My buddy Rhys Richards takes a look at realignment and what it means (in particular for the Red Wings). Could this move extend the career of Nick Lidstrom?

Radim Vrbata doesn't get a lot of league wide attention, but there aren't many better pure offensive talents. Inconsistent production is a part of his game, but he's been pretty good in that regard this season. He's currently on pace for 41 goals and 73 points. Playing with a true play maker like Ray Whitney has helped a lot.

Chris Campoli is healthy and ready to play, but it is unclear when that will be. The Habs have been getting good play from some of their young defensemen, most notably Raphael Diaz and Alexei Emelin.

Jeff Skinner had the flu and was a late scratch last night for the 'Canes.

Chris Higgins is likely to play for the Canucks tonight. Not sure where he'll play - either with Kesler and Raymond, or with Hodgson and Hansen.

A beastly game from Dennis Wideman last night - three goals and an assist. His assist was probably the nicest offensive play he made all game, too. In Wideman fashion, he managed to be a minus-1 at the end of the game, too.

Cam Ward was yanked after giving up four goals on 30 shots. Pretty good for his standards this season, actually. Ward is killing me in a few pools with his awful play. He isn't even good enough this season to be labelled as inconsistent.

Sure, Carolina's defense is bad (Jamie McBain was an adventure in every sense of the word last night against Winnipeg), but Ward's numbers make it look like he's playing behind a beer league defense.

Habs prospect Brendan Gallagher is having a good season in the WHL - he scored a great goal last night, too. He's going to be a good player in the NHL. Undersized but a lot of heart and skill (like a few other Montreal forwards).

Kyle Wellwood is on pace for 21 goals and 53 points.

Blake Wheeler had a horrific start to the season, but he had three points last night and now has eight in his last six games. He'll be a solid second or third line winger, but he isn't and won't ever be a top line winger in his career.

Sam Gagner scored twice last night - one of his better games in the while. Nugent-Hopkins and Eberle both had two points.

THIS is the Ovechkin we have been missing. Passion. Watch him battle Phaneuf hard last night with these video clips.

Ovechkin had eight shots on goal, and had his second consecutive involved, physical game.

Jason Garrison scored his ninth of the season for Florida.

Thoughts from the four games last night will be up later this AM. I was busy last evening at a charity function for work – each year in December, the clients at the fitness training studio I work at come and “get their revenge” on myself and my fellow trainers. For a great cause (Canuck Place Children’s Hospice in Vancouver), but it is very, very, very hard. Needless to say I needed some zzz’s after.

There were some tweets making the rounds yesterday regarding Sidney Crosby. Apparently whatever injury he is dealing with right now is more serious than they are letting on, and apparently it isn’t head/concussion related.

Matt Hackett’s shutout streak of over 100 minutes to start his NHL career is a new league record.

The Ducks have called up Kyle Palmieri from Syracuse. He’ll play tonight. A column will be up later today with more on him.

The Flames have demoted Roman Horak. He'll get to play with his former junior line mate in Ryan Howse with Abbotsford.

Here is a good read from September on how Calgary originally noticed Horak.

Team Canada will get both Brett Connolly and Devante Smith-Pelley. Both will also play right wing. I think Brendan Gallagher still makes the team, but in more of a depth/energy role. The player to watch for Canada this year is going to be Jaden Schwartz.

The Devils recalled Matt Taormina. Taormina has 12 points in 23 AHL games to date. He had some brief success last season before suffering a brutal ankle injury. Larsson/Tallinder/Fayne are seeing the PP time for the defense – not exactly the hardest group to leap over with a few good games.

With Friday usually being a light game in terms of scheduling (and one I am away from the PC for in the evening), I usually have more links than usual. I don't want the ramblings to be a link dump (Puck Daddy already does a fantastic job of rounding up the best from around the 'net), so I'll do my best to post my thoughts/analysis on each link. If I sometimes stray away from this, don't hesitate to call me out.

Both Brayden Schenn and Chris Pronger are out with concussion-related symptoms. Pronger had a virus and a knee injury, and it turns out that the virus was actually lingering side effects from a concussion. I hope he'll be healthy for the Winter Classic, as I'm sure he'll be one of the stars of the reality series. Oh, and he's pretty important to Philadelphia's success.

After a great start to the season, Sheldon Souray is struggling offensively in the past month or so. I hope you didn't expect him to be a 50-point defenseman (although he is still on pace for 12 goals and 39 points). Souray is missing a puck moving partner. Robidas isn't a pure puck moving defenseman, and Goligoski is injured. I'd expect Dallas to take a run at a defenseman who can help get the puck up the ice (and on to Souray's stick).

Speaking of Souray, Defending Big D takes a look at some successful reclamation projects that we have seen in Dallas over the years. From the link:

*"Kari comes in at number 3 on this list, but he has the potential to end up number 1 by the time his career is over. The gigantic Finn has been one of the brightest stars in the last few seasons, keeping us in games that we don't deserve to be in, and keeping our league standing in the playoff hunt when our payroll is in the cellar.*

*In Atlanta, his career was marred by injuries and trips to McDonalds. A former second overall pick, the Thrashers were running out of patience and were ready to cut bait and move on. The asking price? Ivan Vishnevskiy.*

*I said the Niinimaa for Ribeiro trade was lopsided... this one ranks up there with Kevin Hatcher for Sergei Zubov. Vishnevskiy, once regarded as the heir to the Zubov throne, was struggling to crack the lineup and supposedly threatening to defect back to Russia.*

*He never managed to crack Atlanta's lineup either, faded away back to his homeland, and the Thrashers ended up in Winnipeg. Kari, on the other hand, has turned into one of the league's top netminders, who other than his recent groin pull setback has been the epitome of consistency and conditioning."*

Hyperbole maybe, but Winnipeg may still be in Atlanta if Lehtonen figured his stuff out earlier on in his career. Defending Big D is one of my favorite blogs (yes, I have many). Dallas is a team I don't get to see a lot of, but I own numerous Stars across my four leagues.

Another great blog is Broad Street Hockey. In this piece , they take a look at playmakers and shooting percentages.

*“Do individual players shoot for a higher percentage when they're on the ice with a playmaker than when they're not?”*

Henrik Sedin is used as an example:

*“A simple paired t-test says this is significant, but it gives equal weight to Hamhuis and Burrows, which can't be right given their number of shots. Moreover, the significance in that test is based largely on the number of players considered; the t-test would be less impressed by a dataset of two players who each had 1000 shots with and without Sedin, yet I would find that data more compelling. If there's a statistics expert who would be interested in showing me how to include the uncertainty on each measurement as part of the significance test, I'd love to do that, but in the meantime we'll settle for qualitative observations.”*

World Junior themed 15 Points to Consider out next week. My favourite hockey of the year. Time to sell high on some prospects!

Is now the best time for Anaheim to move Bobby Ryan? With a slew of young wingers in the system (Smith-Pelley, Etem, Palmieri, and more), and needs on the back end, Anaheim Calling makes a compelling case for it.

*"I don't think Bobby's value is going to get much higher than it is now. He has a good stat line, good size, and a decent contract that has him locked up for the next three seasons after this one. This will be the only time I talk about Bobby's play. He's been good, but not great. He has a very solid stat line that's very appealing. He isn't Sidney Crosby. He hasn't looked like a once in a generation player. He's looked like a slightly streaky scorer who will get you 30 goals every year, and 70 points. That's solid. It's not amazing; it's solid.*

*What makes Bobby such a hot commodity is that no one knows if he'll take the next step. There's a chance he could reach the levels of Perry and Getzlaf, but he might not. To be fair, nobody knows. As a result, you can make suitors pay for potential. More importantly, Murray doesn't HAVE to move Bobby yet. Even if other GMs try to strong arm him into a deal under the premise that he won't be able to afford Bobby later, he can say that he has time to think about it. Other GMs are going to want to get him with those three full seasons left and try to get value. Someone WILL overpay to have him. There's a distinct possibility that the Ducks can get a quality forward, a young defenseman and a first round pick for Bobby, which is a pretty great return. Of course, Bobby could also be used as bait for a bigger prize."*

Pulled this from James Mirtle's piece on Phaneuf yesterday – since the All-Star Break, Dion Phaneuf is scoring at a 59-point pace.

Going to mention two more blogs I really like. Copper & Blue consistently has outside the box analysis, like this piece on the best young line in hockey (no, they don't play in Edmonton). They use a lot of statistics, which is something I really enjoy and I hope we see more of in hockey (it is starting to come to the forefront more and more).

And the comprehensive blog if you don't get to read enough about the CHL (fantasy studs of the future) – Buzzing the Net.

A Montreal paper breaks down the Kaberle trade . Needless to say, they don't like the move.

Thomas Drance takes a look at Cory Schneider's young career. Future/current fantasy stud, and what he has done in limited games is really, really impressive. Don't even think of trading him – he'll be starting somewhere in the league next season, 100% guaranteed.

A sick feed from Nugent-Hopkins - great commentary too:

{youtube}AIr1NgNW8o4{/youtube}