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Five thoughts on hockey in Europe for the PlayNow Blog - looking forward to getting a look at Barkov during the upcoming WJC in Ufa, Russia.

He doesn't sound Finnish, but Aleksander Barkov is one of the most promising young hockey players to come out of Finland since Mikael Granlund. Barkov's father, also named Aleksander, is a former pro hockey player in Russia. The younger Barkov currently plays for Tappara in the SM-liiga, the same team that Canuck right winger Jannik Hansen is suiting up for during the lockout.

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Terry Murray, the coach for the Flyers AHL affiliate, spoke quite glowingly of Brayden Schenn yesterday.

"Since I saw him in LA, every part of his game has come along tremendously," Murray told the Philadelphia Daily News. "He's physically more mature, mentally more mature. He's starting to really identify with what his niche is in the game.

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We ran a contest here at DobberHockey over the past two weeks asking the readers to explain who they believe is the greatest goaltender of all time.
Well, it is time to vote for the three finalists.

Here are their submissions. Please vote on a winner!

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Shane Doan discusses the Coyotes ownership situation, as well as the informal skates that are going on in Scottsdale right now – he makes an interesting point on the importance of goalies and how happy he is to have three of them down in Phoenix – "goalies hold everyone hostage" according to Doan.

NHL players are now facing the same problem as many stick and puck players – finding someone, anyone, who is willing to play goal!

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I took a few questions from the DobberHockey forums yesterday and decided to answer them in today's ramblings (a mini mailbag of sorts):

Trade: Landeskog for Granlund and Kuznetsov. Pick a side.

This trade could be viewed in a few ways. One – it could be selling a bit high on Landeskog. The new Captain, the Calder Trophy win, his value is pretty high right now. Trading him for two unproven assets is a huge risk, especially considering one of them appears content to spend the next few years in Russia.

However, Granlund is a special talent. It depends on your league format. I'd almost ignore Kuznetsov when evaluating this trade, to be honest. Simply too risky to consider right now. In a points-only league, I'd actually think about making this trade – that is how high I am on Granlund.

However, in any league with other categories, you have to go with the proven and versatile Landeskog here.

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Ryan Getzlaf for Ryan Callahan?

On the surface, the side getting Getzlaf appears to have the clear win here. Buying low on Getzlaf, selling high on Callahan. Getzlaf is entering a contract year (and may simply be a free agent next summer if the season is wiped out, depending on what happens with the new UFA rules), while Callahan is Mr. Everything for the Rangers.

However, with the Nash acquisition, and the emergence of Carl Hagelin and a few other young Rangers, Callahan's role may change a bit from a scorer into more of a two-way force. That isn't to say he is only a scorer right now, but he may see some of his PP opportunities given to other players. His versatility may hurt his fantasy value in the long run.

Getzlaf was miserable last year – his value couldn't really be lower. Try making this trade a few years ago.

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A huge trade here – Perry, Getzlaf, and John Carlson in exchange for Brad Richards, Briere, Myers, Yakupov, and a 1st round pick.

As I like to with any big trade, let's break this one down into chunks. This league counts hits and blocked shots in addition to the usual categories.

Perry + Getzlaf > Richards, Briere, and Yakupov.

With those scoring categories, Perry and Getzlaf have a lot of value over Richards and Briere. And, as mentioned above, this would be buying low. I love Yakupov's upside – he is going to be a superstar – but fantasy hockey is about winning now and this trade improves your team a lot. Carlson is another young player who will see his numbers increase if given more offensive responsibilities – I'd take him over Myers. The 1st may be a bit much, but it is hard to evaluate the value of draft picks in leagues you aren't a participant in.

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Jordan Staal, Heatley, and Ryan Suter for Jonathan Huberdeau and Justin Schultz.

A very interesting trade for a few reasons.

1) This is a classic proven-for-unproven trade. Staal, Heatley, and Suter are all seasoned NHL veterans, while Schultz and Huberdeau each have yet to play a single game in the league.

2) Staal should see his fantasy value increase dramatically in Carolina. And what happens with Heatley in Minnesota? He obviously isn't the 50-goal scorer he once was, but he should be better with a much-improved supporting cast (including Suter).

3) That being said, Huberdeau is arguably the best prospect in hockey, and Schultz has adjusted seamlessly to the pro game, and he looks poised to be the next star defenseman to break into the league.

This may be a risk, but I'd go for the younger side. I'm not sure how well Suter will do in Minnesota compared to Nashville (similar production at best).

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A “brawl” breaks out between two youth hockey teams in Russia – worth watching:

{youtube}N7y5qS5mmnQ{/youtube}

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I am very interested in statistics and analytics in hockey, and I have been watching some videos from the MIT sports analytics conferences from recent years. Here is my review of the 2011 hockey analytics panel – the video is over an hour long, but I condensed my notes and included only the most interesting stuff.

MacKinnon believes that the sport would benefit significantly if the developmental leagues would start to count a wider array of statistics (most notably shot quality and scoring chances) so NHL teams could use analytics more effectively when evaluating prospects.

*

Katie Baker from Grantland wrote this fantastic piece on college hockey earlier this week. Figured it was worth sharing. She attended a game between Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Part of it is that Bjugstad is one of the top players in the country. He's a first-round NHL draft pick, taken 19th overall by the Florida Panthers in 2010. He was named preseason Player of the Year for the Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA), and Inside College Hockey pegged him as a top-10 candidate for the Hobey Baker award. He has seven goals and 11 points in 13 games this season.

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Anton Stralman has fit in quite nicely with the Rangers, and a lot of the credit should go to his coach.

Stralman's improvement in his own zone – stepping up his physicality, blocking shots, and simply playing a harder all-around game than he was used to – brought him more ice time and gave both his coach and the fans more confidence in him. By the time the playoffs began, no one minded seeing him on the second defensive pairing or even on the power play, where his offensive capabilities, notably a soft wrister and an accurate point shot, came in handy.

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My latest fitness post – five ways to burn fat at the gym :

Ditch the isolation exercises

If you are a bodybuilder trying to sculpt the ideal physique, there is room for bicep curls and triceps extensions. However, if you are looking to burn fat, these exercises are pretty ineffective.

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Speaking of the gym, here is a video clip of Letang training from this summer – he's a beast in the gym:

{youtube}U3XuZ8uS34Y{/youtube}

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Jagr’s still got it:

{youtube}nnmZhDGTBcA{/youtube}