As keeper league hockey pools increase in number each year, fantasy junkies become more active in the off-season as they prepare their team for the coming year. Rebuild? Retool? Tweak? Whatever your intentions, it helps to get all the information you can about your players.

Throughout the off-season, FPL will look at a pair of teams each week and give you the fantasy lowdown. To kick things off, we'll buck the trend of past years and start alphabetically – in reverse. Just to be different. And because of the fact Anaheim is still playing.

(This article, and all of Dobber's articles, can also be found on ESPN.com, The Hockey News

and MSN.ca)

Washington Capitals

Potential UFA's – Bryan Muir .

Potential RFA's – Kris Beech , Steve Eminger , John Erskine , Tomas Fleischmann , Milan Jurcina
,
Jakub Klepis
,
Brooks Laich
,
Jiri Novotny
,
Brian Sutherby
.

Looking to Add - A puck-moving defenseman and a No.1 center. Brian Pothier was brought into the fold last summer after a career season with Ottawa, but he did not score his first goal until the New Year. That experiment is over. If the Caps want to take advantage of Alex Ovechkin
's talent, they need a quarterback who can get him the puck on the power play. The team also needs a No.1 guy up the middle to take some pressure off rookie Nicklas Backstrom
.

Ready for full-time - Backstrom is the best fantasy hockey player to own who has not played a game in the NHL. That doesn't mean he'll step right onto this team and tally 100 points. It means he is a favorite to win the Calder Trophy and a 70-point season is possible right off the bat. Indications are he won't be playing with Ovechkin to start. The team does not want to put pressure on the youngster, so he may start on the second or even the third line (similar to Gilbert Brule
in Columbus last year). However, he won't take long to work his way up to that top line. Eventually, he will be Ovechkin's setup man. Just don't be disappointed if he isn't there on opening night. It will take a few months.

Tomas Fleischmann is also ready for full-time duty. He is a brilliant winger with a bright future. However, he is learning to play on the right side – his off-wing – and it may take him a couple of seasons to adjust.

Fantasy Outlook - The team is about to begin Year 3 of what looks to be a five-year rebuilding plan. The kids look great and in two years the Caps will be a hot commodity. It would be wise to start acquiring these players now, because next summer you won't be able to.
Fantasy Grade: B (last year was C+)

Vancouver Canucks

Potential UFA's – Jan Bulis , Jeff Cowan , Rory Fitzpatrick , Josh Green , Trevor Linden , Taylor Pyatt
,
Bryan Smolinski
,
Brent Sopel
.

Potential RFA's – Lukas Krajicek .

Looking to Add - Two wingers who can score at least 25-30 goals. If they have lost confidence in Brendan Morrison , the team may also be shopping for a No. 2 pivot.

Ready for full-time - The team has very little interest in wooing Jason King or Jozef Balej back from Europe, but that is not to say it won't happen. Keep an eye on the situation. Both players have shown enough talent that, with the right chemistry on their line, a 25- or 30-goal season could happen.

Luc Bourdon made the team out of training camp last season, but was eventually sent back to junior. Once he was traded to a Memorial Cup contender, his minutes tumbled…and his numbers absolutely plummeted. Next year is likely not going to be his NHL rookie year.

Fantasy Outlook - The coaching style revolves around goaltender Roberto Luongo – and rightfully so. However, that does nothing to help poolies and it would seem that if you don't own Luongo or the Sedin twins, you probably should not own any Canucks. Keep an eye on their winger situation over the summer, because that player could possibly be of some value, whoever that player turns out to be.
Fantasy Grade: C (last year was C+)