

August 12, 2012

Written by Chris Nichols

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Flyers defenceman Andreas Lilja may be out until December (although GM Paul Holmgren tells CSNPhilly.com it should be late October or early November) after undergoing hip surgery. The team is already down Chris Pronger (seemingly career-ending concussion issues) and Andrej Meszaros (Achilles tendon, out for most of next season) and they lost Matt Carle to Tampa Bay in free agency.

Philly reporter Tim Panaccio projects the '12-13 blueline, as it stands now, to be Kimmo Timonen - Braydon Coburn; Nick Grossmann - Erik Gustafsson; Luke Schenn - Marc-Andre Bourdon; 7th: Bruno Gervais

Lilja's absence in and of itself shouldn't be a huge deal for this team, but every piece of depth lost hurts when you're already down some key pieces.

Of particular interest to fantasy owners headed into the fall drafts will be how this current blueline will be able to support Ilya Brygalov. Remember that although his struggles were well-documented last season, he put together a strong last few months (including a 10-2-1 mark in March with four shutouts and 1.43/ .947 splits) to rescue what were pretty horrible stats until then. I think he'll bring a new level of focus to his game from the start this time around, but he'll still need some help in front of him. Another addition to the back end wouldn't hurt, but as mentioned in the original post last night... I don't think the D will be as bad off as some may think.

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Last year Bryz ended up hurting many poolie rosters, but this year he could make for a pretty decent bargain since most will likely shy away from him until at least the top half of starting goaltenders are off the board.

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Sports Illustrated led into this weekend with a piece on Claude Giroux and how the Philadelphia Flyers will be [counting on him more than ever](#) this season. He touches on everything from the team's ability to have someone step up when needed last season, being bypassed in the OHL priority draft and his rivalry with Angelo Esposito. Giroux learned a lot living with Danny Briere and then passed those lessons on to Brayden Schenn.

The takeaway from the article for Giroux's fantasy owners should be something noted by virtually any great player: "Everyday at practice, I still learn something. It's the way hockey works, it's all about learning and knowing what to do with it."

Here's something you don't see every day: The Nashville Predators may be left [scrambling for travel plans](#) if the NHL season starts on time. They use Swift Air, which apparently filed for bankruptcy in late June – but has continued to operate. A \$50 million civil lawsuit has also been levelled against the company, accusing four executives of fraud. What's of particular interest is that the airline wants to KEEP its contracts with the Boston Bruins, Buffalo Sabres, Chicago Blackhawks and St. Louis Blues. But it wants OUT of the deal with the Preds. Maybe they're big Ryan Suter fans...

With the lease on the Scotiabank Saddledome set to run out in 2014, The Calgary Herald writes that [speculation continues to build](#) about the location of a new arena. The current home is the sixth-oldest arena in the league (opened in 1983), but team president and CEO Ken King said there isn't any hurry. Although the Flames' lease on the Saddledome will soon expire, it can be extended for as long it takes to construct a new facility.

Unnamed Flames' official: "If the %^#&&\$ Edmonton Oilers are getting a new arena then we better *&%@^~well build one soon too!" #probablynotfarfromthetruth

It wouldn't be a news cycle this summer without something on Shane Doan. His agent told Pittsburgh Tribune-Review reporter Josh Yohe Saturday that, "We are going to try to ride this thing out in Phoenix. Pittsburgh remains a possibility."

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Steve Montador spoke with The Chicago Tribune about his role as a [member of the NHLPA negotiating committee](#), while also dealing with the uncertainty of not knowing if he'll feel as good as he does now once he takes to the ice and begins to receive hits. He missed time late last season with a likely concussion.

This quote of his made the rounds on Twitter: "It's different in that we're working together, but they have their point of view and we have ours. It's a little poker, it's a little chess, it's a little schoolyard battlefield."

He also offered up this take on what could be his second lockout: "Our careers are short enough," he said. "To miss two years of a potential 10- or 15- or whatever-year career ... that's a lot of time. At the same time, we're not going to sacrifice our beliefs just to play a game under a system that we don't feel will benefit the league, the fans or even individual clubs."

On the lockout front: if you're on Twitter, you can follow [player agent Allan Walsh](#) to get a lot of good anti-owner info during negotiations. He's pretty outspoken anyway and tends to have worthwhile material in general.

Cristobal Huet, who will turn 37 next month, had been hoping to get his foot back in the NHL door. The combination of there being no movement on the Roberto Luongo or Jonathan Bernier fronts and the rhetoric about a possible lockout heating up certainly weren't helping that cause though, so he inked a four-year deal with Switzerland's HC Lausanne. Best of luck to the man. I

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always thought some his critics were harsher than they needed to be; although the further along our society becomes technologically, the more nasty we've trended.

Among the candidates for any potential back-up gig now are Brent Johnson (Pens smartly nabbed Tomas Vokoun, who will be in line to be one of the more valuable No. 2 men in fantasy), Dwayne Roloson (an injury somewhere may be his ticket in and he still has something left to give, IMO), Marty Turco (the Boston gig was so brief... hard to tell if he's still worth it), Dominik Hasek (he's training with HC Pardubice now and at 47, he might still be the best guy available) and Dan Ellis (at 32, the youngest guy in this crowd).

The problem for the goaltending free agents is where exactly are they supposed to sign?

I've been working on goaltending rankings of late so I'm of the mind to dive right into this subject now. This isn't meant to be comprehensive (underlined, italics, flashing red lights), but let's briefly go alphabetically and see where some potential weaknesses may exist for '12-13.

The Ducks have Jonas Hiller and will, IMO, use Viktor Fasth as the back-up this time. Yes, Jeff Deslauriers is a possibility. I just think Fasth has this gig in the bag. As much as there's generally a learning curve of sorts for European goalies in North American rinks, I believe Fasth – who just turned 30 and who was downright dominant in the SEL – will fare well. The Ducks should also be stronger from the beginning of the season with a full Bruce Boudreau training camp and last year's tutelage in the memory banks.

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Tuukka Rask will eat up most starts for the Bruins. If Anton Khudobin stumbles, which I don't really anticipate, one of those veteran UFAs could be signed as a stop-gap measure.

Sabres have Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth. Flames with Miikka Kiprusoff and Henrik Karlsson, with Leland Irving getting close.

Canes will go with Cam Ward and Justin Peters, since Brian Boucher's shoulder injury will potentially sideline him until Christmas. If Peters can't get the job done, there's a conceivable hole a veteran could fill. It's also entirely possible we won't be seeing any hockey played until the New Year, so then it'll be a moot point.

Hawks will once again roll with Corey Crawford and Ray Emery. They admitted to inquiring about Martin Brodeur and the Roberto Luongo rumours remain out there, so we'll see. I've never been huge on Crawford and we saw Emery gain some traction last year, but either it'll be Chicago trading for a big No. 1 like Luongo or it'll remain status quo. No room for second-hand UFAs here.

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Avs are set with Semyon Varlamov (I expect a stronger season from him) and Jean-Sebastien Giguere.

Sergei Bobrovsky has his chance to become a starter in Columbus, although being dealt there was the equivalent to you telling your parents you want a car for your 18th birthday and they bring you out to the driveway blindfolded and unveil your very own 1977 Chevy Vega.

Behind Bobrovsky, Steve Mason is still there. Please trade Mason, Scott Howson. He needs a fresh start somewhere. The kid's career can still be salvaged, but he's spinning his wheels there and needs to learn what it takes to be an NHL goaltender in a different locale. Columbus could be a place for another keeper on the market.

Aside from starter Kari Lehtonen, Dallas will rely on Richard Bachman for some minutes. There's at least a chance of a spot there.

Wings are going with Jimmy Howard and Jonas Gustavsson. I've remained a Gustavsson loyalist, despite thinking from the get-go that he made a horrible choice signing with the Leafs coming from Sweden. Detroit will be a great fit for him, even without Nicklas Lidstrom on the back end.

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Oilers have Devan Dubnyk and Nikolai Khabibulin, with Yann Danis making some people take notice. Panthers possess Jose Theodore and Scott Clemmensen, but it's all about waiting for Jacob Markstrom to make his mark.

Cup-defending Kings locked up Jonathan Quick, who may or may not be ready right at the start of the season after his minor back surgery. You'd think with that development especially, there'll be zero chance of Bernier going anywhere in the short-term.

Wild with the usual pair of Niklas Backstrom and Josh Harding. Habs avec Carey Price et Peter Budaj. Preds have Pekka Rinne and Chris Mason. Devils will use Martin Brodeur and Johan Hedberg. The Isles will ride Evgeni Nabokov and the usual clown car of goalies that'll fill in when Rick DiPietro gets hurt, which this season will include several prospect possibilities. Trying to predict what that team will do is pointless. Henrik Lundqvist and Martin Biron set in stone for the Rangers. Robin Lehner and Ben Bishop will square off for playing time behind Craig Anderson in Ottawa.

The Flyers, naturally, have Ilya Bryzgalov. Michael Leighton will resume his back-up role, so there may or may not end up being a need for a different veteran there. That roster isn't hurting quite as badly as people may think on D, but the losses there have certainly been notable and will leave a mark.

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The Coyotes will utilize Mike Smith and Jason LaBarbera. Pens are safe with Marc-Andre Fleury and the afore-mentioned Vokoun. Sharks should be fine with Antti Niemi and Thomas Greiss. Tough to beat what St. Louis received from Jaroslav Halak and Brian Elliott last year. I like Tampa Bay's duo of Anders Lindback and Mathieu Garon.

Toronto is one destination besieged by goaltending rumours, but that would be the case if they had Lundqvist as their ace with Quick backing up. It's Toronto. James Reimer (he'll be better this season) stands to be the starter now, with Ben Scrivens and then Jussi Rynnäs in line behind him. While the latter two have little NHL experience, Scrivens will be 26 next month and Rynnäs is 25. You'd have to imagine the Leafs will end up doing something between the pipes either before the season begins or shortly thereafter; if nothing else, to at least ensure Reimer has some veteran help.

The Canucks, of course, will need to address who will be Cory Schneider's back-up once the Luongo deal is finally consummated. A positive veteran who knows his role and who can buy the Canucks time until Eddie Lack is ready down the line would be ideal and they probably already have someone in mind. There's no law against making overtures like that to a UFA; it's just whether or not that free agent would want to wait or not.

Cannot wait for the Caps this season. Braden Holtby and Michal Neuvirth should thrive and they are going to be middle-round steals in pools this fall as No. 2, 2A goalies on fantasy rosters. The Jets signed Al Montoya to give Ondrej Pavelec some rest from time to time and that was an astute move.

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Twitter: [@Nichols NHLPool](#) NHL news, analysis & fantasy takes with minimal inane babble.

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