I like to think of my fantasy hockey drafts as if they were final exams. In order to do well on a final exam, you need to study and do your homework. Cramming is what the pre-season is all about. There is a ton of information to glean from training camp news. Here are some of the things I look for during the pre-season action.

Take a realistic look at the established players. How many players are on one way contracts? How many positions are really up for grabs? Does the hot shot rookie have a chance at unseating one of the veterans? A player having a hot training camp, while promising, does not mean he's a lock to make the team. There are often other factors at play, be it contract status, age, salary cap implications, etc.

Every year we see young guys who have great camps, but are either sent back to their junior clubs or to the minors. That's why it's important to view the big picture to see if the player has a legitimate shot at making the team.

Look at what the player's projected role is on the team. If he's projected to be a top six forward, but those spots are all spoken for by established players, does he have the ability to play on the checking line? A defenceman's value is significantly diminished if he doesn't get the power play minutes.

I tend to steer clear of players who miss all or part of training camp. Often players in this situation end up having a bad season or they re-aggravate the injury in an attempt to hurry back. I'm certain that statistics would prove this true, but I couldn't find any, so you'll have to go with your gut on this one.

Avoid players with lingering or chronic injuries, especially potential long term ones involving concussions or backs. The season is long enough; you don't need to draft a player that's injured to start the season. Make a note of it and move them down your draft list accordingly. If someone else takes him, he's their headache.

Contract year equals added motivation. Some players are predictable this way. Also be aware of the dreaded post-contract blues. This happens the season AFTER they sign the big contract. Production can decline considerably due to pressure of trying to "earn" the big pay cheque or just plain apathy.

Don't pay too much attention to what the coach says…ever. Often the things they say through the media are intended to motivate a player or to see how a player will respond.

Pre-season line combinations can't be trusted. It is important to monitor, but some coaches like to change their line combinations as often as O.J. gets arrested. I wouldn't pick up or trade for a player just because he's the flavour of the week on Crosby or Thornton's lines. It's a little like playing roulette, you could hit the jackpot if you pick the right number, but you're more likely to go home empty handed. Set lines are less and less common in today's NHL. You would be much better off to focus on who's going to play on the team's power plays, that's where the money is.

It's music to my ears when I hear that a player spent the summer working out and reported to training camp in the best shape of their life.

Carolina's goalie Cam Ward reported to camp 20 pounds lighter! He changed his diet and worked with the Canes fitness consultant over the summer. The end result is that he's quicker than last season. A nice rebound is in store for both Ward and Carolina.

Montreal's big winger Guillaume Latendresse, who played at 230 pounds last year, now weighs in at a solid 220 pounds. He and Maxim Lapierre worked out during the summer with the Canadiens strength and conditioning coordinator.

In Boston, Marc Savard, who hit the big 3-0 in July, got serious and hired a nutritionist and a personal trainer. He lowered his body fat and looks very good thus far in camp. It appears that the Bruins are giving Schaefer a shot on Savard's port side.

Savard wasn't the only Bruin working hard in the off-season, apparently Phil Kessel showed up noticeably leaner as well. I expect Boston to be a much improved club with Claude Julien at the helm this year. The coach's top priority is to lower the goals against. That will help out the goalies, but often with defensive responsibility comes reduced offensive numbers.

Over in Florida, Ville Peltonen gets first crack at lining up with Olli Jokinen, thanks to their history together on the Finnish national team.

Information like this can be very useful during your draft. Do your research and take some notes for your draft list. It will pay dividends when you win your pool. Knowing what to look for is half the battle.