The weekly IR report is back and kicks off with news on Nash, Pitkanen, Vrbata and more!

Get the stretcher (latest injuries):

Rick Nash is out with an undisclosed injury and the New York Rangers are not saying anything, which has some people thinking possible concussion. Talk on Sirius/XM NHL radio was that Nash might have been hurt back against the Boston Bruins on February 12. If that's the case and he has a concussion somebody is not doing their job protecting players who suffer concussions.

Nash was riding a four game point streak before missing Tuesday's game against the Montreal Canadiens. If Nash is out long term this is a huge blow to the Rangers and many poolies who were expecting a big year from Nash.

This could be just the break needed for Chris Kreider who has struggled this season after an impressive start to his career during last season's playoffs. According to Frozen Pool Line Combinations Kreider played with
Ryan Callahan
and
Brad Richards
28.3% of the time on even strength and saw 22.2% of the power play time in the game against Montreal. Power forwards tend to take longer to develop but this is a great opportunity for Kreider.

Jimmy Howard left Tuesday's game against the Nashville Predators with what the Detroit Red Wings are calling a head injury. According to Red Wings Coach Mike Babcock (Source: Detroit News) "Howard was hit during practice before the game and it affected him during the game. He wasn't seeing good, or something like that." This doesn't sound good for Howard who will have further test done.

Detroit replaced Howard with Jonas Gustavsson at the 11:22 mark of the first period and he stopped 16 of the 18 shots he faced. For now expect Gustavsson to be the starter as he is the only proven NHL goalie left in their organization after losing
Joey MacDonald
on waivers. Gustavsson put up decent numbers on a terrible Toronto Maple Leafs team so count on better numbers playing for a veteran Detroit team. Take the gamble now and grab him in case Howard is out long term.

Detroit Free Press just reported that Howard was cleared to play, which is great news for Howard owners but with a head injury dress with caution as he may get a rest to be sure.

Marian Hossa took an elbow to the head from Vancouver Canucks forward Jannik Hansen and left the game in the third period. The extent of the injury is still uncertain but with his past injury woes there is reasons for concern.

{youtube}7LNckFS-7j8{/youtube}

Hossa suffered a major head injury last season after Raffi Torres took him out. He is a vital player for the Chicago Blackhawks so count on them taking every precaution. With the start they have had playoffs are basically a lock so there is no reason to rush him back so expect him to miss a few games for sure.

Jumping up to the second line to play with Jonathan Toews and Brandon Saad should be Viktor Stalberg
. Despite struggling over the last five games with zero points he did play quite a bit last season with Toews so that chemistry is already there. Stalberg looked solid last night against the Canucks, especially when he blew by the Vancouver defenseman for a great scoring chance, count on him finding his offensive game once on the second line.

Kari Lehtonen left 13:49 into the game against the Canucks with a groin injury and didn't suit up for the next game against the Calgary Flames. This is very concerning news as he is a very injury prone goaltender who missed 63 games since December 2005 with groin injuries.

With Lehtonen out Richard Bachman now becomes the starter for the Dallas Stars. He has all of 24 games experience in the NHL and has a 9-8-1 record, posting a 2.97 GAA and SV% of .901. Bachman started against the Flames on Sunday and stopped 22 of 26 shots; he took a 3-1 lead into the third but gave up three goals to take the loss.

If Lehtonen is out for a long time and Bachman falters expect the Stars to make a trade for a proven goaltender. Dallas is right in the mix for a playoff spot, but in a shortened season where every game counts if they can't get quality goaltending they will have to bring someone in.

Jeff Skinner received great news that he doesn't have a concussion and is being treated for an upper body injury (source: Raleigh News & Observer). Fantasy owners are rejoicing as Skinner missed 16 games last season due to a concussion so suffering a second one so soon could have been terrible.

Coming off being named the NHL's third star of the week and now Jiri Tlusty gets to play on the first line with
Eric Staal
and
Alexander Semin
. He has gone pointless in the last two games but tends to score points in bunches so hopefully he can get on a roll playing on the top line.

Pull Off the Band-Aid (poised for a return to action):

Jaroslav Halak will be in net Wednesday for the St. Louis Blues according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch after being out with a groin injury. Halak has been out since February after injuring his groin against the Red Wings. He is 3-0-0 this season with two shutouts and a 2.10 GAA. Halak's return should send Jake Allen back to Peoria (AHL) despite how well he has played in the NHL.

Joni Pitkanen practiced Wednesday and could be ready to go for Thursday game according to Hurricanes coach Kirk Muller. Pitkanen who has missed two games due to a lower body injury suffered last Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils. Pitkanen is solid in roto pools as he puts up solid numbers in multiple categories. His return will likely send Michal Jordan back to Charlotte (AHL).

Johan Franzen could return Thursday hip flexor after missing four games. Franzen has points in seven of the 12 games he has played, scoring three goals and nine points. His return could mean the end for Joakim Andersson in the NHL.

Cam Fowler is close to returning to action for the Anaheim Ducks after being hit into the boards by Jarret Stoll back on February 2. He won't play till he is 100% but the good news is that he has been symptom free for four or five days (source: Orange County Register) so he is very close.

Radim Vrbata should be back in the line-up for Saturday after suffering a lower body injury on Saturday against the Columbus Blue Jackets. According to the Arizona Republic Vrbata skated briefly on Monday but was grimacing throughout. Vrbata's return means Nick Johnson goes back to being a healthy scratch.

Andrej Meszaros returned to practice last week after being out since January 24 with a shoulder injury. He could be ready to go before the month is over. The Flyer's defence could really use him this season with the departure of Matt Carle and potential retirement of Chris Pronger.

Cam Atkinson (ankle sprain) and Artem Anisimov (foot) both are ready to get back on the ice as early as Thursday against Detroit as their injuries have healed up (source: Columbus Dispatch). The Blue Jackets need offense and these two guys will definitely help. Sean Collins and Nicholas Drazenovic will be on their way back to Springfield (AHL) once both are cleared to play.

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