



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 2019

## THE ATHLETIC

### Consider the All-Star Game another box checked on Sebastian Aho's road to stardom

By Sara Civian

PHILADELPHIA — It was the Hurricanes' 2017-18 season opener — a 5-4 shootout win over Minnesota — and Sebastian Aho's two assists had just earned him the oh-so-coveted First Star of the night

"I think you're getting used to this," Fox Sports' Mike Maniscalco quipped on the post-game show.

"No," Aho looked out at the PNC Arena crowd. "Never."

A season and a half later, Aho leads the Hurricanes in goals (15), assists (24) and points (39) through 38 games. His season started on a franchise-best 12-game point streak and keeps checking off boxes on the road to near-inevitable stardom.

The latest item off the list is his first invitation to the NHL All-Star Game. The defense-heavy Hurricanes haven't sent a forward to the event since 2011. That's why a weekend that's mostly just a fun opportunity for Aho to connect with the NHL's best also represents the weight he's had to carry on a team with well-documented scoring woes.

"I think it's obvious that would be the player — I don't think there's any surprise there," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said Thursday. "... You just hope he gets through it and is somewhat refreshed when he comes back because we're obviously going to need him on top of his game. ... As a coach, you'd almost rather have them get the rest at that time, but those are memories he'll be able to cherish."

Brind'Amour's ability to empathize with young stars has been an obvious strength in his head coaching career. Perhaps it's most evident in what he's reluctant to say and do — he'll refer to 21-year-old Aho as the team's "star veteran" then laugh at the ridiculousness, he'll temper expectations and responsibilities for 18-year-old Andrei Svechnikov, he'll call on more experienced players to step up when things are going awry.

Careful as Brind'Amour is to protect Aho from pressure, stardom is coming for him. And much like Aho at 3-on-3, there's not much anyone can do to slow it down. He'll flex those 3-on-3 skills among others on a national stage come All-Star weekend. Might as well take advantage of the perks,

including a \$212,500 Schedule 'A' bonus that comes with Aho's All-Star invitation.

"It's the first time for me, so it's pretty exciting," Aho said. "It's going to be a cool experience for me, I'm sure."

Brind'Amour, who played in an All-Star game as a Flyer in 1992, got to break the news after the team's flight to Philadelphia on Wednesday. As usual, his words came with a side of simple advice.

"Just enjoy it," Brind'Amour said he told Aho. "You certainly don't want to do anything but have fun with it. Who wins, who loses all that, it's just about really taking advantage of being around people you wouldn't normally be around. He'll have some great teammates and get to know them a little bit, watch them, get to see what they're doing and learn a little bit."

With three All-Star Game appearances under his belt, Justin Faulk took Aho to dinner last night and gave him his rundown of the weekend. Who knows exactly what that entailed, but you can bet he echoed Brind'Amour's "just enjoy it" advice.

The Metro division roster features elite players at all different stages of stardom like Sidney Crosby, Claude Giroux, Taylor Hall and Mat Barzal.

Who is Aho most excited to play with?

"They're all great players," he told me. "So all of them."

Fair enough.

Maybe he'll pick up a few sharp-angle pointers from Crosby or some hair product recommendations from Barzal. His Hurricanes teammates mostly just hope he has all the fun he deserves.

"He already plays on an All-Star roster," one teammate responded, jokingly awaiting Aho's emphatic agreement.

It was the latest of many tongue-in-cheek attempts to make Aho laugh this season.

Maybe Aho was right back in 2017 — maybe he'll never quite get used to his stardom. He's certainly too young for the weight of a team on his shoulders. He'll take it all as it comes, anyway, and his teammates will help one smirk at a time.



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## Preview: Blue Jackets vs. Hurricanes

Divisional showdown brings Columbus to town

by Michael Smith

Following a sweep of a home-and-home set with the Philadelphia Flyers, the Carolina Hurricanes return home for a brief stop and a Friday night divisional match-up against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The Hurricanes scored two victories over the Flyers in the span of four days and will now play their fifth straight divisional game before jet-setting again for a three-game road trip.

### All-Star Efforts

Sebastian Aho was named to the Metropolitan Division All-Star team on Wednesday evening, and shortly after, Teuvo Teravainen was designated as the Canes' "Last Man In" nominee, the winner of which will be determined via a fan vote.

Both players followed it up with multi-point efforts on Thursday in Philadelphia.

Teuvo Teravainen led the way with three points. In the second period, he scored a power-play goal (the team's second of the game) off a beauty of a seam pass from Aho. With the Canes' four-goal lead reduced to just a goal in the third period, Teravainen beat Michal Neuvirth on a 2-on-1 rush to stall the Flyers' momentum and essentially seal the victory.

"I kind of took my time to think if I should pass or not," Teravainen said. "I feel like I had so much time to shoot it. I didn't want to just make a bad pass and it's over, so at least we get a shot if I just shoot it."

Aho recorded two primary assists, helping to orchestrate both power-play goals that snapped the Canes' seven-game drought on the man advantage.

"We need our power play to get wins," Aho said. "We made some nice plays and worked really hard."

"They moved the puck a little better," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "The work ethic was there. Had a good couple of entries, which helps get the zone time, and pucks went in when they shot them."

### Reinforcements Needed?

Center Clark Bishop left Thursday's game in the first period after taking an awkward spill along the far boards. He was ruled out for the remainder of the contest with a lower-body injury, and his status for tonight's game is unknown.

Should he be unavailable, the Hurricanes will need another body from Charlotte. Jordan Staal has missed the last five games with lingering concussion-related symptoms and is not yet ready to return to the lineup.

### The Last Meeting

Captain Justin Williams called the last meeting between these two teams "a dud" for the Hurricanes, who were bested, 4-1. It was the lone regulation loss of the Canes' season-long, six-game homestand in mid-November. Cam Atkinson netted a hat trick, while Aho was the lone goal scorer for the Canes.

### The Opposition

The Blue Jackets have won six of their last seven games, a stretch that includes four one-goal wins (one in overtime) and two shutouts. Columbus has been idle since New Year's Eve, when they doubled up the Ottawa Senators, 6-3, at home. The Blue Jackets, who are 23-13-3 with 49 points, now begin a three-game road trip in Raleigh.

### AT THE RINK

The Hurricanes' Military Drive, which benefits servicemen and women through a partnership with the USO of North Carolina, begins tonight. Fans who donate granola bars, chewing gum or beef jerky will be entered to win a gameday experience or autographed prize.

The All-Star Chef Series welcomes chefs Jacob Boehm (Snap Pea Underground) and Mike Lee (M Sushi) to PNC Arena, where they will be serving a tasty menu of food in a special pregame event. Limited seats remain!

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## Recap: Hurricanes Fend Off Flyers

Teravainen scores two goals in 5-3 win

by Michael Smith

PHILADELPHIA - The Carolina Hurricanes survived a furious comeback attempt by Philadelphia and hung on to defeat the Flyers, 5-3.

The Hurricanes scored four straight goals to assemble a healthy lead, only to see it nearly dissipate in the third period. But, led by Teuvo Teravainen's three points, including a big insurance marker in the third, the Canes held on for their second straight victory against the Flyers.

Here are five takeaways from the Canes' first game of 2019.

### One

A win's a win, right?

After the Canes took a 4-0 lead early in the third period, the Flyers methodically worked their way back into the game, taking advantage of a couple of power-play opportunities after their man advantage was listless in the first 40 minutes.

The Flyers cut the deficit to just a goal, but the Canes held on and got a big odd-man rush goal from Teravainen, his second of the game, with less than five minutes to play in regulation. Dagger.

"Maybe we took our foot off the gas, but still a big win and a big two points," Sebastian Aho said. "I don't care how we win."

"We'll take it. We needed it," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It wasn't our best game, but our goalie was good when he needed to be, and we played well enough early to get that lead."

### Two

New year, new power play.

After going 0-for-25 in their last seven games (and not connecting on their first opportunity tonight), the Hurricanes scored goals on two straight power-play opportunities in what was a three-goal second period.

"It was huge. It's been tough lately," Teravainen said. "We've done some good things, but there's a lot of times we're not hard enough and make stupid plays. Then they clear the puck, and it's over. We have to be hard on pucks and confident out there."

"We need our power play to get wins," Aho said. "We made some nice plays and worked really hard."

Justin Williams scored the team's first power-play goal since Dec. 14 just 68 seconds after Dougie Hamilton fired the opening salvo. Williams found a soft spot in the Flyers' coverage at the right faceoff dot and scored on a one-timer off a pass from Aho.

"They moved the puck a little better," Brind'Amour said. "The work ethic was there. Had a good couple of entries, which helps get the zone time, and pucks went in when they shot them."

Later in the period, Aho hesitated like he was going to shoot before zipping a no-look pass cross-ice to Teravainen for another one-time tally.

"I saw him and thought he might have the seam pass for me," Teravainen said of the play. "I was ready for that pass. Right on my tape. Pretty easy."

### Three

After netting three goals in the second period, the Canes bookended the Flyers' production in the third with two crucial goals.

Five minutes into the final frame, Warren Foegele redirected a Justin Faulk point shot. Saku Maenalanen, playing in his second NHL game, was also cruising through the slot and providing traffic in front. It was a well-executed play, and sharp hand-eye coordination from Foegele to score his fifth goal of the season, the goal that proved to be the game-winner.

Late in the period, with both the Flyers and the Wells Fargo Center crowd buzzing at the thought of a four-goal comeback, Teravainen raced down the ice with Aho on a 2-on-1. Teravainen held onto the puck and fired a wrist shot that leaked through the five-hole of Michal Neuvirth and into the net.

"I kind of took my time to think if I should pass or not," Teravainen said. "I feel like I had so much time to shoot it. I didn't want to just make a bad pass and it's over, so at least we get a shot if I just shoot it."

"It's been tough to get him to shoot. That's not his nature," Brind'Amour said. "He's unselfish and wants to make other players put the goals in, but we needed some goals. We haven't had them all year."

### Four

Considering the Flyers had dropped four consecutive games and were shut out 4-0 by Nashville on New Year's Day, it was only expected that, down 4-0 again, they were going to push back with a vigor.

That they did, and in a span of 4:41, the Flyers scored three goals to take a big bite out of the Canes' lead and cut the deficit to just a goal.

"I didn't like our start to the third," Teravainen said. "They got a few goals and a few power plays. They got momentum, and it was a new game. We did a good job, anyway, to stick with it."

"I think we were a little sloppy in the third period. They made some good plays, too," Aho said. "On the power play, those guys are really dangerous."

The comeback attempt began with a power-play goal from Wayne Simmonds just 1:16 after Foegele's goal made it 4-0. Only 66 seconds later, Sean Couturier redirected the puck in the slot to slice the Canes' lead in half. Then, it was James van Riemsdyk corralling a rebound on another power play to bring Philadelphia within a goal.



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"A couple power-play goals, and it just changes the whole complexion of the game," Brind'Amour said. "Yeah, we sat back. It's what happens. You get up four, and you tell them not to (sit back), but it's human nature. I've been there many, many times. The other team is playing with nothing to lose, and we just sat back. It's a great lesson. It's a good thing we had a 4-0 lead because they pumped a few in there."

"It's always hard when you have a four-goal lead, and then it's a one-goal lead. But you have to keep believing that you're still winning the game," Teravainen said. "Play simple, and you might get a 2-on-1 or something because they're cheating. That's what happened. That's a good goal for us."

Five

In the first period, Clark Bishop did the splits in an awkward fall along the far boards. He left the game and did not return due to a lower-body injury.

"It's tough when you lose a guy in the first period like that early because now it does put a lot of onus on other guys to play a little more," Brind'Amour said. "They contributed, and that's the key. We need everyone to contribute in some form or fashion regardless of how many minutes you get."

The Canes are back in action again on Friday night, so they might have to make a quick call to Charlotte if Bishop is unavailable.

Up Next

The Canes will make a pit-stop back in Raleigh to host the Columbus Blue Jackets on Friday night. Then it's back on the road for three straight games.



## Teravainen has three points, Hurricanes hold off Flyers

Scores two goals, has assist; Philadelphia rally in third comes up short

by Adam Kimelman

PHILADELPHIA -- Teuvo Teravainen scored two goals and had an assist for the Carolina Hurricanes in a 5-3 win against the Philadelphia Flyers at Wells Fargo Center on Thursday.

Dougie Hamilton had a goal and an assist, and Justin Williams and Warren Foegele scored for Carolina (17-17-5), which was coming off a 3-1 win against Philadelphia on Monday. Petr Mrazek, in his 200th NHL game, made 34 saves.

The Hurricanes have consecutive victories for the first time since winning three straight Nov. 18-23.

"We know where we're sitting (in the standings), so we know we need the points right now," Hamilton said. "Two big games and we got a lot of games coming up before the All-Star break and stuff, so we've got to get on a little roll."

Wayne Simmonds, Sean Couturier and James van Riemsdyk scored for the Flyers (15-20-5), who have lost five in a row. Michal Neuvirth made 23 saves.

"It's like quicksand," Simmonds said. "You're trying to get out, and it feels like it's getting deeper."

Teravainen's third game since Dec. 14 with at least three points provided the spark for the Hurricanes. He had an assist on Hamilton's goal 1:56 into the second period that gave Carolina a 1-0 lead. After Williams scored on the power

play at 3:04 of the second to make it 2-0, Teravainen's power-play goal with 2:40 left in the period made it 3-0.

Foegele scored 5:01 into the third to give the Hurricanes a 4-0 lead.

"It seems like we're right in the game," Couturier said. "Shots are pretty even, it's up and down the ice, and we get down a goal and it gets frustrating not scoring, especially when you're getting 20-25 shots and you're not getting the bounces, and they get one bounce and it's in the back of your net and you're just chasing the game."

After the Flyers rallied with three goals in 4:41 to get to within 4-3, Teravainen finished a 2-on-1 with 4:47 remaining to make it 5-3.

"It's always hard when you have a four-goal lead and it becomes a one-goal lead," Teravainen said. "You have to keep believing. You're still winning the game. Play simple and you might get a 2-on-1 or something because they're cheating, (and) that's what happened."

Teravainen, who was named Carolina's representative for the 2019 NHL All-Star Last Men In presented by adidas fan vote Wednesday, made a strong audition to join Aho on the Metropolitan Division team at the 2019 Honda NHL All-Star Game at SAP Center in San Jose on Jan. 26.

"It would be great to see [Teravainen] and Aho go together," Hamilton said. "They've been carrying our team so far. Both so smart and so good together. They were huge for us tonight."



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Simmonds scored on the power play at 6:17 of the third to make it 4-1.

Couturier tipped a Claude Giroux centering pass to cut the Hurricanes lead to 4-2 at 7:23. The goal was upheld after Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour challenged for goaltender interference by Travis Konecny.

Van Riemsdyk scored a power-play goal at 10:58 to make it 4-3.

They said it

"We haven't seen anything like this really where we actually score on some chances. We'll take it. We needed it. It wasn't our best game, but our goalie (Petr Mrazek) was good when he needed to be. We played well enough early to get that lead, so that's definitely the recipe." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

"The big word here is frustration. Trying to find a way to win a hockey game, it doesn't matter how you do it, you just have to find a way, and right now we're not, so frustration builds up and it's not easy right now." -- Flyers captain Claude Giroux

Need to know

Hurricanes forward Clark Bishop left the game with a lower-body injury with 8:20 left in the first period, but Brind'Amour said he was fine. ... The Hurricanes scored on the power play for the first time in eight games. ... The Flyers scored multiple power-play goals for the first time since Nov. 17. ... Philadelphia goalie Brian Elliott, out since Nov. 15 with a lower-body injury, could return to practice in the next 10-14 days. ... Flyers forward Nolan Patrick, who has missed four games with an upper-body injury, could be cleared for contact Friday. ... Philadelphia defenseman Andrew MacDonald, out Thursday with a lower-body injury, won't play against the Calgary Flames on Saturday but could be back against the St. Louis Blues on Monday.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Columbus Blue Jackets on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET; FS-CR, FS-O, NHL.TV)

Flyers: Host the Calgary Flames on Saturday (1 p.m. ET; NHLN, NBCSP, SNW, NHL.TV)



## Hurricanes score 3 goals in 2nd to beat Flyers 5-3

By DAN GELSTON

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Carolina had its second win over the Flyers in a week when the team's social media department had fun trolling the NHL's most popular mascot: "Gritty victory."

Gritty had to keep his googily eyes open and watch the latest Flyers' flop. Some Flyers fans tried to avoid the latest disaster and wore paper bags over their heads.

Dougie Hamilton, Justin Williams and Teuvo Teravainen scored second-period goals to lead the Carolina Hurricanes past the woeful Philadelphia Flyers, 5-3 on Thursday night.

The Flyers are a mess and there may be little choice ahead but to dismantle the team by the trade deadline.

"It's like quicksand right now. We're trying to get out and it feels like it's just getting deeper," Flyers forward Wayne Simmonds said.

The Flyers fired coach Dave Hakstol and general manager Ron Hextall last month and the shake-up has yet to spark any kind of sign of playoff life for a franchise that hasn't won a Stanley Cup since 1975. The Flyers lost their fifth straight game and fell to 3-5-1 under interim coach Scott Gordon since his promotion from the AHL.

Simmonds scored in the third to make it 4-1 and end Philly's scoreless streak that stretched more than 123 minutes. The Flyers got hot too late in the game: Sean Couturier and

James van Riemsdyk also scored goals the third, but the rally died at 4-3.

Teravainen's second goal of the game ended the Flyers' comeback and secured Carolina's third win since Dec. 20. Petr Mrazek stopped 31 shots for the Hurricanes.

"We did a good job just to stick with it, get the pucks deep and do our thing," Teravainen said.

The Flyers lost the last four games of a five-game road trip and not even a return home could help the hapless franchise. Once a tough ticket, there were thousands of empty seats at faceoff and the crowd thinned out after the Hurricanes scored three times in the second.

"I thought we were in the game, it was tight out there," Couturier said. "The next thing you know, a few penalties, the PK doesn't do the job and we're chasing the game."

Philly fans finally went wild late in the second — when an Eagles highlight video flashed on the big screen and the crowd belted out the lyrics to "Fly, Eagles, Fly."

The Hurricanes have their own issues and have only four more points (39) than last-place Philadelphia. But the Hurricanes played like a team with playoff hopes and

"We know where we're sitting, so we know we need the points right now," Hamilton said. "We've got a lot of games coming up before the All-Star break and stuff, so we've got to get on a little roll and help us get back in the standings."



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Hamilton took a shot in his 204th straight game and connected with his fourth goal of the season only 1:56 into the period. Hamilton beat Michal Neuvirth for his first goal in 22 games.

Williams, a former Flyer, scored his eighth of the season and Teravainen followed with his ninth late in the period for consecutive power-play goals for the Flyers.

Neuvirth was helpless when Warren Foegele scored on a deflection for a 4-0 lead early in the third. What seemed like an ordinary goal in a rout turned into the cushion the Hurricanes needed for the second win over the Flyers this week. The Hurricanes scratched out a 3-1 win on Monday at home.

"I don't care how we win. I'll take every point," Carolina forward Sebastian Aho said.

NOTES: The Flyers had updates on several players suffering from undisclosed injuries: G Brian Elliott (back practicing in 10 to 14 days); C Corban Knight (return to play mid to late February); D Andrew MacDonald (out at least one more game); D Sam Morin (ACL surgery, mid-February); C Nolan Patrick (return next week); and G Anthony Stolarz (practice this weekend). ... Mrazek played in his 200th career game.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host Columbus on Friday night.

Flyers: Host Calgary on Saturday.



## 2019 NHL All-Star Game: Rosters announced for all four divisional teams

The NHL released the four divisional rosters Wednesday night

by Pete Blackburn

The NHL released rosters for the 2019 NHL All-Star Game on Wednesday night, giving fans a look at the players that will be representing the league's four divisions during the event in San Jose, California, later this month.

The roster unveil comes one week after the four fan-voted captains -- Toronto's Auston Matthews (Atlantic), Washington's Alex Ovechkin (Metropolitan), Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon (Central) and Edmonton's Connor McDavid (Pacific) -- were announced. Ovechkin has since voluntarily withdrawn from the event in order to rest for the second half.

While fans got to choose the four captains for each team, the league's hockey operations department selected most of the remaining 40 players (10 from each division) for the game. However, for the first time this year, fans will also get to choose the "last man in" on each team.

Here are the rosters for each division:

Atlantic

Jack Eichel, Buffalo Sabres

Nikita Kucherov, Tampa Bay Lightning

Auston Matthews, Toronto Maple Leafs

David Pastrnak, Boston Bruins

Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay Lightning

John Tavares, Toronto Maple Leafs

Thomas Chabot, Ottawa Senators

Keith Yandle, Florida Panthers

Jimmy Howard, Detroit Red Wings

Carey Price, Montreal Canadiens

Metropolitan

Sebastian Aho, Carolina Hurricanes

Cam Atkinson, Columbus Blue Jackets

Mathew Barzal, New York Islanders

Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh Penguins

Claude Giroux, Philadelphia Flyers

Taylor Hall, New Jersey Devils

John Carlson, Washington Capitals

Seth Jones, Columbus Blue Jackets

Braden Holtby, Washington Capitals

Henrik Lundqvist, New York Rangers

Central

Patrick Kane, Chicago Blackhawks

Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche

Ryan O'Reilly, St. Louis Blues

Mikko Rantanen, Colorado Avalanche

Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg Jets

Blake Wheeler, Winnipeg Jets

Miro Heiskanen, Dallas Stars

Roman Josi, Nashville Predators

Devan Dubnyk, Minnesota Wild

Pekka Rinne, Nashville Predators



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Pacific

Johnny Gaudreau, Calgary Flames

Clayton Keller, Arizona Coyotes

Connor McDavid, Edmonton Oilers

Joe Pavelski, San Jose Sharks

Elias Pettersson, Vancouver Canucks

Brent Burns, San Jose Sharks

Drew Doughty, Los Angeles Kings

Erik Karlsson, San Jose Sharks

Marc-Andre Fleury, Vegas Golden Knights

John Gibson, Anaheim Ducks

As is usually the case when All-Star rosters are released, there are some notable snubs absent from the list. The league does its best to reward all of the deserving

candidates and there's certainly no shortage of talent right now, but the NHL has four key criteria points that it tries to meet with its selections and that often leaves some qualified players on the outside looking in.

That inclusion criteria is as follows:

One representative from each of the league's 31 teams

The top 10 to 15 league scorers at the time of selection

As many marketed league "stars" as possible

Multiple players from the host team/city

As has been the case over the past few years, the All-Star Game will be played in the format of a 3-on-3 tournament. The Metropolitan and Atlantic Division will play a 20-minute game, followed by a 20-minute game between the Central and Pacific Divisions. The winners of those two games will meet in a championship game (also 20 minutes) with the winning team splitting a \$1 million cash prize.



## Recap: Canes stave off late surge in Philly to defeat Flyers 5-3

Thanks to two goals from their slumping power play and big nights from Teuvo Teravainen, Dougie Hamilton and Sebastian Aho, the Canes beat the Flyers for the second game in a row.

By Andrew Schnitker

The Carolina Hurricanes should probably schedule the Philadelphia Flyers more often. The Canes survived a third-period scare and topped the Flyers 5-3 at Wells Fargo Center Thursday night.

Teuvo Teravainen had two goals and an assist for the Canes (17-17-5). Dougie Hamilton had a goal and an assist, Warren Foegele and Justin Williams also scored, and Sebastian Aho had two assists.

The power play finally broke out of its slump with two goals. Petr Mrazek stopped 33 of 36 shots in net in his first game against the Flyers after a less than successful run in Philly last season. Former Flyer Rod Brind'Amour won his first visit as a head coach.

The Canes nearly took a 1-0 lead early in the first period; Michael Ferland's backhand shot beat Neuvirth but struck the post.

Clark Bishop skated off doubled over in pain after a collision along the boards with Robert Hagg about halfway through the first period and went to the locker room. He did not return to the game.

The Canes caught a break with about five minutes left in the first; with Jordan Weal breaking in on Mrazek, Wayne

Simmonds was called for interference behind the play. The Carolina power play, however, lasted all of two seconds before Williams got the gate for tripping in the offensive zone right off the draw.

Hamilton put Carolina up 1-0 a little over two minutes into the second period, creeping in from the point and zipping a shot over Carter Hart's glove from the left circle. The goal was Hamilton's first since Nov. 10.

Brett Pesce went to the locker room after taking a shot off his hand; but quickly returned to the game.

Williams made it 2-0 barely a minute later with a power-play goal from the slot, the Canes' first power-play tally in 27 attempts. Hamilton earned an assist on the goal, giving him his first multi-point game as a Hurricane.

The Canes scored their second power-play goal of the game late in the third period; Aho slid a perfect pass to Teravainen at the left circle, and he one-timed a shot home to make it 3-0.

Foegele extended Carolina's lead early in the third, tipping home a point shot from Faulk. Saku Maenalanen was initially awarded an assist when it appeared he also got a piece of Faulk's shot, which would have given him his first NHL point, but it was later determined he did not touch the puck.

But despite the Canes controlling play for long stretches in the first 40-plus minutes, the Flyers roared back and made the game way more interesting than it had any business being.



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Shortly after Foegele's goal, Simmonds started the Flyers' rally, breaking Mrazek's shutout bid with a power-play goal. He finished off a sharp feed from Jakub Voracek that gave life to the Flyers' woebegone power play. A little over a minute later, Sean Couturier brought the Flyers within two goals, the beneficiary of a few fortunate bounces. Brind'Amour challenged that Travis Konecny interfered with Mrazek, taking advantage of the timeout to calm his team down, but the goal was predictably upheld.

And the Flyers weren't done yet. James van Riemsdyk potted a rebound goal on another Flyers power play with about eight minutes left and Hamilton in the box to bring Philly within one.

Finally, with 4:47 to go, Teravainen's second of the game gave the Canes their breathing room back. Using Aho as a decoy, Teravainen burst into the zone on a 2-on-1 and had his shot in mind all the way, beating Neuvirth through the pads to restore a two-goal Carolina lead.

Mrazek did the rest, making a pair of spectacular saves on Couturier and Simmonds, doing a split on the latter to deny the goal with the Flyers' net empty, to seal the game and give the Canes a victory to open the new year.

It'll be a quick turnaround for the Canes, as Columbus comes to Raleigh Friday night

## Janne Kuokkanen, Trevor Carrick named AHL All-Stars

The two players will represent a dominant Charlotte Checkers team in Springfield.

By Justin Lape

The American Hockey League announced Thursday that Charlotte Checkers defenseman Trevor Carrick and forward Janne Kuokkanen will represent the Checkers in the 2019 AHL All-Star Classic. Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci was previously announced as the coach for the Atlantic Division on Dec. 31st.

Carrick leads all Checkers defenseman with 21 points (5 goals, 16 assists) in 33 games this season. Carrick's play earned him a brief NHL call-up earlier this season. The veteran defenseman has been a calming force for the Checkers who remain one of the younger teams in the American Hockey League. This is Carrick's second All-Star game selection; he was also named to the 2016 All-Star team.

Kuokkanen has had an up and down year — literally. The Finnish forward has split time between Raleigh and Charlotte but has been dominant offensively in his time in the AHL. He's posted 27 points (11 goals, 16 assists) in 29 games this season and is one pace to beat his 40 points from last year. This is Kuokkanen's 1st All-Star selection.

(Incidentally, Sebastian Aho will be representing both leagues at their respective All-Star weekends:)

The AHL All-Star weekend will take place on Jan. 27-28 in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Below is the press release from the Checkers:

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Carrick and Kuokkanen will join Checkers coach Mike Vellucci at the event that will be held in Springfield, Massachusetts, on Jan. 27-28.

This marks the second career selection for Carrick, who joins former Checker Jerome Samson (2011, 2012) as the only players to earn multiple All-Star selections with the team. A 24-year-old native of Stouffville, Ontario, who made his previous All-Star appearance in 2016, Carrick is currently tied for 12th among AHL defensemen with 21 points (5g, 16a) in 33 games. He is also tied for third among league blueliners with 10 power-play assists and is tied for second with three game-winning goals. A fourth-round draft pick by the Carolina Hurricanes in 2012, Carrick has spent all five of his professional seasons with the Checkers and currently ranks second in team history with 309 games played. He also ranks third with 119 assists, 155 points and 329 penalty minutes. Carrick has appeared in four career NHL games with the Hurricanes, including one this season.

This is the first All-Star selection for Kuokkanen, who ranks second on the Checkers with 27 points in 29 games. The 20-year-old also ranks second on the team with 11 goals that equal the amount he posted in 60 games as a rookie last season. A native of Oulunsalo, Finland, he also leads the team with six power-play goals and is tied for third on the team with 16 assists. Kuokkanen has played 11 career NHL games with the Hurricanes, who chose him with the 43rd overall draft selection in 2016, including seven this season.

## Metropolitan Division Weekly Roundup: Tumbling Into 2019

Teams are all coming out of their holiday breaks and getting settled in until the All-Star break.

By Zeke Lukow

1. Washington Capitals: 51 Points (24-11-3)

Alex Ovechkin is channeling his inner Sidney Crosby and will skip the All-Star Game on January 26. He will face a one game suspension which he will serve in either the game

before or after the exhibition. Ovechkin, who is now 33 years old and is coming off of the most hockey he has ever played in a year, cited needing rest so he can focus on the second half of the season. It is a good move for him and the Capitals, and that's what ultimately makes the most sense.

I know that the NHL says they need all of the stars for the game to help 'grow the sport,' but Ovechkin has already done his job there. He has re-energized an entire hockey



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market in Washington, D.C. since he was drafted, generated a ton of interest in Russia, and has countless highlight goals that have still made SportsCenter's top 10 plays despite their anti-hockey bias. Also if the NHL cared about growing the sport, they would let players in the Olympics, and who knows — this could be Ovi's way of retaliating against the league's decision for PyeongChang.

## 2. Pittsburgh Penguins: 50 Points (22-12-6)

The Penguins currently have the league's longest active win-streak with seven straight wins. They also have a record of 9-1-0 in their last 10 games which is only behind the Lightning for the best record in that timespan. A big part of this success has been the successful play of their goaltending. Since December 13<sup>th</sup> the Penguins have given up more than two goals just three times. They have conceded up the third-fewest goals in that time, with 19.

Matt Murray has won six straight games with a save percentage of .959 and a 1.38 GAA. This is great news for the Penguins. Murray has had back to back up-and-down seasons and has struggled to stay healthy. This is the first time since Marc-Andre Fleury left where Murray has been able to take over games and shut teams down. And if he isn't starting well, backup Casey DeSmith also has a .944 save percentage in his last four starts.

## 3. Columbus Blue Jackets: 49 Points (23-13-3)

The Blue Jackets are currently without their captain Nick Foligno, who is at home with his family while his daughter recovers from surgery. Foligno missed Monday night's game against the Senators but is planning to come back as soon as possible. Hopefully that means he will be back on the ice when they face the Hurricanes on Friday. The Blue Jackets didn't miss a beat and were able to beat the Senators 6-3 after scoring five goals in the third period.

On a lighter and more fun note, before Christmas Jackets coach John Tortorella came out in favor of shooting for an empty net from wherever a player is on the ice. The most common strategy is to wait until the red line, so they don't commit icing, but not for the Blue Jackets. This is surprising because it is entertaining and fun, where as Tortorella normally has, ahem, somewhat more boring policies and strategies. It will be fun to see if this catches on around the league if the Blue Jackets score empty net goals consistently from their own zone.

## 4. New York Islanders: 46 Points (21-13-4)

The Islanders have injected more youth in their line up with 2014 fourth round pick Devon Toews breaking into the NHL. He joined the team on December 23<sup>rd</sup> and has played in all four games since joining the team. He also joins Josh Ho-Sang who is getting consistent time ever since cracking the lineup on December 15<sup>th</sup>. Since getting the two 2014 draft picks together, the Islanders have won four straight games by a combined score of 16-5.

Though only Ho-Sang has found the scoreboard with two goals, they seem to have really injected the team with offense. Since December 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Islanders rank 9<sup>th</sup> in shots for with 125 or 31.25 shots per game. Up until this point the Isles ranked second to last with only 948 shots per game or 27.88 shots per game. Four games is a very small sample

size, but it appears that the two youngsters are making an immediate impact in the roster and are helping to generate more chances for the offense without sacrificing on the defensive end.

## 5. New York Rangers: 41 Points (17-15-7)

The Rangers are performing better than nearly everyone expected before the season and find themselves in fifth in the division. Although some are calling for the Rangers to keep their team together or add pieces, this would be a terrible move for the team's future. While the Rangers are in fifth, they had a record of just 4-5-3 in December, and that includes winning their last two games of the month. They also lost last night 7-2 to the Penguins, which shows what happens when they play skilled teams.

While it may seem tempting to declare a rebuild over early and make another push, it is more important to make sure that the team and organization is fully stocked. The Rangers do have three rookies who have played significant time this year in Brett Howden, Filip Chytil, and Lias Andersson. But they still need to work on their defensive depth and finish plugging the holes. It does them no good to not have a fire sale at the deadline to increase their odds in the draft lottery as much as possible.

## 6. New Jersey Devils: 37 Points (15-17-7)

The Devils placed Taylor Hall on Injured Reserve retroactive to December 23. Hall had missed three straight games with a lower-body injury before the move was made allowing for an additional roster spot before heading on a four-game road trip to the Southwest. This is the second time that Hall has missed games for this lower-body injury. He initially missed time earlier in December, when he missed two games on December 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>.

This will likely lead the Devils to keep him out longer until he is fully recovered. He tried to come back after four games last time, but he was unable to continue playing. There is also no rush because the Devils are climbing the standings, winning three games in a row including back-to-back shutouts against the Hurricanes and the Canucks before losing last night to the Stars. It makes more sense to let him fully recover while the team is playing well, which will allow for a better push later in the season rather than continuing to have him miss time here and there for the rest of the season.

## 7. Carolina Hurricanes: 37 Points (16-17-5)

The Hurricanes now sit in seventh place in the Metro after a 3-6-1 record in their last 10 games and now sit 10 points out of a playoff spot. The big question going into 2019 is how the team and organization will respond to this. Even last year when being a couple of points out of a playoff spot, the Canes sold at the deadline. But how much selling can they do? The organization is already packed with young depth, but lack top skill.

If the Canes were looking to sell, their only pending UFAs are Justin Williams, Jordan Martinook, and Micheal Ferland. Ferland would be the obvious target for most teams, but that would be catastrophic for the Canes. This is a player they swapped a young forward for and is one of the only legitimate top six players on the team. The Canes need to



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lock him up for years to come to also show the players and fans that they are ready to commit and build the team.

But when looking to buy, things can get dicey. Just look at the moves that Peter Chiarelli is making. He's under the gun and it's playoffs or bust for him. Now he is forcing trades and trading picks for marginal players and actually making the Oilers worse. The Canes cannot afford one of these kinds of moves because they don't have the skill depth to be able to miss on a big trade.

## 8. Philadelphia Flyers: 35 Points (15-19-5)

The Flyers now find themselves in the basement of the division with four straight losses. They are 3-4-1 since firing Dave Hakstol which maintains almost the exact same pace the team was on when they fired him. Hakstol coached 31

games (just under four times as many games as Scott Gordon) with a 12-15-4 record. This shows that the team is struggling based more on talent level than say coaching. When looking at the Flyers it is easy to see what is going on, they have the league's worst goaltending.

The Flyers have started five different goalies: Brian Elliott, Carter Hart, Anthony Stolarz, Michal Neuvirth, and Calvin Pickard, all of whom have played at least five games. They respectively rank 31<sup>st</sup>, 51<sup>st</sup>, 67<sup>th</sup>, 68<sup>th</sup>, and 69<sup>th</sup> out of 72 goalies who have played five or more games. Elliott is the only goalie with a save percentage of over .900 with a .911. Hart was looked at as the savior after winning his first two games. However, he has since lost his last three games, including getting pulled against the Hurricanes when he let up three goals on seven shots.



## Trevor Carrick, Janne Kuokkanen Named AHL All Stars

Written by Paul Branecky

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ranks second in team history with 309 games played. He also ranks third with 119 assists, 155 points and 329 penalty minutes. Carrick has appeared in four career NHL games with the Hurricanes, including one this season.

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Carrick, Kuokkanen and the Checkers finish a six-game Canadian road trip with a three-in-three set in Belleville (Friday and Saturday) and Toronto (Sunday) this weekend. They then return to Charlotte to begin a six-game home stand against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins on Friday, Jan. 11.

### TODAY'S LINKS

- <https://theathletic.com/747932/2019/01/03/consider-the-all-star-game-another-box-checked-on-sebastian-ahos-road-to-stardom/>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-columbus-blue-jackets-carolina-hurricanes/c-303539032>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/recap-hurricanes-fend-off-flyers/c-303527606>
- <https://www.nhl.com/news/carolina-hurricanes-philadelphia-flyers-game-recap/c-303517794>
- <https://apnews.com/2247bc8c4de6453fbaf78ea74f1d6b97>
- <https://www.cbssports.com/nhl/news/2019-nhl-all-star-game-rosters-announced-for-all-four-divisional-teams/>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2019/1/3/18167735/recap-canescountry-stave-off-late-surge-in-philly-to-defeat-flyers-5-3>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2019/1/3/18167257/ahl-all-star-roster-janne-kuokkanen-trevor-carrick-charlotte-checkers>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2019/1/3/18166297/metropolitan-division-weekly-roundup-new-years-edition-2019-pittsburgh-penguins-washington-capitals>
- <http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/trevor-carrick-janne-kuokkanen-named-ahl-all-stars>



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## SportScan

Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

1124203 Carolina Hurricanes

Consider the All-Star Game another box checked on Sebastian Aho's road to stardom

By Sara Civian

Jan 3, 2019

PHILADELPHIA — It was the Hurricanes' 2017-18 season opener — a 5-4 shootout win over Minnesota — and Sebastian Aho's two assists had just earned him the oh-so-coveted First Star of the night.

"I think you're getting used to this," Fox Sports' Mike Maniscalco quipped on the post-game show.

"No," Aho looked out at the PNC Arena crowd. "Never."

A season and a half later, Aho leads the Hurricanes in goals (15), assists (24) and points (39) through 38 games. His season started on a franchise-best 12-game point streak and keeps checking off boxes on the road to near-inevitable stardom.

The latest item off the list is his first invitation to the NHL All-Star Game. The defense-heavy Hurricanes haven't sent a forward to the event since 2011. That's why a weekend that's mostly just a fun opportunity for Aho to connect with the NHL's best also represents the weight he's had to carry on a team with well-documented scoring woes.

"I think it's obvious that would be the player — I don't think there's any surprise there," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said Thursday. "... You just hope he gets through it and is somewhat refreshed when he comes back because we're obviously going to need him on top of his game. ... As a coach, you'd almost rather have them get the rest at that time, but those are memories he'll be able to cherish."

Brind'Amour's ability to empathize with young stars has been an obvious strength in his head coaching career. Perhaps it's most evident in what he's reluctant to say and do — he'll refer to 21-year-old Aho as the team's "star veteran" then laugh at the ridiculousness, he'll temper expectations and responsibilities for 18-year-old Andrei Svechnikov, he'll call on more experienced players to step up when things are going awry.

Careful as Brind'Amour is to protect Aho from pressure, stardom is coming for him. And much like Aho at 3-on-3, there's not much anyone can do to slow it down. He'll flex those 3-on-3 skills among others on a national stage come All-Star weekend. Might as well take advantage of the perks, including a \$212,500 Schedule 'A' bonus that comes with Aho's All-Star invitation.

"It's the first time for me, so it's pretty exciting," Aho said. "It's going to be a cool experience for me, I'm sure."

Brind'Amour, who played in an All-Star game as a Flyer in 1992, got to break the news after the team's flight to Philadelphia on Wednesday. As usual, his words came with a side of simple advice.

"Just enjoy it," Brind'Amour said he told Aho. "You certainly don't want to do anything but have fun with it. Who wins, who loses all that, it's just

about really taking advantage of being around people you wouldn't normally be around. He'll have some great teammates and get to know them a little bit, watch them, get to see what they're doing and learn a little bit."

With three All-Star Game appearances under his belt, Justin Faulk took Aho to dinner last night and gave him his rundown of the weekend. Who knows exactly what that entailed, but you can bet he echoed Brind'Amour's "just enjoy it" advice.

The Metro division roster features elite players at all different stages of stardom like Sidney Crosby, Claude Giroux, Taylor Hall and Mat Barzal.

Who is Aho most excited to play with?

"They're all great players," he told me. "So all of them."

Fair enough.

Maybe he'll pick up a few sharp-angle pointers from Crosby or some hair product recommendations from Barzal. His Hurricanes teammates mostly just hope he has all the fun he deserves.

"He already plays on an All-Star roster," one teammate responded, jokingly awaiting Aho's emphatic agreement.

It was the latest of many tongue-in-cheek attempts to make Aho laugh this season.

Maybe Aho was right back in 2017 — maybe he'll never quite get used to his stardom. He's certainly too young for the weight of a team on his shoulders. He'll take it all as it comes, anyway, and his teammates will help one smirk at a time.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124224 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets | Coach John Tortorella resists tweaking top line

Brian Hedger The Columbus Dispatch @BrianHedger

Jan 3, 2019 at 9:20 PM

They're scoring a lot of goals, creating numerous scoring chances and giving Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella few more gray hairs in his beard.

The Jackets' top forward line — Artemi Panarin, Pierre-Luc Dubois and Cam Atkinson — also are teaching Tortorella the underappreciated art of patience, which he has needed more than a few times this season to avoid scrapping them as a unit.

"That line is one of the top lines in the league," Tortorella said Thursday, a day before playing the Carolina Hurricanes in Raleigh, N.C. "How many have we played ... 39 games? Probably 20 times during those games, I'm thinking about breaking 'em up."

Why doesn't he?



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"Because I'm just trying to let them figure it out," Tortorella said. "I don't want to short-circuit them with a knee-jerk reaction because I'm mad about a couple of shifts. And it's something I have to watch as my coaching style, as I'm mad and I just change it up, because I think it's unfair to them. They have done a lot of work for us."

They have indeed.

Almost halfway through the season, Panarin (43 points) and Atkinson (42 points) are averaging more than a point a game. Dubois (36 points) is also sneaking up on "point-a-game" status.

Combined, they have potted 13 game-winning goals, scored eight of the Jackets' 16 power-play goals and have eight two-goal games. They also have helped Atkinson notch two hat tricks.

"I think we need to get some secondary scoring going here, because they are going to get checked tighter," Tortorella said. "(But) you have to give them some credit. They have just kept about their business. They have to continue to work at the (defensive) side of the puck ... (but) they've been really good."

The Jackets scrapped the experiment with a 2-3 look on the top power-play unit and went back to a 1-3-1 setup.

They also swapped out defenseman Zach Werenski for left wing Anthony Duclair, who has four power-play goals. Seth Jones quarterbacked the top unit from the point, while Werenski manned the blue line with the second group.

The Blue Jackets haven't scored a power-play goal since Dec. 13 against the Los Angeles Kings (eight games) and they're 0 of 21 in that span.

Nick Foligno remained away from the team while 5-year old daughter, Milana, recovers from surgery Monday in Boston. Tortorella said he has talked with the Jackets' captain twice a day, but only about Milana — not hockey or a possible timeline to rejoin the team.

"(I) have not even had a discussion on that with him and I don't plan to," Tortorella said. "As far as the (recovery), everything is going really well."

Injury update

Forward Brandon Dubinsky and defenseman Markus Nutivaara each practiced after missing practice Wednesday with undisclosed injuries. They were listed as day-to-day, but are now expected to play Friday against the Hurricanes.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124225 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets | Growth of Seth Jones, Cam Atkinson mirrors team's rise

Brian Hedger The Columbus Dispatch @BrianHedger

Jan 3, 2019 at 7:19 PM

The Blue Jackets' transformation into a competitive team with big goals doesn't rest solely on the backs of Seth Jones and Cam Atkinson.

They do provide a good snapshot, though.

Each has developed into an elite talent, each wears an 'A' as an alternate captain, each is driven to win and each will represent the Blue Jackets again, for the second time together, at the 2019 NHL All-Star Game in San Jose, California on Jan. 25-26.

"(It's) not so much in words and what they say in the locker room, but the style of play we have right now, as far as just going for it and attacking," coach John Tortorella said, replying to a question about the duo's impact on raising the standard in Columbus. "I think that develops into a mindset of, 'We're not going to counterpunch on teams. We're going to go after teams.' I think they've helped us there tremendously."

Atkinson and Jones certainly have been aggressors this season, despite Jones missing the first seven games with a sprained medial collateral ligament in his right knee.

Atkinson leads the team with 24 goals in the first 39 games and is on pace to become the first player in franchise history to eclipse 50 in a season. Not even Rick Nash, the current record-holder with 41 goals in 2002-03, scored that many.

"I think he has just taken off," said Ryan Murray, who has witnessed Atkinson mature into one of the NHL's top-tier offensive talents. "He just has an extra step, I think, this year. There are no second thoughts, there is no second guessing. There's not even a slight moment of hesitation anywhere with him, anywhere on the ice. He gets that puck and he knows exactly what he's doing with it."

Since returning from a broken foot a year ago, Atkinson has cemented his role at right wing on the first line and has put up elite numbers. After finishing last season with 33 points on 18 goals and 15 assists in the final 33 games leading into the playoffs, he has 42 points this season — including two hat tricks.

"He can think the game," Tortorella said. "It's not just his quickness and his goal-scoring and all that. He can think the game. He has continued to grow. Whenever we talk about Cam, I always bring up that point of, 'Can he handle having some success?' I think he knows how to handle success now and that's what has made him a more consistent player."

Jones has learned a lot too.

Since coming to the Blue Jackets in 2016 in a blockbuster trade that sent star center Ryan Johansen to Nashville, he has become an integral part of Tortorella's game plan on both sides of the puck. He plays in all situations, soaks up more than 26 minutes a game — among the highest averages in the league — and his leadership skills are beginning to match his physical gifts.

This is Jones' third straight season being selected for the Metropolitan Division's All-Star roster. He has improved each of the past two seasons and earned the honor this year after the early knee injury.

"It took me about a week or so to get back into the flow of things after the injury this year," said Jones, who has 23 points (six goals) and is coming off a career-high 16 goals last year. "I wasn't thinking about the All-Star Game or anything like that. I was just trying to get back healthy and do what I could to help the team again. It's an honor to be selected, but helping my team was much more important than that."

Jones and Atkinson both have that singular focus on winning, and it has led them both back to All-Star weekend, two years after helping the Metro win the 3-on-3 tournament in Los Angeles in 2017.

"It's always exciting," said Atkinson, who had three goals and five points as a replacement in 2017 for Penguins center Evgeni Malkin. "I take a lot of pride in that. It should be a great event. It's obviously a little different, too, because my boy (Declan) will be coming. A lot has changed in the last couple years."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124226 Columbus Blue Jackets



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Channel Information for Cleveland Cavaliers and Columbus Blue Jackets: January 4, 2019

FOX Sports Ohio

Friday, January 4, 2019

Cavaliers vs. Jazz at 7:30 p.m. | Pregame at 7:00 p.m.

Blue Jackets @ Hurricanes at 7:30 p.m. | Pregame at 7:00 p.m.

Cavs

Cable providers

Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, Youngstown/Erie, Bowling Green, KY, Louisville/Lexington, Charleston/Huntington and Wheeling/Steubenville areas: Main FOX Sports Ohio channel

Columbus/Lima areas: The game is being made available to providers to air on the plus FOX Sports Ohio cable channels. Channel information can be found here.

Blue Jackets

Cable providers

Columbus/Lima, areas: Main FOX Sports Ohio channel

Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, Louisville/Lexington, and Charleston/Huntington areas: The game is being made available to providers to air on the plus FOX Sports Ohio cable channels. Alternate channel information can be found here.

foxsportsohio.com LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124227 Columbus Blue Jackets

How Blue Jackets' Pierre-Luc Dubois went from 'losing his marbles' to embracing the challenge of playing center

By Tom Reed

Jan 3, 2019

NEWARK, N.J. — Boone Jenner stood outside the Prudential Center visitors locker room and spoke like an actor in a car commercial who cannot believe the vehicle he's chosen isn't a high-priced European import.

The SUV in question was teammate Pierre-Luc Dubois.

"He wasn't always a center?" Jenner said Dec. 23. "I'm really surprised to hear that. I had no idea he played wing in juniors. He just looks like a natural center. He's a big body who skates really well and plays really hard. When he has the puck on his stick, he wants to make something happen."

Not a bad testimonial. The back story is even better.

Blue Jackets fans know all about management's daring decision to select Dubois with the third overall pick in the 2016 NHL Draft. They're also aware of how coach John Tortorella started him on wing at the beginning of last season and moved him to center out of necessity due to injury and underperformance involving others.

Dubois has evolved into the franchise's undisputed top-line center. At age 20, he's also emerging as one of the NHL's better young players at

the position. Tortorella said recently it's Dubois who is "driving that line," which features Artemi Panarin and Cam Atkinson.

The 6-foot-3, 207-pound pivot has 16 goals and 20 assists this season and is coming off his first four-point game Monday night in a 6-3 win over the Senators.

But if not for a levelheaded father, a change of heart and a little happenstance, the Blue Jackets might never have drafted Dubois. They might still desperately be searching for Ryan Johansen's replacement.

"I haven't gone back and thanked (my junior coach) directly, but I'm really happy with how everything turned out," Dubois said.

'It's too much work'

As a kid, Dubois hated the thought of playing center. It was an eat-your-liver-and-onions kind of hate. A no-video-games-until-you-shovel-the-snow kind of hate.

When Dubois was 12 years old, his father, Eric, switched him from wing to center for a summer-league game in Rimouski, Quebec. Eric had played professionally for 12 seasons as a defenseman and was a longtime coach in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

The offseason was the only time dad had a chance to coach his boy. Eric shifted him to the middle because he was tired of watching Dubois "wait for the puck." It's a common coaching ploy to get a winger to move his feet. Centers must work deeper in the defensive zone and support their linemates all over the ice.

Ken Hitchcock famously moved Rick Nash to center for one game during their time together with the Blue Jackets as a spur to skate harder.

The experiment with young Dubois lasted less than two periods. He despised the exigencies of the position.

"He was losing his marbles," said Eric, who's now an assistant for the Winnipeg Jets' top minor-league affiliate. "He kept looking over at the bench like, 'It doesn't work. It's too much work.' I said, 'relax and do the best you can.' "

Dubois, a left-handed shot, was only too happy to return to his familiar right wing. He might never have played center again if not for a 2014 QMJHL showcase.

Checking every box

The 15-year-old examined the list of names and corresponding positions and thought someone had made a mistake. There were about 60 prospects invited to the showcase, the last big event before the QMJHL draft.

Why was Dubois, already a strapping 6-1, 170-pound winger, being listed as a center? It turns out there was a dearth of qualified players at the position. The junior league scouts and coaches wanted to see if Dubois could adapt.

At first, the teenager focused on the negatives. He thought competing out of position would hurt his draft stock. But three years after bristling at the idea of playing center, he was more receptive to it.

Dubois took his father's advice.

"My dad told me, 'It could be a good thing because you can show people another side of your game that nobody knows about,'" Dubois recalled. "My dad always told me you want to be that player who can do everything on the ice, the one who can check every box and check every position."

The scouts loved what they saw. Dubois was selected by Cape Breton with the fifth overall pick in the 2014 QMJHL Draft behind Luke Green (Saint John), Pascal Laberge (Gatineau), Samuel Girard (Shawinigan) and Evan Fitzpatrick (Sherbrooke).



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"He was the best player on the ice by far," said his father, who was coaching with Rimouski at the time. "All the scouts came to me and said, 'Has he played center before?' I said, 'No, not really.'"

Cape Breton coach and general manager Marc-Andre Dumont moved Pierre-Luc Dubois to center during the 2015-16 season in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

'Go back to see them both again'

It's not uncommon for NHL wingers to be temporarily shifted to center while their team is dealing with injury or poor play down the middle. Blue Jackets fans know the drill all too well.

In the past two seasons, they have seen Tortorella ask Jenner and Nick Foligno to make the sacrifice. Both players, however, had experience at center in the junior ranks.

Blue Jackets skills coach Kenny McCudden said it would be very difficult to make such a transition for a winger with no prior playing time at the position.

Luckily for the Blue Jackets, Cape Breton coach and general manager Marc-Andre Dumont faced his own issues at center midway through the 2015-16 season. It was during the annual World Junior Championships. Dubois had been one of the final cuts for Team Canada. Several other Cape Breton forwards had been chosen by their respective nations, however, and Dumont decided to give Dubois a whirl at center after playing him on the wing the previous season.

"I was happy to see him at center," Eric Dubois said. "He would get involved in the play a lot more. He would skate a lot more, he'd have the puck a lot more. I felt like at times as a winger he would relax too much. Just wait for someone else to do the job and save his energy for when someone got him the puck. He was more physical on the wing, but I was happy. They put him between the two Russian kids."

Dubois thrived on a line with Evgeny Svechnikov and Maxim Lazarev. He finished the season with 42 goals and 57 assists and rocketed up the NHL Draft board. Dubois became the first QMJHL player in more than 10 years — the last was Sidney Crosby — to finish No. 1 on Central Scouting's final rankings of North American prospects.

Auston Matthews (Maple Leafs) and Patrik Laine (Jets) were the consensus top-two selections in the 2016 NHL Draft. The Blue Jackets held the third pick. Many thought Columbus would either take winger Jesse Puljujarvi or trade back.

They did neither. General manager Jarmo Kekalainen and his staff stunned the crowd in Buffalo, site of the 2016 draft, by staying put at No. 3 and choosing Dubois.

"We really liked Pierre-Luc's hockey sense and his playmaking," said Blue Jackets director of amateur scouting Ville Siren. "We projected him as a center the entire time."

"We liked them both (Dubois and Puljujarvi). I remember Jarmo kept saying, 'Go back, go back. Go back to see both of them again.' I must have seen Pierre-Luc 15 times that year. We felt like we really did our homework."

Puljujarvi has 16 goals and 17 assists in 121 career games for the Oilers. Dubois has 36 goals and 48 assists in 121 career games for the Blue Jackets.

Since centering the Blue Jackets' top line for the first time Nov. 20, 2017, Dubois ranks 25th in goals and 32nd in points among all NHL centers. The 80 points are two better than Johansen in the same number of games (101).

Dubois' competitiveness and willingness to use his size have been evident since first earning top-line minutes. But in recent weeks, his play-making skills are drawing raves. His ability to make good passes on the forehand and backhand are producing a bevy of scoring chances.

"His game is just growing all over the ice," Jenner said. "He's got that confidence. He has the puck and he's making plays in open ice and coming off the wall. You can really see it with his passing and willingness to hang on to pucks."

Where would the center-starved Blue Jackets be without Dubois?

"As you know, we were not going to put him in that position early on but because of necessity and the lack of play from other centers he was put there," Tortorella said. "That is sometimes how you find out about other people. It's not overanalyzing. You throw him in a spot and see what he can do. He's grabbed ahold of it and is by far our top center, which kind of pisses me off about some of the other guys."

"... I love his edge. He has not taken a step back in the people I have played him against as far as any intimidation. Has he gone up and down a little bit? Sure he has, which is to be expected. He's still young."

Standing outside the visitors locker room in Philadelphia on Dec. 22, Dubois chuckled at the memory of his reluctance to play center.

He certainly would have found his way to the NHL had he remained a winger. But years later, Dubois is glad he listened to his father and embraced a new challenge.

So are the Blue Jackets.

"I know what kind of player I am and I know I can play every style of game," Dubois said. "I take pride in playing the defensive side of the game and winning physical battles. It's funny, a lot of people focus on my size, but I feel I have a lot more to offer than just that. I think it's coming with time."

"I don't think I have a lot of things I'm dominant at, but I think I do a lot of things really well. I'm still learning the position."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124293 Ottawa Senators

Warren's Piece: Sens' Nilsson adjusts to whirlwind, Paul blasts way into record books at skills show

Ken Warren

It didn't take long for newest Ottawa Senators goaltender Anders Nilsson to introduce himself to the fans.

Only a day removed from being traded to the Senators from the Vancouver Canucks, Nilsson was part of an intriguing twist at the Senators annual skills competition on Thursday night at Canadian Tire Centre.

Nilsson and fellow Senators netminder Marcus Hogberg were asked to try to somehow scamper their way around the rink in the fastest possible time, while wearing all their gear. In Nilsson's case, that equipment is still Canucks-coloured.

"It was good to be around the team a little more, get to know the guys a little bit better and meet the fans for the first time," said Nilsson, who is expected to make his first appearance with the Senators either Saturday against Minnesota or Sunday against Carolina.

"It's great to see so many kids here. It's fun for them to watch and maybe get a little bit closer to us for normal games."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 2019

Nilsson says "it has been a bit of a crazy 24 hours here" following the trade, but he's slowly coming to terms with the move.

Nilsson, who was expecting to serve as backup for the Canucks on Wednesday, learned of the trade while at the club's hotel early in the afternoon. When he arrived at Canadian Tire Centre, he entered the Senators dressing room for the first time.

He's already started to make plans for his wife and three boys — aged five, three, and one — to join him in Ottawa at some point following next week's road trip to California.

"We'll see if we can find a place, if we can get a hold of that pretty fast."

### PAUL TURNS HEADS

On Wednesday night, Nick Paul watched the action as a healthy scratch in the overtime loss to the Canucks.

Come Thursday, the 23-year-old rookie forward was the star attraction at the skills competition, taking home both the hardest-shot and fastest-skater honours.

Paul set a franchise record with a 108.3 miles-per-hour slap shot, breaking Freddy Claesson's two-year old record.

"I don't know, it just kind of happened," said Paul, who surprised himself with the velocity. "When I grew up, we had an outdoor rink and my dad bought a radar, so I would always sit there and just whack away at the puck. I knew I had a pretty good (shot), but I didn't know it was going to be 108."

Earlier in the evening, Paul was also the toast of the coast-to-coast skating competition, circling the rink in 14.24 seconds.

He had some fun with it all, celebrating by riding his stick and performing a moonwalk following the events.

Paul clearly opened some eyes, but the bigger goal, of course, is to earn consistent ice time under coach Guy Boucher.

"The biggest thing for me is staying positive," said Paul, who has one assist in 14 games. "I got an opportunity up here (in the NHL) and I've got to take advantage of it. Every night I'm in, I've got to show the best I can, show my assets, show how hard I work."

And, of course, show how hard he can shoot.

### PAGEAU CLEARS ANOTHER HURDLE

Jean-Gabriel Pageau took part in the skills competition and could be only days away from seeing his first game action since suffering his Achilles tear on the opening day of training camp.

On Wednesday, surgeons cleared him to return. Now a return to the lineup is about making sure he can catch up to the pace and conditioning of actual games.

"I think I'm almost there, almost ready to play," he said. "I will practise with the team (Friday) and we will go from there. I've got to be honest with myself, too, in that process. I think on both sides (including the medical and training staff) we've been honest from the start. I'm feeling pretty good right now. I hope I'm going to come back as soon as possible, but I also want to make sure I don't come back too quick, either."

If Pageau isn't deemed ready for the weekend games, it's a good bet he will leave with the Senators on Monday for the three-game road trip to California.

### BOROWIECKI A NO-SHOW

Notable by his absence on Thursday was defenceman and alternate captain Mark Borowiecki. Borowiecki played 16:08 in Wednesday's 4-3 overtime loss to Vancouver.

### BATHERSON GETS HIS DUE

All things considered, rookie Drake Batherson would rather be back in the NHL than the AHL. But he is being rewarded for his standout play with Belleville.

Batherson, who has scored eight goals and 17 assists in 21 games with the Senators' top farm club, is headed to the AHL all-star game in Springfield, Mass., on Jan. 27 ... The game will also feature ex-Senators Curtis Lazar (11 goals and 14 assists in 31 games with Stockton) and Cory Conacher (13 goals and 23 assists in 27 games). Francis Perron, who was traded to the San Jose Sharks in the Erik Karlsson deal in training camp, will also be going to Springfield, having scored 13 goals and 14 assists in 28 games with the AHL's San Jose Barracuda.

### THE BIG SHOTS: Fastest shots at skills competition

Nick Paul: 108.3 MPH\*

Mark Stone: 104.9 MPH

Cody Ceci: 103.0 MPH

Ryan Dzingel: 99.4 MPH

Brady Tkachuk: 98.7 MPH

\*New Franchise record

### THE SPEEDSTERS: Fastest skaters in round-the-rink competition

Nick Paul: 14.24 seconds

Colin White: 14.40 seconds

Magnus Paajarvi: 14.57 seconds

Max Lajoie: 15.20 seconds

Marcus Hogberg: 19.420 seconds

Anders Nilsson: 19.677

\*\*Franchise record owned by Colin Greening (13.665, set in 2011)

### THE ACCURATE ONES:

(Four targets inside posts on top left, top right, lower left, lower right of net)

Bobby Ryan: four targets on four shots

Brady Tkachuk: four targets on five shots

Magnus Paajarvi: four targets on five shots

Matt Duchene: four targets on seven shots

Jean-Gabriel Pageau: three targets on eight shots

Zack Smith: three targets on eight shots

\*\*\*\*Calum Hartnell (11-year-old): four targets on four shots.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124294 Ottawa Senators

GARRIOCH: Young Ottawa Senators stumble to the midpoint of the season

Bruce Garrioch

What now for the Ottawa Senators?



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 2019

As the Senators hit the midpoint of the NHL season with a 4-3 overtime loss to the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday, the club's season-high losing streak extended to six games, and they need to dig down to deep to find their way out of this.

While general manager Pierre Dorion, coach Guy Boucher and the players knew there were going to be days like this when the club decided undergo this rebuild, it's a lot easier to talk about it than experience it as Ottawa sits 30th overall with 35 points.

Preparing to open the second half of the season with home games Saturday against the Minnesota Wild and Sunday versus the Carolina Hurricanes before heading to California, the Senators can only hope for better days ahead after a challenging first half.

"You can't roll over in this league. Nobody is feeling sorry for you," alternate captain Mark Stone told this newspaper after the loss to the Canucks. "The teams that are coming in are trying to do the same thing as you, and nobody is out of the playoffs right now.

"We've got to find ways to win games. Teams we play are going to try to do the same thing as us. Trying to make the playoff is the ultimate goal."

"I think we've just got to wipe the slate clean here a little bit," alternate captain Mark Borowiecki said of the club's situation as it moves into the second half of the season. Jay LaPrete / AP

Heading into Thursday night's action, the Senators were ranked last in the Eastern Conference and were 12 points behind the Montreal Canadiens for the final wildcard spot. That means the best bet for the club is to play for pride in the last half of the year.

The Senators had actually played above expectations heading into December, but since then the club has struggled mightily. Not only have they had their share of difficulties defensively, injuries to the likes of Thomas Chabot, Craig Anderson and Christian Jaros have made it tougher.

In 15 games since Dec. 1, the Senators have a 4-9-2 record, and that, in itself, has taken them out of any conversation for the post-season, and the key now is to try to make something out of this year.

"I think we've just got to wipe the slate clean here a little bit," alternate captain Mark Borowiecki said. "It would have been nice to start 2019 with a win. That didn't happen, but I think we moved in the right direction a little bit towards the second half of the game (against the Canucks).

"But we have to learn from our mistakes. We need to be better defensively as a group, as individuals and learn from that, but do our best to kind of erase that first half and see what we can string together here."

When the Senators decided to undergo a rebuild and sent captain Erik Karlsson packing in camp, Dorion indicated he wanted to see "progression" with the young players, and if that happened then he'd be pleased with the way the year had gone.

There has been concern about the way Boucher has used young players in the past, but he's bought into the program and the club's prospects are getting a good chance to play in different roles. If they make mistakes, they are given the opportunity to play again.

You could have predicted Chabot was going to have a breakthrough season, but you can be excused if you didn't see blueliner Max Lajoie in this group. Forward Colin White has made great progress and top rookie Brady Tkachuk has made an impact.

Injuries to goalies Anderson (concussion) and Mike Condon (hip) have forced the Senators to give rookie goalie Marcus Hogberg the opportunity to be the club's top goalie.

Boucher has seen the young players get better and he knows the Senators are going to see the fruits of their labour quickly.

"This is Lajoie's first NHL season and we're asking him to play against top players every night," Boucher said. "There's 10 minutes where he

looks great and then there's 10 minutes where their better players get the best of those guys.

"But that's why, over time, when they're 23, 24 or 25 years old, the minutes that they're getting now are really going to pay off. But to say there's going to be growth, where every game you get a constant, that's not true and it's not true for anybody.

"You're down, you're up, but as long as you look over a month, two months or three months to look for the growth, you see it. That's clear for all of our young guys."

The veterans on this team are trying to help lead the way.

"They're playing big roles and big minutes," said Borowiecki. "If you had told me Marcus Hogberg would come up here and played the way he has, I wouldn't have believed you in terms of training camp.

"We've got a lot of young guys who are coming in and stepping into roles that are tough, and they're doing a good job for the most part. It's impressive to watch. My first few callups and first few times in the NHL, I was nervous, timid and hesitant. That applies to that whole group of young guys here."

The Senators hope the growing pains lead to better days ahead.

### AT THE HALF

THE RECORD: 41 GP, 15-21-5, 35 Pts

AT HOME: 22, 11-7-4, 26 Pts

ON THE ROAD: 19, 4-14-1, 9 Pts

GOALS FOR: 129 (9th)

GOALS AGAINST: 163 (31st)

POWER PLAY: 21.6% (13th)

PENALTY KILLING: 74.4% (30th)

AVERAGE SHOTS FOR: 29.1 (25th)

AVERAGE SHOTS AGAINST: 37.6 (31st)

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124295 Ottawa Senators

SNAPSHOTS: Boucher says getting a goalie was a 'must' for the Senators

Bruce Garrioch

The expectation is newly acquired goaltender Anders Nilsson will make his debut in the Ottawa Senators' net this weekend.

Given the fact Marcus Hogberg is coming off a 41-save effort in a 4-3 loss to the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday at home, it would make sense for him to suit up against the Minnesota Wild on Saturday at 1 p.m. and then have Nilsson face the Carolina Hurricanes on Sunday.

If you think the Senators acquired Nilsson from the Canucks before facing them Wednesday because general manager Pierre Dorion, coach Guy Boucher and goalie coach Pierre Goulx are concerned about the state of the club's netminding, you'd be correct.

No, they aren't disappointed with the 24-year-old Hogberg and they didn't mind 35-year-old Mike McKenna, who was sent to the Canucks as part of the deal, but the Senators don't know when they're going to get either Craig Anderson (concussion) or Mike Condon (hip) back.



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That much was made clear by Boucher following the loss when he was asked about the decision by the organization to get Nilsson.

"It's been tough because we haven't had (Condon)," Boucher said. "When you're missing your NHL backup, it has an impact on your team, and over a long period of time we didn't know what was going to happen."

"Knowing now that it was going to be longer, (the trade) was a must I think and Pierre acted on it. Now, we've got an NHL backup that's coming to help us."

The issue for the Senators is Anderson hasn't made much progress since he suffered the head injury on Dec. 21 versus the New Jersey Devils. At the time, the Senators felt he'd be back right after the Christmas break, but that never materialized.

He didn't take part in the skills competition Thursday night at the Canadian Tire Centre and he's going to have to skate with the team before there's any chance of a return. The hope was, earlier in the week, he'd play on the weekend, but that's not going to happen.

That's why the Senators wanted a goalie with an NHL resumé.

Is Nilsson the future in the club's net? Probably not, but at 28 years old with this year left on his deal, it gives the Senators a chance to evaluate him. If he can get the job done, they can look at next year. If not, they can move on.

The Senators, who have been looking for depth in goal since Condon went down with an injury in Belleville after clearing waivers on Oct. 31, want to see what they've got in Nilsson.

No, his numbers haven't been great with the Canucks, but he has 117 games of NHL experience with Vancouver and the Islanders. He has a 39-54-13 lifetime record with a .905 save percentage and a 3.07 goals-against average.

"Not knowing when Anderson is back, it's important to have that (experience) throughout the year," Boucher added. "Right now, we desperately need that. Hogberg has done well, but we can't put all that on his shoulders right now."

"It's more than welcome right now."

## TALKS ABOUT TO HEAT UP

Not only will the Senators get down to business with unrestricted free agent winger Mark Stone on a contract extension in the next two weeks, Dorion will also be focused on centre Matt Duchene.

According to a report by TSN's Darren Dreger during an NBC Sports segment on Wednesday night, talks between Duchene's agent, Pat Brisson, and Dorion are going to intensify in the next three weeks.

As Dreger noted, it makes sense with the NHL trade deadline set for Feb. 25 at 3 p.m. EST. If the Senators aren't going to be able to sign Stone, Duchene and forward Ryan Dzingel, then they're going to have to weigh the marketplace for possible deals.

The sooner the Senators know what Stone, Duchene and Dzingel want to do, the better it is for the organization. Dzingel will likely have to wait to see what happens with Stone and Duchene before getting dealt with. That's just the reality of the situation.

Stone and Duchene have both stated they'd like to sign with the Senators, however the next month or so will determine whether they are dealt at the deadline.

## THE LAST WORDS

Vancouver goalie Jacob Markstrom was caught off guard by the Canucks' decision to deal Nilsson to the Senators. "(He) actually called me right before I was getting ready to have my pregame nap," Nilsson told NHL.com after the game. "He called me and told me he was in shock. He is a really good friend, so it's tough. I've been there, he's been there before. I've never been there for two goalies just swapping teams

at the morning skate. ... The Swedes, they're pretty close here. We celebrated Christmas together a couple weeks ago. For sure, it's all family, all great people. He'll be missed, for sure." ... Vancouver placed McKenna on waivers at noon Thursday, and if he clears he'll be sent to the club's AHL affiliate in Utica on Friday. He dressed as the backup at the Bell Centre on Thursday. The Senators felt they didn't need McKenna because the goaltending in Belleville will be solid with Filip Gustavsson and Hogberg when he goes back.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124282 New York Islanders

## First Career Goal Gives Islanders an Overtime Win

By Field Level Media

Devon Toews scored his first N.H.L. goal 1 minute 48 seconds into overtime Thursday night as the surging Islanders edged the Chicago Blackhawks, 3-2, in Uniondale, N.Y.

Toews, who was playing in his fifth career game, put back the rebound of his own shot to give the Islanders their fifth consecutive win. The Islanders are 3-0-1 in four games at Nassau Coliseum, where the team will play 16 more regular-season contests.

Mathew Barzal scored both goals in regulation for the Islanders. Goalie Robin Lehner recorded 19 saves, winning his sixth straight decision.

Dominik Kahun and Patrick Kane scored for the Blackhawks, who have lost two straight. Goalie Collin Delia made 47 saves as he took his first loss in four starts this season.

The Blackhawks took the lead just 3:05 into the first, when Kahun swooped just outside the crease and backhanded home a rebound of a shot by Brandon Saad.

Barzal didn't need long to tie the game with the first of his two goals. Johnny Boychuk's shot from the blue line was deflected by Delia and bounced off the stick of the Islanders' Anthony Beauvillier to Barzal, who swung at the puck while it was a few inches off the ice. The puck sailed past Blackhawks defenseman Erik Gustafsson and over the stick arm of Delia at the 6:47 mark.

The Islanders briefly appeared to take the lead with 6:20 left in the second, when Cal Clutterbuck batted home a rebound in the crease. But upon replay, the goal was waved off because Clutterbuck's stick was above the crossbar.

Barzal put the Islanders ahead in similar fashion with 1:04 left in the second, when he was stationed next to Delia as Nick Leddy's shot was initially turned back by the Blackhawks goalie. Barzal then tucked the puck into the corner of the net past a sprawling Delia.

Kane tied the game in unusual fashion 5:01 into the third, when his stick broke as he fired a shot from the face-off circle. However, Kane put enough on the shot that it fluttered into the crease and skipped past Lehner.

New York Times LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124283 New York Islanders

Devon Toews' first NHL goal lifts Islanders past Blackhawks in overtime



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 2019

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS | JAN 03, 2019 | 10:50 PM

Devon Toews picked a great time to get his first NHL goal and keep the Islanders' winning streak going.

Toews knocked in the rebound of his own shot at 1:48 of overtime to lift the Islanders past the Chicago Blackhawks 3-2 Thursday night for their fifth straight win.

"It feels good to score and to get the two points is huge for our team," said the 24-year-old rookie playing in his fifth career game. "(Josh Bailey) made a nice play over to me and the goalie made a pretty nice save on the first one. I saw he was scrambled so I just put it back five-hole toward the net. It went in."

Mathew Barzal scored twice to keep up his scoring binge and help the Islanders win for the eighth time in nine games. Robin Lehner, making his third straight start, stopped 19 shots as the Islanders moved to 3-0-1 in four games at the Nassau Coliseum this season.

"Robin made a couple of big saves, we got a big power-play goal," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "And Toews getting the game-winner, that's pretty special if it's your first NHL goal in overtime."

Devon Toews celebrates with teammates after scoring the game-winning goal Thursday night.

Lehner has given up just three goals on 107 shots over his last four games since replacing Thomas Greiss in the second period of the Islanders' 6-3 comeback win against Ottawa last Friday night.

"I've had (good) stints before," Lehner said. "Today was a weird game for me. It was in waves. ... They have high-end skill over there. So when they're in our zone it's pretty dangerous. You try to be on your toes."

Patrick Kane and Dominik Kahun scored for Chicago, which lost for the third time in five games. Delia, making his third start of the season and sixth of his career, finished with a career-high 47 saves.

Kane tied the score with a one-timer that he didn't hit cleanly and the puck fluttered off the post and in past Lehner for his 23rd at 5:01 of the third.

"We didn't play very well tonight, that was pretty evident," Kane said. "I think we'd be happy taking a point, especially when we play like that."

Barzal put the Islanders ahead with a power-play goal late in the second, putting in the rebound of Nick Leddy's shot in front for his 12th with 1:04 left. After extending his point streak to six games with his first goal, Barzal — selected for his first All-Star appearance a day earlier — now has eight goals and 11 points in that stretch.

The reigning Calder Trophy winner as the league's top rookie acknowledged he has a high level of confidence in his game right now, having totaled nine goals and 17 points in his last 12 games.

"(It) comes from working hard, doing the extra stuff and just playing with detail," Barzal said. "Been focusing on that a little more and obviously it's been paying off a little bit here."

Cal Clutterbuck nearly gave the Islanders the lead earlier with about 6:20 left in the period as he batted the puck out of the air from the right side. The officials conferred on the ice and initially ruled it a good goal. However, it was overturned after a video review because Clutterbuck's stick was above the height of the crossbar when it hit the puck.

The teams were tied 1-1 after one period, though the Islanders controlled play for most of the first 20 minutes, outshooting the Blackhawks 14-3.

Kahun got Chicago on the scoreboard first. Duncan Keith fired a long shot from the left point and Brandon Saad's deflection in front was stopped by Lehner. However, Kahun backhanded the rebound from the right side for his sixth at 3:05.

Barzal tied the score at 6:47 with his 11th. Johnny Boychuk's shot from the right point deflected off Anthony Beauvillier in front, and Barzal batted it out of the air from the left side into the top left corner.

New York Daily News LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124284 New York Islanders

Rookie's first NHL goal propels red-hot Islanders to OT win

By Associated Press

Devon Toews picked a great time to get his first NHL goal and keep the Islanders' winning streak going.

Toews knocked in the rebound of his own shot at 1:48 of overtime to lift the Islanders past the Blackhawks 3-2 Thursday night for their fifth straight win in their fourth game of the season at Nassau Coliseum.

"It feels good to score and to get the two points is huge for our team," said the 24-year-old rookie playing in his fifth career game. "[Josh Bailey] made a nice play over to me and the goalie made a pretty nice save on the first one. I saw he was scrambled so I just put it back five-hole toward the net. It went in."

Mathew Barzal, who Wednesday was selected to the All-Star team for the first time, scored twice to keep up his scoring binge and help the Islanders win for the eighth time in nine games. Robin Lehner, making his third straight start, stopped 19 shots as the Islanders moved to 3-0-1 in at the Coliseum this season.

"Robin made a couple of big saves, we got a big power-play goal," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "And Toews getting the game-winner, that's pretty special if it's your first NHL goal in overtime."

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New York Post LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124285 New York Islanders

Islanders have become one of NHL's most compelling stories this season

No one else can match the mix of nostalgia, excitement, bitterness, uncertainty and hope that the Isles have put together in a season that looks a lot better than we thought it would.

By Mark Herrmann

The Blackhawks arrived fresh off yet another appearance under the wide-open sky, secure in their status as a National Hockey League marketing staple. What was waiting for them under the low latticed roof of



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 2019

Nassau Coliseum was something even more impressive: the Islanders, the league's best story.

You won't see the Islanders in the Winter Classic, the Jan. 1 centerpiece in which Chicago has played four times (all losses, including one at Notre Dame's football stadium Tuesday). But at this moment, there is no team as fetching, quirky and compelling as the one that plays (most of the time now) on Long Island.

No one else can match the mix of nostalgia, excitement, bitterness, uncertainty and hope that the Islanders have put together in a season that looks a whole lot better than we thought it would.

Few saw this coming, this stretch of five straight wins and eight in nine games, the latest a 3-2 overtime victory over Chicago on Thursday claimed by an overtime goal by minor-league call-up Devon Toews, who never had scored in the NHL before.

"I don't think I ever dreamed about it," he said. "Growing up, it was more just trying to make the NHL and make that dream come true. I never thought about scoring or anything."

The anything-is-possible motif is courtesy of coach Barry Trotz, who spent roughly half of 2018 winning the Stanley Cup in Washington and the other half lighting a fire under a franchise that seemed to have lost its wick when captain and superstar John Tavares left.

"It's been very interesting, it's been enlightening, it's been fulfilling, it's been a challenge," Trotz said. "It's been all of the above. Everything that life has to bring, I've had all of it. The good, bad and ugly in a lot of ways. That's what makes coaching and life interesting because it's not the same thing every day."

Heading the category of "interesting" is the case of Mathew Barzal. There was every reason to wonder how good he really was, as he was able to ride through his rookie year under Tavares' radar. Could he really be a legitimate No. 1 center?

To quote his fans: "Yes! Yes! Yes!" Barzal was named the team's All-Star representative Wednesday, and he celebrated by scoring goals in the first and second periods Thursday. He has confidence in himself and in everyone who wears the crest he will be proud to represent at All-Star Weekend in San Jose.

"You can kind of tell before a game, this is one of the coolest locker rooms I've been in. Just the dynamic, with younger guys, older guys," he said.

The oldest figure is the real star of the Islanders' drama. That would be the Coliseum, which was buzzing and jumping again. After Barzal's second goal, the crowd launched its favorite new anti-Tavares chant. There is no venue remotely like it in pro sports. The move back to the Isles' ancestral home has been more than a shot in the arm. It is more like a total-body makeover.

In the same vein, there is that one other notable distinction in this Islanders season: a transformation from the leakiest defensive sieve in 2017-18 into the team that, entering play Thursday, had allowed the fewest goals in the league (102).

"I know that if I was on the other team playing against some of my teammates," Barzal said, "I know I'd have a tough time."

The toughest part is attracting notice outside of Long Island. The outdoor Winter Classic is a TV show, and we all know that the first rule of network television is to put on programming that garnered ratings in the past, whether it be the Blackhawks or an ossified Murphy Brown redux.

Still, the Islanders have more intriguing moving parts than anyone else in the NHL. "We're just in a groove," Toews said. "Everybody is playing for each other."

The roof in their home rink may be low, but their entertainment-value ceiling is sky high.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124286 New York Islanders

Blackhawks' Jeremy Colliton fondly recalls time in Islanders organization

By Andrew Gross

Jeremy Colliton would have preferred to have his playing career last until he was 40, but it didn't work out that way. The Islanders' 2003 second-round pick retired from professional hockey at 29 because of post-concussion symptoms.

Colliton, 33, named the Blackhawks' coach on Nov. 6, was back at NYCB Live's Nassau Coliseum on Thursday night after spending 2005-12 in the Islanders' organization. He had three goals and three assists in 57 NHL games.

Colliton played with current Islanders Casey Cizikas, Matt Martin, Brock Nelson and Josh Bailey during his time with AHL Bridgeport and in the NHL. He retired as the leading scorer in Sound Tigers history with 203 points in 326 games. He also cited former Bridgeport and Islanders coach Jack Capuano as a strong influence on his coaching career.

"Good memories," Colliton said of returning to the Coliseum. "This is the only organization I was with. It's fun to be back and they've made some changes, so that's neat.

"I kind of wanted to play until I was 40 and figure it out then," he added. "I wasn't ready to be done with hockey. I felt like I had a lot to contribute still."

Martin said that as Colliton's teammate, "you could tell he's a really smart guy. Looking back, it makes a lot of sense he became a coach."

Notes & quotes: Center Valtteri Filppula (upper body) missed a game for the first time this season but skated on his own on Thursday morning . . . Defenseman Thomas Hickey (injured reserve/upper body) and right wing Jordan Eberle (injured reserve/upper body) also skated on Thursday. Eberle participated in the Islanders' morning skate . . . Left wing Ross Johnston and defenseman Luca Sbisa were the healthy scratches . . . The Islanders' first goal in Monday's 3-1 win at Buffalo has been credited to Leo Komarov instead of Nick Leddy . . . Forward Michael Dal Colle and defenseman Sebastian Aho were named AHL All-Stars for Bridgeport.

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1124287 New York Islanders

Devon Toews' first NHL goal gives Islanders overtime win over Blackhawks

It also was the first NHL point for the rookie defenseman; Mathew Barzal scores two goals to extend his hot streak.

By Andrew Gross

Mathew Barzal certainly played like an All-Star on Thursday night. Devon Toews showed why he might be one in the future.

What a way to score your first career #NHL goal!

Congrats on the OT winner @DevonToews6! #Isles  
pic.twitter.com/UwbDaF2nZ



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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— New York Islanders (@NYIslanders) January 4, 2019

The rookie defenseman scored his first NHL goal at 1:48 of overtime as the Islanders beat the Blackhawks, 3-2, at NYCB Live's Nassau Coliseum before a crowd of 13,454, which was just shy of a fourth straight sellout at the venerable barn.

"Toews has been a big piece the last five, six games," said Barzal, who scored twice to extend his point streak to six games (eight goals, three assists) a day after being named to his first NHL All-Star Game. "He's added another weapon back there."

Toews connected from the right for his first NHL point in his fifth game since being recalled from Bridgeport.

"I feel really good," said Toews, a fourth-round pick in 2014 who was limited to 30 games for Bridgeport last season because of a shoulder injury. "It's a learning experience throughout the game."

Toews took six shots in 16:16 and earned coach Barry Trotz's trust to be used in the three-on-three overtime.

"It's pretty special to get your first NHL goal in overtime," Trotz said.

The Islanders (22-13-4) matched their season high with their fifth straight win and have won eight of their last nine. Their last six-game winning streak came at the end of the 2016-17 season.

Robin Lehner made 19 saves in winning his sixth straight decision and has allowed 10 goals in his last nine appearances. Collin Delia stopped 47 shots for the Blackhawks.

Barzal had a game-high eight shots in 20:16 and drew both of the penalties Chicago took. He has scored seven of the Islanders' last 13 goals.

"I thought Mat was really good," Trotz said. "He managed the puck really well. He challenged the seams and was taking the ice that was presented. I thought he played a pretty complete game."

Said Barzal, "Confidence comes from working hard and doing the extra stuff."

Trotz warned his team before the game that the Blackhawks presented a potential "trap game." The franchise that won three Stanley Cups from 2010 to 2015 entered the night tied for the third-fewest points in the NHL, although Chicago was 6-3-1 in its previous 10 games.

The Islanders were coming off Saturday's emotional 4-0 win in Toronto in their first game against former captain John Tavares and Monday's 3-1 win in Buffalo, as Lehner faced his former team for the first time since signing with the Islanders.

Patrick Kane tied the score at 2 with a power-play goal from the right at 5:01 of the third period. The Blackhawks were outshot 18-3 in the period.

The Islanders built a 14-3 shot advantage in the first period and took the game's first five shots, but Chicago took a 1-0 lead at 3:05. Dominik Kahun, to Lehner's left, backhanded in the rebound of Brandon Saad's deflection.

Barzal tied the score at 1 at 6:47 of the first period with his own rebound goal. He swatted the puck out of the air from low in the left circle after Delia stopped Anthony Beauvillier.

Barzal's power-play goal at 18:56 of the second period — he had drawn a holding penalty on Gustav Forsling at 18:35 — gave the Islanders a 2-1 lead. He connected from below the left circle after defenseman Nick Leddy had his initial shot partially blocked.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 01.04.2019

The Athletic / A prospect analysts roundtable: How certain metrics help the evaluation process and how they can get better

By Ryan Biech

Jan 3, 2019

No stone should be left unturned when trying to find a competitive edge in the world of sports and one area where the rise of analytics has been most prevalent has been in amateur scouting.

Long gone are the days of scouts watching games and then forming an opinion based solely on their viewing. Anyone that puts time into prospect evaluation will tell you that there is value in old-school scouting and that 'gut feeling' about a player can sometimes pay off. Nothing will ever beat the ability to focus on a player in a game, speak to the player and their acquaintances to learn about them and then track a player's development over a couple years. Watching games is the most important part of scouting and that won't change anytime soon.

But there has been a movement of prospect evaluators in the public sphere that are looking at various ways to improve how these teenage prospects are evaluated. You'll see certain terms and numbers thrown around now and so with that, I reached out to three advanced analytics prospect evaluators with varying metrics to pick their brains a bit on that topic.

Jeremy Davis, is very familiar in Vancouver to Canucks fans. Currently a writer for CanucksArmy, Jeremy has created a cohort system that allows us to look at success rates of comparable players and an adjusted scoring metric.

Will Scouch has been digging into NHL draft analytics since 2016 adding more metrics and more detail to his methods in order to further explore what may be the keys to having a successful draft. Since August 2018, he's owned and operated Scouching.ca, a hub for everything you might need for draft and NHL analytics, they offer YouTube videos/livestreams, blog articles and access to live updated prospect spreadsheets unlocked through Patreon donations.

Evan Oppenheimer just graduated college and is currently focusing on a lot of stats-related prospect analyses and other hockey analysis.

The following answers have been slightly edited for clarity and length.

Explain your metric and how it's used.

Jeremy Davis: I gather a wide variety of data on prospects, but I predominantly manage two models: a cohort model called pGPS (Prospect Graduation Probabilities System) and an adjusted scoring metric called SEAL (Situation-Era-Age-League adjusted scoring). They both have their advantages and disadvantages, and the greatest benefits are achieved by using them in conjunction with one another.

pGPS uses Euclidean geometry to compare a target player against a database of historical players using a series of quantitative factors, including scoring rates, goals created, point shares and more. From the careers of players that are deemed "statistical matches", the model assigns an expected likelihood of success for the target player. The latest version of the model focuses not just on the likelihood of making the NHL, but on the likelihood of being impact players (top-six forwards or top-four defencemen) as well.

SEAL uses data pulled from game sheets and multipliers derived from decades of data to adjust a player's scoring rate with the intent to account for factors known to affect production: how old the player is, the quality of the league the player plays in, how much of their production came on the power play and so on. The idea is to level the playing field, so to speak, so that the scoring rates of all prospects can be compared



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as if they were the same age, playing in the same league and given the same opportunities.

**Will Scouch:** My main metric is NHLScore, which is an age-adjusted, league-adjusted and position-adjusted metric meant to somewhat even out a player's production across age groups, position and league. A score over 20 generally indicates first-round-level production, a score over 30 indicates a top-level draft-eligible player. It's calculated by taking a player's Involvement Percentage (INV%), multiplying it by an average modern NHL offence (240 goals), applying an age adjustment, league adjustment as per previous estimations as well as my own and scaling for differences in production between forwards and defence. Before you ask, INV% is simply a player's points per game divided by the team's goals per game. Using INV% also allows proper scaling between different offensive eras if you're looking at historical data. Someone who is involved in 40 per cent of team goals in 2018 vs. 1989 carries similar value, regardless of how many raw points they're scoring.

**Evan Oppenheimer:** My metric is betweenness. It's a tool used in network analysis to find influential nodes in a network — nodes meaning important friends in a social network, important links in the internet, or, in this case, important hockey players in a scoring network.

I wrote about it here.

Betweenness is a way to see how much a player drives scoring. Basically, in betweenness, the only variables that are considered are goals and primary assists. So a player will have a high betweenness score if they score and assist on a lot of goals and do so with a lot of different players. The intuition being that you're more of an independent scorer/assister if you can do so with many different players rather than just one or two. With that, we can say that we're more confident that you are your own scoring, and you don't rely on anybody for your scoring. I use betweenness as a proxy for "what percentage of your points were 'truly' yours?" And it's great because it's super simple in its construction — only goals and primary assists — so you can do it for virtually any league that tracks that. That means the NHL, CHL, KHL, SHL, BCHL, NCAA, you name it.

So, tl;dr version: it's a way to see how much a player drives their and their teammates' scoring.

How do you think that benefits the objective analysis of prospects? How does it help to disrupt biases?

**Davis:** Both pGPS and SEAL aim to take bias and guesswork out of comparing players between prominent leagues. Scouts who get a little too used to watching Canadian junior games can have trouble assessing scoring rates of teenagers playing pro in Europe — even though they know the rates are going to be much lower — determining what is good and what is just OK is still not an easy task. pGPS cuts to the heart of the matter by showing how likely a player is to succeed based on historical players with similar numbers, while SEAL takes a different approach, allowing someone to compare the rates to a player playing in a league that they are more familiar with.

**Scouch:** NHLScore is meant to significantly level the playing field. It is not at all a one-size-fits-all metric and there is plenty of other context I take into consideration to evaluate a player, but it's a good way to quickly see if a player's production is historically undervalued, overvalued, or is worthy of more exploration. It makes it much more easy to evaluate the production of a player regardless of what position they play, what age they are and what league they may be coming from. The most undervalued prospect since I've really dug into draft metrics? The Elias Pettersson.

**Oppenheimer:** I think it's huge in the objective analysis of prospects because it provides context to a player's points (goals and assists) that we wouldn't otherwise get. You see two players on a team with a lot of points. You wonder: "were they partners in crime? Or was one relying on the other?" Betweenness is a way to answer that. It provides a context to scoring that, in all honesty, is unavailable with any other stats. Even though nobody "truly" believes that all points are equal, we often analyze

players and prospects as if they are, and betweenness is a way to look at points at a deeper level to say "yeah, points aren't all the same."

Since starting this type of metric and analysis — do you feel that it's adjusted the way you look at prospects and how teams evaluate said players?

**Davis:** The thing about large-scale prospect models like pGPS and SEAL is that they don't tend to influence the way that you see the game (as opposed to my experiences in manual tracking, which most certainly affects the way that certain in-game events pop out at you). Instead, I find that it has given me a more subconscious understanding of how players' counting stats compare to each other: I can look at a player from a given league and a given age and have a pretty strong idea of how good their production is relative to their peers before I even run the numbers.

When it comes to NHL teams, I've been told multiple that most, if not all, NHL teams are using similar methods at some point in their draft preparation process. I imagine that it's helping them in a similar way and giving them some object evidence to show their more traditional scouts when it comes to comparing players of different leagues and ages.

**Scouch:** It has changed things to a certain extent. Putting as many prospects as possible on as level a playing field as possible gives you as unbiased a look at thousands of games of data so you can make the most informed decision. There are plenty of things that go into a draft pick, but if you're searching for value at your respective pick, it's a great starting point. I've put my money where my mouth is by tracking Toronto's draft picks I would've taken since 2016, and right now I'm feeling pretty good about quite a few (Dahlen at 31 in 2016, Raddysch at 57 in 2016, Fox at 62 in 2016, Allard at 72 in 2016, Ronning at 182 in 2016 and Chekhovich at 172 in 2017, most notably), and some that have made me rethink my thinking entirely (Candella at 122 in 2016, Lipanov at 59 in 2017, Nick Campoli at 141 in 2017, etc.). It's still early, but if there's evidence that what I'm up to is an improvement on the success of an entire scouting team without ever getting off my couch, then I'll keep digging in.

**Oppenheimer:** Yes, 100 per cent. Now when I look at prospects, the first questions that come to mind are "how'd they produce? (points per game is what I'd look at)", "what league did they play in? (league quality)" and "how much did they drive their scoring? (betweenness)." With these three pieces of information, I feel that I can do a good job of telling a prospect's offensive story — at least a much better job than I did prior to my initial application of betweenness.

What do you hope to see from the prospect stat analysis group in the next few years?

**Davis:** While I still think there's value in building models based on publicly available information, I'd like to see further developments in the field of microstatistics — particularly when comparing league to league and league to NHL. At which point do zone exit rates in the WHL become equivalent with zone exit rates in the SHL? What sort of retention rates do the metrics have as the players move into the AHL and NHL?

Those are questions that some NHL teams likely already have answers to, but that's the type of area that I'd like to see public analysis head toward.

**Scouch:** I hope for more from the leagues in general. Even-strength metrics are sparse or inaccurate at best in the CHL/USHL and are very clunky in most European leagues. The Czech Republic and Finland are doing it right and everyone should strive to at least trend in that direction over time. Even-strength ice time, shot counts and shot locations for every league in the CHL/USHL would be a huge step in the right direction. A better consumer-directed digital streaming model for junior hockey would be preferable, too. All it would do is give people like me more ability to further refine our work.

In terms of prospect stat analysis folks specifically, I'd like to see more work done in a/b'ing what you see on paper with what you see on the ice.



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Put the numbers and the eye-test to work together. It's something I'm planning on doing more of on the YouTube channel as we get further into 2019. Some folks seem to use metrics as gospel, and some seem to minimize their significance or isolate outliers as a sign of failure. Both groups disappear when those outliers often regress to their career averages, and I have to say I've been guilty of the same thing, so I try to be more aware of my biases as time goes on.

Oppenheimer: I want people to think more about context. I want people to think more intellectually. I think betweenness is a huge step in trying to measure what we TRULY care about with a player — how much of their offence was \*theirs\* — not their teammates', not their coaches', not their team's, but theirs. I think my application was a huge step in advancing hockey in this way. And I hope people take my lead and keep pushing forward to answer the questions that we truly care about — not just those that people have decided to worry about.

Give me one or two 2019 draft-eligible players that you think people are sleeping on.

Davis: He doesn't exactly need my help to stand out, but Arthur Kaliyev's numbers are demanding to be seen at this point. He's in the top three for both pGPS and SEAL lists. There are aspects of his style of play which may constitute red flags (he's definitely more of a beneficiary than a generator), but his production is truly spectacular. If he keeps that up over a full season, it will be hard to keep him out of the top 10.

Another player that's starting to pop for me is Nick Robertson, younger brother of Dallas Stars draft pick Jason Robertson. Nick is small (5-foot-9) and young (born Sept. 11, four days before the draft cutoff), which are key ingredients in being overlooked early on. He's currently just over a point per game in the OHL, leading the Peterborough Petes in primary points per game and shots on goal per game. He has that waterbug quality to his game and a cerebral aspect that jumps out in both his positioning and playmaking.

Scouch: Now we're getting to the juicy stuff. I think that now that the WJAC is over, you're going to hear Bobby Brink's name come up in the first round. Just remember that yaboi Will gave you the heads up beforehand. He tied for the lead in tournament scoring and has absolutely shredded the USHL this year in Sioux City. He's a fast and creative offensive player who plays with a dynamic style that I think could lend itself extremely well to the next level. He can make space for himself and make either make a play or score goals himself. At time of writing, his INV% is at 50 per cent (which is hilarious), and he's driving goal differentials very well at both ends. He's ranked as a mid-second on my sheet right now and I can't see a profile like his slipping out of the first.

The other one would be a Russian not named Vasily Podkolzin. I'm a big Pavel Dorofeyev fan. He is one of the older first-time draft eligibles, but even with his October birthdate, his NHLLeScore in the MHL (Russia's junior league) is over 30 on the back of a 60 per cent INV. I've seen quite a few Stalnye Lisy games, and while he isn't often the fastest skater on the ice, he's great on his edges and seems to know how to carve through a defence to find open space. He just gets the job done in multiple ways and seems almost impossible to knock off the puck. He's been in the KHL and held pointless so far, but that isn't uncommon. I would like to see him sent to the Magnitogorsk's VHL farm team in Orsk, but they aren't the best team so I can see how the KHL might be the better avenue right now for him. I'd also keep an eye on his teammates Dmitri Sheshin and overager Nikita Rozhkov. Sheshin's got bye-bye agility and can cover a lot of ice for a little guy. Tons of skill as well and makes a great linemate for Dorofeyev when I see them together. When he isn't playing with Dorofeyev, Rozhkov often is, and I see a similar profile there.

Oppenheimer: The Egors — Egor Serdyuk and Egor Afanasyev (Use the hashtag #YearOfTheEgor on Twitter, since 2019 is officially both the Year of the Pig and the Year of the Egor). Both players look to be important scoring drivers for their teams — the Victoriaville Tigres in the QMJHL for Serdyuk and the Muskegon Lumberjacks in the USHL for Afanasyev. As of now, I haven't seen any major prospect rankings have

them in their top 60, let alone the first round, but I think there's reason to think that they at least have as much offensive ability and potential as any 2019 prospects not in the semi-consensus top six (the top six being Hughes, Kakko, Zegras, Dach, Cozens and Krebs).

All three models cited above are not perfect nor can they be used as the be-all, end-all in prospect evaluation. What they do is provide more information about a player and their situations. I know from speaking with Davis, Scouch and Oppenheimer from time to time that they are constantly working to improve their metrics and looking for different ways to improve these evaluation tools.

Combining qualitative and quantitative analysis is always the best way to come to the best-informed decision possible. Watch the prospect, review data and come back for second viewings with specific details in mind. The data can usually explain or shed light on things that might've slipped through the cracks in prior viewings and then you suddenly become aware of a player doing certain things. To that end, hopefully shedding some light on these three analysts in the public sphere and their metrics allows us to all better evaluate prospects (and hockey players in general).

The Athletic LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124359 Websites

The Athletic / Samuels-Thomas: Midseason NHL award picks — the kind you won't see handed out in June

By Jordan Samuels-Thomas

Jan 3, 2019

We've just about reached the halfway point of the NHL season, and Pierre LeBrun recently published his midseason picks for individual NHL awards. LeBrun, of course, focused on the well known NHL awards given out every June — the Norris, Calder, Vezina, Selke, Jack Adams and Hart.

But there are other areas of the game in which players deserve recognition as well. That's where my "Unofficial" NHL awards come in.

Some of these accolades will celebrate areas of the game that are not currently recognized by the traditional NHL awards, while other honors will focus on the lighter side of the game.

There's a disconnect in appreciation between the historical players of the past and the talented players we watch today. With that in mind, I named each of these awards after the current and former players that most represents the spirit of each award.

Without further adieu:

The Dustin Brown Award — bounce-back player of the year

Nominees: Max Domi (MTL), Jeff Skinner (BUF), Tomas Tatar (MTL)

It was so hard not to give this award to Jeff Skinner who is among the league leaders with 26 goals already. However, it's hard to ignore what Max Domi has done under the pressure that comes with playing in Montreal.

An organization never wants to move on from their lottery picks. But that's exactly what Arizona and Montreal did when they swapped Domi and Alex Galchenyuk this summer.



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In 40 games this season Domi has not disappointed in his new role as the Canadiens No. 1 center. Domi has been producing at almost a point-per-game pace (14-23-37).

The decision to acquire Domi and the faith displayed in the 23-year-old has brought some stability to the center position in Montreal.

The Cory Conacher Award — best call-up

Nominees: Pontus Aberg (ANA), Drake Batherson (OTT), Adin Hill (ARI)

Every time I've watched Batherson play in Ottawa he's made an impact. One day he's running Ottawa's power play from the half-wall and the next day he's in Belleville. It's only a matter of time before he earns a full-time role in Ottawa, but this award goes to Adin Hill who has come out of nowhere for Arizona.

Hill has done exactly what you'd hope your call-up goaltender would do each time he's given the net: Give the team a chance to win. He's done that and more for an Arizona team that has been battling injuries all season.

Hill has earned a 7-4 record while riding a 2.36 GAA and .916 save percentage.

Goalies are funny in the sense that their development and the level in which they find success vary greatly. You could be in the SPHL like Scott Darling was in 2011 and just three years later be starting in the NHL.

Before being called up from AHL Tucson, Hill was sporting a GAA of 3.22 and a save percentage of .871 in six games. Heck, I even scored on him a couple years ago.

He's been a different goalie in the NHL. His feet are quiet in traffic and he's played well within his 6-foot-6 frame. At just 22, Hill is playing himself into consideration as the future long-term option in Arizona.

The Mark Giordano Award — most improved player

Nominees: Timo Meier (SJ), Sam Reinhart (BUF), Morgan Rielly (TOR)

The argument for Morgan Rielly as the leagues most improved player is a strong one. He's well on pace to shatter his career highs in both goals and assists and is in serious consideration for Norris honors. He's been a big part of Toronto's offensive potency and with a contract that pays him \$5-million over each of the next four seasons, Rielly is a salary cap steal.

But this award goes to Timo Meier who has really emerged into the player the Sharks hoped for when they drafted him with the ninth overall pick in 2015. Meier is the prototypical new-aged power-forward who is physical, has size, can score, plays with an edge, and — most importantly — can really skate.

In 81 games last season Meier registered 36 points but in just 39 games so far this season he is only one point shy of last season's totals. Meier has found his offensive stride and his improvement from last season makes an already deep Sharks team even deeper.

The Raymond Bourque Award — best two-way defenseman

Nominees: Seth Jones (CBJ), Ryan McDonagh (TB), Shea Weber (MTL)

With the Norris trending toward rewarding the offensive statistics of defensemen above all, I thought it'd be appropriate to recognize the NHL's replacement of the defensive defensemen by recognizing the league's best two-way defensemen.

Ryan McDonagh has made a living matching up against the NHL's top forwards and Shea Weber has been lights out since returning from injury but Seth Jones earns my midseason nod.

He's an efficient puck mover, a strategic power-play quarterback and is formidable as a top-line shutdown defender for Columbus. He's excelled in every situation coach John Tortorella has put him in.

The Beatles Award — NHL's best group

Nominees: Bergeron/Marchand/Pastrnak (BOS), Rantanen/MacKinnon/Landeskog (COL), Tavares/Marner/Hyman (TOR)

The group in Toronto brings excitement every night but their play is really driven by two-thirds of the line. When healthy, the group in Boston has arguably been the most dominant group but Patrice Bergeron has missed significant time due to injury.

That leaves Mikko Rantanen, Nathan MacKinnon and Gabriel Landeskog as the NHL's best line so far this season. Rantanen and MacKinnon rank second and fourth in league scoring and Landeskog is in the top-20.

Their chemistry has been undeniable and they always find a way to produce. The other groups have at least two players 26 or older to complete their line, while the group in Colorado has 26-year-old Landeskog as their elder statesman.

No team has had an answer for this trio and with this group being so young Colorado has a premier first-line to count on for years.

Alexander the Great Award — goal of the year

Claude Giroux (PHI vs. Tampa Bay)

Before Giroux decided to take the Lightning to the catwalk, I was deciding whether this honor would go to Evgeny Kuznetsov or Sidney Crosby.

Yet through all the change, confusion, and chaos going on with the Flyers right now, Giroux returned from his Christmas break with a nice little message reminding everyone that he's still one of the premier talents in the NHL.

Where to begin?

We can start with his speed coming through the neutral zone, his confidence to pull the puck between his legs, his awareness to lift McDonagh's stick, his strength to shield off and protect the puck from McDonagh, or his skill to pull the puck across the crease on Andrei Vasilevskiy for the goal.

The Jumbo Joe Award — assist of the year

Mitch Marner/Bobby Hastings (TOR vs. SJ)

There have been plenty of pretty plays performed this season but Mitch Marner's assist to John Tavares truly embodies the team sport that is hockey.

Marner breaks his stick early in his shift and Leafs equipment manager Bobby Hastings recognizes the compromised piece of composite before Marner does. Hastings retrieves Marner's backup and when No. 16 finally realizes his stick is unusable he sprints toward the bench where Hastings is ready as Zach Hyman leads a 3-on-3 rush up the ice. Without breaking stride Marner grabs his new stick, receives the puck just inside the blueline and uses some elite deception to freeze the San Jose goaltender and find Tavares backdoor.

A lot of times we limit the roles of a hockey team to just its coaches and players. But ask anyone playing in the NHL who keeps the team running smoothly and almost all will point to an equipment manager, an athletic trainer, or any of the other behind the scenes jobs required in having a successful organization.

The Dominator Award — save of the year

Carey Price (MTL vs. Washington)

Goaltender Carey Price is still struggling to find his 2013-2017 form but that hasn't stopped him from gracing our eyes and Twitter feeds with some spectacular saves.

His most recent save on Alex Ovechkin received appreciation from fans, teammates, and Ovechkin himself who was first in line to clap his hands and give Price a fist-bump in appreciation for the save he made.



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Adding to the magnitude of the save was the timing. The game was tied 4-4 with the final seconds of regulation ticking down on the clock, Price's save secured at least one point for his team and gave them a chance to earn one more in overtime.

If it's good enough for one of the best scorers the NHL has ever seen, it's good enough for me.

The Golden Cup of the Great One Award — hardest to defend

Nominees: Johnny Gaudreau (CGY), Nathan MacKinnon (COL), Connor McDavid (EDM)

A lot of players have been allusive and deserved consideration for this super scientific award. Connor McDavid is the league's most unguardable player. McDavid is probably the only player in the league whose highlight reel of "almost" goals and assists runs just as long as his actual highlights.

As long as he's in the league, I'm not sure if he'll meet a challenger for this award.

The Patrik Stefan Award — worst play of the year:

Marc Barberio runs over Semyon Varlamov

I wish I could say "it happens" but that just wouldn't be true.

This mishap resulted in Flyers rookie Mikhail Vorobyev's first NHL goal. Quite the story to tell his kids.

The Patrick Kane Award — best dangle

Context is important for this one. In the days leading up to this installment of the Crosby vs. McDavid matchup, Crosby's pedestrian start left many wondering if McDavid had unquestionably passed No. 87 as the world's best player.

Crosby responded with a two-goal night, including this game-winning overtime goal. Crosby channels his inner James Harden by circling toward the corner before re-attacking Ryan Strome in a 1-on-1 situation.

Crosby, who is not known for his dangles, continues to show how complete his game is.

The P.K. Subban Award — most exciting new face

Nominees: Elias Pettersson (VAN), Rasmus Dahlin (BUF), Gritty (PHI)

Rasmus Dahlin has been as advertised and Elias Pettersson has been better than anyone could have imagined, but I'm not sure if anyone has made a bigger impression than Gritty, the Flyers new mascot.

He's been everywhere during this NHL season and has shown no signs of slowing down. I don't think anyone could have envisioned a better reception for a new mascot who has become a pop-culture icon in just four months.

The Teemu Selanne Award — best goal celebration

Rasmus Ristolainen

I love seeing a guy who loves to score goals and Rasmus Ristolainen loves to score goals. Now that the Sabres seem to have turned a corner it's no surprise to see a guy like Ristolainen show just how much fun he's having playing for a winner.

He's scored four goals this season and almost all of them resulted in Ristolainen triggering his inner Justin Timberlake.

There was this goal and celebration against the Sharks:

And my personal favorite celebration following an overtime goal against the Canadiens:

I'm not exactly sure what he's doing here but it was a lot of fun to watch and it has been awesome to see more personalities emerge this season.

The Theo Fleury Award — worst goal celebration

This one is a bit tricky as the celebration itself made sense. Ryan Ellis hadn't scored a goal a couple months into the season so the old 'monkey off the back' thing is understandable.

But the net was empty. So I'm not sure a celebration of that magnitude is warranted or appropriate. Does an empty-net goal really get the preverbal monkey off your back?

I'll share a quick story that only a few know. My first professional goal was against the Utica Comets while I was playing for the Rochester Americans. It was an empty net goal. Not how I pictured my first professional goal and, quite honestly, I was a bit too embarrassed to celebrate. Though it did feel good to know that the zero next to my name would be gone.

My team was now up two goals and with 30 seconds left in regulation, my coach kept me out there to finish the game. A few seconds after the draw I quickly gained possession of the puck in the neutral zone. I skated the puck over the blue line to the top of the circle and wired a puck over Jacob Markstrom's shoulder.

It was at that point that I believed the monkey was truly off my back. I'd go onto score three goals that season.

The Barry Melrose Award — best hair

Nominees: Brock Boeser (VAN), Jonathan Drouin (MTL), William Nylander (TOR)

This was arguably the tightest race of all the midseason awards. William Nylander, Brock Boeser, and Jonathan Drouin all have futures as shampoo models and if they don't already have a conditioner endorsement, their agents have failed them.

Nylander's game still needs some ironing out but his hair is silky smooth and is already in midseason form. Players often say, "Look good, feel good, play good," so it's only a matter of time until Nylander's game matches his elite level flow.

Update: Naturally, Nylander showed up for Thursday's game against the Wild with a new, clean-cut look, as I kinda suspected. He still gets to keep his Melrose Award because we know what he's hiding under his helmet.

The Mr. Universe Award — most interesting play

Just when I thought I've seen everything, Robert Bortuzzo makes me wonder why I ever thought it was okay to play the majority of my career without wearing a cup.

Especially considering it can be used to score goals and I could have definitely benefited from more goals in my career.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.04.2019

1124360 Websites

The Athletic / The story behind the Rangers fan who trash talked his way to a signed stick from Sidney Crosby

By Craig Custance

Jan 3, 2019

The thing that still stands out was the guy's voice. It was LOUD. And not only that, his taunts from near the glass at Madison Square Garden, were extended and long. This wasn't "Crosby sucks" material.



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"I couldn't come with that, I had to come with something better," said Rangers fan Nick Lipeika. "He's probably heard that before."

No, this trash talk was much more creative. So much so, that it caught Crosby's attention.

In the first period, Crosby was called for tripping, which put him right in earshot of Lipeika, who had first row seats by the penalty box. Lipeika takes his Rangers fandom seriously. When the best player in the league is that close, he believes it's his job to try and throw him off his game.

"I'm hoping he's the guy who comes to the box and right off the bat, he does," Lipeika said. "Right off the bat, I gotta roll with it. I gotta hit him with things."

Hey Crosby! For two minutes you and I are going to sit here, with no goals!

When Gatorade was looking for endorsements in Canada, they were looking for a tough guy. Justin Bieber wasn't available, so they used you!

I heard Evgeni Malkin said he would have won a few more Cups if he had a better supporting cast!

Crosby smiled. So did the NHL official in the box. That just encouraged more and another Rangers fan, Michael Gross, started to join in.

It might have been the Pierre McGuire comment that got him.

Hey Sid! Pierre McGuire DOESN'T want you to have fun out there.

It was around that point where Crosby let some water fly from his squirt bottle in the direction of the Rangers fans.

"He sprayed me through the glass," Gross said. "It was non-stop from there."

Despite the best efforts of these Rangers fans to get inside Crosby's head, it's safe to say it didn't work. The Penguins won. Crosby did what he does and had a goal and a couple assists. But perhaps his biggest upset was winning over these diehard fans.

Like any red-blooded Rangers fans, these guys hated Crosby. That's what happens when you're the best player in the league. If he was a Ranger? Different story. But he isn't. He was the target of most of their trash talking on this night, as he is on most nights in visiting cities. Only the occasional reminder to Phil Kessel that he's his parents' third-favorite kid, got Crosby a reprieve.

Then came what Lipeika called Crosby's power move.

Lipeika still isn't sure why he was hanging around after the final buzzer but there was a payoff when Penguins assistant equipment manager Jon Taglianetti emerged with a stick and tapped on the glass. After the tap on the glass was a point in Lipeika's direction. The stick was for him.

"My first reaction is I don't know if I want this right now. I don't think this is what I signed up for," Lipeika said. "I could see something was written on it."

To the left of Crosby's signature was a message back to Lipeika.

"Good chirps. Take it easy on me next time!"

A goal and a win aside, winning over a section of Rangers fans might have been Crosby's biggest accomplishment on Wednesday night.

"If he was a Ranger, I'm all in, couldn't get enough of him. When the No. 1 guy in the league comes in, you want to hammer him," Lipeika said.

And now?

"Now, things look a little different in my eyes," he said.

It's hard to hate a player who handles the trash talk like Crosby did.

"You can't," he said. "With a power move like that, you have to respect it."

If Lipeika was on social media, it'd be blowing up. Instead Gross posted a picture on Twitter and his mentions have been flying. Lipeika heard from friends that he might want to break his social media avoidance to see the reaction. The picture of the signed stick was everywhere.

Lipeika still isn't sure where he's going to display the stick. But he's got a great story, from one of the greatest players in the game. Not just him, but everyone around him.

"I had a buddy of mine who texted me, 'So what do you think about Sid now?'" Gross said. "I was like, 'Dude, he's the man.' You don't see that. You just don't. He took grief for three quarters of the game, had fun with it, and was like, alright, here you go."

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The Athletic / A look inside the elite hockey mind of the Lightning's 'wizard': Nikita Kucherov

By Joe Smith

Jan 2, 2019

LOS ANGELES — Nikita Kucherov strolled around a Tampa Bay area furniture store in early December doing what he does best: lightning the lamp.

It was for a soon-to-be-aired GEICO commercial, where the insurance company sought out Kucherov, hoping to parlay Kucherov's world-class goal-scoring skills into a funny skit. Kucherov, in a Lightning jersey, was all business — no smiles, no speaking lines — just turning on a half-dozen lamps before walking out.

"See you tomorrow," a store employee said.

Kucherov said it only took a couple takes to nail it.

"Quick and easy," Kucherov said. "It was fun, too."

Hockey seems to come easy for Kucherov, who was named Wednesday to his third straight NHL All-Star team; he'll join captain Steven Stamkos on the Atlantic Division team, with Brayden Point a candidate for the "final man in" fan vote ([www.nhl.com/vote](http://www.nhl.com/vote)). Kucherov leads the league in scoring (65 points) after a dominating December where he racked up 30 points (nine goals) in 14 games.

Defenseman Victor Hedman called him the best player in the league. Kucherov wouldn't go that far but said that's his goal.

"For sure, who doesn't?" Kucherov said. "If you don't want to be the best, you can't be here. It's a tough league, if you want to compete against the best, you want to be the best. It's every kid's dream to be the best player. And obviously, everyone has their own opinion. ... You can't satisfy everybody. I'll work hard and, maybe, for someone I'll be the best."

One thing where there's no debate: Kucherov has one of the most brilliant hockey minds in the game. For all the elite skills Kucherov has — from his sniper's shot, his deceptive skating, his slick passing — it's the way the Russian thinks and sees the game that sets him apart. Assistant Derek Lalonde calls him "Wizard." Former NHL center Jeff Halpern compared him to Albert Einstein.

No, Kucherov didn't develop the theory of relativity, like Einstein. But when it comes to Kucherov's hockey IQ, his ability to read and anticipate the game, he has few peers.



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"I mean, it's higher than everyone else," Stamkos said. "It's tough to explain when you know what plays are coming ahead of time or know what the defender is thinking and trying to do. He's just a step ahead. For me, being an offensive guy myself, you can just tell he's going to where the puck is going to be and looking to move it where he's hoping his linemate is going to be. The results are dangerous looks. He's always had that ability to do that. But when you mix in (the) confidence and skill set he has acquired over the years, you get a supreme offensive player."

Is hockey IQ a learned trait or innate?

Stamkos uses the example of the first goal he scored against the Flyers Dec. 27.

You'll see Stamkos curl behind the net with the puck and try (unsuccessfully) to feed Ondrej Palat in front. The loose puck goes to Kucherov in the right circle. He sees Stamkos out of the corner of his eye, but that's enough.

He knows where Stamkos is going. Stamkos curls into the high slot area, between two Flyers defenders, and one-times an on-the-tape Kucherov pass.

"Hockey is all about reads," Kucherov said. "Reading the play. Reading where the next play is going to be. I knew where (Stamkos) was going to be before he was there. He knew I was going to pass it. We were a step ahead of what happened. I just put it in an area where he was going to skate in and he knew I was going to put it there. If someone else goes there, maybe it won't happen."

How do you develop hockey IQ? Is it a learned trait or innate? Kucherov said you can pick up more by watching film or by having a good coach. But how did Kucherov's start?

Playing handball.

Kucherov had humble beginnings growing up in Moscow, wearing skates that were three sizes too big (padding with three pairs of socks). But he was always playing sports. Hockey. Soccer. Basketball. And handball, which is a team sport in which two teams of seven players each pass the ball using their hands with the aim of throwing it into the goal of the other team.

"It's like soccer, basketball, it's all the same mentality — pass the ball and get open," Kucherov said. "We played it all the time when I was a kid. I think that's where I picked up this try to get open, read the play. If you have the ball, the three other guys have to think fast to get open or set a pick on a guy. You know from the beginning as a kid you have to learn how to do it. Now, it helps me. Now, every time I want to pass it, I want to get open."

Kucherov credits his youth hockey coach, Gennadi Kurdin with developing the way he thinks the game. Kurdin would pick up Kucherov every day for practice, peppering the kid with questions, discussing strategy and what-if scenarios.

"I'd listen to everything," Kucherov said. "Sometimes he'd ask me, 'What would you do on a 3-on-2, what would you do if the D was here?' All the little things. All the talk was on hockey. How to get open, how to be available for a partner. Don't stand still. If you're standing still, you're taking yourself out of the game."

"Always be creative."

'Like Einstein'

Kucherov never stops learning.

There are many games where Kucherov's agent Dan Milstein's company will send the wing clips of his shifts from that night so he can pour over them like we binge on Netflix. Kucherov also watches highlights of some of the game's other top players, from Patrick Kane to Jack Eichel to Nathan MacKinnon, Artemi Panarin, Evgeni Malkin and Johnny Gaudreau.

"I like it — guys make plays every night," Kucherov said. "It's fun to watch. People come to watch these guys (and) they want to see special plays and sick goals. Those guys are inspiring. The next time when I have a chance, I'll do the same thing, cause it'll be in my head."

Kucherov even pointed to an unreal goal that the Flyers' Claude Giroux scored against the Lightning Dec. 27. It was against Kucherov's line, but he couldn't help but admire the play.

"I had fun watching it," Kucherov said. "Skilled play. Even though he scored on us, it's still a sick goal."

Lightning assistant Jeff Halpern, a long-time NHL center, compares Kucherov to the elite-level thinking of Hall of Famer Adam Oates.

"Adam Oates, when people call him a great passer, it's more than just people moving all over the ice, it was him seeing those movements three, four, five steps ahead," Halpern said. "Where the other nine players are going to be. The best example for Oates was he was able to pretend there were other guys on the ice. So he could fake a pass to people who weren't there and had defenders diving all over the ice."

"You don't even think about that at times if you're most players. (With) Kuch and (Oates), it's not just from their athletic ability where they are the biggest, fastest, strongest. They just think the game a different way. They have the hands and feet to go with it. That's what you get."

Halpern said it impacts the way you have to coach a player like that. He and coach Jon Cooper said there are plays or reads Kucherov makes that they might initially think is wrong, but it works out. "The puck follows him around the ice," Cooper said. Halpern said any power play meeting he's holding is better when Kucherov stands up and runs it.

"You can try to build up someone's hockey IQ, but it's kind of like saying, 'I want to be a better mathematician,'" Halpern said. "If you practice math, you can be better, but the Albert Einsteins of the world and those people — Kuch is in that discussion for the gifts they have in the way they think and how their brain works. It's a different level of thinking, just a special person at their craft like a musician or an artist. He's in that category."

One of the most memorable moves Kucherov has made in his career is his fake-shot breakaway attempt, where he makes the goalie think he's going to his forehand but instead lets the puck slip off his stick and between their legs.

Kucherov first did it in a regular-season game in Buffalo last season, then repeated it at the All-Star Game on Capitals goalie Braden Holtby. The premise came from a simple idea: Kucherov noticed that when he'd go to his forehand on a breakaway, goalies typically open up their legs as they try to move from left to right.

Hence, the opening.

"He's one of those players who thinks like a goalie," Holtby said. "It's scary when guys think that way."

It wasn't an impromptu move. Kucherov worked on it at practice with goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy. Kucherov continued to think a step ahead. So when he tried the move on Holtby later in the season in a game in Washington, Kucherov added a couple small elements to it. Instead of selling the fake and going to his forehand, Kucherov moved his stick over the puck a couple times as it headed for Holtby.

"Something different," Kucherov said.

Lalonde, in his first season as a Lightning assistant, admired Kucherov from afar the past several years while working in the Wild organization. But Lalonde said he got a whole new appreciation for the three-time All-Star when working with him up close the first 41 games this year.

"I call him 'Wizard' in the coaches room," Lalonde said. "He's truly special at what he does. His deception, his play with the puck, what he does for his linemates. His anticipation, it's remarkable. There are some skilled guys that, when he gets the puck, you kind of leave him alone and let him go. He's that special and that creative."



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Defenseman Anton Stralman said there are many times where Kucherov has caught him and teammates off guard with passes and plays he's made. "You have to expect the unexpected," Stralman said.

Milstein, who also represented Wings legend Pavel Datsyuk, said the two Russians are "100 percent alike" in their spectacular hockey sense.

"Everything he does is elite," Stralman said. "I don't think there's a lot of guys in this league that can take him on any of those skills. Whether it's his edge work, weaving through the natural zone or coming out of tight situations, playmaking ability, shooting. He's just one of the best."

And Kucherov wants to get better. Despite his record-setting month of December, Kucherov is far from satisfied.

"Things are going well right now, but you can always do more," Kucherov said. "I always come out of a game thinking, 'I could have done more, I could have had more chances, I could have scored more, done better defensively.' There's always something more, more."

"I think you can only be satisfied when you're done playing hockey. You want to always push yourself to do better every time. Nobody cares what you did last game, tomorrow is a new challenge."

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The Athletic / Would moving practices to nighttime make NHL players sleep more soundly — and play better?

By Fluto Shinzawa

Jan 3, 2019

Sean Kuraly does not consider himself a morning person. At the same time, the Bruins' fourth-liner encounters an issue that's common around the league: It is not easy to settle down after the high of a game and go to sleep.

By Kuraly's estimation, it is usually 1 or 2 a.m. after a 7 p.m. home game that his eyes close for the night. Then, if the Bruins are scheduled to practice the next day at their usual 11:30 a.m. start time, Kuraly wakes up at 8:30 a.m.

Kuraly, 25, is single. He does not have children to get to school. Still, his alarm is not a welcome intrusion.

The 8:30 wakeup leaves Kuraly enough time to get a coffee, commute from his downtown home to Warrior Ice Arena, and arrive at the practice rink in Brighton to eat breakfast, stretch, work out, attend meetings, and do whatever else is scheduled before he hits the ice at 11:30 a.m. To counter the quick turnaround, Kuraly usually takes a nap after practice.

There is a possible solution: practicing at night on non-game days. No team currently does.

"If you're able to do that and have player buy-in, I would definitely support that," said Benjamin Jensen, key account manager for professional sports sales in the USA for Firstbeat, the Finnish company that collects and interprets heartbeat data for teams.

The problem lies within Jensen's statement: player buy-in. Today's NHL players are used to their routines. It would be a massive disruption to bust career-long habits and have players approve a 7 p.m. session.

The first NHL coach who proposes such a shift would face a mutiny. But the first coach who does so may enjoy a competitive advantage.

"It is an interesting concept to see if anybody did it," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "I'd like to see how it would work out."

Synchronizing training and performance times is nothing new. It is common practice for individual athletes in the Olympics, for example, to train around the same time as their events. The circadian rhythm falls into place. The body figures out when to peak for performance and fade for recovery.

In theory, there are no barriers to limit such a setup in the NHL. Nothing in the collective bargaining agreement dictates when teams must practice. Article 16.6 reads as follows: "Practice sessions shall be scheduled at reasonable times in accordance with the general practice of Clubs in the League."

Currently, practice is late morning or early afternoon, regardless of what has taken place the night before. Exceptions are practices on the road, especially on the West Coast. Eastern teams sometimes practice in the late afternoon Pacific time to acclimate.

If there is a trend, it is toward later practices following night games.

"We go at 11:30," Cassidy said. "Years ago, it was always, 'Let's just stick to 10:30.' I wouldn't be surprised if teams went at 12 or 12:30. We may do that down the road."

The reason is to extend postgame sleep for the players. Data has proven that proper sleep is critical for recovery. Depending on the player, the process of repair sometimes does not begin until several hours into his shuteye. It makes little sense, then, to disrupt recovery during a critical stage.

A player coming off proper rest is in better shape, so to speak, than one who is fatigued. The likelihood of injury decreases. The chances of better performance increase. A team that has more good, healthy players is more likely to win than one that does not.

Part of the hesitation at aligning game and practice times is the break with tradition. Everybody in the league is used to practicing in the late morning after a night game.

But tradition sometimes cedes to practicality.

The morning skate used to be standard operating procedure. Regardless of fatigue, venue, or circumstance, players would always report to the rink the morning of a game — specifically for an on-ice flush of toxins imbibed the previous night.

Bruins captain Zdeno Chara entered the league in 1997.

"Back then, that was not even an idea or a thought," Chara, 41, said of bypassing the morning skate. "Unless you were really hurt or injured a little bit, then you took some morning skates off. But other than that, everybody was on. No exceptions. It was just the culture. Skate, skate, skate. That's the way it was."

Today, with kale smoothies being more popular than tallboys, what was mandatory has since been loosened. Depending on the team, the morning skate is no longer required, especially during stretches of travel or heavy game scheduling.

In some circumstances, data gathered via wearable devices has led to the routine's outright banishment.

Like most Finnish teams, Jokerit Helsinki held morning skates. But when the club moved from Finland's SM-Liiga to Russia's KHL, its travel skyrocketed. The information Jokerit studied from its Firstbeat heart rate monitors convinced the club's decision-makers the team was better off scrubbing the morning skate to compensate for its KHL travel.

"They were still in a recovery state when they woke up," Jensen said. "When they were allowed to sleep in, those were really important recovery hours in the late morning. The big deal for them was playing within seven different time zones because Russia is so big. It's a little bit of a different situation than in the States. But what is applicable is that their biggest finding was by eliminating the morning skate."



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It is a reasonable guess, then, that pushing back practice would improve recovery and promote better health. It is just a guess. There are no teams that have synchronized practice and games, and thus no data to work with.

So teams are doing their best with the current template. The morning after a game, players continue the recovery process at the rink. The data they're compiling through such routines encourages this behavior. A morning practice also gives players enough time to recover after the session and before the next game.

"Sometimes it's often beneficial from a recovery standpoint to get them in to do a little bit of lighter-intensity, lighter-volume work to flush the legs out," said Emma Beanland, sports science manager at Catapult Sports, which allows teams to monitor workloads, among other things, with its wearables. "It's an opportunity to get in there to the facility to do a massage, have a shake, eat good food in the morning."

By now, players consider this schedule second nature. That can be a good thing.

"There's a comfort to that," said Dina Gentile, professor of sports management at Endicott College. "A lot of times in sports, folks call these things rituals. That can go awry, like if you have a certain athletic trainer who's been taping your ankle and not available, so you can't perform. We try to use the word routine more. If it's another trainer there, you're still able to perform. It's a mental game."

If players have settled into their current routines, it's possible they could adapt to later practices — and possibly thrive. Lifestyle, however, would suffer.

Cassidy was used to practicing at night. During the three seasons he spent in Alleghe in northeastern Italy, Cassidy and his teammates on HC Alleghe practiced at 7 p.m. His teammates had day jobs.

"My partner was the local cop," Cassidy said. "My other (defenseman) was the town plumber."

It is not that way in the NHL. Some of today's players have never held other jobs. Their skills have given them families to spend time with or nightlife they enjoy. Practicing at night would compromise their lifestyles.

"You'd have to have a very understanding group," Cassidy said. "And you've got to have understanding wives. You'd really have to be in sync with that and have some top-end guys that said, 'I've done this. It works.'"

The Canucks, given their home base in Vancouver, face the most troublesome travel schedule in the NHL. As such, they have sought outside help. In 2011, the Canucks hired Fatigue Science, a company that studies how sleep affects human performance, to optimize their travel, rest, and practice schedules.

The Canucks, however, did not regularly practice at night.

It would not be good enough for a team to have a forward-looking coach, general manager, and sports science personnel to turn a practice schedule upside down. They would have to convince players, many with families, to forego dinners with their spouses and children in search of a theoretical spike in performance.

Good luck, in other words, telling Chara, Patrice Bergeron, and David Backes that their current routines no longer qualify.

"It would be the time when kids want to see you before bed and you can spend some time, whether playing with them or reading them bedtime stories, and you'd be like, 'I've got to go,'" Chara said. "Then you're dealing with traffic. You probably have to leave at 5 for 7 o'clock practice, and it's rush hour. That's another thing you're dealing with — accidents, rush hour. So I think it would probably be tough."

The most likely recipe for adoption would include a young team, an experienced coach, and a data-driven organization. The first team to try it would be considered cuckoo. But a lot of old-school thinkers rolled their

eyes when morning skates were diminished, enforcers dropped off rosters, and brown rice replaced pregame pasta.

Progress requires a pioneer.

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1124363 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Pettersson incident 'not a dirty play' in eyes of Canucks

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

January 4, 2019, 12:12 AM

The Elias Pettersson Road Show took a potentially disastrous plot twist on Thursday when the Vancouver Canucks' star rookie was injured in a 2-0 loss to the Montreal Canadiens.

The 20-year-old centre, a runaway leader in the NHL rookie scoring race and the Calder Trophy favourite this season, was injured at 5:44 of the second period on a takedown behind the play by Montreal rookie Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

Pettersson's right leg doubled back under the weight of his body as he was pulled down by Kotkaniemi. Pettersson required medical attention on the ice but was able to skate to the dressing room on his own. He did not return.

After that, the game hardly seemed to matter on the West Coast as Canucks fans, mostly alarmed and enraged, flooded social media. Coming off a 4-3 win the night before in Ottawa, where Pettersson's hat trick included the overtime winner on the day he was named to the NHL All-Star Game as a rookie, the Canucks struggled to test Canadiens' goalie Carey Price.

Vancouver eventually outshot Montreal 33-27 but seldom sustained pressure or generated second-chance opportunities against Price. Vancouver goalie Jacob Markstrom also played well but was beaten in the first period by Jordie Benn's shot from distance (after Canucks Troy Stecher lost the puck and Sven Baertschi lost his check) and on a second-period breakaway by Jonathan Drouin that followed a turnover by Brock Boeser.

The Canucks end their six-game road trip Saturday in Toronto, where Pettersson was supposed to make his inaugural visit to the centre of the hockey universe.

There was no indication from the Canucks as to how long Pettersson might be out with his "lower-body injury," but he is staying with the team on the road and will be re-examined Friday in Toronto.

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As would be the case in every passionate Canadian hockey market that loses its favoured son to injury due to questionable contact, the response from fans to the Pettersson injury was severe and overwhelmingly hostile.

It didn't help that Kotkaniemi, who is Finnish, joked during the Canadiens' visit to Vancouver in November that "I hate Swedes" when he was asked about facing Pettersson. After the Canucks scored in the 3-2 loss to Montreal, Kotkaniemi said: "Nice shot today but not anything special."



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Pettersson, of course, is extraordinary. With 22 goals and 42 points in his first 37 NHL games, he is scoring at a historic clip for first-year players.

But it should be remembered that Kotkaniemi is only 18 and apparently chirps everyone, including teammates. He has six minor penalties in 41 games.

Where Canucks fans are justifiably upset is that for the second time this season, Pettersson was injured by contact behind the play without a penalty being called. The 2017 fifth-overall pick missed six games in October with a concussion after he was bodyslammed to the ice by Florida Panthers defenceman Mike Matheson, who was suspended for three games by the NHL.

Kotkaniemi clearly hooked Pettersson as the Canucks started to move up-ice ahead of the Canadiens rookie. When Pettersson slammed on the brakes, Kotkaniemi fell over him but grabbed the Canuck on his way down, pinning Pettersson's right leg.

Kotkaniemi, who apologized to Pettersson on the ice as the Canucks limped off, clearly did not intend to injure Vancouver's most promising young star since Pavel Bure. But his infractions could easily have been penalized for either hooking or interference.

This is what Canucks coach Travis Green told reporters in Montreal about the play: "I've watched it a lot of times. First of all, it's not a dirty play by their player at all. (Pettersson) gets hooked a little bit. Petey actually pushes back on him, leans back and probably tries to give a little bit of a reverse hit, and two young guys fall to the ice. It's not a penalty."

It wasn't an ideal night for Brandon Sutter to return to the Canucks lineup after missing 30 games with a shoulder injury. Not only was he unlucky enough to be asked to replace Pettersson on a power play that went 0-for-5, Sutter made the mistake of being honest when interviewed in the second intermission by Sportsnet's Dan Murphy.

"It was a pretty innocent play," Sutter said of the Pettersson injury.

That made Sutter the second most unpopular guy in Vancouver after Kotkaniemi.

Playing for the first time since Oct. 29, Sutter was given 19:14 of ice time and registered two shots while going 13-7 on faceoffs.

With Nikolay Goldobin scratched by Green a second consecutive game, the coach's power-play choices were limited after Pettersson's injury. He shortened his bench to just three lines as Tyler Motte and Tim Schaller sat out most of the third period.

Vancouver's heavy schedule through the first half of the season means even a significant absence may not cost Pettersson too many games.

After Saturday's game, the Canucks don't open a six-game homestand until next Thursday against the Arizona Coyotes. With the All-Star weekend and NHL schedule break at the end of January, those six games are the Canucks' only action over a four-week period.

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1124364 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / William Nylander's drought serves as a warning for Maple Leafs' Kyle Dubas

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

January 3, 2019, 7:27 PM

TORONTO — Auston Matthews called it.

Once coach Mike Babcock reinserted the slumping William Nylander on his right side, the Maple Leafs star centre took it upon himself to play monkey exterminator.

"He's going to score a goal, and the weight of the world is going to be off his shoulders," Matthews accurately predicted Wednesday, ahead of Thursday's matinee versus the Wild.

"I told him I'll definitely be looking for him tomorrow, and I told him to shoot everything."

And so it was written, that a Nylander-Matthews-Nylander give-and-go on a buttery behind-the-net cycle would see Nylander glide out from behind goalie Devan Dubnyk's right blind spot and snap a wrist shot high and clean and only 256 days in the waiting.

"I was like, 'Oh my God, I can't believe it. Finally.'" Nylander said post-game. "There are a couple more things I can do better. But it's at least been nice that you're able to get chances when you're not playing at 100 per cent. Because then when you are at 100 per cent, you'll be good."

Riding elation from his first goal of the season, his first in an unlucky 13 games dating back to April — and his first point of his past nine outings, snapping the greatest production drought of his career and likely his life — Nylander leapt into the arms of a giddy Travis Dermott, unswallowed himself from a group hug, reached back to his nameplate and threw an imaginary monkey over the glass and deep into Section 323.

"That's big for him," Matthews said, finding a positive after the Maple Leafs squandered the 3-2 lead that Nylander's marker gave them and fell 4-3 to the Wild. "He can get goin' again."

Matthews can empathize. Used to lighting lamps at will, he went 13 games without a goal in his rookie year — and still wound up lifting the Calder Trophy.

"I felt like the weight of the world was coming down on me. People were saying trade me and all that stuff. It can definitely weigh on you as a player, as a person," Matthews explains.

"But I think once that one comes, you feel that extra jump in your step. You're back feeling confident and hopefully get back on a roll."

A 22-year-old with two 20-goal seasons, Nylander's 2018-19 has been anything but the projected giant step in forward progress that a smart exec like Leafs GM Kyle Dubas is banking on. He's copped to frustration and anger, and — over the break — had his aunt/hairdresser chop off his flowing locks.

Nylander sat out training camp with a contract impasse you may have read about it, and he's been scrambling ever since to catch up to race in which the other horses were already at full stride and rounding the quartermark as he stepped into the starting gate.

Cringe-watching Nylander bobble pucks and get line-juggled and scuffle to a minus-4 rating on a plus-34 freight train has served as a warning for all involved.

"It's certainly not the way that you want it to play out. You don't want players missing two months of the season plus training camp and exhibition in their preparation time," Dubas told Sportsnet's TV panel before the game, mindful he can't take a similar if-you-got-time-use-it approach with impending RFAs Matthews and Mitch Marner.

"The inclination is that everyone wants to be patient, everyone wants to take their time, but we're wide-open on those. Everyone realizes these are paramount discussions. Both Mitch and Auston bring leadership. They're obviously excellent young players, and they're key, key parts of our franchise, not only on the ice but off the ice.

"Our goal is to get those done as soon as we can and keep an open dialogue with their representatives."



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Though the organization did an excellent job muting expectations for Nylander's true return by pulling out a sports-scientific mid-January timeline, Dubas conceded Thursday that team success helped obscure the underwhelming performance of Toronto's new \$45-million man.

"It's another case of adversity for William. Luckily, with the team playing the way that it has, it's sort of masked that and given him some breathing room," Dubas said. "We'll see him on the verge of returning to his usual form."

To a man, Nylander's teammates have been publicly supportive and patient throughout this four-month process.

"He came to the rink with the attitude every single day of happiness and pure joy," Marnier says of how Nylander handled the dry spell.

"It's a great relief to him and our team that he's getting on that scoresheet now. He's found his groove. Now it's going to be scary for other teams now we got him back."

The pressure doesn't suddenly evaporate with one perfectly placed shot.

With great compensation comes great responsibility.

Babcock's promotion of Nylander to the top six — which, conversely, demotes a hard-working Kasper Kapanen to Nazem Kadri's perpetually in-flux third line — isn't so much a reward of merit as it is a coach doing everything in his quiver to get an important forward engaged.

Nylander ranks just eighth among Leafs forwards in average ice time (15:02) and skates on the seldom-used second power-play unit, and it was telling that with Thursday's points on the line and Leafs goaltender Michael Hutchinson pulled early, Nylander didn't see time 6-on-5.

The ignition has been turned. The gas pedal needs slamming.

"Ideally what [that first goal] is going to do is get him to compete harder, skate harder and take a load off him and get going," Babcock said.

"I thought he was going to get the winner here tonight; I thought one was going to be enough. In the end, it wasn't. That's all he got.

"We need him to help our team and be a productive Leaf. We think he can be, and it's just a matter of time."

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Sportsnet.ca / Michael Hutchinson lives Maple Leafs dream in unplanned start

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

January 3, 2019, 5:01 PM

TORONTO — Until mere days ago, Michael Hutchinson had zero inclination that the next generation of Toronto Maple Leafs goaltenders would ever include him.

Yet there the 28-year-old found himself on Thursday afternoon, standing in the crease at Scotiabank Arena wearing the sweater of his boyhood team, taking an extra moment during the national anthems to look around and soak in the moment.

This is the stuff kids dream of before they grow into men and learn that pro hockey is the kind of business where your life can be turned upside down with one phone call. It's the kind of business where you can spend Christmas with family in Winnipeg, return to Springfield, Mass., and be

traded immediately to Toronto, start an American Hockey League game with the Marlies on New Year's Eve and then follow in the footsteps of your idols by getting called up to the Leafs.

All inside a 10-day window.

"When I got traded here, you kind of hope that you get a chance to play for the Leafs," said Hutchinson, who was raised about 100 kilometres north of the city in Barrie. "It was really exciting to get my first game under [my belt], but it also makes you hungry to get more. And to get the first win and go from there."

That this particular start ended in a 4-3 loss to the Minnesota Wild didn't dim the significance for Hutchinson. His wife and parents were able to make their way to the arena and watch from the stands, as were untold others who knew him from Barrie.

He tried to keep his mind in small spaces, as goaltenders in particular are trained to do, but the sheer unusualness of the situation couldn't be completely ignored.

"It was a little bit hectic," said Hutchinson. "I found out last night so things moved pretty fast."

It took not only last week's groin injury to Leafs starter Frederik Andersen, which prompted Kyle Dubas to part with a 2020 fifth-rounder and acquire Hutchinson in a Dec. 29 trade, but also an errant William Nylander shot that hit Garret Sparks in the mask during Wednesday's practice.

That put Sparks in concussion protocol and saw both Hutchinson and Kasimir Kaskisuo called up on an emergency basis before the game against the Wild.

Other than Nazem Kadri and John Tavares, whom he played with before reaching the NHL, Hutchinson knew none of his teammates. He had to introduce himself to head coach Mike Babcock in the hours before the only afternoon start of the Leafs season.

"I asked what his first name was, he told me. I asked him what he liked to be called, he said 'Hutch.' I said, 'Have fun,'" said Babcock.

Then he went out and faced 19 shots in the first period.

That came after Mitch Marnier gave the Leafs a 2-0 lead inside six minutes and Minnesota hit back with a strong push. Toronto got buried in its own end and had 17 defensive zone faceoffs in the opening 20 minutes alone, according to Babcock.

Hutchinson finished with 30 saves, many of them on point-blank looks. It was not a game where his teammates controlled the puck and made things easy on him.

"Full credit to him," said Tavares. "The way he came in and met pretty much everyone for the first time, probably no idea about our system and kind of the things we're trying to accomplish that can be predictable for the goaltender. Under the set of circumstances, it's not an easy position."

"He did a hell of a job," added Marnier. "He kept us in a lot of those chances and he kept us in as long as he could."

Hutchinson is a veteran of 102 appearances for the Winnipeg Jets — losing his only previous start in this building, in overtime, back on Feb. 21, 2015 — and is now battling to re-establish himself as a reliable NHL backup.

The Florida Panthers envisioned him as a solid No. 3 option when they signed him to a \$1.3-million, one-year deal over the summer, but Hutchinson struggled in four starts when Roberto Luongo was injured in October.

Hutchinson spent the rest of his time in AHL Springfield before getting traded to Toronto.

This can be considered a small window of opportunity since the Leafs lost both Curtis McElhinney and Calvin Pickard on waivers at the end of



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training camp, and are dealing with a fair amount of uncertainty in the crease.

Andersen has been skating with goalie coach Steve Briere daily, but hasn't participated in a full practice since Dec. 27. Sparks may have a concussion and there's no way to know when he might return. And Kaskisuo has had a tough year for the Marlies and hasn't ever played a NHL game.

There have been internal discussions about acquiring more goaltending depth, according to Babcock, but as of right now Hutchinson is his healthiest, most experienced option. And all things considered, he acquitted himself fairly well against the Wild.

"I thought Hutch gave us an opportunity," said Babcock. "That's all you can ask of him."

The Leafs will probably be asking him to do it again when the Vancouver Canucks are in here on Saturday night.

For a kid who grew up watching Felix Potvin shine on "Hockey Night in Canada," that would be another dream come true.

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Sportsnet.ca / Carey Price showing signs he's ready to carry Canadiens through second half

Eric Engels

January 4, 2019, 12:31 AM

MONTREAL — There's a tell. There's always a tell. An indication that a goaltender is as locked in as can be. A distinct moment in a given game that you can point to and say, "That's it, he's not getting scored on in this one."

It's not always an acrobatic save that tips you off. Not always a windmill-glove stop, or a two-pad stack, or a scorpion-skate save. And in Carey Price's case, it's rarely any of those things.

Thursday night's 33-save shutout for Price was no exception to that rule. Granted, he made some highlight-reel stops as his Montreal Canadiens beat the Vancouver Canucks 2-0, but the tell that he wouldn't be beat came on one of the most innocuous plays of the game.

A puck was shot at Price from 60 feet away. It was more of a dump-in than anything, and it was soaring over his head.

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That's when he casually lifted his stick and swatted the puck to the boards in one swift motion.

Doesn't sound like much, does it? But it's that type of play that makes you realize how focused Price is on everything going on around him. That type of play that belies everything else you're seeing from him in the game —that it's hard but he's making it look easy, like he has so many times before.

That's Carey Price at his best. The Carey Price the Canadiens hadn't needed through most of the 40 games they played prior to Thursday's game, but the Carey Price they're going to need from here to the end of

the season, as the playoff race tightens and the pressure ratchets up a few notches.

"You could definitely tell he was calm and confident," said Jonathan Drouin, who scored the insurance goal for Montreal 8:24 into the second period. "There was screens in front and he was gloving pucks with no rebounds. That's the Carey we're used to seeing."

It's the Carey we saw from 2014-2017, as he established himself as the consensus best goaltender in the world. It's the Carey we've seen since the beginning of December, too—and for the first time since two Aprils ago.

Last season was a horror show from him. He was flopping around his crease from start to finish, making everything look more challenging than it was, losing pucks in plain sight, losing control of rebounds, and losing himself in the process of losing all but 16 of 48 starts.

Price was steadily building his game at the beginning of this season. Then he suffered an injury in the first week of November and his play slipped dramatically until the final month of 2018 began.

Now the 31-year-old has won eight of his last 10 starts. All in impressive fashion, but none more so than what he offered against Vancouver.

You have to consider the circumstances, too. Price had missed the three games prior to Thursday's contest and witnessed the birth of his second daughter in between. The nagging lower-body injury suffered in November had finally forced him to the sidelines. And there was plenty of concern a 12-day layoff between games was going to stall his progress.

Concern he quickly batted away like he did that puck in the second period.

"He missed quite a bit of time but he didn't look like he was rusty at all tonight," said Canadiens coach Claude Julien. "If anything he looked even sharper, so it was all good news for us tonight. And what does it do for your team? I think it gives it confidence, but hopefully not confidence to the degree that we're going to get sloppy in front of him, which we were at times tonight."

There were many occasions where that proved to be the case, but Price was there to bail the Canadiens out.

There was a left-pad save on Jay Beagle, a glove save on a Sven Baertschi one-timer, another glove save on Loui Eriksson, and there was that highlight-reel snag Price made on Bo Horvat after Canadiens forward Joel Armia threw a soft pass right into the slot that landed on Horvat's stick. And that's just what Price did in the second period.

He made 11 saves in the third, including three great ones on Brock Boeser, two on Jake Virtanen and another on Baertschi.

Price's final save came with just over three seconds remaining, as he peaked through the maze of bodies in front of him and tracked the puck before squeezing his legs to trap a dangerous shot from Markus Granlund.

There was just nothing that was going to distract him in this one. Not a puck fluttering towards his head, or a Canucks player crashing the crease, or a potentially devastating injury Canucks star Elias Pettersson suffered in a second-period collision with Canadiens rookie Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

While most of the players in the rink watched the replay of the incident on the Bell Centre scoreboard, Price focused on his crease—clearing the snow away and preparing for the next sequence.

After the game, he didn't have more than a word to offer on his performance.

"Rested," Price said.

Jordie Benn, who scored the game-winning goal at 11:50 of the first period, said Price was "outstanding."



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"I would say (he was) normal because we're used to seeing him play like that," said Julien.

"What wasn't normal was the tough year he had last year. So I think he's himself—making big saves at the right time. He's found his game and feeling good about it."

Clearly.

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Sportsnet.ca / Top 7 pending free agents on one-year contracts who can now re-sign

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen

January 3, 2019, 8:40 AM

As we start down the path of a New Year in 2019 the NHL season is hitting its halfway mark. This means it's soon going to be crunch time for the league's GMs who have to start thinking about what to do at the trade deadline and how that may impact their plans for the off-season.

Jan. 1 brought us to a critical juncture for players who signed one-year contracts last summer. While players can sign extensions when they are in the final year of their contract, the CBA dictates that those who are on one-year pacts can't extend until the calendar flips to a new year.

Who are those players? There are some big names, lots of middling ones, and a couple veterans who may end up waiting until their contracts lapse in the summer to decide what to do next in their career — if they continue playing at all.

Here are the players who signed on for one year last summer and are now eligible for contract extensions:

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

Mark Stone, Ottawa Senators

All eyes are on the 26-year-old, who is one year away from full UFA eligibility unless he signs a long-term deal. There's been a ton of speculation surrounding how the rebuilding Senators would deal with UFA Matt Duchene and Stone, who is on a \$7.35 million AAV that was signed days before his arbitration hearing. With 18 goals and 43 points, the excellent two-way winger is having one of his better seasons and would be the favourite for the captaincy if he stays.

"It hasn't been a distraction yet," Stone told the Ottawa Sun. "We're three months into the season and it hasn't bothered or fazed me one bit. I'm expecting things to get going in the next couple of weeks here."

William Karlsson, Vegas Golden Knights

After putting together a dream season in 2017-18 with 43 goals and 78 points that came out of nowhere, Karlsson was one of the more interesting contract negotiations to watch play out last summer and, ultimately, he bet on himself when he signed a one-year extension with a \$5.25 million cap hit. Predictably his pace has fallen, but not to a level of obscurity he played at before landing in Vegas. Karlsson still has 15 goals and 15 assists in 43 games on a 16.5 shooting percentage. Turning 26 next week, Karlsson again will be one of the more interesting contracts to watch play out.

"I want to show that I can be a good player and that I deserve that, but I try not to think," Karlsson told the Las Vegas Sun last month. "I mean, why? It's just going to weigh you down. You just gotta go about each day and try to have fun when you come in to the rink and to not put too much pressure on yourself."

Joel Edmundson, St. Louis Blues

Like a lot of the Blues, Edmundson isn't having his best season, but there is still a lot to like in the 25-year-old's game. He won't wow you with offence and rarely gets any power-play time, but he's been a strong stay-at-home defender in St. Louis for a few years now. This year his minus-7 at 5-on-5 alone with an expected goals percentage of 48.71 ranks near the bottom of the Blues' blue line, but overall they aren't sharp declines compared to past seasons. He's the team's third-most-used defenceman in the defensive zone so some of his minus shot differentials can be explained by his usage.

The question around Edmundson is the same as it is around a lot of the Blues players these days: Who will still be around next season? So far 2018-19 hasn't gone as planned and there's is speculation all over that a shake-up is coming.

Jacob Trouba, Winnipeg Jets

We're nearing crunch time for Trouba and the Jets. Since requesting a trade in 2016, which was later rescinded, everyone has been anticipating a split in the relationship. But both Trouba and the team have played it down. This past summer Trouba went to arbitration and it was another opportunity to come to terms on a long-term extension, but instead his was one of the few cases that actually got to the arbitrator, resulting in a one-year reward. Another one of those would put Trouba on the path to UFA status in the summer of 2020. Is this the year he's traded, or will a big contract finally get signed? Josh Morrissey has passed him on the depth chart.

Brock Nelson, NY Islanders

Second among all Islanders forwards in average ice time (18:01) Nelson is on pace for a career season with 13 goals and 25 points in 38 games so far. Nelson replaced John Tavares in the vacant top-six centre spot and given the team's top forward prospects are wingers, the 27-year-old Nelson seems poised to lock in for at least the next few years as the Islanders continue to surprise.

Joe Thornton, San Jose Sharks

Injuries have taken their toll on Thornton, who will be 40 next season if he signs an extension. With 18 points in 32 games he's on his lowest points per game pace in 20 years and he's lost his role as a definite top-line centre. It would be a shock to see Thornton sign somewhere else at this point and the Sharks are still challenging for a Stanley Cup. Perhaps if they win this season it'd be easier for him to retire as a winner, but if they fall short, Thornton may be inclined to try his luck again.

Zdeno Chara, Boston Bruins

With an average of 21:11 per game in 21 outings, age and injuries have slowed Chara, too, but he's recognized as one of the fittest players in the game today and is seemingly capable of playing beyond this, his 41-year-old season. He has just four points and this is the first season he's spent as a Bruin where he hasn't been the biggest minute eater on the team. He didn't sign his current one-year deal until March 28, so there is no rush to get this deal signed.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sidney Crosby rewards hilarious heckler with signed stick



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 4, 2019

Emily Sadler | @EmmySadler

January 3, 2019, 3:21 PM

"Hey Crosby, you were voted third toughest Canadian, behind Celine Dion and a close second to Avril Lavigne."

That's some next-level chirping right there — just ask Sidney Crosby.

The Pittsburgh Penguins captain, who has no doubt heard his fair share of jabs, was the target of two minutes worth of material from New York Rangers fan Nick Lipeika while serving a tripping penalty during Wednesday's game at Madison Square Garden.

Lipeika, who was seated near the visitors' penalty box, is a seasoned chirper — it's one of sports' great arts, after all, especially in The Big Apple — and told ESPN's Greg Wyshynski he tries to be prepared for whomever is sent to the sin bin. While the fan was well-prepared for Crosby, the elite centreman isn't exactly known for taking penalties (he's got just 10 so far this season), so it was "like a late Christmas present" for Lipeika to have Crosby as his captive audience early in the first period.

Clearly, Crosby heard him loud and clear. After the game, No. 87 even rewarded his opponent's creativity by tossing a signed stick over the glass with a pretty great message: "Good chirps. Take it easy on me next time!"

"He's probably heard it all. For me, I wanted to tell him things he hasn't heard before," Lipeika told Wyshynski on Thursday. "He's won everything. That's why everyone wants to heckle him."

Crosby had two points (1G, 1A) in Pittsburgh's lopsided 7-2 victory — which could perhaps count towards why Crosby was in such a giving mood post-game.

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TSN.CA / Five Takeaways: Canucks vs. Devils

Jeff Paterson

1) There were a number of reasons Monday's game in New Jersey was going to be a tough one for the Vancouver Canucks. They were coming off an emotional comeback win against a division rival on Saturday in Calgary. They were facing a team they didn't know a whole lot about with a goalie they knew even less about. They had flown cross-continent on Sunday losing two hours in the process due to time zones. And the game was a 1pm local start. Yet, despite all of the obstacles, the Canucks came out and, aided by an early power play, had seven of the first nine shots of the hockey game. They didn't score then and that was about as good as it got for them at Prudential Center. The Devils won the special teams battle scoring twice on three power play opportunities and held the Canucks off the scoresheet on their four chances with the man-advantage. While the Devils have struggled overall this season, they now have 11 of their 15 wins on home ice (11-4-4), so The Rock isn't an easy place for visitors. Just ask the Canucks who have now lost eight straight games overall to the Devils and haven't won here in Newark since October 24, 2013.

2) Anders Nilsson did not speak to the media following the loss. It's clear the mild-mannered netminder was frustrated in the moment -- and likely with the way his season and possibly his NHL career are slipping away. Nilsson has lost his last nine starts (0-8-1) and going back to December of 2017, he has just four wins in his last 27 starts (4-20-4 -- he had a decision from a non-start, too). This is the National Hockey League and at some point the bottom line has to be the bottom line. Nilsson didn't look great on either of the long slap shot goals that beat him Monday and left a gaping 5-hole for Brian Boyle to poke a puck through on the game opener. On Monday, he was outdueled by a 22-year-old rookie making his fifth big league start. Mackenzie Blackwood now has as many wins since Christmas as Nilsson has all season. Blackwood, by the way, was a 2015 second round pick -- one year after the Canucks selected Thatcher Demko in the second round. And with Demko patiently waiting his turn in Utica, you have to wonder if it's time to make a goaltending move. With 40 games to go on the schedule, Jacob Markstrom, if healthy, will likely start close to 30 of them. That leaves 10 other starts. Nilsson is now into the final half season of an expiring contract and won't be back with the organization next season. Do the Canucks owe him any more starts? Or is it time to usher in Thatcher Demko's time as the back-up? Complicating matters -- and this important in Nilsson's defense -- is that the guy gets absolutely no goal support. For the second time this season, the Canucks failed to score a goal for Nilsson and in his last seven starts the team has scored all of nine goals. Back it up further than that and the Canucks have scored just 12 times during his personal nine game losing streak. That's not fair to the netminder who has performed better than his Win-Loss record, but not enough to change it. Add it all up and you can understand why he walked away without saying anything on Monday afternoon. He's surely frustrated at himself, his teammates and his situation.

3) The Canucks power play managed just three shots on goal in 7:32 of time with the man-advantage. After going 0 for 4 against the Devils, the Canucks power play has fallen to 21st in the National Hockey League at 17.8%. This is with the team completely healthy. There will be nights when the power play doesn't score. But in a 2-0 game through 40 minutes, the Canucks power play had a chance to provide a needed spark for the hockey club on Monday. Three shots in nearly four full power plays simply won't cut it. Further more, those three shots -- from Elias Pettersson, Sven Baertschi and Josh Leivo -- all came on the game's first power play with Will Butcher off for an early hook on Bo Horvat. So on the final three power plays of the night, the Canucks couldn't manage a single shot on net. The Canucks top unit all saw more than 4:15 of power play time during the game and mustered a measly two shots on goal. Then again, the second unit had nearly three minutes to work with and generated just one shot. Since Jake Virtanen scored a power play goal in Brooklyn against the Islanders on November 13th, only four Canucks forwards have scored on the power play: Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson, Bo Horvat -- and Sam Gagner. Suffice it to say, the second unit isn't providing any support these days.

4) Boeser had a tough day Monday. It's too bad, too, because it was the 100th game of his terrific young NHL career. But tough days happen. He seemed to be fighting the puck for much of the afternoon and failed to register a single shot on goal in his 19:48 of ice time against the Devils. Saturday in Calgary he had eight shots, scored once and set up Alex Edler's overtime winner, so we'll call the game in Newark just one of those games that happens over the course of a long season. But it does stand out when a shooter like Boeser leaves the rink without putting a single puck on net. It's just the third time this season that has happened and the second since opening night against the Flames. It also happened in a 3-2 win Columbus on December 11th. It looked like Boeser might force Mackenzie Blackwood to make a save midway through the third period when he had the puck in the left circle. However, his wrist shot with traffic in front appeared to hit the back of Devils defenseman Ben Lovejoy's leg and did not make it to the net. Regardless of the quiet afternoon for Boeser, December was a terrific month as he got back to full health and led the team with eight goals in 13 games.

5) Monday's game brought an end to the calendar year for the Canucks who went 34-41-10 in the 85 games they played. I'll do the number



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crunching for you: that's 78 points in 85. So no it won't be a Happy New Year based on this one result. But a year of transition for the organization is over as the franchise watched icons Daniel and Henrik Sedin retire and President of Hockey Operations Trevor Linden walk away from his post. The year also saw the arrival of Elias Pettersson who has thrilled fans with 19 goals and 39 points in his first 36 NHL games. And even though the rookie didn't find the scoresheet against the Devils, head coach Travis Green thought Monday was one of Pettersson's best games of the season and called it a great learning lesson to continue to push to play well even when the game isn't going the way the team wanted. While 2018 ends for the Canucks, the new year ahead includes hosting the 2019 NHL Draft in June which will surely be one of the highlights of the next 12 months. Health and happiness to you all in 2019. Have a safe and happy New Year's Eve and thanks for taking the time to read this article.

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TSN.CA / Five Takeaways: Canucks vs Senators

Jeff Paterson

8-10 minutes

## TAKEAWAYS

1) Elias Pettersson has impressed on many nights in his rookie season, but Wednesday in Ottawa was his best goal-scoring night of his first NHL season. He capped his first career hat trick with the overtime winner scoring three consecutive Canuck goals after Sven Baertschi had opened the scoring in the hockey game midway through the first period. The overtime goal came seconds after the young Swede had rung a shot off the crossbar in overtime. The Canucks regrouped in the neutral zone and upon re-entry into Sens territory, Pettersson had the look of a player who would not be denied if given a second opportunity to end the game. On the winner, Brock Boeser slid the puck to Pettersson who snapped the puck past Marcus Hogberg on the 45th and final Vancouver shot of the night. The overtime goal was the capper on a memorable night, but Pettersson's second goal left an impression, too. In his spot on the power play, Pettersson absolutely hammered a one-timer past Hogberg. It may have been the hardest puck the rookie has fired all season. Post-game Travis Green agreed with my assessment that Pettersson's one-timer is special in a league full of players who can rifle the puck. The coach called his one-timer 'elite' -- and my guess is Marcus Hogberg would agree.

2) It was a remarkable day -- and night -- for Pettersson. He was named the lone Canucks representative to this month's All Star weekend in San Jose. He scored his 20th goal of the season -- and then added two more for good measure. The 20th triggered a rookie bonus worth \$212,500 US. Pettersson then rounded out his night with his league-leading seventh game winner of the season (tied with Colorado's Gabriel Landeskog). Anthony Cirelli of Tampa, with three, is the only other first year player in the NHL this season with more than two game winning goals. Pettersson now has five goals in the first four games since the Christmas break. You get the sense that he is building toward a big finish to this road trip in Toronto on Saturday on arguably the biggest stage in hockey. I think it's safe to say, the moment won't overwhelm him.

3) The Canucks looked like they felt the game was over when Pettersson put the hammer down with the laser that put his team up 3-1 five minutes into the third. After jumping out to a 27-7 edge in shots midway through the hockey game, the Canucks perhaps felt like they had squeezed the

life -- and any spirit -- out of the Sens with just 15 minutes to play. To that point in the hockey game, last place Ottawa didn't look like a team that would mount a late charge. But the Canucks were as sloppy with the puck as they've been in a while. Bo Horvat had an uncharacteristic turnover that led to a Sens breakout chance. Chris Tanev got called for a late slash after another Canucks turnover. And slowly the Senators chipped away. They made it 3-2 with under 10 minutes remaining and then forced overtime with Hogberg on the bench for an extra attacker. The Canucks lost coverage as the Sens rotated down low and Mark Stone -- Ottawa's leading goal-scorer -- was left wide open to the right of Jacob Markstrom and made no mistake with just 50 seconds left on the clock. The Canucks get out of town with a victory and two points in their back pocket, but they also got a lesson in taking their foot off the gas.

4) Most of the game was played in the Ottawa end. The shots on goal favoured the Canucks 45-33 and the shot attempts told an even more one-sided story. The Canucks launched a season-high 86 shots toward the Ottawa net. That eclipsed their previous high this season by a whopping 20 attempts. The final shot attempts were 86-59 in Vancouver's favour. Brock Boeser had seven shots on goal and 11 attempts while Elias Pettersson had three goals on six shots and nine attempts. Jake Virtanen and Alex Edler also had nine attempts and Antoine Roussel had seven. It was that kind of night. Give Hogberg credit for keeping the Sens in the hockey game because the Canucks should have been able to run away and hide from their opponent on this night. Only three players in the hockey game did not register a shot on goal: Tyler Motte and Derrick Pouliot on the Canucks side of the ledger and Max Lajoie for the Senators. But all three attempted shots, so everyone on both teams -- goalies excluded -- directed pucks at the net. That doesn't happen often.

5) I noticed Tim Schaller. That's significant because it hasn't happened often in his first season as a Canuck. After eight straight healthy scratches, Schaller returned to the line-up on Wednesday. He was physical from the start and took on Sens defenseman Ben Harpur in a first period fight. Those were Schaller's first penalty minutes of the season. He finished the night with a team high five hits and added a couple of shots in his 10:26 of ice time. Was he a standout? No. But he left his mark on the hockey game which is what he should be able to do far more often than he has in his previous 29 games this season. Get in on the forecheck, take the body, offer some pushback and get invested in the game -- those are things Schaller should be able to bring to the line-up every night. He hasn't done it often enough and as a result has lost his spot on left wing for the past three weeks. But doing it once and then going quiet again doesn't accomplish anything for him or the hockey club. Perhaps as a former Boston Bruin seeing the red, white and blue of the Montreal Canadiens will bring out some passion in Schaller. Wednesday was a step in the right direction, but it has to become his new normal if he wants to remain in the line-up.

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TSN.CA / Scoring depth makes the Capitals dangerous

Travis Yost

At the halfway point of the regular season, most prognosticators have penciled the Tampa Bay Lightning in as the prohibitive Stanley Cup favourite.

But don't tell the Washington Capitals that. With eight wins in their last 10 games, the Capitals have rocketed to the top of the Metropolitan Division and look every bit as scary as they did during their championship season.



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What's particularly interesting about this version of the Capitals is their tremendous depth. If you watch a Capitals game, it seems as though they're capable of attacking in waves – not dissimilar to the style of play that has been so effective for their former Southeast Division counterpart.

Alexander Ovechkin and company tend to get a lot of the fanfare, but Washington's depth forwards are just as deadly lately at applying sustained pressure and generating dangerous scoring chances.

The Capitals have undoubtedly evolved as an organization. In years past, they were a rather top-heavy team armed with an electric power play. They have preserved those attributes while adding considerable playmaking depth further down the lineup through a handful of savvy player acquisitions and key player development.

It's paid considerable dividends – the type of dividends that have Washington as the league's second-best scoring team at 5-on-5, just a tick back of league-leading Tampa Bay.

Playmaking can be a hard attribute to quantify because of how many competing definitions exist, but as a general rule we can call it something to the effect of creating better opportunity for your teammates. Some of the best playmakers in the world – think Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby – are notorious for not only generating heaps of scoring opportunities for themselves, but also finding prime passing lanes for their teammates. We see this manifest in the data, whether it be in teammate shooting percentage, teammate shot location, and so on.

On that teammate shot location piece: this is an area where Washington is exceptional this season. The Nicklas Backstrom line tends to get most of the attention, but Evgeny Kuznetsov (primarily the second-line centre) and Lars Eller (primarily the third-line centre) have been monstrous.

Consider the data set below. Here we have a calculation of average shot distance created by every regular centre in the NHL this season. (The data set omits all shots taken by the centre, so we are truly focusing on two wingers and two defencemen, all at 5-on-5.) Since we know shot distance is strongly correlated with goal-scoring, there is tremendous value in driving this number down.

No one has done it better than Washington's middle-six centres:

The average shot at 5-on-5 comes from about 35 feet, so you can see that on a base of hundreds of shots, decreasing the shot distance by four to five feet per event is pretty substantial. That's what we have with both Eller and Kuznetsov, who are consistently putting their teammates in better scoring areas than the average centre.

The cool thing here is that there are a lot of really talented players on this list, which gives the measure some obvious contextual value. Guys like Tyler Seguin, John Tavares, Ryan Getzlaf, and Jonathan Marchessault are notoriously talented offensive zone passers and all of them appear in our top 25.

Shot distance is far from the only measure indicating playmaking success, but since hockey is such a directionally straightforward game, it's a pretty reasonable place to start. But there's also the fact that Washington carries the league's highest 5-on-5 shooting percentage, and, more specific to this point, the fact that their high on-ice shooting percentage isn't exclusively driven by one line exploding for half of the season.

Keep in mind the league average on-ice shooting percentage for a skater this year is around 7.9 per cent. So not only does Washington carry a high on-ice shooting percentage at the team level, it's driven by performance throughout the lineup (note how low the floor is for a Washington skater here). Whether it's line one or four on the ice, the Capitals are generating attack.

Knowing what we know – that Washington as a team consistently carries high shooting percentages and that shot distances for depth Washington forwards appear to be much shorter than the average forward around the league – it's reasonable to conclude that guys like Eller and Kuznetsov

are having a pretty substantial impact. I'm sure Capitals fans are happy that both are signed in D.C. long-term.

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TSN.CA / Late rallies on the rise across the NHL

Staff Report

DENVER — Don't be fooled: That third-period lead isn't so safe.

Not this season, anyway. There's been quite a comeback for the comeback.

The NHL has seen 110 third-period comeback wins spanning 611 games through New Year's Eve. That's third-most in league history and not far off the 114 rallies in 2014-15 and 113 in '13-14, according to research by the NHL stats and information department.

Going into the new year, the only teams without a third-period comeback for a win in regulation were Carolina (0-13-2 when trailing after two) and Los Angeles (0-17-1). And the only team not to lose with a final-period lead remains Toronto, which is 19-0-0.

Translation: Don't leave early, because anything can and often does happen in the final period.

"Fans are getting what they want," joked Montreal forward Tomas Tatar said. "It's got to be pretty intense for them."

These days and in this speedy version of the game, no lead seems out of reach. Take Tampa Bay on Saturday: Down a goal in the third against Montreal, Adam Erne tied it up and then scored the game-winner with 1:02 remaining.

"There's no more of sitting back and closing and trying to suffocate the other team," Montreal coach Claude Julien said when his team was in Denver on Dec. 19. "It's a skating game now. With the skating game that's being allowed right now, there's more offence being showcased."

Try sitting on the puck to protect a lead with the likes of Connor McDavid, Sidney Crosby, Nikita Kucherov or Nathan MacKinnon attempting to swipe it away.

Good luck with that.

"The league is just getting faster and faster, young guys are coming through the league and they're really, really good skaters," Tatar said. "It's just a fast game. It's faster than ever."

Not only that, but these youngsters don't view things as erasing a deficit so much as an opportunity to crank up the intensity.

"Everybody is good throughout the lineup," Avalanche captain Gabriel Landeskog said. "That makes it that much harder to put teams away. It goes to show how many good players there are in the league and how many game-changers there are, that can turn things around."

And no slashing. Or holding. Or hooking. Defencemen need to be on their best behaviour.

"Defensively speaking, when you can't clutch and you can't grab — it's been that way for 10 years now — that really opens up the ice and allows guys to score," Avalanche defenceman Ian Cole said. "The guys are as skilled as they've ever been. Every year, they're more skilled and scoring more and more ridiculous highlight-reel goals. Guys are shooting from



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the goal-line and it's going off the side of the goalie's mask and in. Guys are doing stuff now that they haven't done before — or doing it more often.

"The skill level is as high as it's ever been in the league."

Hence, the volume of comebacks. This also helps when down: A positive attitude.

"You always have to believe. You can't give up," Tatar said. "And you don't have to. There's a big chance you score one or two goals and you're back in the game."

That was the case on Dec. 15 for Dallas, which fell behind the Avs 3-0 after one period and 4-2 after two. The Stars tied it up late in the final period before Colorado scored twice to earn the win.

Nothing is easy.

"I don't feel comfortable with any lead until the buzzer sounds," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "It's a tribute to the talent around the league. When teams start feeling it, they start coming at you in waves, and it's tough to defend."

That's why the best defence is sometimes to remain on the offensive. Don't sit back — keep striking.

"We're trying to stay aggressive," Landeskog said. "The O-zone is the best place to play defence. At least, that's the way we think about it. That's easier said than done. The team that's behind is always going to push."

### THREE AMIGOS

Mikko Rantanen (17 goals, 45 assists) and MacKinnon (24 goals, 35 assists) get the lion's share of the credit on the high-scoring top line for Colorado.

Chalk up another assist for Rantanen, though, because he wanted to make sure Landeskog received full credit, too. Landeskog's tied for the team lead with 24 goals.

"He flies under the radar," Rantanen said. "The way he plays the game is the right way always. That's real fun to watch."

### WINTER CLASSIC

The 2020 Winter Classic will be held at the Cotton Bowl in Texas. Dallas will host the 12th edition of the NHL's annual outdoor game on New Year's Day against an opponent yet to be determined. Commissioner Gary Bettman also said the Heritage Classic will return on Oct. 26 when Winnipeg plays Calgary at Mosaic Stadium in Regina, Saskatchewan. In addition, the NHL will bring an outdoor game to the Air Force Academy on Feb. 15, 2020, as part of the Stadium Series. Colorado will play a team not yet announced.

### LEADERS (through Monday)

Points: Nikita Kucherov (Tampa Bay), 65; Goals: Alex Ovechkin (Washington), 29; Assists: Kucherov, 46; Game-winning goals: Gabriel Landeskog (Colorado), 7; Rookie goals: Elias Pettersson (Vancouver), 19; Goals-against average: Robin Lehner (New York Islanders), 2.14; Shutouts: Marc-Andre Fleury (Vegas), 5; Wins: Fleury, 22; Save percentage: Lehner, .930.

### GAME OF THE WEEK

John Tavares leads Toronto against Minnesota on Thursday. Tavares is two goals shy of 300 for his career. He was the first overall pick by the New York Islanders in 2009.

TSN.CA LOADED: 01.04.2019

USA TODAY / Opinion: Applaud Alex Ovechkin's decision to skip NHL All-Star Game, don't punish him

Christine Brennan, USA TODAY

Published 5:09 p.m. ET Jan. 3, 2019

Washington Capitals superstar Alex Ovechkin is being suspended by the NHL for one game for what amounts to being really smart.

At the wise old hockey age of 33, Ovechkin is skipping a meaningless exhibition — the league's All-Star Game — to save himself for the rest of the season and presumably the playoffs, where the Capitals will be trying to win a second consecutive Stanley Cup.

Ovechkin should be hailed for this decision, not punished for it. He's missing the pomp and circumstance of the All-Star Game to help ensure his availability for the most important portion of the NHL season, the playoffs. If college football stars not playing in bowl games, which still count towards a team's record, has become acceptable, then a player like Ovechkin reasonably missing an exhibition game so he can be available to his team for the rest of the season should be too.

Unfortunately, that's not how it works in the NHL. Because Ovechkin wants to take the All-Star break off to rest for the stretch run, a 10-year-old NHL rule requires him to miss one game either immediately before or after the Jan. 26 All-Star Game in San Jose. Washington plays in Toronto before the break and hosts Calgary after it.

How in the world does it help the NHL to keep Ovechkin out of a regular-season game, where he is at his best and most interesting? The answer is that it doesn't, not one bit.

It's clear that there has to be some kind of understanding that top players will play in the All-Star Game, or else soon there won't be an All-Star Game. But there should also be a reasonable agreement that for the betterment of the league, not to mention the well-being of a future Hall of Famer, an occasional excused absence for a veteran like Ovechkin makes sense for all concerned.

In fact, if the NHL is so worried about presenting itself to the masses that it has to punish Ovechkin for missing a very public performance, why did it pull out of the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang? Two weeks' worth of games by Ovechkin and all the other great players in the game on the most visible platform on the planet were gone in a flash. Perhaps Commissioner Gary Bettman and the owners can suspend themselves a few games for that decision.

One of the reasons Ovechkin is in need of some rest this season is because of what happened last season, when his off-season was a month shorter than it has been the rest of his career, for the best of reasons. He played in a total of 106 games last season, including 24 postseason games during the Capitals' Stanley Cup championship run. This season, he has come right back to play in 38 games and is on pace to have his best season in nearly a decade. At the moment, he leads the NHL in scoring with 29 goals.

This probably is as good a time as any to mention that Ovechkin might not be in such need of a break had he not so fully exhibited his ability to be a world-class beer drinker and party boy during the Caps' boozy Stanley Cup celebration last spring, but then I'd be labeled a killjoy, so never mind.

As short-sighted as it is, the NHL has made its decision, and Ovechkin obviously has made his. The league and its fans will miss him Jan. 26. But how happy will they all be to have him playing this spring, possibly all the way to June?



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USA TODAY / NHL rookie leader Elias Pettersson suffers injury in awkward collision

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY

Published 10:39 p.m. ET Jan. 3, 2019 | Updated 11:12 p.m. ET Jan. 3, 2019

Vancouver Canucks runaway rookie leader Elias Pettersson scored a hat trick the night that he learned he would be heading to the NHL All-Star Game.

His second night didn't go so well.

Pettersson left the ice in pain in the second period after getting tangled up with Montreal Canadiens rookie Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

Pettersson, 20, had checked Kotkaniemi behind the net and as he skated back out of the zone, Kotkaniemi hooked him.

When Pettersson turned, their legs got tangled and they fell awkwardly, with Pettersson's knee and ankle buckling under his weight. He tried to get up, but stretched out on the ice in pain.

Here's another look.

Pettersson was on the ice for several moments before he got up with help. He was able to skate off gingerly on his own — Kotkaniemi went over to make sure he was OK — and walked to the dressing room.

The Canucks tweeted that he wouldn't return because of a lower-body injury.

"It's not a dirty play by their player at all," Canucks coach Travis Green told reporters after the game.

Pettersson, who missed six games earlier this season with a concussion, entered Thursday night's game with a team-best 20 goals and 42 points, 17 more than the next closest rookie.

Green said Pettersson would remain with the team on its trip.

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