Best of luck to the ECHL's San Francisco Bulls as they play their opening game at home tonight!

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Finally... opening night of the hockey season has arrived. The AHL kicks off tonight with a few games. Lots of great players in action - Brayden Schenn, Sean Couturier, Cody Hodgson, Slava Voynov, Jordan Eberle, Justin Schultz, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Taylor Hall, and more.

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Hey Football fans - get our 2012 Fantasy Football Guide for free here . We are confident you will love the fantasy football guide that was put together for the 2012 season. Check it out.

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My latest hockey fitness post - what does the NHL Draft Combine really measure?

The NHL combine is conducted each spring leading up to the NHL Draft in June. Top prospects from around the world are invited to impress their potential future employers (NHL teams) with their physical capabilities.

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Anaheim has had some tough luck with NCAA players recently. First, they lost Justin Schultz for nothing after he chose to sign elsewhere.

And this week we have found out that 2012 draft pick LW Nic Kerdiles has been suspended for the season by the NCAA. The NCAA believes that Kerdiles violted the issue with NCAA players not being allowed to have agents. Here is more on the issue.

This is a bizarre situation and really quite unfortunate on the NCAA's behalf. Kerdiles didn't really do anything illegal – they claim that the issues are:

He offered autographs for his twitter followers, and he posted photos from the NHL Draft with him and NHL agents on his Facebook page. Kerdiles was seen at a dinner with fellow draft pick Alex Galchenyuk, as well as Galchenyuk's agents (including Igor Larionov).

The NCAA is also investigating whether the Ducks and Wisconsin paid Kerdiles under the table to get him to go to Wisconsin. Very bizarre, as I said.

Kerdiles has his WHL rights held by the Kelowna Rockets. He would be a great player in the WHL.

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Emerson Etem is willing to work for an NHL roster spot – I'm excited to see what he does in the AHL this season. He trained with some pretty famous former players this summer:

"There, he worked three hours with hockey fitness guru T.R. Goodman and NHL players Rob Blake, Chris Chelios , Glen Murray and Sean McDonough, who took the youngster under their collective wing. So, too, did Philadelphia's Wayne Simmonds , an Etem role model as one of the NHL's few black players."

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Corey Perry and Drew Doughty have been practicing with the London Knights. Several of the Canucks in town have been practicing with the UBC Thunderbirds hockey team. I guess one small positive from the lockout is the players on these teams getting to skate and compete with the best hockey players on the planet.

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Did anyone watch the KHL on ESPN the other day? A scathing review from SBNaton.

ESPN must have known the quality of hockey they were getting. Aside from the occasional shift from Zdeno Chara or Alex Ovechkin , there was nothing really separating the KHL from, say, the AHL in terms of skill level. As a man who saw a lot of the Newark Bears back in the day, the KHL feels like independent league baseball. Honestly, seeing a Canseco brother wouldn't have shocked me.

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Lighthouse Hockey looks at potential lines for the Islanders farm team:

Players to watch: David Ullstrom , Casey Cizikas , Nino Niederreiter , Kirill Kabanov , and Brock Nelson, among others. Three of those forwards could be with the Islanders if and when

the season eventually gets under way.

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Nathan MacKinnon and Seth Jones are going to be a lot of fun to track this year as they compete for the top spot. Here is a beauty goal from MacKinnon:

{youtube}Xx7nQcM9ZMQ{/youtube}

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More hockey highlights:

{youtube}-UmAco0KQGA{/youtube}

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Bad news for Devils fans – top prospect Jon Merrill suffered a fractured vertebrae and is expected to be out for at least six weeks and perhaps longer. Merrill won't need surgery, which is a good sign.

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As I wrote yesterday, the Texas Stars are going to be a really strong club this year. Here is a good preview on the team from The Hockey Writers.

The most notable trait about the Texas Stars that Nieuwendyk, along with the help of Texas GM

Scott White, has developed is balance. From top to bottom, the team looks more than capable in every regard, and is without any considerable weaknesses.

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Hockey Prospectus looks at player performance relative to salary from last year - a great resource for those of you in salary cap leagues.

You can't build your team exclusively with value-priced players, because you'd find yourself far below the cap floor, and while the team would be efficient, it would not be very competitive. To succeed in today's NHL a certain amount of money must be invested in superstars with game-changing potential, but which ones? Unlike the other ranges, the choice can easily make or break a team.

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Ryan Johansen is a player who is going to benefit tremendously from the lockout. He played depth minutes on a crappy team last year, but should be a leader this year (in both the AHL and NHL). He put on a lot of size and strength this summer, and is now well over 210 pounds. The big forward has bounced between wing and center at the NHL level – he's likely a long-term center, though.

I wouldn't be surprised to see him build off of a strong AHL start and come in to the NHL as a productive sophomore when the lockout is lifted. I'd give him solid fantasy value even in one-year leagues.

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A couple new DobberHockey wallpapers - David Backes and Erik Karlsson.

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As always, comment away any questions or thoughts regarding the world of hockey (preferably non-lockout related...).