And the draft is only eight days away… what better way to prepare than picking up a copy of our 2012 Fantasy Prospects Report?

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My weekly piece for the Canucks Army takes a look at defenseman Marc-Andre Gragnani this week, specifically what the team can do to ensure Gragnani develops properly.

“There are similarities between Ehrhoff and Gragnani. Both were cast aside by the teams that drafted and developed them (Ehrhoff with the San Jose Sharks), in part because they were thought to be "defensive liabilities." Ehrhoff was dubbed "Error-Hoff" by Sharks fans, but he was a steady top-four presence during his time in Vancouver. Could Gragnani morph into the same type of player?

Unlike Gragnani, Ehrhoff had experienced some sustained offensive success with the Sharks, including a 42-point season in 2008-09 before the trade. In Vancouver, Ehrhoff's production skyrocketed. His mobility and ability to pass the puck up the ice fit in quite nicely with the system the Canucks were implementing. In fact Ehrhoff's emergence as an elite puck-moving defenseman allowed the Canucks to play a more vertical, attacking brand of hockey."

Chris Stewart was given a one-year extension for $3 million. Put up or shut up time for the struggling forward – he clearly was in the doghouse with St. Louis coaches last season.

Stewart is an interesting case. He made my top 10 RW keeper list last year after a spectacular season, but wasn't even in my top 20 this time around. Shows how much can change in a year. He has terrific puck skills and great speed for a big guy, but his consistency and effort level this season wasn't where it needed to be. If he isn't scoring, he isn't contributing enough to play a regular shift on a good team like St. Louis.

The Blues still have to sign RFAs David Perron and TJ Oshie . I still wouldn't be surprised to see one of their young forwards packaged up in a trade.

Edmonton will be making a mistake if they move the 1st overall pick (provided the return isn't insane). I would draft Nail Yakupov, get the young studs to go on a private jet and pay Justin

Schultz a visit (full court press), and then try and sign a few veteran defensemen. Once the quartet of young superstars hit their stride (sorry, Magnus Paajarvi) I'd move one of them for a proven defenseman.

Yakupov will have a hell of a lot more trade value in two years when he is scoring goals in the NHL than right now when he is an unknown. He could end up busting, and that is the risk one always takes with prospects, but from what I have seen, read, and heard, the young Russian is going to be a great NHL player.

Back to Paajarvi – I think he is a great buy low candidate right now. A ton of talent, coming off of a miserable year. Hard to blame him though, as he played inconsistent minutes and bounced back and forth between the NHL and AHL.

According to CSN Philadelphia, Ryan Suter has a list of clubs he would be willing to talk to if traded before July 1st (the rights to sign him would be traded). Apparently no Eastern Conference teams are on the list.

Detroit is generally considered to be Suter's top choice, and the move makes a ton of sense from both sides.

Update – apparently Suter's agent is refuting the report. Gee, ya don't say?

I wouldn't be completely shocked for Suter to listen to available offers and return to Nashville. He doesn't strike me as a guy who wants the spotlight or huge money (although money talks to everyone).

I have been enjoying the prospect countdown going on at Lighthouse Hockey.

Today was #9 of their top 25 under 25 – Matt Martin (those of you in fantasy leagues that count hits are very familiar with him).

"Once passed over, Matt Martin is a year older than most of his '08 classmates, so with 153 NHL games he's second in the cohort to Josh Bailey 's 291. (Travis Hamonic is third, with 135.) It's likely -- or at least hoped -- that he will be passed on this list as other younger, higher ceiling talent in the pipeline matures. But right now he's established himself as an NHLer and one who has a defined role for the foreseeable future."

The top two goaltending prospects right now are Eddie Lack and Jacob Markstrom . Lack is behind Schneider and Luongo, while Markstrom isn't really behind anyone right now. However, a lot is going to change in the next few weeks.

Luongo is likely on the move, and rumor has the Panthers as one of the possible destinations. Markstrom wouldn't be happy, as Luongo has at least five or six more years as a 50-65 game starter in him. Schneider is just starting his career as an NHL starter, and would block Lack from playing significant minutes (unless he comes in and steals it).

Both goaltenders are NHL ready. Lack may benefit from a little more seasoning, and Markstrom's only real weakness at this point is consistency (and it is a minor one). It will be interesting to see how Vancouver and Florida handle their talented Swedish prospects. Patience pays off, but I wouldn't be surprised to see one or both of them force the issue within the next two seasons.

Robin Lehner is also in the mix too, and he has an opening in front of him behind Craig Anderson
next season (he'll battle
Ben Bishop
at training camp).

For teams that want a goalie, Luongo is an attractive option. Six more years before his contract drops off (likely retirement) at a reasonable cap hit. Josh Harding is an option, but hardly a sure thing. Jonathan Bernier is a great young talent, but unproven and could cost a lot.

I have heard Anders Lindback 's name tossed around a bit. How many would be comfortable with giving him 40+ starts next season?

Michael Russo gives his take on the potential a potential Zach Parise signing by the Wild.

 "The Wild has more than $20 million of salary-cap space this offseason and General Manager Chuck Fletcher has made clear the team hopes to add more "NHL talent." Owner Craig Leipold said in April that the Wild will not "be shy" this summer.

Parise made $6 million this past season, but the Wild, the lowest-scoring team in the NHL last season and desperate for a star, is expected to offer Parise as much as $8-9 million annually."

Let's assume Parise does go to the Wild. Who does this help? For one, Mikko Koivu . It gives him a legitimate top line talent to play with. Parise's work ethic would hopefully be infectious down the lineup, especially on San Jose castoffs
Devin Setoguchi
and
Dany Heatley
.

The Wild are in a position where they can overpay a lot. Parise may want to win above all else, and the Wild are several pieces away from contending (especially on the back end). However, the chance to play at home may be a strong pull for the Minnesota native.

I really dig Bobby Holik's blog . I don't entirely agree with his column on the Flyers, but I wanted to share it nonetheless. Some of the more interesting points:

 "I have written in past blogs, the Flyers have been great at finding great skilled and character players. These kinds of players exist in abundance, but the hard part is maximizing their potential. If one looks back in the last two decades, you would find many players who were put in a tough spot by the organization. They put unreasonable expectations on some of these young men (Lindros) or sign them to ridiculous contracts as far term goes (Richards or Carter) and think their work is done. It's not."

If Paul Holmgren had made the Richards/Carter trades and signed a cheaper goalie (or traded for a Schneider or Bernier), I'd love what he did last summer. He got great value in both trades. Schenn, Simmonds, Voracek, and Couturier will all be top six forwards in the NHL for a long, long time. The Flyers are set to contend for the next decade with their forward group.

That being said, I agree with Holik's overall point. Is there something in Philadelphia that makes it hard to shine there?

Regardless of what you think, it is great to have a former player share his thoughts with opinions to back them up. I hope Holik can get on TV soon – we sure could use some more common sense thinking on many of the hockey programs.

Marcus Johansson wasn't very good last season for the Caps.

I think Washington players deserve the benefit of the doubt with the amount of change the system there has undergone in the last two seasons. Johansson has great assets (speed, hands), but he has been ineffective as an NHL top six forward. He struggled when Nick Backstrom was out for a few months, and it highlighted the need for some depth up the middle in Washington.

"2012-13 Expectations: First, the Capitals need to decide whether to hold onto Johansson or include him in a trade package to land a top six forward or top four defenseman. If they decide to keep him, Johansson will need to start making better decisions all over the ice and a nice start would be stopping hard in front of opposing nets and hunting for rebounds instead of

making big circles around the net. If Johansson can develop better habits, he can be a solid 25-goal, 45-assist player next season. “

An interesting read on negotiationfrom Arctic Ice Hockey.

 “As for the rest, the key to any negotiation, as we'll go over in the near future, is preparation; you know what you want to get, what you want to give up, what your bottom line is, and how you're going to make it happen. What might look like "playing hardball" to an outside observer is in fact a carefully prepared strategy tailored to your purpose. What may look like a risk to someone else is in fact not a risk at all, but rather a calculated and planned concession.”

“Faulty Feedback

After most negotiations, people never know what would have happened if they had negotiated differently or what others might have achieved in the same situation. They don't know what could have been achieved and have very little or no feedback about how they could have achieved a better result.

Self-Reinforcing Incompetence

This one's my personal favourite. Most people negotiate poorly. With experience and a little confirmation bias thrown in, they become even better at negotiating poorly. It's a vicious cycle with no end in sight."

I really enjoyed that piece. Great negotiators are prone to bad deals. The brain has a way of tricking us into doing things we don't want to do. These cognitive biases usually arise out of overconfidence or lack of/too much information.

My piece on Tom Gaglardi and the New Era in Dallas was picked up by the team and published on their official team site. You can read that here.

Will Oscar Moller come back to the NHL? He was such an impressive player in the WHL – gritty, skilled, hard working.

Seemed to be the total package, and it was only a matter of time until he was causing havoc in the NHL for the LA Kings?

Size was his undoing initially, as he wasn't big or strong enough to handle the physicality of the NHL game.

Moller returned to Sweden this past season to play after bouncing around in the Kings system for a few years. He had been close to a point-a-game guy in the AHL, and his NHL numbers were pretty decent for a rookie (12 goals and 26 points in 87 games).

Moller gave an interview last fall , and it was translated from Swedish. Here are some interesting excerpts:

Q : What's your personal goal during this season in Elitserien?

Möller: To be able to develop both offensive and defensive. Then I will be stronger. I can withstand more. I have never played in Elitserien – but the ultimate goal is to come back to NHL.

Q : Where would you rather play? In not-so-good team while earning a milliard (I assume in crowns) in 4 years or Detroit Red Wings while making 200 000 per month for 4 years and win SC every year?

Möller: What a question. If you get to win Stanley Cup, that's the best.

Nyström: But what they thought about you going back to Sweden?

Möller: I talked with Ron Hextall, who's the assistant GM. He said that the Kings thought it was good for me and that they had talked about it themselves. They said that they believed it would be good for me. AHL isn't bad league, but I want to test how well I can develop in Sweden. I really feel like I haven't burnt any bridges."

He went over to play on the same SEL team as another Kings prospect – Bud Holloway . An unusual move as it seems like a step back from the AHL (maybe not level of play but in terms of NHL preparation).

A Swedish follower let me know that Moller recently had a kid and plans to stay in the SEL for next season. Hmm….

A pretty cool photo from The Fan Zoo – Quick and Doughty celebrating a win.

The Colorado Avalanche won't be re-signing Jay McClement. Why is this important?

Well, McClement played a ton of defensive minutes. Colorado's PK went from 30th in 2010-11 to 12th last year, and he was a big reason why. He led all skaters with 3:06 of PK time per game.

Does this mean more defensive minutes for Gabriel Landeskog , who played 1:20 per game on the PK? It might, and this wouldn't be good for his production.

There are some decent depth options on the open market, including Paul Gaustad , Daniel Winnik (the former Av), Jarret Stoll , Jeff Halpern , Scott Nichol , and more. Hopefully for Landeskog owners the Avs bring in a vet to fill the void McClement will leave.

Caglary is bringing in Martin Gelinas as an assistant coach. He will work with the forwards and the PP. Always been a big fan – Gelinas was one of my favorite players growing up. He bounced around the league a lot, but always left an impression wherever he went. Decent skill set and a tireless work ethic.

What are the odds Buffalo trades Derek Roy ? Tyler Ennis and Cody Hodgson are solid young centers, but it would be risky to pencil them in as the #1 and #2 centers. Roy has fallen out of favor in Buffalo for the past two years. For good reason – he had only 44 points in 80 games last year.

His 54 PIM were also not the good kind – Roy isn't tough and a lot of them were of the tripping, holding, and hooking variety.