The NFL season has kicked off with one game, but many football leagues are drafting this weekend. Here is a 48-hour offer - Buy the Keeper League Fantasy Hockey Pack **and** the Fantasy Football Guide for $19.99 when you use the coupon code:
PIGSKIN
. So the Fantasy Hockey Prospects Report, Fantasy Hockey Guide/ Draft List, Fantasy Football Guide - less than 20 bucks. Get started
here with the Football Guide
.

The DobberHockey swag shop is finally back up and running. A couple of funny new designs c an be found here
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My Canucks Army countdown continues – the #4 moment of 2011-12 for the Canucks was Cory Schneider's arrival as a legitimate starting goaltender.

"All in all, Schneider's performance last season as a pseudo back-up was incredibly impressive. He has developed about as well the Canucks could have hoped for when they picked him in the first round back in 2004 out of high school, and he looks like he is on the verge of emerging as one of the best goaltenders in the game."

My fantasy hockey mailbag is open for the next few days - ask your questions here.

A big congrats to the DobberHockey Hall of Fame class of 2012 - Troy "Zorro" Williams has been a valued member of the forums as long as I can remember. Ryan Ma is one of the best hockey columnists on the net. Period. He has a fantastic ability to balance stats and intangibles. Pete Belanger is a huge reason why DobberHockey is as successful as you see it today, and Peter Hadley has absolutely dominated his way through the DobberHockey hockey pools in recent years.

My latest lockout beneficiary – the Edmonton Oilers. Here are my reasons as to why:

"There have been some positives this summer, outside of the draft. Not re-signing Cam Barker is a classic example of addition by subtraction, and apparently Ryan Whitney is fully healthy, too. Devan Dubnyk is going to start most of the games, and he has earned the chance with solid play behind a pretty poor defensive group. Hall's shoulder rehab is also right on track.

The one player who will benefit the most from a lockout isn't Dubnyk, however, and it isn't any of the young forwards, either. Schultz is coming in to the NHL with a lot of pressure and expectations. Players around the league likely took note of how he handled the situation in Anaheim, and fans did too. He was within his rights to choose where he wanted to play, but it isn't an avenue often pursued by rookies. With a lockout, Schultz would be able to get his feet wet professionally at the AHL level down in Oklahoma City first."

Zack Smith has signed a four-year extension with Ottawa. Average cap hit of $1.88 million. Smith is a very solid player and carries some value in PIM fantasy leagues.

I really enjoyed this read on Rask from Justin Goldman - back from late August. Well worth the read. "Tuukka Rask and the Benefit of Injuries."

"I think a highly athletic goaltender like Rask, one who is akin to relying more on his reflexes and flexibility, will actually develop better overall balance to his game because a groin injury will help him slow things down.

Like many naturally gifted reflex-based goalies, Rask has a tendency to over-amplify his movements. In some instances, he ends up in less-than-perfect positioning on rebound chances, or in scramble situations."

The Roberto Luongo situation:

Luongo wants to go to Florida. Florida wants him. However, Florida isn't prepared to offer Vancouver what they want. From what I have heard, Florida has tabled an offer and it remains on the table – featuring a forward (likely someone like Sean Bergenheim or Scottie Upshall) and a prospect (not a top tier prospect). Theodore and Clemmensen were both very good last year, but it would be risky to project similar numbers this season - it was Theodore's best season in quite some time. Even with Luongo's postseason failures, he represents a significant upgrade (with a reasonable cap hit of $5.3 million).

Not sure if Vancouver changes their tune – it will be interesting to see how the situation plays out. I wouldn't fully count Toronto or Chicago out yet, either.

Evgeni Kuznetzov's season has started in Russia . Here is a pretty interesting interview from the other day. Some excerpts:

"Evgeny Kuznetsov: I have no idea. And now, it's a shame they didn't even invite me to their summer development camp. [Editor's note: "очень обидно " literally means "my feelings are greatly hurt"]

Yuriy Golyshak: Would you go?

Evgeny Kuznetsov: I really wanted to. It's just very interesting to get another look at how it is there. Even if I wouldn't be able to go, just to get the invitation would be nice. I don't know whether they gave up on me all together or not, but it's somewhat strange."

I'm not sure why Washington would bother inviting him if he has re-upped in Russia for two more years. What a shame – he is arguably the most talented prospect outside of Granlund and Yakupov.

NHL.com delivered their top 175 fantasy rankings . It is good to get a wide variety of opinions when finalizing your own lists.

If you owned Erik Karlsson in a pool right now, would you sell high? Would trading him for a superstar forward even be selling high? I own him, and haven't really entertained thoughts of moving him (yet), but looking at the fluctuations in defensive production from year to year, maybe it would make sense to kick some tires?

Lars Eller is the #4 young player in Montreal according to Habs Eyes on the Prize.

"Strengths: Eller is a simply superb puck carrier and controller based off of strength, speed, and puck handling. A very good skater both in terms of speed and technique. Physically strong and hard to knock off the puck. Solid at playing a simple cycle game in the offensive zone. Excellent penalty killer. Pretty good passing and shot although he isn't a high volume shooter.

Weaknesses: Doesn't make the best use of his linemates and tries to do too much himself. Not the best offensive instincts or creativity from what has been seen so far. Does poorly when moved to the left wing. Has yet to put up really noteworthy offensive numbers in the NHL, but also has not played a role were that might be reasonably expected of him. Could be much better on faceoffs.

Projection: At best we can hope that Eller becomes a solid two-way second line center that is deployed against the opposition's best forwards. At worst he can be a solid defensive 3rd line center and penalty kill specialist. I doubt he'll be the next Mikko Koivu like we initially hoped, but I feel pretty good about him becoming the Habs' version of David Bolland.

Eller fills an important role, as he brings size behind two undersized centers – Desharnais and Plekanec. It will be interesting to see how he develops – he has some great assets, but also some weaknesses in his game that he needs to shore up if he wants to step up into a full-time top six position.

I have intentionally avoided the Phoenix ownership situation/mess in the ramblings, as would probably set off more than a few rants, and it doesn't have a ton (directly) to do with fantasy hockey. I also have some good friends in the Phoenix area who are very passionate about the Coyotes and hockey in general.

But at the end of the day, if Greg Jamison is struggling to get financing… how is he expected to be able to run the hockey club properly in the coming years? According to a source , Jamison has received his financing… I guess we will see where this goes.

If there is a lockout, I am looking forward to going to more WHL games, and watching more AHL games (I think I am going to purchase the online streaming package for the AHL). How are you going to get your hockey fix?

Six players I will be watching closely this season:

Marek Hrivik – Rangers

The slick winger came in to the AHL last season and dominated in a short stint. Likely needs some time at that level before making the Rangers, but he isn't far off.

Zack Phillips – Wild

Snagged the cerebral center in my recent dispersal draft – he has many similarities to Brad Richards
. Both players are average size and speed, and rely on hockey sense and playmaking to succeed. Both also played in the QMJHL and were extremely productive there.

Jon Merrill – New Jersey

Merrill will be one of the best defensemen in college this season at Michigan, and he should form the top pairing with freshman Jacob Trouba (Winnipeg's 2012 1st round pick). Merrill shouldn't need much time at the AHL level once he turns pro (likely next summer). He projects as a very good two-way defenseman.

Brandon Pirri – Chicago

Pirri has a significant opportunity in front of him in Chicago – the Hawks still have no second line center, and he is the best bet to fill the vacancy (internally). He showed last season he could one day be ready, but he wasn't quite up to speed just yet. Patrick Kane will play center for now, but he is more effective offensively on the wing.

JT Brown -Tampa Bay

There are several Bolts who could challenge for a roster spot next season – Conacher, Barberio, Killorn, and Brown, among others. Brown may have the best chance to be an impact player right away.

Joe Morrow – Pittsburgh

Morrow is not far off from the NHL, but the Penguins will take their time with him. In the long run, he'll compete with some talented young defensemen for ice time, but he should have the inside track at power play minutes, as he is very talented offensively. Simon Despres projects as more of a two-way defenseman, and Derrick Pouliot is a few years away.

A 14 minute highlight video featuring Pavel Datsyuk . You are welcome:

{youtube}NwxrBnIr0bg{/youtube}