Tough break for St. Louis Blues rookie sensation Vladimir Tarasenko, who reportedly suffered a concussion in Saturday's KHL action. This sort of injury can be wildly unpredictable at the best of times and acquiring reliable information from overseas can also present its own set of challenges – even in this day and age - so let's hope for the best for one of the up and coming stars in the game.

Honestly, I have no idea what sort of concussion protocols are in place for the KHL and how they relate to what the NHL does. Or tries to do. And let's be straight – the NHL doesn't have this down completely right either yet, although at least they've made big strides in recent years.

*

While we're on the subject of concussions, The San Diego Union-Tribune presented a pretty sombre Sunday morning read on Junior Seau. Aside from being a compelling human interest story, the story paints a picture of how his suicide was yet another jarring reminder of the potentially devastating and lasting impact of head injuries on athletes.

We've seen our own well-documented sadness on that front in the hockey community (more instances will come, make no mistake) and this is a matter which needs more resources, more study and more action.

Seau was (and remains) larger than life in the San Diego community and hopefully his death will provide another step forward in understanding an essential issue.

*

I meant to include this last night and it slipped through the cracks. Henrik Zetterberg's debut with EV Zug is expected to happen Tuesday and it seems as if he'll be playing on a line with Damien Brunner, who Red Wings coach Mike Babcock has said will be given a legit chance to make the top-six out of camp.

Generally speaking, Brunner would be best-served as a free agent pick-up in most fantasy leagues. If you get tied down to too many 'he may play on this line at the start of the season' guys at the draft itself, you can lock up your roster with too many maybes early on and hamper your team's chances right out of the gate. I like to have a little more flexibility, at least where

possible.

*

24-year-old Navy Seal. Lost both his legs less than three months ago. IED. Seven months into his tour in Afghanistan.

Guess how he spent Friday? CSNWashington.com details how he was strapped up in a sledge hockey sled and was taking shots from Capitals like Nicklas Backstrom, John Carlson, Jason Chimera, Matt Hendricks and Jay Beagle.

We all have real heartache and problems. But the next time you're feeling sorry for yourself for one of the more pathetic reasons (we all fall victim to it from time to time), suck it up and remember that guy.

#hero

*

Saturday should have been the first busy night of the regular season in the NHL, which is an evening that has otherwise come to be known as fan heaven. Instead, we who live and breathe the sport linger in purgatory as the fight to split up an increasingly shrinking pie wages on.

Well done, boys. Well done.

*

Sportsnet.ca is running a daily lockout clock, which can simultaneously be called quite cool and yet extravagantly depressing. For each day of the regular season missed, you can see a giant running tally of the total salary lost and the number of games missed as well. Each day's schedule also features a game-by-game, team-by-team salary breakdown.

*

The San Jose Mercury News caught up with golfer Mike Weir. If you want a hockey quote of any kind, any random Canadian is a pretty safe bet. He says he follows the lockout ‘fairly closely’ and believes it's 'disappointing.’

Among his thoughts:

”If I was a player, I’d want to play. As a golfer, if for some reason we had the purses reduced, I’m not going to not play — I’m going to play.”

“It’s like high school boyfriend-girlfriend stuff – ‘I’m not going to call you, you call me.’ “

*

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review got some candid thoughts from Sidney Crosby on the awesomeness of one Connor McDavid, which was especially satisfying for McDavid since Crosby is his childhood hero.

"He looks like he's got it all," Crosby said. "When I watched him play, he reminded me of myself."

If you tend to tune more into the NHL than the lower-level leagues, it's an intuitive look at a kid who is 100 percent ok with the heavy burden that has and will continue to come with his exceptional status and skills.

"I know there will be pressure,"McDavid said. "And I'm ok with that. It's what people play hockey for, to be 'The Guy.' I love when the arena is full. The more people that come out, the better. I actually sort of like that pressure."

*

Count me as a long-time, shameless admirer of Ken Hitchcock's work behind the bench and oh, to have lived in the St. Louis area in the last week.

More than 150 area youth coaches took advantage of a three-day series of free seminars taught by one of the best hockey minds around, who also happens to be the reigning Jack Adams winner. He and four Blues staffers schooled the local coaches. What an opportunity.

Hmm. Headed to a painting class tonight at the Learning Annex. Instructor is listed as one P. Picasso. Hope he knows his stuff.

Hitchcock told The St. Louis Post-Dispatch that coaching youth hockey teams is no longer a joking matter.

"I find at the minor hockey level, there's a lot of pressure on the coaches," he said. "The coaches used to be just somebody's parent who had the time and he did the best he could. There's high expectations for coaches now at every level. They expect a lot of themselves, but I can tell you, the athletes and the parents, they expect as much or more. That's what I've really noticed. The days of just volunteering and just trying to help. Those days are gone.

"When you're going to ask people for as much money as they need to spend on hockey, and you're going to demand three or four or five days a week from kids, you've got to be on top of your game."

*

Matt Cooke has, like a number of players, been enjoying more time with his wife and kids during the lockout. He tells The Canadian Press he isn't quite ready to look overseas. Cool. Whatever. But what sort of logic is this?

"There's always opportunities and some have arisen since the lockout but I think right now my fear is to go over and play 25 games and then have to come back and play a 75-game schedule, then I'm already at 100 games before playoffs," the feisty left-winger said. "Right now I'm good with where we're at. We have a good competitive ice time that's keeping us sharp and as long as that continues and the optimism of getting a deal is fairly high then I have no intentions of going over to Europe. But I haven't completely closed the door either."

For the NHL to still get in a 75-game schedule, there would have be an agreement reached pretty damn quickly. So where is he going to rack up 25 games in that scenario? Even if he had signed in a European league right away, there's no way he'd hit the 25-game mark there and be coming back to a 75-game NHL slate.

*

Cool spread in The National Post about the surprisingly rich hockey history of Cleveland. Good insight from Dennis Maruk, who rang up some pretty impressive NHL campaigns. New York Rangers winger Mike Rupp also talks about the little chip on his shoulder which came from being from that area.

*

Beauty quote from Oklahoma City Barons head coach Todd Nelson on Saturday's 3-2 win over Lake Erie: "It wasn't pretty. It was quite ugly actually. From the middle of the second period until the end of the game, I felt like I was in a bad dream.

“But we found a way to win, and sometimes you need these greasy wins to develop your character.”

*

Speaking of those Barons, defencemen Justin Schultz and Martin Marincin began the year Friday night paired together. The Edmonton Journal points out coach Nelson was intrigued by the similarities of their offensive strengths and big shots.

Fast-forward to Saturday night, where Schultz scored the game-winner and was the game’s first star. Marincin had a goal as well and earned a second star nod. They were a combined plus-5 as well.

*

The focus in Ottawa goaltending circles when it comes to the present and near future is rightfully on Robin Lehner (see Saturday's AHL recap section further down for his stellar start) and Ben Bishop in Bingo battling for the No. 2 job behind Craig Anderson, but the lockout is also providing fans a chance to spend a little more time getting to know Francois Brassard.

The Ottawa Sun caught up with the guy who is firmly entrenched as the No. 1 goalie on the nation's top-ranked CHL team, the Quebec Remparts, along with being one of the top netminders in the QMJHL. It's a good look at how he developed an increased work ethic and more mature approach to his game.

There was this gem too. Six straight wins to open the season and then the inevitable happened. So what does Patrick Roy do?

"After we lost our first game, he had us doing a 20-minute bag skate. It means a lot to the players to see how competitive he is," said Brassard. #nomercy

*

The Boston Herald believes Chris Bourque had a shaky start to the AHL season Friday night with two costly giveaways. That said, coming off a career campaign with Hershey which saw him tally 27-66-93, the article notes he could push for a spot with the Bruins whenever this season gets underway.

Providence coach Bruce Cassidy offered up an interesting perspective.

“He makes plays and there’s going to be risk in some of the plays he makes. I know that,” said Cassidy. “But he’s proven he can get it done at this level. So certain guys need rope and he’s one that will get that rope.”

*

Harry Zolnierczyk was, let’s be honest, slated to be a bubble boy for the Flyers at the start of the season. If he makes the team (he had 37 games with Philly and 39 with Adirondack last year), it’ll be on the strength of his speed and his energy. He tells CSNPhilly.com he looks at this lockout as a chance to outplay guys in the AHL to find his spot at the NHL level. Great attitude.

“The entire summer I was working on my game,” Zolnierczyk said. “Strength-wise, everything on ice and building yourself up to get your confidence back so when you get the chance with the NHL, you’re ready.

“Being able to play here now in the minors during the lockout is something I can benefit from. Full stride when league gets going.”

*

The New York Times tracked down 21-year-old Rangers forward Chris Kreider, noting he projects a certain guardedness when asked if an A.H.L. October in Hartford is any different from a playoff May in New York.

“I don’t think the mind-set changes,” Kreider said. “Keep your head down, work hard, try to learn as much as you can.”

He had four goals in two exhibition games and then a helper in Friday’s opener. Connecticut plays again Sunday afternoon.

*

Some brief AHL notes from an active Saturday evening.

Double shutouts from Rockford and Chicago for Carter Hutton (31/31 and second star) and Eddie Lack (25/25 and first star). Brandon Pirri came up with the only shootout goal for the IceHogs, while Jordan Schroeder, Bill Sweatt and Darren Haydar (third star) converted for the Wolves.

Jake Gardiner (1-1-2) took second star honours for the Marlies in a 3-1 win over Rochester, which also saw Ben Scrivens turn aside 20/21. Ryan Hamilton (2-0-2) was the first star and scored a pretty smooth goal. See below.

Adirondack's 6-3 win over Portland featured an effective showing for Flyers star-in-the-making Sean Couturier (1-1-2, 6 SOG), who was the night's first star. Brayden Schenn racked up 2-1-3, but was shut out on the star front by Garrett Roe (1-1-2) and former college star Andy Miele

(1-1-2). Oliver Ekman-Larsson also nabbed a marker.

Blueliner David Kolomatis potted both of Manchester's goals in a 2-1 win over Albany. You'll never guess who took home first star consideration.

I had OKC notes earlier, but Jordan Eberle (5 SOG), Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (1 SOG) and Magnus Paajarvi (3 SOG) combined for no points.

Bridgeport beat Providence 4-2 and Kevin Poulin, who stopped 29/31, must have been strong. First star. Nino Niederreiter had a goal, giving him 2-2-4 after two affairs. Great start for the young winger, which should go a long way toward boosting his confidence.

Hamilton over Grand Rapids 4-3 (shootout win with Michael Bournival as the only scorer), but the latter still swept three star nods. Don't see that too often. 1. GR - J. Hoggan (1-1-2) 2. GR - T. McCollum (33/36) 3. GR - T. Parkes (1-0-1). Aaron Palushaj and Blake Geoffrion each came up with a goal for the Bulldogs.

Two points each for Tomas Kubalik (1-1-2), Matt Calvert (1-1-2) and Tim Erixon (0-2-2) in Springfield's 4-2 victory over St. John's. Those are also your three stars.

Big night for Robin Lehner. 35/36 in a 2-1 win over Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. Jakob Silfverberg netted a goal in his North American pro debut. Stars No. 1 and No. 2. Excellent.

Norfolk topped Worchester in a shootout, 4-3. Kyle Palmieri (0-1-1) and Peter Holland (0-1-1) won the skills competition for the Admirals, while Devante Smith-Pelly (0-2-2) was the top star of the contest. 6-4 winger Patrick Maroon, who ran around a point-per-game last year with 120 PIM, had a two-goal affair.

Brett Connolly scored in Syracuse's 4-3 win against Hershey, but Cory Conacher (1-1-2) was the night's first star. He currently leads the AHL with five points (2-3-5) in his two games as well. Braden Holtby gave up the four goals in the loss.

Texas topped San Antonio 2-1 and Tomas Vincour fired off nine shots, although he came up with zero points to show for it. Cody Eakin had a helper though.

Zero points for Mikael Granlund and Charlie Coyle in Houston's 3-1 loss, although defenceman Jonas Brodin scored. Justin Peters (27/28) and Matt Hackett (35/37) took home first and third star prizes respectively. Nice night for Justin Faulk, who ended up with two helpers and seven shots. He continues to be someone we watch for as a potential first unit power play threat alongside Joni Pitkanen in Carolina once the madness ends.

Saturday's action wrapped up with another two points for Sven Baertschi, who has four points (2G, 2A) through two games for # **AHLHeat** . Second star Friday. Third star Saturday. # **Flames**
#
Svensational
#
Stud
Abbotsford beat up on Peoria, 6-2. Blueliner T.J. Brodie had three helpers and was the first star, while Roman Horak scored his second goal in as many games to earn second star honours.

As promised, here is Ryan Hamilton's second goal. Suh-weet.

{youtube}_PKNzqmQ7gk{/youtube}

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