Welcome back to An Expert's Audit. Every month we'll take a look at a reader's keeper league team in the hopes of helping him toward a championship. If you're interested in getting an audit for your own keeper team you can begin the process by emailing Dobber about it.

Ryan G plays is a Pens fan who plays in a 24 team salary cap fantasy point league where salaries are based on actual NHL salaries with renewable contracts as each season wears on. The fantasy point setup is **G (1), A (1), P (.25), GWG (3), PIM (.25), +/- (.25)** and **W (4), SHO (5), Saves (.1)**
and
GA (-1)
. As a contract expires in this league it would need to be resigned according to the cap hit of

the player and that would make for some interesting negotiations if you have a contract that needs to be resigned but no room under the cap to get it done.

At any rate, let's take a look at **Pittsburgh Penguins** on the day I arrived.

C **Claude Giroux** PHI – he was leading the scoring race for a chunk of time before Gino realized he could like, do some stuff since Sid wouldn't be around for awhile. After a brief lull in goal production he appears to be right back on top of the world. The kid's a rock star.

C **Evgeni Malkin** PIT – at some point Gino realized he could like, do some stuff since Sid wouldn't be around for awhile. Wow, did you guys get this déjà vu thing like I just did?

C **Dustin Jeffrey** PIT – well in truth this guy is on your roster simply because you needed a contract that could fit under your cap. There's virtually no fantasy value here at all.

C **Brandon Sutter** CAR – he's a Sutter, he's not going to be a scorer but if you need some gritty in the corner work or a decent forecheck then look no further.

W **David Jones** COL – I think a best case scenario is that he's a solid citizen in the neighbourhood of 20 goals a season. Last year's 27 goals might just be a career high.

W **Bryan Little** WPG – in '08-09 he had a 31 goal, 51 point season and he hasn't come anywhere close to that since then. The Jets are goal starved and this guy takes 2 shots per game. He'll never be at the fore of your offense and if you can find good return then he's a

decent trade chip.

W **Matt Martin** NYI – his only value is in PIMs and if you couldn't find room under the cap to re-sign him then it would not be a major loss at all if you ask me.

W **James Neal** PIT – his contract is expiring at the end of this season and you will not be able to re-sign him given the cap hit he'll provide to a fantasy team. That makes him a prime candidate for a trade if you can get the right return. Who wouldn't want to add one of the best goal scorers in the league to a fantasy roster?

W **Kyle Okposo** NYI – it seems that every January through March the Islanders go on a run and put up a bunch of offense. OH-poso has 14 pts in the 17 games since New Year's. That's what I'm saying.

W **Max Pacioretty** MON – he has 4 multi-point games since New Year's, 16 pts in those 17 games with 11 of those as goals and his first NHL hattie. As a lifetime Leaf fan it pains me to say that I like Patches.

W **Benoit Pouliot** BOS – in a lot of leagues he has value because his +/- is elite this season. That's not the case in your league since your fantasy point setup only rewards you at .25 for +/-. I don't know what to say, he's ok ... he's young and his contract is such that it creates space for you to keep the big guns around.

W **Wayne Simmonds** PHI – two years ago in LA he put up 40 pts and 116 PIMs, that's really borderline elite in terms of a point and PIM ratio. If you prorate his production so far over a full season you come up with something close to 49 points and 94 PIMs and that just means he'll need to lose it a couple times so he can boost his PIM-yness a bit. Never worry though, crunch time is coming and there'll be plenty of opportunity for him to step up and beat the snot out of somebody this season.

D **Chris Butler** CGY – meh. Best case scenario is that this guy turns into Trevor Daley.

D **Trevor Daley** DAL – oops ... um ... well ... aw, screw it. Meh.

D **Kris Letang** PIT – the 7 weeks he was away from your roster really affected your total offense. Now that he's back you have the anchor you need from the back end.

D **P.K. Subban** MON – his struggles this season are simply growing pains. The time will come that he's your anchor on the back end and he'll contribute across the board to your team. This kid's got serious skills.

D **Marek Zidlicky** MIN – there is something wrong with this guy. Seriously. He was a 40 point guy (except for one year) prior to last season and he isn't getting anywhere near that this season. The Wild need that offense and it just isn't there anymore. He's looking like he's on the other side of the hill and heading down FAST.

G **Corey Crawford** CHI – there was a period of time since Christmas where Craw sat and Ray Emery took the reins. At the time I was thinking that everyone should just take advantage of using Emery for this period because the time would shortly come that Crawford would take his rightful place again. I can't believe how much goaltending you have in a 24 team league.

G **Mike Smith** PHX – I was most definitely not a believer in Smith or the Yotes this season and I've got to say that I've been surprised. I was actually picking the Yotes to finish last overall this season since they had lost their best player and there was still all kinds of turmoil there. Smitty should easily get past 30 wins and the ratios have been surprisingly good.

BN **Curtis** "Fred" **Sanford** CBS – who are the tenders for the Jackets next season? I'm thinking that Steve Mason's best before date in C-bus might be expired and the smell is getting bothersome ... so I could easily see a tandem of Sanford/Dekanich as the backbone there for a few years. Man the Jackets sure have had the worst of luck with goalies eh? Maybe not

Islander bad but still, pretty bad.

BN **Eric Fehr** WPG – I was happy to see a Manitoba boy return to the hometown team here but the experiment has been an abysmal failure. I don't know if his contract with the Jets will continue but I do think that you should definitely buy him out in this league.

BN **Linus Omark** EDM – cool name, check. Spin-a-rama shootout move, check. Superstar skills breaking on to the scene to wow the world? Uh, no. I don't know that he'll ever be the star that he thinks he'll be and I'm also ok if I'm wrong about that.

BN **Kris Russell** STL – for the longest time with the Jackets I thought he was going to take the next step but now that he's with the Blues I think that he can be insulated a little more and the chance that he'll blossom has increased a good deal. I don't think he'll ever be a superstar but eventually he might be a very good D4 for the Blues.

IR **Sidney Crosby** PIT – IR guys still count against your cap and this is a huge salary to have weighing things down. He's still the best player on the planet though, and over the course of this month we've learned that he won't be retiring so all the nay-sayers can just cram it with walnuts (except I say it mean).

IR **Nikita Nikitin** CBS – insert a sucking on your butt joke here. Ok I'm still working on that one but this kid has arrived and when the Wiz is back for C-bus then he'll have more offensive help from the back end. He'll have to carry the load pretty much by himself for a while though.

IR **Scott Parse** LA – he's a 3rd line guy with little fantasy value when healthy and there is little chance that he'll contribute anywhere this season anyway.

IR **Mark Dekanich** CBS – all the leg injuries make me think of Pascal Leclaire with the same organization not so long ago. I actually hope that he doesn't end up on the same paths that Pascal went down because I just hate watching goalies that fall by the wayside. If he can be a star then great and the Jackets sure need something like that.

Waiver Wire Options

Ok, this is a very deep league. There are 24 teams in here and the farms for everybody are pretty extensive. I was a bit surprised to find much of anyone.

Joey Crabb TOR – in a league that is this deep there is a little bit of value here. I'm not expecting loads of offense over the course of what might be an ok career but at the same time, he's better than a couple guys you already roster.

Mark Stuart WPG – he's a solid NHL D who would add to your fantasy totals mostly in the PIMs he has. He'll never be a star but he's good roster filler if you need it.

Nick Johnson MIN – he's had a couple cups of coffee for the Penguins in seasons past but this season he's gotten into the Wild lineup on a fairly regular basis and contributing on a slightly less basis.

Trading Options

The biggest problem with this club was that all the talent was making it difficult to keep the same guys together. Sid sat on IR but his salary still counted against the cap and the rest of the talent was such that they were leading this team to the top 3 in the league over the course of the season. What about the future though? Someone like James Neal would not be able to be signed after this season, his contract expires and there just isn't cap room.

We seriously considered trying to trade Sid. When Sid's health status was unknown nobody wanted to take the chance on trading for him and when it became known that he was going to come back the price we were asking went up and the negotiations dried up. So we endeavoured to try and trade James Neal instead. The Oilers, Leafs, Habs and Sabres all expressed some interest and the best option looked to be something with the Oilers. The first significant offer to Oilers was to offer James Neal, Brandon Sutter, Marek Zidlicky, two first round picks (presently looking to be 17th and 20th overall), and two second round picks for Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Taylor Hall. It got his attention but in the end it was declined saying that RNH was not available at all. We next came back with Neal, Sutter, a 1st round pick and a 2nd round pick for Taylor Hall alone. Oil thought for a long time and eventually declined the deal. A trade like that would've set you up to resolve salary cap problems while netting you a franchise player like Hall for the next half decade or so. Unfortunately it didn't fly but negotiations can still happen and I think a deal can still occur.

Conclusions

So in the end, the deal that should've happened didn't happen. One does need to be careful about the trades made. You don't make a move just to be able to make a move and if it means that you'd have to pay more than what is reasonable to pay, then you can always say no. Trading in a keeper league is like a marathon, you don't want to P-off a manager that you're going to need later when you want to make the next deal and you also don't want to sell the

world just so that you can get the one thing that you’re after. I wholeheartedly believe that Oil should’ve taken that offer for Hall, it would’ve landed him an elite goalscorer who’s salary he can afford to re-sign plus he would’ve ended up with another decent center and two draft picks for the future. It also would’ve helped your situation too, don’t get me wrong about that. Hall would come cheaper, you could afford to re-sign him and keep him around longer. None of that means that you’re done though, you can still make that deal or one very much like it for your own sake.

Well ok, your team is really solid Ryan. You have a shot at it this season and you can still make moves that benefit your team down the road. I’m not all that worried about your situation and you should be more than fine. Good luck to you kid.