the M-V-P chants in Ottawa? I don't think so.

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PK Subban played only 18:25 last night, but he finished the game with a goal and a helper.

Tampa scored three goals in the final six minutes to tie it up… Anders Lindback was rock solid for them down the stretch of the third and in OT/shootout.

Victor Hedman scored a pair of goals for the Bolts.

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Speaking of impressive comebacks, the Caps scored two goals in the final half of the third and added the OT winner to beat Florida. 11 goals combined… so lots of fantasy goods:

Nick Backstrom had a pair of helpers, and Mike Ribeiro continued his strong season with three points.

Ovechkin had two points as well. His game is slowly coming around… I am still recommending to hold off on trading him right now.

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The Preds have given Pekka Rinne 25 goals of support this season… in 13 games. Rinne made 25 saves for the shutout victory last night.

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The Flyers got some production from their big guns last night - Voracek (two points), Schenn (one point), and Giroux (one point) will need to carry the offence while Hartnell is out.

Sean Couturier missed the game with flu-like symptoms. So… does he have the flu? Or some crazy new disease that they are keeping secret?

Two helpers for Blake Wheeler, who also earned the cheap 10 minute PIM misconduct at the

end of the game. Poolies who own him won't complain!

Byfuglien was pointless in 25 minutes of ice time in his return to the Winnipeg lineup.

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The questioning of management in Colorado continues – taking a “what if” approach to pursuing Justin Schultz last summer. And the team still needs a goal from a defenseman (as of Tuesday afternoon).

Yes, the Erik Johnson potential is there, and Ryan Wilson and Matt Hunwick have some offensive jam, but instead of giving Elliott and/or Barrie the opportunity to be that guy, they re-signed unrestricted free agents Wilson, Hunwick and Shane O’Brien, plus UFA Greg Zanon, the prototype defensive-defenseman who played with Minnesota and Boston last season. There weren’t opening-night spots for Elliott or Barrie, because they had seven defensemen on one-way contracts and they were on two-way deals and eligible to be sent down to the AHL without clearing waivers.

Hey, the Avs have size and grit on the back end. What they don't have is a consistent Schultz-type defenseman. Barrie has played four of 11 games for the Avs; Elliott none.

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Without an NHL contract, Pavel Kubina has signed to play the rest of the season in Switzerland. You know it's not going to happen when the Flyers pass you over for Bruno Gervais and Kurtis Foster.

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Columbus has fired Scott Howson. It will be interesting to see who takes over (my money is on Blues exec Jarmo Kekalainen, who is responsible for drafting many of the young studs in St. Louis, and he is familiar with BJ's president John Davidson).

Howson is a smart man and did a great job with the Rick Nash trade (seriously, Columbus got a hell of a return), but his body of work beforehand wasn't great. The Johnson/Carter trade was ugly, especially considering that he gave up Voracek/Couturier for Carter only a few months before.

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An updated look at the Art Ross race:

PATRICK KANE

Kane has been the best forward in the NHL season, and he has led the Blackhawks to a ridiculous 10-0-2 start. He is known for his ability to make opposing defensemen look foolish, and he is doing so game after game in 2013. He and Marian Hossa have been a nightmare to contain for opposing defenses. Don't be surprised to see Kane keep going on his impressive scoring pace for the rest of the 2013 regular season.

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10 thoughts on the Dallas Stars:

Injuries lead to opportunity, and the Ray Whitney injury gave Brenden Morrow another crack at playing top line minutes. He is skating with more jump than he has in a long, long time. In fact, Morrow's recent stretch of play is the best I have seen from him since the 2008 postseason. Over his last three games, Morrow has averaged close to 20 minutes of ice time.

Can he sustain this kind of play over the rest of the season? Who knows at this point, but it has to be encouraging to everyone in the Stars organization. At the very least, Morrow is building up his trade value should the Stars look to move him (and you can bet contending teams would be lining up around the block to land a proven veteran and winner like Morrow in early April).

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Alex Ovechkin is starting to embrace the move over to right wing. It also helps that Mike Ribeiro
has been fantastic all season long for the Caps.

"The first couple games I didn't feel comfortable and then I go back to left wing," Ovechkin said of his early frustrations. "Then I watch a movie with [Adam] Oates and he just said the time is there. You just have to get used to it and talk to your linemates."

Now playing on a line with center Mike Ribeiro and left wing Jason Chimera , Ovechkin is carrying the puck through the neutral zone more now than at any time in his career.

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Ryan Malone will be out for up to a month with a lower body injury. A big opportunity for one of the young guys in Tampa Bay (likely either Richard Panik or Alex Killorn).

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Ryan Kesler is shooting and taking faceoffs without any pain, and he is getting closer to a return. If this were the playoffs, or if Kesler hadn't rushed back last year, I think he would be playing by now. But with the Canucks playing well and him not wanting to rush back again, both sides are playing this one very safe.

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Leland Irving is still looking for his jock:

{youtube}lsNv0h-aQW0{/youtube}

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I really enjoyed Down Goes Brown's latest for Grantland – a look at 10 strong early season performers and how they will fare the rest of the way.

Sheldon Souray :

The expectations: Souray was an easy player to forget about coming into the season. After establishing himself as an All-Star in Montreal, he signed a big deal in Edmonton and had a mostly disappointing stint with the Oilers that at one point included being buried in the minors, Wade Redden –style. After being bought out and posting mostly unimpressive numbers playing tough minutes with the Stars last season, he signed with the Ducks in the offseason.

The reality: He's posted seven points through 11 games, and his +10 is the second-best in the league. More importantly, he's been a steady presence on the blue line for a Ducks team that's been one of the league's most surprising squads.

Can he keep it up? At 36 years old, he's solidly into the "savvy veteran" stage of his career. But though his days of 20-plus-goal seasons are behind him, he looks ready to be a workhorse for a young Ducks team — if he stays healthy.

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Undersized forward Kevin Roy recorded a hat trick the other night in college hockey – he's the top scoring rookie in the NCAA:

{youtube}oS871MjOT14{/youtube}

Roy was drafted by the Ducks in the 4th round of the 2012 draft, and he currently plays for Northeastern.

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Brandon Worley takes a look at the need for a number one defenseman in Dallas.

If we look the top defensemen for the Cup-winning teams over the past few years we see a very legitimate trend: Nearly all of the top blueliners for the best teams in the NHL were drafted by that team: Drew Doughty , Brent Seabrook , Duncan Keith , and Kris Letang , just to name a few. Chris Pronger helped the Ducks to win the Cup in 2007, so perhaps it could be seen that the price tag to acquire him was then worth it. The Stars, however, are not the team the Ducks were when making that trade.

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Vlad Sobotka steps in and defends himself after a dirty hit - no problem with these fights:

{youtube}xDElFFS5DXI{/youtube}