A good prospector knows which streams to avoid.

Panning for gold is hard enough work as it is – and time consuming – so when you have little or no chance of finding nuggets, you stay away.

When it comes to yielding hockey prospects, some teams are worth your effort and some are

not.

Last week, I wrote about the Detroit Red Wings and how they do such a great job drafting and developing players. I'll always give a Red Wings prospect a longer look because their farm system provides a steady stream of prospects to the NHL – especially from rounds 2 through 7.

A team I avoid – except for the obvious top-tier talent – is the Atlanta Thrashers, because they've mastered the trifecta of ineptitude.

Two of the components of that trifecta are drafting and player development. The other, is asset management, which doesn't really speak about the Thrashers' ability to develop players, but explains why they're still struggling to be successful.

I thought about this last night as I watched the Thrashers play the Capitals. My son asked me, "Why are the Thrashers always missing the playoffs? Haven't they been in the league for a long time?" Aside from one year when they were swept by the Rangers, it's been a long run of futility for this franchise and poor drafting and development are big factors.

Here's a quick look at Atlanta's drafts from 1999 to 2003, and the players that have played more than 100 NHL games.

1999: Patrik Stefan and Garnet Exelby.

2000: Dany Heatley and Darcy Hordichuk

2001: Ilya Kovalchuk and Pasi Nurminen

2002: Kari Lehtonen and Jim Slater

2003: Braydon Coburn and Tobias Enstrom

When you pick as high as the Thrashers did during those years, your first-round pick should be an impact player.

Stefan was a bust, but 1999 was a weak draft year which could explain why Stefan was so highly touted. Atlanta didn't opt for the Sedin package and picking just one wasn't an option, or

so the story goes. Heatley, Kovalchuk, Lehtonen and Coburn were good picks, and Atlanta is just guilty of poor asset management with them.

Dany Heatley turned into Marian Hossa who was dealt for Angelo Esposito, Colby Armstrong and a first-rounder (Daultan Leveille). Kovalchuk turned into Niclas Bergfors, Patrice Cormier and Johnny Oduya and New Jersey's first-round pick this summer. Lehtonen let them down with a poor commitment to conditioning and was injury-prone. To a lesser degree, this is an example of poor asset management, but blueline prospect Ivan Vishnevskiy could still tip the scales back to even for the Thrashers.

Coburn turned into Alexei Zhitnik, who went back to Russia.

Getting impact players with top 10 picks is a bit like picking low-hanging fruit. Many people can do it. What separates successful teams from also-rans like the Thrashers is how well it can snag impact players and role players later in the draft. Trading for them and making smart free-agent acquisitions are also keys to success, but let's focus on drafting.

When it comes to developing players in-house, the Thrashers have done a poor job. The jury is still out on their performance since 2003, but it still looks weak.

Of their top 12 forwards only Jim Slater, Evander Kane, Bryan Little were drafted by the team and the farm system doesn't yield much hope of changing that.

Even when you consider Bergfors and Armstrong – the net result of trades – it doesn't look good. Two guys I focused on in the mid-season report are Brett Sterling and Spencer Machacek. I'm not a fan of Sterling, but GM Don Waddell is so that means you shouldn't give up on him until Waddell is gone. I think Machacek will be a solid citizen – the kind of player all teams need and want – but not an impact scorer.

On defence, they've snagged Tobias Enstrom and Zack Bogosian and there's still some hope for Paul Postma and Arturs Kulda.

In net, they boast Ondrej Pavelec and I've got my eye on fifth-rounder Alex Kangas. Kangas took a step back with the Minnesota Gophers this year, but don't give up on him yet.

As a fantasy GM, you need all the help you can get to scout prospects. Without the benefit of a large travel budget to go see all these players yourself, you need to keep in mind certain factors.

Given their drafting and development history, I do not have a lot of confidence in any Atlanta Thrashers prospects. I never completely close my eyes to them, but as a keeper league GM, I don’t rate any of them very highly.

You’re safe with any of their top 10 picks, some of them are gold, but the rest are mostly sand and gravel.