My latest for the CanucksArmy - looking into my crystal ball to see what would have happened if Mats Sundin had accepted the original two-year, $20 million contract offer.

*

Linden Vey (Kings) had a goal and three shots on goal yesterday.

Andrei Loktionov also had a goal - I would look for him to be on the move once the NHL starts back up - he's a talented prospect but there is no room for him in Los Angeles.

Martin Jones (Kings) allowed only one goal on 30 shots faced.

*

A huge night for several Isles prospects.

Travis Hamonic had three helpers and 12 PIM.

Casey Cizikas (a favorite of mine) had two goals.

Brock Nelson had a goal and a helper. He'll be in the NHL very soon.

Nino Niederreiter had three points and five shots on goal. He had only one point all of last season with the Islanders. Impressive early start for him.

*

Corey Tropp had two goals for Rochester - the gritty forward earned a spot with the Sabres last year and should be in the NHL once again this year.

For Syracuse (Tampa Bay), Cory Conacher picked up where he left off last season with three points.

Mark Barberio also had a goal for the Crunch.

*

Justin Schultz was a minus-2, but did record his first pro point (an assist).

*

Kyle Palmieri and Peter Holland both had goals for Norfolk - Palmieri led the team with four SOG.

James Sheppard had two helpers for Worchester - he is trying to get his career back on track after never really developing as hoped - is it too late?

*

Sven Bartschi had two points for the Heat last night, and Akim Aliu had 17 PIM. Aliu is going to be a great find for PIM leagues - he is never one to shy away from the after-the-whistle stuff.

Jake Allen struggled for Peoria, allowing four goals on only 14 shots.

Vladimir Tarasenko suffered a concussion today. Never good news when this sort of thing happens. I'll try to get some updates as the day progresses.

*

A new wallpaper for the weekend – phenom Nathan MacKinnon . Enjoy!

*

Justin Goldman offers his AHL goaltender rankings. As always, a must read.

*

I watched hockey yesterday! That felt good to say – caught some of the DEL game with Giroux and Danny Briere. Their team lost 6-5, but they combined for six points (and Giroux, in particular, could have had a few more).

More on the game here at Broad Street Hockey.

Also on their Berlin team is Mark Katic – former Isles prospect and OHL defenseman.

*

I'll have my fantasy mailbag posted later today. Taking questions all lockout long over on the forums, and will answer some of them each Saturday.

*

Taylor Vause has been signed to tryout contracts by the AHL's Texas Stars, as has Cam Barker. Barker was awful last year in Edmonton and is looking to find his game in the AHL this year.

Vause is an interesting prospect – Dallas has been uncovering some gems with the WHL, having signed Vause, Brenden Dillon , and Matt Fraser all as free agents. Vause worked his butt off this summer and appears to have won a roster spot with the baby Stars.

He's a former teammate of Cody Eakin 's in Swift Current, scoring 37 goals there last year as an overage forward. Keep him on your radar.

*

Chicago prospect Mark McNeill has been one reason why the WHL's Prince Albert Raiders are currently the top team in the entire CHL.

*"He's the leader of our team, he's a guy who has been through everything with us from age 16 to 19," Raiders coach Steve Young says. "The season he had last year, it wasn't a bad year, but it was a disappointing year for him. I think with going through the draft and signing [with Chicago], all that stuff, I think he put a lot on his shoulders. This year he's come in with less pressure on himself and an attitude that it's just time to play.*

*

Both Jason Garrison and Alex Edler have minor injuries, which means they are currently getting paid
and are able to work with the Canucks training staff (along with
Ryan Kesler
).

*

The talk of Russian players staying in the KHL is just that – talk. I put the chances of Ovechkin (or any other stars) staying in the KHL at about 0.000000000001%, and that may be a bit on the high end.

*

A solid read on Chicago Wolves goaltender Eddie Lack from the Chicago Tribute.

*"(Lack) is ready to make the jump, but he has to be dominant in the American Hockey League," said Wolves general manager Wendell Young, who owns nearly every goalie record for the organization. "Consistency is what's going to distinguish whether he's going to be a full-time NHL goalie. He has all the talent to dominate games."*

*

A great point with goaltenders – because of the lockout, some good prospects are getting

pushed to the ECHL. That isn't necessarily a bad thing for their development.

A certain recent Conn Smythe winner spent some time in the ECHL (heck, the two most recent Conn Smythe winners have both played in the ECHL).

A few this year – Scott Wedgewood (New Jersey) and Joe Cannata (Vancouver) who both would have likely started off in the AHL in any other year.

*

Sven Bartschi may be worth the price of admission for those in the Lower Mainland looking to catch some hockey in Abbotsford. He's got a pretty interesting story to boot:

*Those who know Baertschi marvel at his resolve. His parents divorced when he was 11 and his mom worked two jobs so her two boys could play hockey. The decision to join the Winterhawks after an unspectacular season in the Swiss B league caught some by surprise, but Baertschi*

*responded with 34 goals and 85 points and was a WHL rookie-of-the-year finalist in 2010-11.*

*

One Vancouver Giant who has really impressed me this season has been steady defenseman and Flames prospect Brett Kulak – the Giants have turned out some impressive defensemen, and he is the latest one – Andrej Meszaros , Jon Blum, Mark Fistric , Kevin Connauton , Brett Festerling
, and more (I know I am forgetting a few more good ones).

More on Kulak: .

*Kulak will be easy to spot for T-Birds fans watching on Friday. He is a good skater, takes care of his own end and will help get the Giants offense moving. Most young hockey players have a guy they try to pattern their game after and for Kulak that's no different.*

*"I like to watch Duncan Keith ," Kulak says. "He's my favorite player, I think we're similar, we both play a two-way game and he's good defensively and contributes offensively."*

*Kulak's comparison is a solid one in terms of playing style – he's a good skater and plays all over the ice.*

*

Rich Hammond, one of the best NHL reporters and writers, is now coveringUSC football and basketball. Why? The NHL wouldn't allow him (as an official team employee) to speak with players during the lockout. Hammond has been an official Kings staff member for a few years after the LA Times cut his workload, but he retained complete independence with his reporting.

This is a shoddy move by the NHL – "hey, let's remove a great PR and media initiative that has been a huge success in one of our biggest markets and with our recent Stanley Cup winning team!"

*

I mentioned yesterday that Michigan defenseman and Devils top prospect Jon Merrill is out for a month or two with a neck injury. His projected defensive partner this season is freshman defenseman Jacob Trouba, who the Jets took in the 1st round of the 2012 Draft.

Even without Merrill, Trouba had a goal and an assist in his first NCAA game on Thursday evening. Pretty impressive debut for the youngster – he has a lot of upside, but will probably spend a couple of years at Michigan before turning pro.

*

Top 10 NHL bloopers from last season:

{youtube}WdaYBZJ0hwE{/youtube}

*

According to Jeff Marek, Boone Jenner (Columbus draft pick) is currently the best player in the OHL. Is Marek on point here?

*"The thing with Boone is that he's always been really great inside his own zone," Marek said. "Last year was really the beginning of the coming out party for Boone when he became a point-a-game guy for Oshawa. This year, not only is he a point-per-game guy or sometimes more, the thing is that he's still great in his own end.*

*"Every summer, he's the kid that goes away and works on something and wants to get better. This year, the thing for him was face-offs. Boone Jenner may be the best face-off man in the OHL from what I've seen so far this year. He is the best guy at the dot and it's just remarkable."*

*

John Davidson coming to Columbus is appearing more and more likely – just another step in the right direction for the team. They are looking for a new direction after the Nash trade, and Davidson will help them establish that
, just like he did with the once-struggling St. Louis Blues.

It's unclear how Davidson would fit within the Blue Jackets' hockey operations department, but it's widely assumed around the NHL that he would need the promise of complete autonomy, just as he had with the Blues since joining them as president in 2006.

*

Zack Kassian has been impressive in preseason with the Chicago Wolves – he will start the season on the top line with
Jordan Schroeder
and Billy Sweatt.

*“We need him to be a power forward and not play just one or two shifts,” added Arniel. “He’s giving himself a good chance to get off to a good start. He’s like most young guys. He’s eager to learn and recognizes the opportunity that’s been put in front of him. Does he want to be a fourth-line right winger, or does he want to play in the top six of the Canucks?*

*

My preview of the DEL (top German league) for the PlayNow Sports Blog.

*Hamburg Freezers*

*The Freezers have several former NHL players on their roster, and landed a big fish during the lockout with the signing of Dallas star Jamie Benn . Benn joins the likes of Brandon Reid , Matt Pettinger*
*,*
*Duvie Westcott*
*, and former Ottawa defenseman*
*Christoph Schubert*
*. At a 13-to-1 value to capture the DEL league title, Hamburg may be a good value pick if the lockout drags on for the entire season. Benn is up there with Giroux as the best player in the DEL.*

*

Wrote an article on “what would have happened” had the Blues never matched the Canucks offer sheet to David Backes back in 2008 – an alternative reality, if you will.

*Backes, at the time, was coming off of a modest 13-goal, 31-point campaign. Many saw top-six upside in him, but the Canucks were thought to be paying a premium for a glorified checker. We all know what happened since then – the Blues matched the offer sheet, and Backes is now the team captain and one of the most well-rounded forwards in the league. He was also a victim of some very audible trash talk during the first round of the 2009 playoffs against the Canucks.*

*

SI's Allan Muir with a comprehensive breakdown of the CHL this season. Keep an eye on this guy:

*C Connor McDavid, Erie Otters: The first overall pick in the 2012 OHL draft is just the third 15-year-old to be granted early entry into the league. (The other two: Aaron Ekblad in 2011; John Tavares in 2005.) A slick, playmaking center with superstar potential, he'll face a tough challenge from opponents who are as much as five years older.*

*