Continuing with the final set of recap columns from the pre-season, this week we'll review my work in the DobberHockey Fantasy Guide from August.

2010-11 Sleeper Picks – Western Conference

Joffrey Lupul – RW, Anaheim – Lupul disappointed many fantasy owners with an injury plagued season last campaign, but there were definitely some positives. In the 23 contests that he did suit up for, he spent 36.25 percent of his shifts with Ryan Getzlaf and 29.78 percent with Corey Perry. If you pro-rated his stats to a full 82-games, he would have had 50 points, 64 PIMs and 235 SOG, which wouldn't have been a bad investment as a bench third winger. Look for a bounce back season from Loops if he can overcome his back issue.

I chucked Lupul in as a sleeper candidate, but I quickly did a 180 a week later after receiving some negative news about his back injury the following week. Hopefully you were able to change your plans after the release of the pre-season guide. I pretty much covered the status of Lupul in last week's column, so if you want the full jist just refer back to it. ***Maaasquito Bite: MISS***

Mark Giordano – D, Calgary – Giordano really took a big step forward in his offensive development as he cracked the 30-point plateau for the first time in his NHL career. Jay Bouwmeester and Robyn Regehr are more stay-at-home blue-liners than offensive threats, which should open the door for Giordano to be more offensively focused in 2010-11. I'd look for a 35-point, 100 PIM campaign from 26-year-old.

Gio finished the season as the Flames' defensive scoring leader as he tallied 43 points and 67 PIMs in an injury-free season. He definitely made an impact in plenty of fantasy leagues, so expect much of the same heading into next 2011-12. ***Maaasquito Bite: HIT***

Viktor Stalberg – LW, Chicago – The Hawks had their "fire sale" this off-season and out the door went a lot of their offensive depth, but the return that came back could certainly surprise. The 6-3, 210 Swede certainly opened plenty of eyes in his debut with the Leafs and certainly has the opportunity to gain a valued top-six role with the reigning Stanley Cup champions. Chicago lost Buffy the goalie slayer, but Stalberg could be a more talented replacement.

Stalberg definitely didn't fill the shoes of the departed Byfuglien with just 24 points on the season, which isn't surprising since he averaged just 10:41 per contest and barely any PP ice-time (0:12). It's definitely a stark contrast to the ice-time (14:36 and 1:37) that he received in Toronto. *Maaasquito Bite: MISS*

Kris Russell – D, Columbus – It usually takes a few years for junior defensemen to get used to the NHL level, and it appears that Russell is taking the typical development path as planned. In his junior career with the Medicine Hat Tigers, he registered 235 points in 307 career contests, which is almost unheard of from a young developing blue liner. Russell will certainly have the opportunity to become a 30-point defenseman in 2010-11.

Russell did make a concerted effort to try to notch 30 points, but he fell just short with 23. I thought that he would unseat Fedor Tyutin and Anton Stralman during the season for the number one gig in Columbus, but he was still buried behind them. However, 14 of those points were in the last 31 games, indicating a possible 35-plus season next year. Interesting Russell stat of the day: 21, 22, and 23 points the last three campaigns. Is 24 next? *Maaasquito Bite: MISS*

Peter Mueller – RW, Colorado – With 17 points in 54 contests, many poolies left Mueller for dead last year. Then boom, 20 points in 15 contests in Colorado turns his career from disappointment to elation. Many pool/league providers base their pre-season draft rankings on the previous year's production. With only 37 points next to his name, Mueller's draft value is going to be lower than expected. Definitely don't forget his name come draft day.

Mueller missed the entire season due to his concussion problem. Recent news has him "optimistic" about heading into the 2011-12 season healthy, which could make him a great sleeper candidate to keep in mind come draft time. ***Maaasquito Bite: PUSH***

Andrew Raycroft – G, Dallas – Heading into the 2010-11 season with Kari Lehtonen as the number one could be a dangerous situation for the Stars. Prior to last season, Lehtonen averaged just 48 starts in the last four seasons, so the Band-Aid Boy moniker still remains and is certainly well deserved. Raycroft had a solid bounce back season by backing up Roberto Luongo with respectable numbers of a 2.42 GAA along with a .911 SP. If Lehtonen is injured once again, Raycroft could see his fantasy value skyrocket.

It's kind of unfair to have to depend on an injury in order to qualify as a "sleeper" candidate. Lehtonen ended up being healthy throughout the season which pretty much decimated any fantasy value that Raycroft may have had heading into the year. On the positive side, he did finish with a 2.83 goals-against-average and .910 save percentage which does mirror closely to his career numbers. ***Maaasquito Bite: MISS***

Jiri Hudler – RW, Detroit – As mentioned above, *most pool/league providers base their pre-season rankings on the previous year's production. So what*
value do you think a player with a goose egg next to his name will receive on draft day? Hudler spent a year in the KHL after tallying 57 points with the Red Wings in 2008-09. Hudler should have a guaranteed top-six role for this upcoming season, which should equate to a very productive season. His name will be largely forgotten by unsuspecting poolies.

Well I was wrong with this one… Hudler ended up unable to secure a top-six spot and was pretty much kept on a leash throughout the entire season. Instead of averaging the 16-17 minutes a game, that I thought he would, Hudler averaged just 13:39 and couldn't find any rhythm to his offensive game, which lead to a certainly disappointing season for many fantasy poolies. *Maaasquito Bite: MISS*

Sam Gagner – C, Edmonton – Last season was a wash for the Oilers, but it did give them an opportunity to re-tool the shed. One positive note was the development of Gagner in the latter half of the campaign. The former sixth overall pick started the season with 22 points in the first 40 contests, but tallied 19 points in the next 28 contests before being shut down with a hip injury. Another positive note is that Ales Hemsky spent 31.92 percent of his overall ice-time alongside Gagner and the two did show some solid chemistry at the beginning of the season. If the duo gets paired up with Taylor Hall, it could be fantasy jackpot for Gagner.

Gagner did end up spending close to 30 percent of his overall ice-time alongside Hemsky but unfortunately it didn't equate to much this campaign with all the injuries that happened. He is starting to develop a band-aid boy moniker as he's missed 37 contests due to injury during the first four years of his young NHL career. I don't know how to rate this one, because at the end of the day he still did manage to tally 42 points in 68 games

(which is a career-high) and would have pro-rated to 50 points over the course of a full healthy season. *Maaasquito Bite: PUSH?*

Oscar Moller – RW, Los Angeles – I wish I was an Oscar Moller owner, that is what I truly want to be, cause if I were an Oscar Moller owner, everyone would be in love, oh everyone would be in love, everyone would be in love with me! Ok, maybe not at the present moment, but perhaps by the end of the season owners could certainly be singing that song. The Kings have a gaping hole to fill in their top-six and if Moller can manage to secure that spot, he will be in for a great season that we can all sing about.

Opportunity is a big key with sleeper candidates and unfortunately Moller just didn't get that chance with the Kings this season. Typical band-aid boys, Ryan Smyth and Justin Williams, remained relatively healthy which essentially kept Moller down in the minors for the majority of the season. To be fair he did notch 50 points in 59 contests with Manchester, so that's a pretty decent tally. Just too bad that it wasn't in the NHL. The Kings pretty much have their top-six locked for next season, so I don't know if a change of scenery is the solution to unleashing Moller's offensive potential. *Maaasquito Bite: MISS*

Andrew Brunette – LW, Minnesota – It never ceases to amaze me how Brunette always seems to fly under-the-radar. In the past five seasons, he has posted numbers of 81.6 appearances, 16:25 TOI/game average, 63.2 points and 134.8 SOG per campaign. The great thing about the 37-year old is his consistency. If you don't expect anything more than the above numbers, you will be happy with the yield that you'll receive from Brunette in a top-six role in Minny.

During the pre-season guide I used numbers from the past five seasons to "prop up" his numbers, unfortunately it's come back to bite me in the bum. If you look at the last three seasons, the numbers are closer to 81.3 appearances, 16:30 TOI/game average, 56.6 points and 124 SOG per campaign, which are very similar to the numbers (82 appearances, 16:47 TOI/game, 46 points and 117 SOG) that Brunette posted this season. As mentioned in an article earlier this spring, if it wasn't for Mikko Koivu missing 11 games due to a hand injury, Brunette probably would have been right on the projected mark. *Maaasquito Bite: PUSH*

Martin Erat – RW, Nashville – Speaking of consistency, Erat is probably another one of the poster boys for consistency. For the past four seasons, he has averaged 72.3 appearances, 18:33 TOI/game average, 53.3 points, and 153 SOG. Erat has a guaranteed top-six role in the Music City, so if you can handle the odd scratches due to injury, he may be a worthwhile investment.

Once again Erat was pretty consistent with his season totals. He did miss 18 contests this campaign, which is typical of him, and probably the main factor that's truly holding him back from being a consistent fantasy own. If he can ever shake the injury bug, I wouldn't be surprised to see a 65+ point season from him. *Maaasquito Bite: HIT*

Scottie Upshall – RW, Phoenix – Last season, I mentioned Upshall as "sleeper" candidate, which proved to be true as Upshall was on pace for a breakout season (32 points in 49 contests) prior to tearing his ACL in January. As discussed last year, Upshall was once a sixth overall pick as well as a recipient of a CHL rookie of the year award, which demonstrates that he was highly-touted back in the day. The Coyotes aren't going to blow their opposition out of the water with offense, but Upshall should be sufficient enough as a depth winger.

It's been another turbulent year for Upshall as he posted 34 points in 82 contests. I just can't pinpoint what the problem actually is. He had great junior numbers (226 points in 173 contests), and pretty decent AHL numbers (105 points in 123 contests), so it's not like he has offensive "suckitis", but the problem is he can't translate it into the NHL level. Or at least has never gotten the opportunity to translate it at the NHL level (15:46 was his career-high in TOI/game). Columbus won't be the place to give him the opportunity. So if he's still on your fantasy roster, it's probably a good time to cut bait until he gets traded. *Maaasquito Bite: MISS*

Marc-Edouard Vlasic – D, San Jose – With Rob Blake retiring this offseason, it has opened the door on the blue line for the Sharks. My candidate to be the first to walk through that door would be the 23-year-old Vlasic. In the final year of his junior career he tallied 102 points in 89 contests (including playoffs), which does show that he has plenty of offensive upside. In the past, he has always been hurt by the Sharks' depth on the blue line (Matt Carle, Christian Ehrhoff, Craig Rivet, Brian Campbell, Dan Boyle, and Rob Blake), but this year it seems that he has the all-clear for the number two gig behind Boyle.

Well I just can't make excuses for Vlasic anymore. He garnered plenty of ice-time (20:51), but couldn't translate it into a productive fantasy season. I originally believed that he would be the first candidate to walk through the door, but it ended up being Jason Demers instead. *Maaasquito Bite: MISS*

Alex Steen – C, St. Louis – Steen posted a very productive 47 points in 68 contests for 2009-10. He also ranked third amongst the Blues' forwards for power play ice-time per contest, which is definitely a big positive. The problem for him might be the depth chart as he sits in third place behind both Andy McDonald and T.J. Oshie. Steen's a perfect high-risk/high-reward candidate for 2010-11.

Despite missing 10 contests due to injury, Steen still managed to finish with a respectable 51 points on the season. He finished third in Blues' scoring and has certainly cemented himself as a major threat on the Blues' top power-play unit. The Blues are still a deep offense-by-committee team, but Steen could be one of the candidates that you might want to keep an eye on for next season. *Maaasquito Bite: HIT*

Mikael Samuelsson – RW, Vancouver – Samuelsson spent 52.8 percent of his overall ice time during the playoffs with both of the Sedin twins, which to me shows that the Canucks have plenty of faith in a Swedish trio. His 15 points and 42 SOG in 12 post-season contests certainly provide plenty of evidence for his fantasy worth this campaign. Alex Burrows does provide some competition for Samuelsson, but the upside is certainly worth the gamble on the 33-year-old.

Samuelsson also finished with a respectable 50-point campaign, despite spending just only 22.84 percent of his overall ice-time with both Sedin twins. Imagine what the point total would have been if it was similar to the 52.8 percent that he spent during the last playoffs. *Maaasquito Bite: HIT*

Matt Stajan – C, Calgary – The Olli Jokinen signing might take some wind out of Stajan's sails, but he remains a solid fantasy option. Jokinen carries the "big name" but Stajan certainly appears to have more chemistry with Jarome Iginla than the unpredictable Finn. You won't see Stajan share 79.81 percent of shifts with Iggy again, but even if it's roughly 50 percent, he'll see a productive campaign.

Well unfortunately it wasn't the 50 percent of ice-time that I was after, as it ended up being just 37.67 percent which obviously isn't enough to be of fantasy significance. So it's definitely not a surprise to see just 31 points next to Stajan's name at the season's end. *Maaasquito Bite: MISS*

Keith Yandle – D, Phoenix – Yandle really took a big step forward last season by tallying 41 points in a full 82-game schedule. The fact that he averaged 3:05 of power play ice-time per contest shows that he has plenty of offensive upside, especially when his 16 PPP ranked him tied for 30th in the league amongst blue liners. He's buried a bit behind Ed Jovanovski and Adrian Aucoin, but his offensive skills should shine through for a repeat performance in 2010-11.

Yandle is probably the biggest hit in my books as he busted out for 59 points and 199 SOG in 82 contests this campaign. Jovocop and Aucoin proved to be no barriers to Yandle as he fought his ways towards the top of the NHL elite. Yandle started off red-hit with 54 points in 64 games, but tapered off dramatically with just five points in the last 18 contests, which certainly will ring some alarm bells heading into next season. *Maaasquit o Bite: HIT*

Sergei Kostitsyn – LW, Nashville – Kostitsyn has been criticized for many things as part of the Montreal organization and rightfully so, which is probably why he was sent packing from Hab country. One thing that you can't criticize is his offensive potential (209 points in 122 contests with the London Knights and 35 in 38 with the Hamilton Bulldogs). Nashville might be the perfect place for the reclamation project, as they have plenty of opportunity for him to flourish in a top-six role if he decides to grab the bull by the horns. He's another example of a high-risk/high-reward candidate.

SK 74 finished with 50 points in 77 contests, and certainly played a major role in altering the fates of many fantasy leagues. He started the season at a snail's pace with just three points in the first 19 contests, but vamped it up three or four gears with 47 in the last 58. If he and Erat can manage to stay healthy next campaign, we could seriously have a great "under-the-radar" line to make note of. ***Maaasquito Bite: HIT***

Nikolai Khabibulin – G, Edmonton – There's no doubt that Tom Renney is a defense-first type of coach. From 2005-2009 he had the Rangers ranked eighth, sixth, third, and fifteenth overall in terms of shots on goal allowed to the opposition. If he can instill that type of philosophy to the Oilers' lineup this campaign, the Bulin wall should enjoy a solid bounce back season (if he avoids jail time). Last season, his .909 SP actually would have stood alongside Semyon Varlamov, Dan Ellis, Brian Elliott and Antero Niittymaki.

It was a big ask for me to assume that Renney could make such a strong defensive

adjustment with a young squad like the Oilers, but at the end of the day veteran players like Khabibulin need to step up to the plate in these types of situations. In this day and age there is no justification to pay a veteran player $3.75 mil per season to post such horrendous numbers (3.40 goals against average along with a .890 save percentage). With the way that Devan Dubnyk has played this season, you have to start wondering what the future holds for the Bulin wall? ***Maaasquito Bite: MISS***

Tom Gilbert – D, Edmonton – Gilbert's season could have easily been considered a wash as he was on pace to finish the season with just 13 points. Suddenly a switch flipped and he went on a 20-point tear for the final 21 contests to finish the year with a respectable 31 points. One reason for the turnaround might have been the increase in ice-time. Prior to the break he was averaging just 21:48 but upped that to 24:15 post-Olympic break. It appears that Sheldon Souray is out the door, and if that happens, Gilbert could have unconditional number one status in Edmonton, which should produce a nice yield for the upcoming season.

Gilbert didn't end up with unconditional number one status, as that title belonged to Ryan Whitney (before his injury). Despite garnering all the ice-time in the world (24:30 overall and 2:59 on the PP), Gilbert failed to deliver for all of the fantasy poolies that owned him. The young Oilers now have a year of experience under their belts, and the future should look pretty bright for Gilbert and co. in the future, but this season he was a bust. ***Maaasquito Bite: MISS***

Dave Bolland – C, Chicago – Bolland's production was limited to just 16 points due to a herniated disc, which sidelined him for nearly three months of last campaign. He found his stride in the postseason as he tallied 16 points in 22 contests, as the Hawks' second-line center during their Stanley Cup run. With Marian Hossa healthy for a full season, it might not be too much to ask for Bolland to surpass the 55-point plateau.

Bolland missed a large portion of the season due to a concussion problem and a variety of nick-knack injuries. He still managed to finish with 39 points in 61 contests (52 point pace), which is pretty close to the 55-point pace that I initially projected. Much like a few of the players I mentioned above, if Bolland can ever manage to stay healthy for an entire season, look out! ***Maaasquito Bite: PUSH***

Ty Conklin – G, St. Louis – Conklin is starting to build himself quite a name as a career backup. He's never seen a season where he's started more than 40 contests, and he doesn't seem to be poised to break that streak this campaign. The Blues awarded Jaroslav Halak with a large contract based on half a season's worth of brilliance and roughly 100 starts, which isn't exactly a large bank of evidence to draw from. If Halak busts, Conks could surprise himself with a number one gig this season.

Similar to the situation with Raycroft, in order for Conklin to become a major "sleeper" candidate this campaign he needed something seriously bad to have happened to Halak. Unfortunately, when your fantasy value depends entirely on an injury to the number one goalie, you're generally going to miss more than you hit.
Maaasquito Bite: MISS

Shawn Horcoff – C, Edmonton – Ales Hemsky has been bitten by the injury bug for the last three seasons, but has still managed to tally quite a few points, 159 to be exact, and 105 of which involved being on a line with Horcoff. I seriously doubt Horcoff's offensive potential on his

own, but one thing that you can't deny is his chemistry with Hemmer. If Tom Renney decides to keep the duo together instead of using Gagner, Horcoff could certainly make last season's minus 29 rating or his $5.5 mil price tag all but forgotten.

Only seven of Horcoff's 27 points came alongside Hemsky, so maybe I overestimated the chemistry between Horcoff and Hemsky. If you look at the seasonal breakdown he actually did a great job centering youngsters Hall and Eberle, while actually maintaining a decent minus one rating. Edmonton should take another step forward next year, so keep Horcoff in mind when the drafts start rolling around again. ***Maaasquito Bite: PUSH***

Overall I finished with a pretty average 6-12-5 record in terms of identifying "sleeper" candidates. The main reason for such "unimpressive" numbers is that I truly tried to showcase only under-the-radar players. It wouldn't have been hard for me to list Ryan Kesler, Joe Pavelski or Bobby Ryan as "sleeper" candidates to help boost the numbers, but you would have gotten that from every major website on the net. Another reason, in my opinion, was that the pre-season guide was released in early August, so I can only base my picks from the performances of the past season and playoffs rather than the most up-to-date info from training camps. Hopefully you didn't base your judgments solely from the columns in the pre-season guide and that you do check the website daily for the most up-to-date information you can get anywhere on the net.

Next week I'll release the 2011 version of the always popular Projections, Projections we all Love our Projections article,

which is essentially a must-read for all poolies. See you next week! Questions or comments? I'll be happy to answer them in the comments section below.