Ah the exhibition season, full of promise and exciting prospects. Will those players who wowed us in September peter out and wilt under the harsh glare of the regular season lights or will they blossom into full-blown fantasy hockey studs? Now that the silly season is behind us and the regular season is all set to begin, we are about to find out.

Oh the memories of pre-seasons past. I fondly remember tracking Paul Stastny's progress in September of 2006 and then scooping him up with a late round pick in our draft. The best part was getting the inevitable shouts of "who?" or in this case "I thought he was retired". "No, that was his father you doofus", I smugly replied.

Paul Stastny finished his rookie season with 78 points in 82 games and thanks to some flash in

the pan named Evgeni Malkin, Stastny missed out on the Calder trophy. It would have made a great story as his father Peter won the Calder way back in 1980-81, which would have been the first time a father and son had both won that award.

Another pre-season hottie that I fondly remember was Mike Green. We all know how he turned out. If you were lucky (smart?) enough to take a flyer on him late in your keeper drafts two seasons ago, then you are likely still reaping the rewards. Remember though, he had only scored 12 points in 70 games the preceding season. Green finished the 2007-08 season with 56 points and had 73 points last season, including 31 goals.

These players should come with small print: “Caution, results not typical, your experience may vary.” Many of these pre-season prima donnas will be taken far too early in your drafts by those infatuated with what I call puppy love.

Everyone loves that new puppy, at least until they pee on the carpet (blow defensive assignments) and chew your shoes (take untimely penalties). Then you (the Coach) have to send your puppy (pre-season scoring stud) to the dog house (minors or back to junior).

While it’s always a rush to be the first guy in your league to unearth those unknown gems, I prefer the bulk of my roster be stocked with a hefty quantity of mature, proven NHL performers whose statistics I can take to the bank, literally and figuratively.

Here is my cut at this year's Puppies of the Eastern Conference 2009 (swimsuit calendar not available):

Artem Anisimov NYR

He recorded 81 points in 80 AHL games last year, while finishing fifth in league scoring. Anisimov has made the highlight reel with his play in the exhibition season and will start the year with the Rangers.

Michael Del Zotto NYR

Rangers fans have to be excited over this 19-year-old defenseman. He has already been tabbed by the Rangers Head Coach to be the power play quarterback. There are still several others who could take over that role should the rookie struggle. Del Zotto's ability to provide offense is clear; he had nearly a point per game (190-183) in his junior career.

Matt Gilroy NYR

After watching a couple of early pre-season games, I thought for sure Gilroy would get the nod to be the power play quarterback. He was using his speed to launch probing forays into the offensive zone and was still able to get into the play defensively when the play turned back. Gilroy won the Hobey Baker award last season and should challenge Del Zotto for power play duties all season. .

Peter Regin Ott

The 23-year-old Center is trying to be the greatest Dane ever. He’s off to a good start after having a standout camp. His play has forced Mike Fisher to move to the wing, where many think he is better suited.

Mika Pyorala Phi

At 28 years of age, Pyorala is too old to win the Calder trophy as NHL Rookie of the Year, but his maturity and experience has played a significant role in his excellent pre-season. After spending the last nine seasons playing in his native Finland and Sweden, who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks?

James van Riemsdyk Phi

Last season JVR couldn't crack the Flyers top six. This year, Philadelphia is going to try and spread out the offense over three lines. He will start the season as one of the top nine forwards. Coach Stevens seems intent on leaving Briere-Giroux, Richards-Gagne and Carter-Hartnell together and experimenting with different line combinations.

Victor Hedman TB

The Swedish Chris Pronger (in height, not physicality) is drawing rave reviews from Coach Tocchet and Vincent Lecavalier for his play in the pre-season. Lecavalier in particular thought

that Hedman would be a top five defender in the league one day. Even though he is biased (team-mate), that is high praise indeed.

Viktor Stalberg Tor

The Swedish sensation lead the Leafs in pre-season scoring. In eight exhibition games, Stalberg had six goals and nine points. Last year the 23-year-old had 46 points in 39 CCHA games with the University of Vermont and was a Hobey Baker Finalist. He’s greyhound fast.

Gustavsson hasn’t even played a full game yet and some are already hailing him as the second coming (Burke was the first). Okay, I admit I might be one of those guys. Much to my chagrin, I’m having great success grabbing him in my one year leagues, but no such luck so far in my keeper leagues. I think this guy is going to have a, pardon the pun, monster career.

Just remember not to fall blindly in love with every pre-season puppy because for each Stastny and Green (best of breed) there are countless others (mutts) who will end up being sent back to the pound (waivers) for bad behaviour. Woof.