



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE ATHLETIC

Q&A: Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon talks narratives, red jerseys, drafting defensemen and perspective

By Sara Civian

Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon takes exception to some of the persisting narratives surrounding his team.

Of course, there's the one where he barged in 362 days ago and started some sort of "my way or the highway" regime.

"This idea that I'm just going to come in and do it my way, it's a little strange to me," he told The Athletic in a one-on-one interview. "If I thought I knew more about hockey than (head coach) Rod Brind'Amour, that would be crazy. I don't think I'd get to the position I am in life if I went around ignoring everyone else."

He addressed some other narratives, red jerseys on the road, drafting defensemen and more in our ~exclusive~ Q&A.

First of all, how do you convince teams to let the Hurricanes wear their red jerseys on the road?

We just ask, say something like "Hey, we'd like to wear our red jerseys, what do you think?" and sometimes the other teams want to switch it up and show their fans their away jerseys. It's not really a big deal.

How would you assess the season so far?

The things we identified as what we wanted to improve on — intensity and effort — Roddy's done a great job at. I think we play the right way every day. So for that part, I couldn't be happier.

I think results-wise we're all disappointed, right? We expected to have won more games, so the results probably haven't matched up to our quality of play and that's just the way it is. So that's disappointing, but at the same time, I'm extremely happy with what we're building, what Rod's doing and what it means to be a Hurricane. I know it can seem like the same old Hurricanes, but there are new players, new coach, (a lot of) new. I think everybody's pretty confident in the future, if you look at the quality of the AHL team, plus all of our young players, some of the underlying analytics and culturally, what Rod has taken care of.

Having said that, everybody's good in the NHL and the margin of error is really small. I think we'll continue to improve, but at the same time, I know today's what matters. It feels like we should have a handful more wins, and we've done what we needed to do, now hopefully we get some results. A week ago a playoff chance was laughable, now (riding a four-game win streak) we've got these games before the break to see where we're at and that's just hockey.

Other than our record, I'm not sure what else you would want to change — if we win three or four more games the narrative is different, and no one would be shocked if we win six in a row here or if we go .500 — (I understand) we're really hard to evaluate.

You've mentioned a few times now how much you hate losing, how do you put that in perspective with knowing how important it is for this team to win right now, and how individual Hurricanes losses just seem more frustrating than an average loss?

I don't, that's the problem for me.

But we're doing things that lead to really good results. We have to be careful because we can't change the past, there's nothing we can do about it. My job is to make sure the past has nothing to do with how we handle today and tomorrow — that's the challenge right now. You want to be winning right now because of the (playoff drought), but we need to identify reasons we're not getting results and fix those, not just make changes for the sake of change.

We're in a pretty good spot, we have a good path, we fixed a lot of things. You're talking three or four more games won in a row we feel different. We have to be very careful not to let short-term results like that affect our long-term plans. You have to be careful letting the bounces manage the business. Every time you lose you want to do something. Sometimes you win and maybe you're overconfident, you lose and you're too low. It's definitely the challenge of this job.

What have you enjoyed most about owning the Hurricanes?

I think the quality of people — between Rod (Brind'Amour) and Don (Waddell), and the players and the staff as a culture, as a sport, how hard everybody tries and cares about each other. I have certain kinds of people I want to associate with, a certain kind of work ethic and morality and I think we've got that. And in general, the sport has that — that is the quality of the human beings that participate in this sport. I've enjoyed that, and the emotional connection, having something to care about every day.

Carolina owner Tom Dundon likes what he sees in coach Rod Brind'Amour despite a few more losses than he'd prefer. "I'm extremely happy with what we're building, what Rod's doing and what it means to be a Hurricane," he said. (James Guillory / USA Today)

How do you strike a balance between being a hands-on leader and letting the hockey experts do their thing? And how is this different from running another business?

I try to ask a lot of questions and push people. I don't want to tell people what to do in the sense of draft this player, play this guy, cut this guy but what I want is everyone to have an opinion — no one has a monopoly on what we do. Whether it's system, lines, minutes, (Brind'Amour) gets to make the final decision. I'm never going to tell him (otherwise), but I might show him info and say, "Hey, look at this."

I think that's our job — provide resources and ask questions and hopefully as an organization everyone feels empowered to have an opinion. I don't think I do anything that differently, and it's a little strange to me the idea of trying to be disruptive. I think we're just trying to have the best structure



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in place to make the best decisions. I don't tell them who to draft but I get to have one of many voices and make sure everyone's opinion gets heard.

Rod and I know each other, he knows I'm going to have an opinion. If I thought I knew more than him, that would be crazy. At the same time, he's a human being, the job is to push everyone.

This idea that I ignore anyone and do it my way? I don't think I get to the position I am in life if I went around ignoring everyone else. I do get to have an opinion, though.

Another thing, we've got to continue to push the balance where the hockey side gets a lot of value from the analytics side. There are obviously some limitations with analytics in hockey but Eric Tulsky (VP of Hockey Management and Strategy) is an absolute asset. When we disagree on something I'm almost always wrong, and I don't believe for a second that I know more about hockey than anyone that works for us at all. But I know how to create a structure, and that's how it's the same as any other business. I want to create a structure where everyone can have an opinion and push each other.

You've said before that it's a challenge having a non-downtown arena. Is that something you see yourself continuing to work around or are there plans to change it?

Our biggest focus right now is to put ourselves in a position to succeed in Raleigh. We're at a point where we're working to figure out all of the options, then exploring all the different options to see what's best.

(Editor's note: More to come from me on what those options are)

You took some flak for saying the Canes "won't be drafting defense in the first round as long as you're here", but come on, have you seen this team? Do you think that comment is getting taken out of context or blown out of proportion?

We've got (Adam) Fox and (Jake) Bean. Then (Brett) Pesce and (Jacob) Slavin are in their 20s, Haydn Fleury is 22, Dougie Hamilton is 25, Justin Faulk is 27, (Calvin) de Haan is in his prime years and can play Top 4.

You see how much defense this team has picked up over the years. To say we aren't drafting for it in early rounds doesn't mean we don't think it's important — we traded for Dougie, right?

I promise we won't be taking defense in the first two rounds this year. I don't think that's controversial given where we are as an organization. The word "never" is probably too strong, but it's pretty close to never.

Anthem traditions, good and not so much: Rating the antics of NHL fans

By Craig Morgan

When Chicago Blackhawks fans cheer throughout the national anthem at United Center, some fans of other teams take it as the ultimate sign of disrespect. According to Blackhawks fans, it is meant as a show of respect, and there is nothing within the anthem's code of conduct to suggest or demand that fans should remain silent during the anthem, although it is debatable whether Hawks fans should take that tradition into opponents' buildings instead of adopting the when-in-Rome approach.

The Blackhawks' anthem tradition is probably the best known anthem tradition in the NHL, both because of the franchise's recent success and because of its sustained volume. It is not the only one, however. Many fan bases have crafted their own traditions, with varying rates of success.

Before we tackle the controversial and hate-mail-inducing task of evaluating them, here is the official code of conduct for the national anthem in the United States. The official etiquette for the Canadian anthem can be found here. It should be noted that these are not laws, and in countries where personal freedoms also reign, others may choose to observe the anthem in different ways, as they do in other nations.

Now for a look at our ratings, from the inspiring or heartwarming variety, all the way down to the face-palming choices. Thanks to The Athletic's team of beat writers and Brendan McNicholas of the Colorado Avalanche media relations staff for tracking down the information.

The good

Anaheim Ducks: Fans shout "Dawn" when the first verse is being sung. It is a reference to both the words "by the dawn's early light" and beloved anthem singer and Orange County-based Dawn Wright. She was scheduled to have throat surgery this month and hasn't sung since early in the season, but fans still honor her by shouting her name when others take her place. If you haven't heard Wright's version of the anthem, it is well worth a listen.

Nashville Predators: It's clearly not a regular occurrence, but when backup goalie Juuse Saros starts at home, fans will emphasize the "you see" in "O say can you see." We like quirky and this one is quirky and fun. Preds fans will need a new tradition if Saros ever moves on.

Chicago Blackhawks: Fans stand and cheer throughout the national anthem, often in visiting arenas, which has created some backlash. On the other hand, if you grew up in Chicago and have been there to witness this, it can cause goosebumps.

Winnipeg Jets: Fans scream "True North" during that portion of the Canadian anthem where "the true north strong and free" is sung. It is a nod to the Jets ownership group by the same name; a group that also owns MTS Centre and the AHL's Manitoba Moose. Also, it's really cold in Winnipeg. That's cool and patriotic stuff in an arena where much of the game-day experience is first-rate.

Vancouver Canucks: For big games, the Canucks trot out anthem singer Mark Donnelly and he holds the mic toward the crowd for a verse. They sing it while he goes silent.

Toronto Maple Leafs: While fans sing the anthem — and Canadians sing heartily — giant Canadian and Maple Leafs



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flags are held aloft on opposite sides of the arena. It's pretty cool to see.

Columbus Blue Jackets: Similar to Anaheim, Blue Jackets fans scream "Leo!" in unison when anthem singer Leo Welsh sings.

Colorado Avalanche: Avs fans sing this line during the anthem: "And our flag was still there." It's a tradition that the team and fan message boards say originated right after 9/11 when a few fans sang it at an emotion-packed game and it caught on to where most of the crowd now sings it.

The not-so-good

St. Louis Blues: Instead of singing "home of the brave," they say sing "home of the Blues." Blah.

Buffalo Sabres: If Doug Allen performs the anthem, some (but unfortunately not all or most) fans will shout "Dougie!" when he walks on the ice. Where's the love?

Calgary Flames: Fans stress the "see" in "O say can you see by the dawn's early light." The letter emphasizes the first letter of the city's name and creates sea of red when they also stress "red" in "And the rocket's red glare." Yes, these are both lines from the American anthem. So...

Washington Capitals: Caps fans also stress "red" in "And the rocket's red glare." And they emphasize the "O" in "O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave," a tradition that started with the Orioles but now is believed to honor Alex Ovechkin.

Dallas Stars: Stars fans, predictably, shout "Stars" at the appropriate time when the words "whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight" are sung.

Carolina Hurricanes and Florida Panthers: Both fan bases also stress "red" in "And the rocket's red glare." Are you sensing a cliché here?

New York Islanders: Islanders fans do not have an anthem tradition, per se, but they do chant "USA" before the anthem when there's a Canadian team in town. You were expecting friendly in Brooklyn or Long Island?

San Jose Sharks: Right before the anthem begins, someone shouts: "Hey (visiting city.)" And some fans reply "You suck!" It's as lame as it sounds.

Vegas Golden Knights: Fans scream "Knight" during the verse "Gave proof through the night." Vegas does so much right in its game-day experience. This is the rare flaw in the armor. Night and Knight are not the same word. They're not the same spelling. They're not the same meaning. Facepalm.

Teams with no significant tradition

Per The Athletic's beat writers: Arizona Coyotes (a late howl), Boston Bruins, Detroit Red Wings, Edmonton Oilers, Los Angeles Kings, Minnesota Wild, Montreal Canadiens, New Jersey Devils, New York Rangers, Philadelphia Flyers, Pittsburgh Penguins, Tampa Bay Lightning.

And this from Chris Stevenson of The Athletic Ottawa on whether the Senators have an anthem tradition: "No, there is just a morose, soul-destroying silence these days. Just kidding, people sing along, in both official languages, but there is no definitive tradition."

NHL Power Rankings: What to watch for in the second half

By Sarah Goldstein

It isn't often that you get a few dozen people to agree on one thing. And in a league with as much parity as the NHL, agreeing on which team is the best is even more remarkable.

That goes to show you how dominant the Tampa Bay Lightning look this season. No math needed. One hundred percent of voters put them in the No. 1 spot.

But that doesn't mean there is nothing left to watch for. After all, history shows that the front-runner rarely raises the Stanley Cup in June.

So what is The Athletic's NHL team watching for?

Justin Bourne: The Lightning are up a whopping 10 points on the team with the league's second-most points (Toronto), just 42 games into their season. So I have my eye toward how Jon Cooper manages the second half. If they continue to pull away, could we see Tampa's best players – not just the goalie – get nights off? Could they tinker with new systems and lines, experimenting for inevitable postseason adjustments? How do they handle the expectations of being the clear favorite? In some cases, managing teams that good can be as hard as managing less talented teams (as much as you'd always prefer the former).

Sean McIndoe: I'm going to be watching league scoring rates. As we all know, they've been up this year, although nobody seems completely sure why. It's not a huge jump – we're still talking about an extra goal every few games at most – but it's been enough to make everything feel more fun. But almost every season we see scoring rates dip in the second half as the games get tighter and teams go into defensive mode late in games to play for overtime and the loser point. Maybe this year is different, and we don't see much of a drop. Or maybe we just look back on the first half as a reminder of how entertaining this sport can be when the NHL is a 4-3 league instead of a 3-2 one.

Dom Luszczyszyn: The East playoff race with Buffalo, Montreal and the Islanders all fighting for spots – all of whom weren't expected to do much this season. Also, Carolina potentially regressing and finding a way into the mix out of the hole they dug will be interesting.

The Athletic invited all of its NHL writers to rank the teams from 1 to 31 and combined the results here.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (100 percent of first-place votes)

Previous Ranking: 2

The Lightning's remarkable 16-game points streak was snapped Saturday, but they appear the team to beat. Only



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issues are potential injuries and their goals against (2.95, 16th in NHL), which is too high for a team with this caliber goaltending. There is really only one question left with this team: Is this the year they take the final step from contender to champion? — Joe Smith

2. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous Ranking: 3

The health of Frederik Andersen. It's that simple. His recent injury – and his health heading into the playoffs – will be the biggest single determining factor in the Leafs' ability to go all the way. With him, they're one of a handful of realistic Cup favorites. Without him, they aren't. — Scott Wheeler

3. Winnipeg Jets

Previous Ranking: 4

Will the defense hold up?

With Dustin Byfuglien injured, Winnipeg is running all of Tyler Myers, Ben Chiarot, Dmitry Kulikov and Joe Morrow in its top six. That's not Stanley Cup caliber defense; and, if you're into fancy stats, it has been much easier to get chances against Winnipeg this season than it was last season.

The reason this is so important? With contract extensions presumably on the way for Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor, this team is about to get expensive in a hurry. The Jets are going to be good for a long time, but given that cap hell is on its way soon, this season is a unique opportunity for Winnipeg to be great. — Murat Ates

4. Calgary Flames

Previous Ranking: 12

The biggest question facing the Flames? Goaltending. And not just going forward, as in next season (which also happens to be an issue), but going forward, as in next week. Backup-now-starter David Rittich suffered a lower-body injury just as his workload was being ramped up. Mike Smith's resurrection, meanwhile, is something of an ongoing/never-ending project. — Scott Cruickshank

With just a few exceptions, the team's nominal No. 1 goalie, Mike Smith, has really struggled to return to the form he showed in the first half of last year, so one of three things needs to happen: 1. He needs to be better; 2. David Rittich's strong play must continue; or 3. they'll have to tip into the trade market to land a netminding insurance policy. — Eric Duhatschek

5. Washington Capitals

Previous Ranking: 10

The Capitals have to find a way to jump-start their normally lethal power play. The Capitals are 1-for-31 with a man advantage in their past nine contests. That is very uncharacteristic of the defending Stanley Cup champions, and they will need a potent power play down the stretch. — Chris Kuc

6. Nashville Predators

Previous Ranking: 1

The Predators, depleted by serious injuries to key players for the past two months, are on the mend. Viktor Arvidsson, Filip Forsberg and P.K. Subban are back after lengthy absences. The Predators faced little adversity on their way to the Presidents' Trophy last season, so will experiencing some turmoil this season make them a better team when it counts? — Adam Vingan

7. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous Ranking: 18

The Golden Knights appear to have finally hit their stride, with the best record in the Western Conference over the past 20 games. But Vegas is still trying to develop chemistry between offseason editions Max Pacioretty and Paul Stastny on the second line. Both missed time due to injury but are finally playing alongside one another. If those two — along with the team's points leader, Alex Tuch — can provide the team with a potent second line, Vegas could be in line for another long postseason. — Jesse Granger

8. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous Ranking: 19

The Penguins are hoping the real Matt Murray is back. Murray is 7-0 since returning from a lower-body injury and has allowed only nine goals in that stretch. If the Penguins are getting this version of Murray for the remainder of the season, they'll be a concern for the rest of the East. — Josh Yohe

9. San Jose Sharks

Previous Ranking: 11

Will the Sharks get improved goaltending? They entered Saturday night's action with the worst even strength save percentage in the league (.897), as both Martin Jones and Aaron Dell have been inconsistent. They'll have to hope Jones has the kind of second half he did last season, when he was 16-10-2 with a .922 save percentage and 2.35 goals-against average after January. — Kevin Kurz

10. Boston Bruins

Previous Ranking: 9

How will the Bruins improve their five-on-five scoring? Will they target a No. 3 center or a No. 2 right wing? — Fluto Shinzawa

The Bruins are getting healthy and are starting to hit their stride. Boston is getting contributions throughout the lineup, and both goalies are playing well. The biggest thing for the Bruins now is to get defenseman Charlie McAvoy healthy. He's expected to return to the lineup at some point in the coming week, so that will be a good sign for the team moving forward. — Joe McDonald

11. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous Ranking: 7

Will Artemi Panarin be traded at the Feb. 25 trade deadline? Or can the Blue Jackets sign their star forward to a contract extension? Sitting third in the division and on pace for 100 points, the Blue Jackets have played pretty well despite the



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nightmare contract situation with Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky. — Aaron Portzline

12. Buffalo Sabres

Previous Ranking: 6

Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart are dynamic, forming one of the best lines in the league. They're good for a goal or two per game. The rest of the scoring lines range from struggling to invisible. Though the minor-league team in Rochester is winning, no one is filling the net at a "call me up" rate. If Phil Housley can't find combinations that work, GM Jason Botterill will have to start looking elsewhere for help. Buffalo believes it has a playoff team, but lack of goals could derail the postseason hopes. — John Vogl

Scoring depth is by far the Sabres' biggest issue. If they're unable to get help for Eichel, Skinner and Reinhart, their fight to make the playoffs will be very hard. — Joe Yerdon

13. Colorado Avalanche

Previous Ranking: 8

A six-game losing streak curbed the Avalanche's early-season momentum and is starting to eat away at the equity they built in terms of overall record. It's about finding consistency in all areas of the game. If the Avs do that, they should be fine. If not, it could make for an interesting season. — Ryan S. Clark

14. New York Islanders

Previous Ranking: 17

Can the Isles keep up their insane level of goaltending? Robin Lehner and Thomas Greiss don't exactly strike fear into any opposing hearts, but they lead the NHL in save percentage almost halfway through the season. Didn't see that one in the "Farmers' Almanac." — Arthur Staple

15. Montreal Canadiens

Previous Ranking: 15

Considering their special teams struggles, can the Canadiens stay enough in the black at 5-on-5 to finish ahead of teams like the Sabres and Islanders? — Marc Antoine Godin

A top pairing defenseman is the most glaring hole on the roster. While going with a No. 2 defenseman by committee is fine in the regular season, having an effective top matchup pairing becomes vitally important in the playoffs. Of course, teams don't often trade top pairing guys, and if one does become available, it would probably be so cost prohibitive it would risk setting the Canadiens' long-term building plan back a bit. But that's by far the biggest need for this team, and it's not even close. — Arpon Basu

16. Dallas Stars

Previous Ranking: 14

The Stars' lack of depth scoring is the biggest issue. But if you ask the front office, it's the play of Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin. The Stars have created a distraction with public internal feuding, which could have gone even more nuclear than it did. — Sean Shapiro

17. Minnesota Wild

Previous Ranking: 5

Climbing. The Wild have taken a nosedive since our last power rankings in November, losing 11 of 16 games before Saturday's win. Now, they're in a spot where they'll have to string some wins together, something they haven't done in seven weeks. They're only two points behind last season's pace, however. — Michael Russo

18. Anaheim Ducks

Previous Ranking: 20

Incredibly, the Ducks are still within the playoff picture in the Western Conference despite a losing streak that's now at eight games (0-6-2). Consider that they also endured a seven-game drought in October. But they have to decide whether they're really a playoff team or not, and the next month should help GM Bob Murray get a clearer idea of whether to be a buyer and augment a low-scoring lineup or look to sell off potentially attractive pieces for future assets to aid in its current transition to a younger roster. The biggest piece would be right winger Jakob Silfverberg, a fine two-way player whose a UFA on July 1. Silfverberg has been out of the mix when it comes to extensions handed out by the club. If a new deal isn't in the works – and, especially, if they spiral further out of playoff contention – as they move toward the Feb. 25 trade deadline, the Ducks could fetch a decent return from a contending club that could see him as a helpful piece to fill a hole within its top-nine forward group as it prepares for a Stanley Cup run. — Eric Stephens

19. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous Ranking: 13

Carolina wants to add scoring and also create a path for Adam Fox; the Harvard defenseman still needs to sign. Multiple sources confirmed that the Hurricanes are open to trading Dougie Hamilton, not necessarily because they've soured on him but because they're trying to get the best possible offer for a defenseman not named Jaccob Slavin. It would be surprising if the Hurricanes don't trade Hamilton, Justin Faulk or Brett Pesce at some point, although the best deal might not be until the draft. — Craig Custance

20. Vancouver Canucks

Previous Ranking: 26

The question in Vancouver remains the same as it was at the start of the season. But with Elias Pettersson's sublime play as a rookie, the timeline for an answer has been moved up. It's all about identifying the pieces that will move forward with Pettersson, Brock Boeser and Bo Horvat as the Canucks' core. If they can do that while winning games and staying in some sort of playoff chase, even better. Special attention will be paid to goaltender Thatcher Demko's play down the stretch and whether Quinn Hughes gets into a few games for the Canucks at the conclusion of his college season. — Israel Fehr

21. Florida Panthers

Previous Ranking: 28



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The Panthers had won six of eight coming into the New Year, but their goaltending hasn't been as strong as it traditionally has been. Consistency here would be a big step forward. — George Richards

22. Edmonton Oilers

Previous Ranking: 22

Without question the biggest issue facing the Oilers is the continued employment of GM Peter Chiarelli. On the ice, it's how the defense will survive with Oscar Klefbom out and/or how the Oilers can possibly get secondary scoring out of this group, but both of those issues feed into Chiarelli's status. It's hard to imagine him staying on if Edmonton misses the playoffs. — Jonathan Willis

Who is going to score goals for the Oilers other than Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Alex Chiasson? — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

23. New York Rangers

Previous Ranking: 16

The Rangers have hit a fairly lengthy skid (following a 9-1-1 stretch in November), which should have been expected. The question is now, how much worse will it get, especially with another trade deadline sell-off coming in February? And how many ping-pong balls can they accumulate? — Rick Carpiello

24. New Jersey Devils

Previous Ranking: 23

Is Mackenzie Blackwood a potential long-term solution in net? He's looked great in a tiny NHL sample size and is now dealing with a groin injury. Regardless of whether or not the Devils climb back into the playoff chase, how Blackwood plays (not to mention Cory Schneider, once he also returns from injury) could be the biggest storyline of the second half of the season. — Corey Masisak

25. Arizona Coyotes

Previous Ranking: 27

Can they get enough bodies healthy to finish strong over the second half and allow GM John Chayka a fair evaluation of what he has on this scoring-challenged team? — Craig Morgan

26. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous Ranking: 25

The Blackhawks need to begin preparing for next season. Part of that process is deciding which players you project to be part of next year's team and which might be expendable.

I'd be surprised if the Blackhawks didn't sell off a few players before the trade deadline. — Scott Powers

27. Detroit Red Wings

Previous Ranking: 21

Now that the Red Wings have fallen back down toward the league's cellar, the biggest question facing them in the next two months will be who stays and who goes at the trade deadline. Despite their record, they should have multiple pieces that are intriguing to contenders, starting with forward Gustav Nyquist (having a career year) and goaltender Jimmy Howard. In the short term, though, we'll see how well Detroit can survive a severely banged up blueline — a similar situation to the one that saw them lose their first seven games this season. Big minutes are coming for rookies Dennis Cholowski and Filip Hronek. — Max Bultman

28. St. Louis Blues

Previous Ranking: 29

Get Vladimir Tarasenko going. He scored his 12th goal of the season in Philadelphia on Monday, but it was just his fourth point in his past 15 games. He is suffering through a career-low 7.8 shooting percentage. — Jeremy Rutherford

29. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous Ranking: 24

What will the roster look like by the end of the season? The Flyers' disappointing first half has made a playoff berth extremely unlikely, and new GM Chuck Fletcher has yet to really put his stamp on the club. Is he going to "shake up" the core of the team as the deadline approaches? — Charlie O'Connor

30. Los Angeles Kings

Previous Ranking: 31

Which Kings are most likely to be traded? Who stays, and who goes? The end of the regular season used to be the most important day on the Kings' schedule as it signaled the start of their playoff run. Now, the Feb. 25 trade deadline is the day to watch to see what GM Rob Blake will do with a team that has failed to meet expectations. — Lisa Dillman

31. Ottawa Senators

Previous Ranking: 30

Will Mark Stone and Matt Duchene be signed to contract extensions or be traded at the trade deadline? I think Stone is the priority. If they can't sign him, they'll shift their sights to Duchene. Convincing one to sign would be an epic coup at this point. — Chris Stevenson



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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes finally beat Islanders for fifth straight win

By Chip Alexander

Make it five.

For the first time this season, the Carolina Hurricanes have won five straight games, and the fifth came against a team they hadn't been able to solve until Tuesday.

The Canes finally found a way to beat the New York Islanders and goalie Thomas Greiss, winning 4-3 at refurbished Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, N.Y. The Isles had beaten the Canes three times this season, with Greiss in net for all three, and had won their past six games overall.

The run of 10 points allowed Carolina (20-17-5) to ease up in the Eastern Conference standings, leaving the Canes six points out of a wild-card playoff position.

Asked about his team's confidence level, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said, "Winning breeds that. It's kind of a snowball effect, just like losing is. It's really hard to get out of either one. You obviously want to keep the winning one going.

"We're just finding ways to win right now without playing our best. That's really the key and that's a good sign. We know we can get better."

Here's what it took for the Canes to win:

A power-play goal by defenseman Jaccob Slavin with 1:07 left in regulation that gave Carolina a 4-2 lead.

A goal by captain Justin Williams, who first stewed in the penalty box after being called for hooking, then bounced out of the box to flip a backhand past Greiss to make it 3-2 with 2:42 left in the third.

A goal by center Greg McKegg with six seconds left in the first period, then the primary assist on the Williams goal with a sharp, cross-ice feed.

Saku Maenalanen's first NHL goal, which tied the score 1-1 in the first.

A successful coach's challenge by Brind'Amour that wiped out an Islanders goal in the second.

Add in another quality start by goalie Curtis McElhinney, who had 28 saves, and aggressive penalty killing and the Canes had a nice road victory to savor heading to Tampa Bay to face the Lightning on Thursday.

"Good teams have to find a way to win and pick each other up and we did that," Brind'Amour said.

Carolina had two penalties in the second period, then the call against Williams with 4:57 left in regulation, but did not allow the Islanders to convert.

A careless penalty against the Isles' Leo Komarov, who cross-checked Brock McGinn into the boards with 2:05

remaining in the third, allowed Slavin to score what would be the game-winner.

The Canes made things interesting in the final 67 seconds, however. The Isles' Brock Nelson, who had two goals and an assist, scored eight seconds after Slavin and the Canes twice iced the puck after Greiss was pulled for an extra attacker.

"Seems like we always make it interesting, even when we don't have to," Williams said. "That team makes you earn everything."

On the second icing, the Canes' Sebastian Aho missed an empty net. That resulted in one final draw in the Canes zone that was won by the Islanders, and Aho and McGinn both had to block shots by Josh Bailey in the final seconds.

Maenalanen, recalled Jan. 1 from Charlotte, scored his first after some strong forechecking by his line. Warren Foegele dumped the puck in and was first in, Victor Rask got a piece of the puck -- Rask finishing with two assists in the game -- and Maenalanen pawed it down, then backhanded it past Greiss.

New York Islanders' Brock Nelson (29) looks to pass away from Carolina Hurricanes' Brock McGinn (23) during the second period of an NHL hockey game Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2019, in New York. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II)

Frank Franklin II AP

McKegg's goal came on another good forecheck and bang-bang play in front of Greiss as Micheal Ferland centered the puck and McKegg had it go off him and then Islanders defenseman Adam Pelech for a 2-1 lead after one.

"Kegger might have been one of our best forwards," Brind'Amour said. "Every time I threw him out there he was noticeable."

McKegg, who centered the third line Tuesday, has two goals and two assists in three games since being called up from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL.

The Islanders (23-14-4) believed they had tied the score 2-2 early in the second on a Jordan Eberle shot from the slot. But Brind'Amour was quickly informed by video coaches Chris Huffine and L.J. Scarpace that the Isles' Val Filppula was offside on the zone entry and made the challenge, which was upheld on review. No goal.

"They radioed in, 'It was offside, offside,'" Brind'Amour said. "It was. You could see clear as day. We got real fortunate there and got a little better as the game went on."

The Islanders did tie it 2-2 at 4:50 of the third when defenseman Devon Toews scored on a shot through traffic from the point.

"We buckled down when we had to," Brind'Amour said.



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PNC Arena has had \$4 billion economic impact on Wake County, Centennial Authority says

By Chip Alexander

When PNC Arena turns 20 later this year, it's estimated the facility will have had a \$4 billion economic impact for Wake County since its opening in October 1999.

In 2018, the estimated economic impact for the county was about \$262 million from the arena.

Those were two of the financial figures included in the Centennial Authority's response to a request for information for hospitality projects by Wake County. The authority, an appointed body, is the arena landlord and is seeking enhancements to the facility that could cost an estimated \$200 million to \$300 million.

The authority is seeking the enhancement funds for:

New hospitality spaces on the south end of the arena facing Carter-Finley Stadium that would have a rooftop bar and restaurant as its centerpiece.

New club and concession spaces in the arena that the authority says will help "showcase the region's food and beverage culture" while providing additional revenue streams.

New office and meeting spaces on the north end of the arena for staff offices and the "anticipated growth of Carolina Hurricanes operations and management."

The Hurricanes' lease with the authority ends in 2024, and the authority report said there were "ongoing discussions" with the Hurricanes on lease term options. N.C. State uses the arena for its men's basketball games and commencement exercises, and the arena has hosted NCAA basketball regionals, concerts and family events.

The financial request for the enhancement and expansion needs approval from Wake County and the City of Raleigh, with the money being provided through the city and county Interlocal Agreement, which is funded by the hospitality industry's hotel/motel and prepared-food tax.

"The time has come to make PNC Arena more versatile and competitive so we can continue building on the success of the first 20 years," the authority request said.

Or as executive director Jeff Merritt said Tuesday to authority members, "We need to make sure it fits the 21st Century model of an arena. ... While we've done a great job of keeping up the infrastructure and guts and skeleton of the arena, we need to pump adrenaline into the building."

Recent enhancements, requested by Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, include the installation of a 3D projection system and theatrical lighting. Plans call for a new scoreboard to be installed before next season.

The authority's economic impact study was done by John Connaughton, a UNC Charlotte economist at the university's Belk College of Business. Connaughton's study indicated 46 percent of those attending PNC Arena events are from outside Wake County and that the arena generates about 142,000 hotel rooms each year, with hotel expenditures of \$14 million a year. It's estimated \$6 million is spent at Wake County restaurants.

The authority, in the request, said if enhancement funds are approved this spring, the project could be completed by the summer of 2022.



Recap: Canes Top Islanders to Extend Winning Streak

Slavin's late PP tally the game-winner in 4-3 victory

by Michael Smith

UNIONDALE, N.Y. - The Carolina Hurricanes extended their winning streak to a season-long five games with a 4-3 win over the New York Islanders.

Justin Williams and Jacob Slavin scored goals for the Canes in the waning minutes of regulation, and Slavin's power-play tally was the difference in the team's return to Nassau Coliseum.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game on Long Island.

One

With less than five minutes remaining in the third period of a tie game, captain Justin Williams was whistled for a hook. The Canes responded with a sharp penalty kill, never really allowing the Islanders a good look to take the lead.

"I was just in the box with my head down hoping they'd kill off the penalty for me, and they did. They didn't even make me sweat too, too much," Williams said. "That's what I mean about picking each other up. The guys picked me up tonight. I could kiss all the penalty killers on the lips tonight."



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Only 15 seconds after Williams exited the box, he gave the Canes a 3-2 lead. On a clear in, Thomas Greiss sent the puck around the boards. The Canes forced a turnover, and Greg McKegg put a pass on Williams' tape. He dangled and then roofed a backhand shot.

That's a clutch goal from the team's leader.

"That's a tough penalty. Obviously, you don't want to take a penalty there," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "He knows it, and we all know it. Then, he goes out and gets the huge, huge goal for us. Give the guys credit who killed the penalty for him. That's the first thing he said when he went into the locker room. Good teams have to do that. You have to find a way to get a win and pick each other up."

Two

With just over two minutes left in regulation, the Canes were rewarded with a power play after Leo Komarov cross-checked Brock McGinn into the far boards.

Following an offensive-zone faceoff win on the man advantage, Dougie Hamilton worked the puck over to Slavin, who had time and space to walk with it. His wrist shot then beat Greiss through traffic, and the blue-liner's 100th career point gave the Canes a two-goal lead.

It seemed like the dagger, but it ended up being the game-winning goal, after Brock Nelson tallied his second goal of the game with 59 seconds remaining to add some drama to the game's final minute.

"Turns out to be the game-winning goal. Perfect. We didn't know we'd need it, but we did," Williams said. "Seems like we always make it interesting, even when we don't have to. We got it done."

Three

Saku Maenalanen has a puck to take home from this one, as he netted his first career NHL goal just 88 seconds after the Islanders opened the scoring in the first period.

Warren Foegele got the puck deep and got in on the forecheck. The puck bounced around in a scrum in the corner, and Victor Rask took a whack at it. The puck popped up in the air, and Maenalanen gloved it down as he cut to the front of the net. He tried to get a backhand on the puck, but it was Nick Leddy's stick tapping it past Greiss. His stick might not have put the puck in the net, but they all count just the same.

"It looked like he had been knocking on the door in the last few games," McKegg said of Maenalanen. "For him to break that seal was huge. He's playing really well."

The Canes got more assistance from the Islanders to take a 2-1 with just six seconds remaining in the first period. But, again, the goal came as a result of an active, aggressive forecheck. Micheal Ferland got the puck deep and retrieved

his own dump-in before centering in front. The puck changed angles off McKegg and ricocheted in off Adam Pelech.

"[Ferland] made a great play getting it in deep and getting there first," McKegg said. "I just tried to get to the net and stop at the net. Lucky bounce."

"Those guys have really contributed, and I think Kegger might have been our best forward. Every time I threw him out there, he was noticeable. Saku had a good game, too," Brind'Amour said. "These are the guys who are helping out."

The Canes scored two goals in the first period, but they didn't actively shoot either of them into the net. They'll take it, especially considering Brind'Amour said they didn't have their best start and were lucky to take a lead to the locker room.

Four

Credit to the Canes video team of Chris Huffine and LJ Scarpace, as well as goaltending coach Mike Bales' eye in the sky, for challenging what appeared to be a game-tying goal for the Islanders in the second period. Jordan Eberle was left open in the slot and slid the puck through Curtis McElhinney's five-hole to even the score at two at the 2:40 mark of the second, but a second look through the coach's challenge showed Valtteri Filppula was offside on the zone entry; Filppula's front skate was across the blue line and his back skate was off the ice prior to the puck entering the zone.

"We've got great coaches here who work so hard behind the scenes, Chris Huffine and LJ," Brind'Amour said. "They radioed in that it was offsides, and it was. You could see it clear as day. We got real fortunate there."

That arguably changed the course of the second period, as the Canes took their 2-1 lead into the third.

Five

The Canes are now riding a season-long, five-game winning streak, and it's come at a critical juncture of the season.

The most encouraging aspect of the streak? The Canes feel as though they aren't even playing their best hockey.

"We're finding ways to win games. That's what good teams do," Williams said. "Hopefully we'll wind it up and be better next game."

"Winning breeds that (confidence). It's kind of a snowball effect," Brind'Amour said. "We're just finding ways to win right now without playing our best. ... We know we can get better."

Up Next

The Hurricanes will look to extend their winning streak to six when they wrap up their three-game road trip in Tampa on Thursday.



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De Haan, Hurricanes Return to Nassau Coliseum

Canes set to play first game on Long Island in nearly four years

by Michael Smith

UNIONDALE, N.Y. - Calvin de Haan chuckled with nostalgia as he stood inside the visitors' locker room at the newly renovated NYCB Live, home of the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

"Quite frankly, it's kind of a dump, but it was our home, right?" he smiled. "This is an awesome building to play in. It was fun."

He's right. It was home for him and the New York Islanders. Now it's a sort of half-home, as they split their time between Long Island and Barclays Center in Brooklyn for home games in the 2018-19 regular season.

And, it looks a lot different than it used to. Sure, the bones are the same, but an 18-month, \$180 million renovation spruced up the dated Coliseum.

"They fixed it up. It actually looks really nice, way better than I remember," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It actually looks totally different. I'm sure it will be a fun game."

"I think the fans are embracing it again. Same with the players, too," said de Haan, who played the better part of two seasons on Long Island before the Islanders made the move to Brooklyn. "It's loud in here and intimidating. When that crowd is going, it can really send a chill down your spine. It's a fun place to play. I really enjoyed it."

De Haan and the Islanders played their final game at the Coliseum on April 25, 2015 in the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. They topped the Washington Capitals, 3-1, to force a Game 7 - and that was that.

"It was pretty wild. There's not really any other way to put it," de Haan recalled. "That series could have gone either way. It was a war."

The Islanders returned to the refurbished old barn on Dec. 1, 2018, for the first of 20 home games to be played on Long Island in the 2018-19 regular season.

For the Hurricanes, Tuesday night's match-up marks their first game at Nassau Coliseum in nearly four years, and just two players who dressed that night - Victor Rask and Justin Faulk - will play for the Canes in their return. On a snowy night on Feb. 28, 2015, the Canes scored four goals in the second period en route to a 5-3 victory over the Islanders.

In fact, the Canes are 12-2-2 in their last 16 visits to the Coliseum.

"We always did well here," Brind'Amour said. "It was good."

Though he's faced his former team thrice already this season - twice in Raleigh and once in Brooklyn - de Haan said it's still a little weird, especially now being at the old rink.

"It was strange being on the other end of Barclays rink," he said. "The updates are a little different, but the rink is still 200 feet long, and it's still the home of the Islanders."

Even stranger for de Haan is the fact that the visiting team room now occupies the space that the Islanders' locker room once did. Renovations flipped the sides of either room in the bowels of the Coliseum.

In a way, he's returned to where it all began.

"It's nostalgic. It brings back some good memories," he said. "I was able to start my career here, and I'm very fortunate for the opportunity I had."



Hurricanes edge Islanders for fifth straight victory

Score twice late in third period, end New York winning streak at six

by Brian Compton

Justin Williams lifts a backhand shot over Thomas Greiss, giving the Hurricanes a 3-2 lead late in the 3rd period

UNIONDALE, N.Y. -- Justin Williams broke a tie with 2:42 remaining in the third period, and the Carolina Hurricanes won their fifth straight game, 4-3 against the New York Islanders at Nassau Coliseum on Tuesday.

Saku Maenalanen and Jaccob Slavin scored, Greg McKeeg had a goal and an assist, and Curtis McElhinney made 28 saves for Carolina (20-17-5), which defeated New York for the first time in four tries this season (1-2-1).

"That team makes you earn everything you've got," Williams said. "They play hard, they play tough in the defensive zone and we're happy to finally get a win against them."



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"We haven't exactly played our best hockey but we're finding ways to win games, and that's what good teams do. Hopefully we'll wind it up and be better next game."

Brock Nelson had two goals and an assist, and Devon Toews scored for New York (23-14-4), which had a six-game winning streak end. The Islanders have not won seven straight in a single season since their nine-game streak between Dec. 31, 1989, and Jan. 19, 1990. Thomas Greiss made 20 saves.

"Average," Islanders captain Anders Lee said. "There were times where we were fine, but then there were times where you could just tell we made some mental mistakes."

Nelson gave the Islanders a 1-0 lead at 13:42 of the first period with a wrist shot from the left circle after a turnover by Justin Faulk. It was Nelson's 14th goal of the season.

Maenalanen tied it at 15:10 when he cut to the net from the left side and put a backhand past Greiss for his first NHL goal to make it 1-1.

McKegg gave the Hurricanes a 2-1 lead with six seconds remaining in the period after he knocked down Victor Rask's feed in front.

"It's deflating when you give up a goal late," Nelson said. "You have to learn from that and you just have to own it and go out there and make the right play."

New York forward Jordan Eberle had a goal taken away at 2:40 of the second period when video review determined the Islanders entered the zone offside. But Toews tied it 2-2 at 4:50 of the third period on a shot from the point through traffic.

The Islanders were awarded their third power play of the game with 4:57 remaining when Williams hooked Leo Komarov in the neutral zone. But the Hurricanes killed the penalty, and Williams scored 15 seconds after leaving the box when he roofed a shot over Greiss with 2:42 left for a 3-2 lead. It was his 10th goal of the season.

"I was just in the box with my head down, hoping they'd kill the penalty for me," Williams said. "They did; they didn't even make me sweat too much. I just got a great pass from McKegg. I thought about going and passing it back, but the top side opened up and I was able to put it in."

Slavin scored a power-play goal with 1:07 remaining to make it 4-2 before Nelson scored again from the left circle with 59 seconds left for the 4-3 final.

"Frustrating," Lee said. "We had some opportunities, we had some power plays. We just made a couple of mistakes at bad times in the game, allowed them to get those go-ahead goals, tying goals, whatever it was. We kind of point to ourselves tonight."

They said it

"We buckled down when we had to, and some huge kills tonight. That's the difference in the game. I give those guys a lot of credit for sacrificing, doing whatever they had to do to get pucks out. We'll take it." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour on Carolina going 3-for-3 on the penalty kill

"We expect to make the playoffs. Who knows? It's going to be a tight race. That one or two points that we could have had today, we threw them away." -- Islanders coach Barry Trotz

Need to know

The five-game winning streak is the Hurricanes' longest of the season. They are 13-2-2 in their past 17 games at Nassau Coliseum; this was their first game here since Feb. 28, 2015. ... Greiss entered the game having allowed three goals on 112 shots in three wins against the Hurricanes this season. ... Carolina recalled defenseman Dan Renouf from Charlotte of the American Hockey League before the game. He was a healthy scratch. ... The Islanders activated center Valtteri Filppula off injured reserve and sent right wing Joshua Ho-Sang to Bridgeport of the AHL. ... Hurricanes forward Brock McGinn played his 200th NHL game; Islanders forward Matt Martin played his 600th. ... It was New York's first regulation loss at the Coliseum this season (3-1-1).

What's next

Hurricanes: At the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday (7:30 p.m. ET; SUN, FS-SE, NHL.TV)

Islanders: At the New York Rangers on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; MSG, MSG+ 2, NHL.TV)



Hurricanes edge Islanders 4-3 for fifth straight win

By ALLAN KREDA

UNIONDALE, N.Y. (AP) — Justin Williams, a three-time Stanley Cup winner, has scored many big goals. The puck found his stick after he left the penalty box in the third period Tuesday night, and the veteran forward scored another to lift Carolina to a fifth-straight win.

Williams got his 299th career goal at 17:18 of the third and the Hurricanes beat the Islanders 4-3 on Tuesday night to snap New York's six-game winning streak.

His 10th goal of the season made it 3-2. The 37-year-old forward flipped a backhand past goaltender Thomas Greiss with an assist from Greg McKegg.

"I was hoping they would kill off the penalty and they did. Then I got a great pass, the top side opened up and it turns



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out to be the game-winning goal," Williams said. "That team makes you earn everything. We got it done."

Jacob Slavin made it 4-2 for the Hurricanes with a power-play goal at 18:53 before Brock Nelson scored his second of the game for the Islanders at 19:01.

Curtis McElhinney made 28 saves for Carolina, which also got goals from Saku Maenalanen and McKegg.

The Islanders were coming off a three-goal comeback win over St. Louis on Saturday following an overtime home win over Chicago last Thursday. The loss left their coach Barry Trotz frustrated about his team's lack of execution.

Trotz was perturbed the Islanders gave up McKegg's goal with only six seconds left in the first as well as Williams' tally on a broken play in the Islanders' zone.

"I thought we just mismanaged the game," Trotz said. "There are certain moments where you have to execute what is in the best interest of the group. We didn't do that. That's a good way to lose hockey games. That one or two points we could have had, we just threw them away."

Rookie defenseman Devon Toews tied it early in the third period for New York. It was his second goal since being recalled from AHL Bridgeport.

Nelson opened the scoring 13:42 into the first period, but Carolina tied it when rookie Maenalanen scored his first goal at 15:10. The 24-year-old Maenalanen played his fifth career game after signing with Carolina last May as a free agent. He previously played for Karpas of the Finnish League.

"Saku had a good game. He's been a huge boost," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We are finding ways to win right now and we know we can be better."

McKegg put the Hurricanes ahead with six seconds left in the first, knocking a loose puck past Greiss in the crease for his second goal of the season.

"I just tried to get to the net. It was a lucky bounce and it ended up going in," McKegg said.

Jordan Eberle appeared to tie it for the Islanders early in the second period, but Valterri Filppula was ruled offside before the goal.

McElhinney also made a sprawling save on Ryan Pulock alone in the slot in the waning seconds of the middle period.

Lee echoed his coach regarding the missed opportunity to snare at least a point. The Islanders will try to make amends with an upcoming home-and-home series against the Rangers starting on Thursday.

"We should have played better and smarter," Lee said. "We have to reset and get ready to go in a couple of days."

NOTES: The Islanders had won the previous three meetings between the teams this season. ... The Islanders are 3-1-1 at Nassau Coliseum and fell to 10-4-1 in division games. ... Islanders forward Matt Martin played his 600th career game. ... The Islanders loaned forward Josh Ho-Sang to AHL Bridgeport and activated Filppula before the game. ... The Islanders scratched Fs Ross Johnston and Tom Kuhnhackl and D Luca Sbisa. ... The Hurricanes scratched F Clark Bishop and D Dan Renouf.

UP NEXT

Islanders: Begin home and home series with Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Thursday night.

Hurricanes: Play at Tampa Bay on Thursday night.

YAHOO! SPORTS

NHL Power Rankings: The Flames are looking elite

Ryan Lambert

Hey everyone, we here at Yahoo! Sports are doing real power rankings for teams Nos. 1-31. Here they are, based on only how I am feeling about these teams, meaning you can't tell me I'm wrong because these are my feelings and feelings can't be wrong. Please enjoy the Power Feelings.

31. Ottawa Senators (Last week: 31)

30. Philadelphia Flyers (LW: 30)

29. New York Rangers (LW: 26)

I would love it if you would go ahead and try to guess how many regulation wins the Rangers have this season. Just ballpark it for me. They've played half a season, 41 games. I'll hold on a minute.

Okay, what did you come up with? Because the number is 11. In 41 games. The Senators have 12. Can you believe

that? The only difference seems to be that the Rangers have a much stronger ability to force OT, in which they're 6-7.

28. Los Angeles Kings (LW: 29)

27. Chicago Blackhawks (LW: 28)

26. Anaheim Ducks (LW: 24)

25. Detroit Red Wings (LW: 27)

There's a big miasma of really bad teams at the bottom here. I'd go from Vancouver to Ottawa just in terms of "these guys truly stink." That's the future of the league, by the way, because more teams are going to see the value in tanking.

But the thing is how many of these teams are actively trying to be bad? Vancouver, Detroit, New York. That's probably it. The Senators are a year removed from trying to ACQUIRE talent, Chicago can't tank, Philly and L.A. went into the year thinking they would be playoff repeats. And while Anaheim is still holding on tenuously to a playoff spot, it all runs through



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one guy who happens to be the best goalie in the world right now.

How did so many teams miss internal expectations this bad?

24. Vancouver Canucks (LW: 25)

The Canucks are a team that should have been reallllllly bad but Pettersson and Co. are just better than anyone expected on the strength of this one guy. They're a point back of Anaheim despite John Gibson going off and Pettersson missing a bunch of time. Very weird.

23. New Jersey Devils (LW: 22)

And man, like, even though the Devils made the playoffs last year I think everyone there probably figured they'd miss the playoffs this year. That's fine! They should be trying to rebuild, because the core of this team is very bad.

They should also trade Taylor Hall.

22. St. Louis Blues (LW: 23)

21. Arizona Coyotes (LW: 21)

20. Montreal Canadiens (LW: 17)

These guys still have the 14th-best points percentage in the league but they've been trending down for a while now. They still look pretty good and Carey Price has rebounded after a poor start, but in that division, I'm not sure they can put in the legwork to catch up to a healthy Boston team, even if it seems close right now.

19. Edmonton Oilers (LW: 20)

That Hampus Lindholm hit on McDavid Sunday night got a lot of attention, and it should have. Plays like that need to be a penalty 600 percent of the time.

However, less-reported at the time was that McDavid was playing on a line that night with Zack Kassian and Jujhar Khaira. The reason why? L.A. had "taken liberties" with McDavid the night before and Hitchcock wanted a little extra protection.

Those two guys had already hopped off when McDavid got a face full of boards, because they can't stay out as long as McDavid can (no surprise) and it's almost like, presence or not, those guys had no effect on McDavid getting mugged.

Weird how the only thing that will really deter people from taking runs at the best players in the league is officiating, but officials still won't do anything to protect them. Very weird.

18. Florida Panthers (LW: 14)

Amazing that these guys don't occupy a playoff spot, and aren't even close, but the goalies are having a crap year and that's the kind of thing that can be the difference between a mediocre team looking really good or really bad.

17. New York Islanders (LW: 18)

Amazing that these guys barely occupy a playoff spot, but the goalies are having a great year and that's the kind of thing that can be the difference between a mediocre team looking really good or really bad.

16. Dallas Stars (LW: 19)

Amazing that these guys comfortably occupy a playoff spot, but Ben Bishop is having a great year and that's the kind of thing that can be the difference between a mediocre team looking really good or really bad.

15. Colorado Avalanche (LW: 13)

14. Minnesota Wild (LW: 15)

I think I had this stat a week or two ago but the Wild are the only positive-goal-difference team in the league not in a playoff position right now. They have three games in hand on both Dallas and Anaheim, plus five on Vancouver, who's a slot ahead of them.

This might be the most mediocre team in the league, though. Nothing surprises me with their success or failure anymore.

13. Carolina Hurricanes (LW: 16)

12. Buffalo Sabres (LW: 12)

11. Columbus Blue Jackets (LW: 11)

Starting to see a lot of suggestions that these guys might trade one or both of their Russian stars regardless of playoff position around the deadline. And I gotta say: Yes please.

10. Winnipeg Jets (LW: 8)

At this point it's "only" Dustin Byfuglien and Nik Ehlers who are out long-term but those are two pretty important players to miss the next few weeks at least, right?

9. Pittsburgh Penguins (LW: 9)

Since the Penguins bottomed out in mid-November, losing their fourth straight and ninth in 10 games at home in OT against Buffalo, they have been a liiiiiiiiiitttle better.

We're talking 16-5-2 with a plus-27 goal difference. They've gone 17 of 59 on the power play (28.8 percent) and 46 of 53 on the PK (86.8 percent). Which, to me, that's good. Probably not sustainable, but neither was them looking like a hot turd for a month and a half.

8. Boston Bruins (LW: 10)

7. Washington Capitals (LW: 5)

They had a three-game losing streak but if you go back to Nov. 15 they're also 17-5-1 so yeah sometimes you lose but they still look pretty good.

6. Nashville Predators (LW: 3)

5. San Jose Sharks (LW: 7)

If Erik Karlsson had been half as bad as Drew Doughty has been this year it's the only thing we'd be talking about. He's not gonna win the Norris either because of how mediocre his start was, but boy what a player huh?

4. Toronto Maple Leafs (LW: 6)

3. Vegas Golden Knights (LW: 4)

2. Calgary Flames (LW: 2)

They just keep doing it, man. They need to make some trades to shore up that depth but Johnny Gaudreau seems single-handedly committed to making this team elite.



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1. Tampa Bay Lightning (LW: 1)

Hey, they finally lost in regulation. To arguably the best team in the West. On the road. At the end of the usually brutal California trip.

It was their first regulation loss, and only the second loss overall, in more than a month. From Nov. 29 to Jan. 3, they went 15-0-1 and outscored their opponents by an average of 2.1 goals a night. Just incredible, really.

The Hockey News

Five teams that should go all-in on a Vladimir Tarasenko trade

It's no guarantee the Blues deal their best goal-scoring threat, but he's in his prime and under team control through 2022-23, so plenty of teams should trip over themselves to chase him.

By Matt Larkin

After a disastrous start to 2018-19, the St. Louis Blues are 8-7-1 since Dec. 1, meaning they're still highly mediocre. Even if they've stopped bleeding profusely, the damage is probably done for their season. They sit seven points out of the last Western Conference wildcard slot with six teams to pass to snatch it, albeit they do have games in hand on every one of them.

The odds still don't favor St. Louis clawing back into the post-season, so the trade rumors persist. Captain Alex Pietrangelo has sparked plenty of chatter, as have hulking blueliner Colton Parayko and center Brayden Schenn. The Blues' standings situation has gotten dire enough that we're even getting Vladimir Tarasenko buzz now despite his four remaining years on his contract at a \$7.5-million AAV.

In the four seasons preceding this one, Tarasenko scored more goals than every NHLer except Alex Ovechkin. Tarasenko's 12 goals through 39 games this season tie him for 83rd in the league. Given he's 27 and still in his prime, 2018-19 has to qualify as the worst, most disappointing season of his career to date.

Still, while a mid-season trade would prove difficult to execute, it would hardly be impossible, especially because, if you check under the hood, he's still humming along like his usual talented self. He's posted the lowest shooting percentage of his career at 8.3, but he's actually averaging his second most shots per game at 3.69. He's generating the most high-danger shot attempts per 60 minutes of his career right now. He's getting to the net often and shooting the puck from high-percentage spots, and it's just not going in. He's thus due for a huge positive regression in luck. A trade to a contender could provide him with some of his best linemates yet, so it wouldn't be a surprise to see Tarasenko's numbers explode. It's possible his off-season shoulder surgery has taken some mustard off his shot, but it's not like Tarasenko is a rental whose value depends entirely on perfect health this season. Also, the four years remaining on his contract don't qualify as an eternity, so it's not inconceivable that the Blues eat a small amount of salary to a facilitate a trade. Hey, it may not feel fair given how valuable Tarasenko is, but the Toronto Maple Leafs did it with Phil Kessel.

It's plausible Blues GM Doug Armstrong decides to hold the franchise's most prolific goal-scorer since Brett Hull until the

summer or beyond. But maybe someone makes Armstrong a Godfather offer. Which teams would make the most sense as Tarasenko suitors? Consider these five, and remember – Tarasenko has no restrictive clauses on his contract, meaning he can't control where he'd go in any trade.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

Two seemingly universal truths about the Hurricanes, regardless of ownership and GM: (a) they've never been overly aggressive in free agency, so they typically land their biggest fish through drafting and trading; and (b) they're always looking for more goals. They sport the NHL's 28th-ranked offense right now. As Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman pointed out in November, the Canes were highly interested in Toronto Maple Leafs right winger William Nylander before he signed. Tarasenko's price tag isn't much higher than Nylander's ended up being. Tarasenko plays the same position and, given he's five years older, he might cost less to acquire than Nylander would have. The pieces involved would be quite different, of course. A Nylander trade likely would've required Hurricanes GM Don Waddell trading from his position of strength, dealing a veteran blueliner such as Justin Faulk or Brett Pesce. If the Blues move Tarasenko, they're waving a white flag on their season and thus likely seeking picks and/or prospects. The Canes would never surrender Andrei Svechnikov, who profiles as a teenage Tarasenko and would have an ideal teammate mentor in Tarasenko, but it may take a high-end prospect such as 2017 first-rounder Martin Necas to make a Tarasenko package acceptable for St. Louis.

The Hurricanes have heated up lately and haven't made the playoffs since 2009. Their fan base may be restless for an aggressive move. They still boast an elite D-corps and would become much more dangerous with Tarasenko in tow.

BOSTON BRUINS

The Bruins continuously field The Best Line in Hockey when healthy but have searched for scoring-winger depth for several seasons. That's why they traded for Rick Nash last season and have been linked to Ilya Kovalchuk before and since he signed with the Los Angeles Kings.

Landing Tarasenko would require some tricky salary cap tapdancing this summer given Boston has a slew of crucial RFAs to re-sign, including Charlie McAvoy, Brandon Carlo, Ryan Donato, Danton Heinen and Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson. But at least one member of that young core, maybe two, would likely have to go St. Louis' way in a Tarasenko deal anyway. It would sting for Boston to lose one of them, or Jake DeBrusk, and/or any drafted prospects not



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yet in the NHL, such as Jakub Zboril, but think about Boston's big-picture goals. The Bruins only have so many great years left from Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and Tuukka Rask, and they need more firepower to hang with Tampa Bay and Toronto in the Atlantic Division. Tarasenko would be a bold acquisition and, because he's still in his prime, would keep Boston's contention window open for plenty of years.

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS

Owner Bill Foley and GM McPhee are a bold pair. They spent three draft picks to get Tomas Tatar at least year's trade deadline and had no problem including Tatar plus one of their top prospects, Nick Suzuki, to land Max Pacioretty in September. The Golden Knights are willing to make gutsy decisions in the name of winning. Speaking of winning, they've been doing a lot of it lately, climbing all the way to ninth overall in points percentage. They're suddenly in position to challenge the Calgary Flames and San Jose Sharks for the Pacific Division crown. Those two teams rank third and fourth, respectively, in goals per game. Vegas sits 14th and could really use a high-end shooter. The Golden Knights are deep, featuring four forwards with double-digit goal totals, but would look a lot deadlier with Tarasenko.

McPhee has 18 picks, including four second-rounders and four third-rounders, over the next two drafts, so the Golden Knights could dream up a package of futures to tempt St. Louis, but Vegas has already committed almost \$73 million to 14 players for next season. A trade would thus likely have to send a sizable cap hit back to the Blues on top of giving them picks and at least one strong prospect.

EDMONTON OILERS

This may simply be a fantasy for someone who enjoys must-see hockey TV. But arguably no team could do more with Tarasenko than the Oilers, who have yet to settle on a regular right winger for Connor McDavid unless it involves deploying a top-heavy lineup with Leon Draisaitl shifting away from his natural position of center.

Tarasenko and McDavid as linemates? They'd likely help each other produce career-best work. Speaking of which

Tarasenko's best seasons came with Ken Hitchcock as his coach, regardless of whether they clashed from time to time. And look who's behind the bench in Edmonton?

The Oilers would be more challenged than the other teams on this list to prepare a suitable package for Tarasenko, as their farm system lacks depth. It wouldn't be worth including elite blueline prospect Evan Bouchard, but perhaps something built around Kailer Yamamoto, Jesse Puljujarvi or both would be a fair starting point. The Oilers have to start maximizing McDavid's peak years, and Tarasenko would make a great trigger man through 2022-23.

BUFFALO SABRES

I was tempted to put the New York Islanders in this space, but they've begun amassing a highly impressive prospect pool while winning ahead of schedule this season. The pragmatic Lou Lamoriello likely won't dive into contender mode after one promising half-season. The splashiest mid-season deal he made while guiding the Toronto Maple Leafs' rebuild was acquiring Brian Boyle.

So let's look at a team arguably further along in the rebuild – or at least expected to be further along. The Sabres surged toward the top of the NHL standings in November, spiking their fan base's expectations, but have slumped considerably since. They've received tremendous production from their usual first line of Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart but haven't gotten enough scoring from their depth lines, especially with prospect Casey Mittelstadt's offense developing slower than many predicted. Tarasenko would change the team's dynamic and give Buffalo more than one must-stop line, which is something virtually every major Cup contender has now. Most interestingly, the Sabres' cap situation looks quite cushy this summer, with no high-impact RFA to sign, so they could fit Tarasenko under the cap and still comfortably re-sign UFA Skinner. And when a rebuilding team first comes of age, possessing tradable assets is never a problem, as that team has typically spent the past few years loading up on picks and prospects. Buffalo is no exception.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap: Hurricanes extend winning streak with 4-3 win over Islanders

The Canes win streak is now at five as they halt the Isles' own streak at six.

By Andy House

In a battle of teams on winning streaks, the Carolina Hurricanes halted the New York Islanders streak at six, while extending their own streak to five with a 4-3 win at Nassau Coliseum on Tuesday night. Behind a valiant effort from

Curtis McElhinney in net, stopping 28 of 31 shots faced, Carolina was able to grind out the two goals they needed inside the final three minutes of regulation.

The early Canes offense consisted of contributions from the extended depth of the roster that has been instrumental in much of their recent success as Saku Maenalanen notched his first NHL goal and Greg McKegg got credit for his second marker of the season as the Canes claimed a 2-1 first period



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lead, as he continues to make a significant impact in his early work as a Hurricane.

Although the Isles were the first to break the ice on the back of Brock Nelson's unassisted goal off of a turnover from Justin Faulk at 13:42 of the first period, the Canes answered back on a nifty backhander from Maenalanan after he snatched the puck out of the air with his glove near the crease. Carolina captured the lead just seconds before the conclusion of the period as Micheal Ferland whipped the puck towards the net from the corner, where McKeeg and the Islanders defense played pinball into the back of the net, making the score 2-1 after one.

The second period saw the Canes as the beneficiary of the rare challenge for offside, as Jordan Eberle's apparent tally came off the board after Rod Brind'Amour challenged, correctly, that Josh Bailey was offside as the puck entered the zone. As Carolina began to control action late in the second, McElhinney came up with a terrific save on Ryan Pulkock to maintain the tight 2-1 advantage entering the third period.

In the third, the Isles applied pressure immediately and were rewarded with an equalizer almost five minutes into the period as Devon Toews snapped one home from the top of

the circles with a terrific net front presence provided by Nelson. The significant pressure from the Isles continued throughout the third as they sought the tie-breaking goal.

With just under five minutes remaining, Justin Williams got the gate for a hooking penalty, setting up a crucial penalty kill for Carolina. After a gritty kill, Williams sprung out of the box to nullify an icing and roofed the go-ahead goal on the backhand off a pass from McKeeg (his second point of the night).

As the final minutes resumed, a cross-check from behind by Leo Komarov to Brock McGinn with just over two minutes remaining appeared to all but seal the Canes victory. For good measure, Jaccob Slavin wristed home the power play game-sealing tally extending the lead to 4-2 with just over a minute remaining. As action resumed, the Islanders advanced immediately into the Carolina zone, where Nelson again beat McElhinney for an unassisted goal to draw within one goal yet again. Despite a few more heart-stopping moments, the Canes held strong and escaped with a 4-3 win.

The Canes will continue a busy week with a trip to Tampa to take on the best the NHL currently has to offer as they meet the Lightning on Thursday night.

Charlotte Checkers Corner: Back On Track

Three straight wins put the Checkers back on the right path following a bit of a stumble.

By Justin Lape

After a less than ideal previous seven days, the Checkers rattled off three straight wins to get back to their winning ways. In five of their previous six games before this week, the Checkers allowed four or more goals. This week, the Checkers' defense and goaltenders stepped up and provided more security for the Checkers' offense by only allowing four total goals over the three games.

Weekend Recap

The Checkers began the weekend with a 4-1 win over the Belleville Senators on Friday. Patrick Brown struck in the first period to give the Checkers the early lead. Julien Gauthier added a power play tally in the second period to extend the lead before the Senators closed the gap with a goal just four minutes later. The Checkers' well-rounded offense received tallies from Aleksi Saarela and Nic Roy to help ensure a Senators comeback was out of reach. Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 30 out of 31 shots en route to the win.

The Checkers and Senators faced off again Saturday with Charlotte once again getting the best of Belleville. The Checkers' 6-3 win was capped off with multi-point performances from five different players. Martin Necas and Julien Gauthier had standout performances with Gauthier potting a pair of goals and Necas tallying a goal and an assist. Gauthier became the 6th Checkers player to reach the 10-goal plateau this season.

Charlotte wrapped up its road-trip with a dominant 5-0 win over the Toronto Marlies. Alex Nedeljkovic stopped all 34 shots that the Marlies threw his way. Charlotte's well-rounded offense once again had many different goal scorers with each goal coming from a different player. Necas scored his ninth goal of the season while Andrew Poturalski scored his 15th goal.

Thought of the Week

This week's thought of the week isn't actually a thought. The Checkers have their awesome 1950s promo coming up on Jan. 15th and it couldn't be a better time to check out a game in Charlotte. Between their success or the \$1-\$2 ticket price, there's no reason to keep making excuses. It should be a great game and concessions prices will range from 50 cents for sodas and popcorn or hot dogs for \$1. Come check out the Queen City.

Player of the Week

This week's player of the week is Alex Nedeljkovic. He secured two wins this week including a shutout against the Marlies. He has taken strides in improving his position and composure but it's my belief he still remains an outside shot as a number one goaltender in the NHL.

Looking Ahead

The Checkers return home for a six-game homestand that will wrap up on January 20. Charlotte will take on the Wilkes-Barre Scranton Penguins with a match-up on Friday and Saturday.



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Three keys to Hurricanes' winning streak

Andrew Schnittker, Sports Editor

Center Sebastian Aho bails to celebrate after scoring the third goal of the game against the Arizona Coyotes, Sunday, Dec. 16. The Canes won at home, 3-0, after a shot-for-shot loss to the Capitals on Friday.

There's no doubt the 2018-19 season has had its ups and downs for the Carolina Hurricanes. Recently, however, the team has found an upswing in the form of a four-game winning streak.

The Canes have used a number of improvements in key areas to drive a hot streak that currently has them sitting seven points shy of the East's final wild-card spot with a game in hand.* If the team wants to get into the playoff chase for real, it needs to keep this streak going. Here are three keys to doing so:

Balanced scoring – Over the course of the past four games (two wins over the Philadelphia Flyers, followed by wins over the Columbus Blue Jackets and Ottawa Senators), 13 different players have found the back of the net.

Usual suspects such as forwards Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen have continued to dent the scoresheet, while rookie Andrei Svechnikov keeps heating up. In addition, bottom-sixers such as Jordan Martinook, Lucas Wallmark and Brock McGinn have also found twine.

Another key factor will be scoring from the blue line. After not scoring since early November, Dougie Hamilton, the team's prized offseason acquisition, has scored in three straight games, while Justin Faulk and Jaccob Slavin have also scored.

If the Canes want to keep winning at this clip, getting that kind of balanced contribution up and down the lineup will be critical.

Goaltending – The Hurricanes' annual Achilles' heel has actually been a major improvement this year. After four straight years in the bottom five of the league in team save percentage, the Canes are ranked 22 this season. Removing the games the now-waived Scott Darling played would probably move that ranking up.

Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney have been steady in net, and have given the team a chance to win on most nights. Over the four games, the pair have combined to allow just 2.5 goals per game.

All the Canes need is for their goalies to give them a chance, and so far they've been doing so, but they need to keep doing it.

Special teams – An abysmal power play is probably the number one reason the Canes currently sit so far out of the playoff picture. Not surprisingly, a dramatic improvement has coincided with the four consecutive victories. The Canes have four power-play goals over the four games, and really should have five, as one was scored right as a penalty expired.

In addition, the Canes have held opposing man advantages to just three goals in that span.

Poor special teams play is what dug the Canes a hole, and continuing to improve that will be critical if the team wants to keep playing its way back into the postseason hunt.



NHL News & Notes: Schmaltz, Smith, Renouf & More

By Brandon Share-Cohen

In today's News & Notes, Nick Schmaltz is out for the remainder of the season, Reilly Smith is still day-to-day with an undisclosed injury, Dan Renouf has been recalled by the Carolina Hurricanes and David Schlemko has been assigned to the AHL.

Schmaltz Out for Season

The Arizona Coyotes season went from bad to worse when they found out that Schmaltz would miss the remainder of the season with a lower-body injury. Schmaltz was acquired by the Coyotes on Nov. 25 in a deal that saw Dylan Strome and Brendan Perlini shipped to the Chicago Blackhawks.

The season was starting to turn around for the 22-year-old center as well as he scored five goals and 14 points in 17 games with the Coyotes after scoring only two goals and 11 points in 23 games with Chicago to start the season.

Schmaltz finished his 2018-19 season with seven goals and 25 points in 40 games after scoring 21 goals and 52 points in 78 games a season ago.

Smith Remains Day-to-Day

When the Vegas Golden Knights take to the ice Tuesday night, they'll be doing so without Smith as the veteran forward remains day-to-day with an undisclosed injury. The 27-year-old missed the third period of the Golden Knights



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game against the New Jersey Devils on Sunday and is evidently still feeling the effects of the injury as he's out Tuesday night.

In 45 games this season, Smith has scored nine goals and 27 points. He's taken a step back offensively from a season ago when he scored 22 goals and 60 points in just 67 games. This has been somewhat of a trend for Smith who has often played better every second season throughout his career.

Renouf Recalled by Hurricanes

The Hurricanes recalled Renouf from the AHL on Tuesday. The 24-year-old undrafted defender has yet to play a game with the Hurricanes but has played in 36 games with the Charlotte Checkers in the AHL this season. He's scored one goal and 11 points on the year and could be in line for his first taste of NHL action with the Hurricanes with this latest recall.

Though Renouf has yet to play in an NHL game for the Hurricanes, he has actually played in one NHL game in his career with the Detroit Red Wings. Interestingly enough, that game came on March 27 in 2017 against the Hurricanes. Renouf would be held pointless in his one prior NHL game but did take one shot on net on one attempt as well as three hits in 13:35 of action.

Schlemko Assigned to AHL

After clearing waivers, Schlemko was assigned to the Laval Rocket in the AHL. The veteran blueliner has played in 18 games with the Canadiens this season and has notched two helpers in those contests. This is the second consecutive season in as many years since joining the Canadiens that Schlemko will find himself playing in the AHL.

In 415 NHL games, Schlemko has scored 18 goals and 94 points.



Hurricanes Recall Dan Renouf

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Dan Renouf is headed to the NHL for the first time this season as the Hurricanes have recalled the blue liner from Charlotte.

The 24-year-old Renouf leads the Checkers and ranks fifth in the AHL in penalty minutes (76) and has logged 11 points (1g, 10a) through 36 games.

Renouf, who signed with Carolina this past offseason, spent

his first two pro seasons in the Detroit system, winning a Calder Cup with Grand Rapids in 2016-17 and appearing in one NHL contest with the Red Wings.

The Hurricanes are on the road for games against the Islanders tonight and the Lightning Thursday before returning home for contests Friday and Saturday. The Checkers return to action Friday in Charlotte to kick off a six-game home stand.

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1103607 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes finally beat Islanders for fifth straight win

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

For the first time this season, the Carolina Hurricanes have won five straight games, and the fifth came against a team they hadn't been able to solve until Tuesday.

The Canes finally found a way to beat the New York Islanders and goalie Thomas Greiss, winning 4-3 at refurbished Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, N.Y. The Isles had beaten the Canes three times this season, with Greiss in net for all three, and had won their past six games overall.

The run of 10 points allowed Carolina (20-17-5) to ease up in the Eastern Conference standings, leaving the Canes six points out of a wild-card playoff position.

Asked about his team's confidence level, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said, "Winning breeds that, just like losing. It's really hard to get out of either one. You obviously want to keep that winning one going.

"We're just finding ways to win right now without playing our best. That's really the key and that's a good sign. We know we can get better."

Here's what it took for the Canes to win:

-- A power-play goal by defenseman Jaccob Slavin with 1:07 left in regulation that gave Carolina a 4-2 lead.

-- A goal by captain Justin Williams, who first stewed in the penalty box after being called for hooking, then bounced out of the box to flip a backhander past Greiss to make it 3-2 with 2:42 left in the third.

-- A goal by center Greg McKegg with six seconds left in the first period, then the primary assist on the Williams goal with a sharp, cross-ice feed.

-- Saku Maenalanen's first NHL goal, which tied the score 1-1 in the first.

-- A successful coach's challenge by Brind'Amour that wiped out an Islanders goal in the second.

Add in another quality start by goalie Curtis McElhinney, who had 28 saves, and aggressive penalty killing and the Canes had a nice road victory to savor heading to Tampa Bay to face the Lightning on Thursday.

"Good teams have to find a way to win and pick each other up and we did that," Brind'Amour said.

Frank Franklin II AP

Carolina had two penalties in the second period, then the call against Williams with 4:57 left in regulation, but did not allow the Islanders to convert.

A careless penalty against the Isles' Leo Komarov, who cross-checked Brock McGinn into the boards with 2:05 remaining in the third, allowed Slavin to score what would be the game-winner.

The Canes made things interesting in the final 67 seconds, however. The Isles' Brock Nelson, who had two goals and an assist, scored eight seconds after Slavin and the Canes twice iced the puck after Greiss was pulled for an extra attacker.

On the second icing, the Canes' Sebastian Aho missed an empty net. That resulted in one final draw in the Canes zone that was won by the Islanders, and Aho and McGinn both had to block shots by Josh Bailey in the final seconds.

Maenalanen, recalled Jan. 1 from Charlotte, scored his first after some strong forechecking by his line. Warren Foegele dumped the puck in and was first in, Victor Rask got a piece of the puck -- Rask finishing with two assists in the game -- and Maenalanen pawed it down, then backhanded it past Greiss.

Frank Franklin II AP

McKegg's goal came on another bang-bang play in front of Greiss as Micheal Ferland centered the puck and McKegg had the puck go off him and then an Islanders defenseman for a 2-1 lead after one.

"Kegger might have been one of our best forwards," Brind'Amour said. "Every time I threw him out there he was noticeable."

McKegg, who centered the third line Tuesday, has two goals and two assists in three games since being called up from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL.

The Islanders (23-14-4) believed they had tied the score 2-2 early in the second on a Jordan Eberle shot from the slot. But Brind'Amour was quickly informed by video coaches Chris Huffine and L.J. Scarpace that the Isles' Val Filppula was offside on the zone entry and made the challenge, which was upheld on review. No goal.

"They radioed in, 'It was offside, offside,'" Brind'Amour said. "It was. You could see clear as day. We got real fortunate there and got a little better as the game went on."

The Islanders did tie it 2-2 at 4:50 of the third when defenseman Devon Toews scored on a shot through traffic from the point.

"We buckled down when we had to," Brind'Amour said.

News Observer LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103608 Carolina Hurricanes

PNC Arena has had \$4 billion economic impact on Wake County, Centennial Authority says

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH-When PNC Arena turns 20 later this year, it's estimated the facility will have had a \$4 billion economic impact for Wake County since its opening in October 1999.



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In 2018, the estimated economic impact for the county was about \$262 million from the arena.

Those were two of the financial figures included in the Centennial Authority's response to a request for information for hospitality projects by Wake County. The authority, an appointed body, is the arena landlord and is seeking enhancements to the facility that could cost an estimated \$200 million to \$300 million.

The authority is seeking the enhancement funds for:

New hospitality spaces on the south end of the arena facing Carter-Finley Stadium that would have a rooftop bar and restaurant as its centerpiece.

New club and concession spaces in the arena that the authority says will help "showcase the region's food and beverage culture" while providing additional revenue streams.

New office and meeting spaces on the north end of the arena for staff offices and the "anticipated growth of Carolina Hurricanes operations and management."

Carolina Hurricanes forward Sebastian Aho, who had two goals and two assists, says beating the Boston Bruins 5-3 on "Whalers Night" at PNC Arena on Dec. 23, 2018 was a big confidence-builder for the team.

The Hurricanes' lease with the authority ends in 2024, and the authority report said there were "ongoing discussions" with the Hurricanes on lease term options. N.C. State uses the arena for its men's basketball games and commencement exercises, and the arena has hosted NCAA basketball regionals, concerts and family events.

The financial request for the enhancement and expansion needs approval from Wake County and the City of Raleigh, with the money being provided through the city and county Interlocal Agreement, which is funded by the hospitality industry's hotel/motel and prepared-food tax.

"The time has come to make PNC Arena more versatile and competitive so we can continue building on the success of the first 20 years," the authority request said.

Or as executive director Jeff Merritt said Tuesday to authority members, "We need to make sure it fits the 21st Century model of an arena. ... While we've done a great job of keeping up the infrastructure and guts and skeleton of the arena, we need to pump adrenaline into the building."

Recent enhancements, requested by Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, include the installation of a 3D projection system and theatrical lighting. Plans call for a new scoreboard to be installed before next season.

The authority's economic impact study was done by John Connaughton, a UNC Charlotte economist at the university's Belk College of Business. Connaughton's study indicated 46 percent of those attending PNC Arena events are from outside Wake County and that the arena generates about 142,000 hotel rooms each year, with hotel expenditures of \$14 million a year. It's estimated \$6 million is spent at Wake County restaurants.

The authority, in the request, said if enhancement funds are approved this spring, the project could be completed by the summer of 2022.

News Observer LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103609 Carolina Hurricanes

Q&A: Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon talks narratives, red jerseys, drafting defensemen and perspective

By Sara Civian Jan 8, 2019

Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon takes exception to some of the persisting narratives surrounding his team.

Of course, there's the one where he barged in 362 days ago and started some sort of "my way or the highway" regime.

"This idea that I'm just going to come in and do it my way, it's a little strange to me," he told The Athletic in a one-on-one interview. "If I thought I knew more about hockey than (head coach) Rod Brind'Amour, that would be crazy. I don't think I'd get to the position I am in life if I went around ignoring everyone else."

He addressed some other narratives, red jerseys on the road, drafting defensemen and more in our ~exclusive~ Q&A.

First of all, how do you convince teams to let the Hurricanes wear their red jerseys on the road?

We just ask, say something like "Hey, we'd like to wear our red jerseys, what do you think?" and sometimes the other teams want to switch it up and show their fans their away jerseys. It's not really a big deal.

How would you assess the season so far?

The things we identified as what we wanted to improve on — intensity and effort — Roddy's done a great job at. I think we play the right way every day. So for that part, I couldn't be happier.

I think results-wise we're all disappointed, right? We expected to have won more games, so the results probably haven't matched up to our quality of play and that's just the way it is. So that's disappointing, but at the same time, I'm extremely happy with what we're building, what Rod's doing and what it means to be a Hurricane. I know it can seem like the same old Hurricanes, but there are new players, new coach, (a lot of) new. I think everybody's pretty confident in the future, if you look at the quality of the AHL team, plus all of our young players, some of the underlying analytics and culturally, what Rod has taken care of.

Having said that, everybody's good in the NHL and the margin of error is really small. I think we'll continue to improve, but at the same time, I know today's what matters. It feels like we should have a handful more wins, and we've done what we needed to do, now hopefully we get some results. A week ago a playoff chance was laughable, now (riding a four-game win streak) we've got these games before the break to see where we're at and that's just hockey.

Other than our record, I'm not sure what else you would want to change — if we win three or four more games the narrative is different, and no one would be shocked if we win six in a row here or if we go .500 — (I understand) we're really hard to evaluate.

You've mentioned a few times now how much you hate losing, how do you put that in perspective with knowing how important it is for this team to win right now, and how individual Hurricanes losses just seem more frustrating than an average loss?

I don't, that's the problem for me.

But we're doing things that lead to really good results. We have to be careful because we can't change the past, there's nothing we can do about it. My job is to make sure the past has nothing to do with how we handle today and tomorrow — that's the challenge right now. You want to be winning right now because of the (playoff drought), but we need to identify reasons we're not getting results and fix those, not just make changes for the sake of change.

We're in a pretty good spot, we have a good path, we fixed a lot of things. You're talking three or four more games won in a row we feel different. We have to be very careful not to let short-term results like that affect our long-term plans. You have to be careful letting the bounces manage the business. Every time you lose you want to do something. Sometimes you win and maybe you're overconfident, you lose and you're too low. It's definitely the challenge of this job.



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What have you enjoyed most about owning the Hurricanes?

I think the quality of people — between Rod (Brind'Amour) and Don (Waddell), and the players and the staff as a culture, as a sport, how hard everybody tries and cares about each other. I have certain kinds of people I want to associate with, a certain kind of work ethic and morality and I think we've got that. And in general, the sport has that — that is the quality of the human beings that participate in this sport. I've enjoyed that, and the emotional connection, having something to care about every day.

Carolina owner Tom Dundon likes what he sees in coach Rod Brind'Amour despite a few more losses than he'd prefer. "I'm extremely happy with what we're building, what Rod's doing and what it means to be a Hurricane," he said. (James Guillory / USA Today)

How do you strike a balance between being a hands-on leader and letting the hockey experts do their thing? And how is this different from running another business?

I try to ask a lot of questions and push people. I don't want to tell people what to do in the sense of draft this player, play this guy, cut this guy but what I want is everyone to have an opinion — no one has a monopoly on what we do. Whether it's system, lines, minutes, (Brind'Amour) gets to make the final decision. I'm never going to tell him (otherwise), but I might show him info and say, "Hey, look at this."

I think that's our job — provide resources and ask questions and hopefully as an organization everyone feels empowered to have an opinion. I don't think I do anything that differently, and it's a little strange to me the idea of trying to be disruptive. I think we're just trying to have the best structure in place to make the best decisions. I don't tell them who to draft but I get to have one of many voices and make sure everyone's opinion gets heard.

Rod and I know each other, he knows I'm going to have an opinion. If I thought I knew more than him, that would be crazy. At the same time, he's a human being, the job is to push everyone.

This idea that I ignore anyone and do it my way? I don't think I get to the position I am in life if I went around ignoring everyone else. I do get to have an opinion, though.

Another thing, we've got to continue to push the balance where the hockey side gets a lot of value from the analytics side. There are obviously some limitations with analytics in hockey but Eric Tulsky (VP of Hockey Management and Strategy) is an absolute asset. When we disagree on something I'm almost always wrong, and I don't believe for a second that I know more about hockey than anyone that works for us at all. But I know how to create a structure, and that's how it's the same as any other business. I want to create a structure where everyone can have an opinion and push each other.

You've said before that it's a challenge having a non-downtown arena. Is that something you see yourself continuing to work around or are there plans to change it?

Our biggest focus right now is to put ourselves in a position to succeed in Raleigh. We're at a point where we're working to figure out all of the options, then exploring all the different options to see what's best.

(Editor's note: More to come from me on what those options are)

You took some flak for saying the Canes "won't be drafting defense in the first round as long as you're here", but come on, have you seen this team? Do you think that comment is getting taken out of context or blown out of proportion?

We've got (Adam) Fox and (Jake) Bean. Then (Brett) Pesce and (Jacob) Slavin are in their 20s, Haydn Fleury is 22, Dougie Hamilton is 25, Justin Faulk is 27, (Calvin) de Haan is in his prime years and can play Top 4.

You see how much defense this team has picked up over the years. To say we aren't drafting for it in early rounds doesn't mean we don't think it's important — we traded for Dougie, right?

I promise we won't be taking defense in the first two rounds this year. I don't think that's controversial given where we are as an organization. The word "never" is probably too strong, but it's pretty close to never.

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1103688 NHL

Summer coaching changes paying major dividends across NHL

Originally published January 8, 2019 at 11:13 pm Updated January 9, 2019 at 2:36 am

By STEPHEN WHYNO

It wasn't the 15-hour flight to China for training camp that had general manager Brad Treliving's head spinning.

It was the pace of Bill Peters' first practice as coach of the Calgary Flames.

"I was tired watching it," Treliving said.

Peters has lost no time in helping the Flames improve and reach first place in the Pacific Division during his first season. In fact, the six teams that hired a new coach over the summer are all doing well — certainly when compared to the five that have dumped coaches already the season. Those clubs are a combined 47-57-11 since making those moves.

Peters and Todd Reirden, who took over the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals from Barry Trotz, will coach in the All-Star Game on Jan. 26 with their teams leading their respective divisions at the halfway mark.

Trotz's New York Islanders and Jim Montgomery's Dallas Stars are in playoff positions, while the New York Rangers are overachieving under David Quinn and the Carolina Hurricanes are taking steps forward after Rod Brind'Amour replaced Peters as coach.

For Reirden and Brind'Amour, the challenge was moving up from a role as a longtime assistant. Capitals and Hurricanes players say the transitions have been smooth because each coach hasn't altered his approach.

"(Reirden is) a completely different person, different personality, different style and I think he's stuck to who he is," Capitals defenseman John Carlson said. "What's helped him is just staying true to what we all expect out of him."

With almost the same roster back, Washington was expected to make the playoffs and take a good shot at repeating. Expectations were fuzziest for the Flames, Islanders and Stars.

Calgary had alternated making and missing the playoffs under coaches Bob Hartley and Glen Gulutzan before Peters took over. The Flames' 58 points have them atop the Western Conference and trailing only the powerhouse Tampa Bay Lightning in the overall NHL standings, a big testament to Peters' puck-hounding style and straightforward communication.

"He's a great coach," star winger Johnny Gaudreau said. "He knows how to win. It doesn't matter if you're top line, bottom line, if you're not playing well you're not going to be on the ice. He's not going to put you over the



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bench there. He expects a lot out of his players and it's been great playing for him this year."

Trotz has had a similar impact with the Islanders, bringing much-needed structure to a team that missed the playoffs in back-to-back seasons and lost point-a-game center John Tavares to Toronto in free agency.

Veteran GM Lou Lamoriello said with any coaching change three or four players get better and three or four get worse; he thinks Trotz has gotten the most out of a team far different than what he had in Washington.

"He's extremely detailed, very consistent in his approach as far as planning, execution, system and delivery," Lamoriello said of Trotz. "He has an outstanding delivery to the players as far as no highs, no lows and holds them accountable to what is being asked of them."

In Dallas, top-line center Tyler Seguin said Montgomery has done a good job of giving players rest, sometimes opting for video work instead of practice. Despite an uproar over pointed comments made by CEO Jim Lites about the performance of Seguin and captain Jamie Benn, the Stars hold a wild-card spot in Montgomery's first NHL season after five years at the University of Denver.

Quinn spent five seasons at Boston University before GM Jeff Gorton hired him to coach the Rangers, and the returns on that decision are already positive. His job isn't to get New York into the playoffs right away but rather instill good habits. He is also occasionally scratching players young and old to set a standard for quality of play.

"He's trying to set a tone of accountability here," Gorton said. "I think he's been consistent to who he is, and his philosophy is if guys aren't doing the job, then I've got to put guys in that are going to do it."

Consistency and familiarity have helped Brind'Amour with the Hurricanes, who lack scoring punch and have a league-worst nine-year playoff drought. The players respect his legendary work ethic.

"When he says it, you know he's done it and it makes you want to do it, too," defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk said. "When he talks, he commands the room and I think he's a guy you really like to play for."

JOHNNY HOCKEY

No player in the NHL is hotter right now than Gaudreau, who's earning every bit of his "Johnny Hockey" nickname. His 16 goals and 35 points in 18 games are the most in the league since Dec. 1 and inside the organization show the progression of the 25-year-old into an all-around superstar.

"There's a maturity to his game," Treiving said. "He's had a real defensive consciousness this year. Not that he hadn't in the past, but when he doesn't have (the puck), he's tracking to get it back."

TIGHT METRO

The top four teams in the Metropolitan Division — the Capitals, Penguins, Blue Jackets and Islanders — were separated by just four points through Monday. That could mean a Trotz vs. Reirden showdown in the first round, Washington-Pittsburgh again or any combination of first-round matchups among teams that look evenly matched.

"It's a challenge and it forces you to be on your game all the time," Reirden said.

BANGED-UP PREDATORS

Nashville has dealt with major injuries to several key players. Defenseman P.K. Subban missed 19 games before Christmas, winger Viktor Arvidsson missed 24 of 25 and winger Filip Forsberg missed 17 in a row before returning Monday. Nashville endured a six-game losing streak in December but has somehow thrived amid injuries in the stacked Central Division.

"There's no sense crying about it," coach Peter Laviolette said. "We've got to win hockey games."

GAME OF THE WEEK

The Boston Bruins visit the Toronto Maple Leafs on "Hockey Night in Canada" Saturday in what could be an Atlantic Division first-round playoff preview.

LEADERS (through Monday)

Goals: Alex Ovechkin (Washington), 30; Assists: Nikita Kucherov (Tampa Bay), 49; Points: Kucherov, 69; Ice time: Drew Doughty (Los Angeles), 26:38; Wins: Marc-Andre Fleury (Vegas), 24; Goals-against average: Robin Lehner (Islanders), 2.18; Save percentage: Jack Campbell (Los Angeles), .930.

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1103689 NHL

Subban to teen facing racial abuse: Keep pushing forward

Originally published January 8, 2019 at 1:25 pm Updated January 8, 2019 at 6:17 PM

Staff Report

By The Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Nashville Predators star P.K. Subban has reached out to a teenage hockey player facing racial abuse.

The defenseman recorded a video and texted it to Ty Cornett, a 13-year-old Detroit-area hockey player last week.

His father, Matthew Cornett, shared the video, which was recorded in Detroit during the Predators' visit to the city last week, on Reddit.

"I can tell you this right now that as long as you're still breathing in this world, you've got to believe in yourself and let nobody tell you what you can and can't do, especially if it's because of the color of your skin," said Subban, who is black and was born in Toronto and previously starred with the Montreal Canadiens.

"In this world, some things happen that we don't really understand. That's OK. We don't have to understand them. All we need to do is understand ourselves, believe in ourselves keep trying and keep pushing forward.

"I just want to tell you that when you're playing hockey, you play because you love the game and you want to play. Let nobody take that away from you."

Matthew Cornett says Ty had asked for a Subban Canadiens jersey when he was 6 and wears the same No. 76 as the player.

"This year has been tough," he wrote. "My son is very aggressive and loud, so that brings out the trash talk. I have no problem with trash talking at all (part of the sport), but the racist talk needs to stop. Between the N-word being thrown at him over and over, being called monkey by players and parents, having an entire team beat their chests and act like gorillas whenever he touched the puck.

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1103734 Tampa Bay Lightning



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Ryan Callahan misses Blue Jackets game with upper-body injury; Coburn returns

By Nick Kelly

TAMPA — Ryan Callahan missed Tuesday's game with an upper-body injury.

The Lightning listed him as day-to-day. He skated during Tuesday morning's optional skate after missing Monday's practice for a body maintenance day.

Coach Jon Cooper said after the game Callahan re-aggravated something and he didn't expect him to be out long. Callahan missed the beginning of the season recovering from shoulder surgery and missed two games in December after his back seized up.

Danick Martel replaced Callahan in the lineup.

While Callahan left the lineup, defenseman Braydon Coburn returned. He missed Saturday's game against San Jose with an upper-body injury but was a full participant in practice Monday.

The Lightning training staff wanted to see how Coburn responded to practice, assistant coach Derek Lalonde said. Apparently well enough.

He played while Erik Cernak took his turn to sit out a game. Lightning defensemen have taken turns as healthy scratches because they have seven healthy defensemen the team wants to have on the ice.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103735 Tampa Bay Lightning

Coach Marty? John Tortorella likes the idea

Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella thinks Martin St. Louis would make a good NHL coach.

By Nick Kelly

TAMPA — If you ask Columbus coach John Tortorella, Martin St. Louis shouldn't be done working in the NHL.

No, not as a player. Those days are done for the Hall-of-Famer. Tortorella sees him in a different role.

"As far as a guy at this level, I think could be a really good coach," Tortorella said.

This isn't as much a projection as it is a review and endorsement. Tortella has seen and heard Coach Marty firsthand.

He has taken part in conversations with his current forward Cam Atkinson and St. Louis, whom Tortorella coached in Tampa Bay. Similar in stature, St. Louis has mentored and instructed Atkinson recently.

"I think he can talk to Cam in a different way right now that could help him," Tortorella said.

It certainly hasn't hurt Atkinson. He scored 24 goals and tallied 18 assists prior to Tuesday's game. And Tortorella can tell that St. Louis is enjoying the coaching and mentoring.

Coach mode, he called it.

Right now, that coach mode primarily means coaching his kids. But that could change, Tortorella said, if St. Louis' kids at some point decide they don't want Coach Marty behind their team's bench anymore.

"That's a guy, Marty St. Louis that you have got to really look for," Tortorella said.

"It will be interesting to see what happens."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103736 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning's Andrei Vasilevskiy to replace Carey Price in All-Star Game

By Nick Kelly

TAMPA — Andrei Vasilevskiy will need to cancel any All-Star break plans. He's going to be busier than expected.

Vasilevskiy will fill the All-Star spot left by Canadiens goaltender Carey Price, the NHL announced Tuesday. It marks the second straight All-Star trip for the Lightning goaltender.

The Canadiens announced Monday that Price will not participate in the All-Star Game, instead choosing to rest what Montreal general manager Marc Bergevin called a nagging injury. It would have been Price's sixth All-Star appearance.

Vasilevskiy will join Lightning forwards Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov and coach Jon Cooper in San Jose. Brayden Point could also join them through the 'Last Men In' fan vote, which fans can vote at nhl.com/vote until 11:59 p.m. on Jan. 10.

Vasilevskiy earned the nod with a 16-4-2 record this season. He has averaged 2.66 goals against with a .920 save percentage. He has put up these numbers despite missing a month with a left-foot fracture.

Upon his return, Vasilevskiy faced second-place Toronto and made 48 of 49 saves.

"I think he's made the case for himself with his record, statistics and how he's helped our team," Cooper said. "He's definitely worthy."

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1103737 Tampa Bay Lightning

John Tortorella: A couple bad runs good for season

His Blue Jackets went on a 17-game win streak in 2016-17, but bowed out in the first round that year.

By Nick Kelly

TAMPA — The Lightning returns to Amalie Arena on Tuesday for a game against the Blue Jackets after the Sharks snapped their 16-game point streak on Saturday.

Where the Lightning goes from here remains to be seen. If you ask Columbus coach John Tortorella, he knows exactly how he would like the Lightning to respond.

"I hope they get their (butts) kicked tonight," Tortorella said then smiled.



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Of course, that would help him and his Blue Jackets in the immediate future. Two consecutive losses, however, might not be a terrible thing for the Lightning, either, in the interest of their long term success.

"For me, I think you need to go through some tough times during the regular season," Tortorella said. "How do you get out of it to get back to where you want to be? I think come playoff time, you are going to go through some momentum swings as you go through this. I don't think it's a bad thing to have some bad runs during the regular season."

Tortorella speaks from experience. He led Columbus to the second-longest win streak in NHL history two years ago only to lose in the first round of the playoffs. Tortorella also won a Cup with the Lightning in 2004.

"Your leadership group has to be tested on how to get out of some situations as you do start struggling," Tortorella said.

Tortorella did not label the Lightning as a struggling team, though. Although the loss to the Sharks brought the point streak to an end, it still is only one loss.

But eating some vegetables in the form of a few losses might be necessary if the Lightning wants the dessert that is a Stanley Cup.

"I firmly believe during a long season, it can't all be good," Tortorella said. "You can't all feel good about yourselves through that 82 game schedule. It's probably not possible, first of all. Especially with all the parity in the league. I think it's important to go through some of those things because you can lean on that come playoff time."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103738 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning, Andrei Vasilevskiy bounce back with shutout

Lightning notches its second shutout of the season to beat Columbus 4-0

By Diana Nearhos

TAMPA—The Lightning wanted this one. After ending its point streak the last time out, Tampa Bay wanted a big response. After feeling it hadn't supported Andrei Vasilevskiy well enough, the Lightning wanted to set him up for a good game.

Tampa Bay did both of those.

The Lightning came out dominant against Columbus on Tuesday and for two periods at least, set Vasilevskiy up well. He took care of the middle frame on the way to 31 saves and his (and the team's) second shutout of the season. And this on the day he was named to the All-Star Game.

"It's a pretty good feeling," Vasilevskiy said after the 4-0 win. "I didn't play that consistent after the injury and so it feels pretty good, especially for me."

He's one to take the blame on himself for a bad game and doesn't especially give himself credit for a good one. But his teammates take care of both sides of that.

"Before, we gave up a lot of goals and Vasy, we let him down," defenseman Mikhail Sergachev said. "We're obviously thinking about him."

Ryan McDonagh agreed with Sergachev, saying both Vasilevskiy and Louis Domingue deserved more shutouts but hadn't gotten the support they needed in front of them. He said there was a focus on making sure Vasilevskiy could see the shots on Tuesday.

"San Jose did a good job of having guys cross in front and taking away his eyes and pucks hitting bodies," McDonagh said, referring to Saturday's loss. "You just try to clear that lane. If you're not going to block the shot, at least clear the lane so he can see it. If he can see that puck, and track it, he's going to gobble it up and not create a rebound."

Coach Jon Cooper is another who puts what Vasilevskiy called inconsistency more on the team in front of him. He pointed to the Philadelphia and Montreal games at the end of December, in which Vasilevskiy allowed five goals each, saying the team needed to be better defensively not so much its goalie.

So while Vasilevskiy played a great game on Tuesday, the shutout had a lot to do with that team defense as well.

Though, that defense let up in the second period. Columbus out-shot Tampa Bay 17-3 in the frame, and at one point the Lightning went 12:07 without a shot on net. Vasilevskiy stood strong and made a couple of great saves, the kind Cooper called 10-bell saves. That's just what Vasilevskiy does.

"Competitiveness, work ethic, conditioning, all those things you never have to worry about that with Vasilevskiy," Cooper said. "He has been the rock behind us for a couple of years now. I never worry about that. As a coach, you worry about the guys ahead of him. They have been doing a really good job."

Even after Monday's practice, there was a sense Tuesday would be a good game.

Typically, the game after a streak ends can be a trap. And then the game after a West Coast trip can be a trap. Neither of those boded well for Tuesday, so the Lightning took a preemptive strike. Cooper and the coaches set the tone, asking for 30 minutes of hard work and they got a surprisingly high-energy group, more so than assistant Derek Lalonde expected going in.

"There was a sense of urgency," Lalonde said. "Let's keep this thing going."

That showed on the ice when the Lightning came out hot and finished hot. The players wanted to make a statement, wanted to, as Tyler Johnson said after the point streak ended, go out and start another one. That and they wanted to back up Vasilevskiy.

Check, and check.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103739 Tampa Bay Lightning

Competitive friends Nikita Kucherov and Artemi Panarin break down each other's games

By Joe Smith Jan 8, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — When Artemi Panarin delivered his signature playoff performance in April, his friend Nikita Kucherov made sure to watch.

It was an off-day for Kucherov and the Lightning during their first-round playoff series against New Jersey. Panarin was dazzling for Columbus in 3-2, double-overtime loss to the eventual Cup-champion Capitals. Kucherov, a train stop away from New York City, stayed back at the Lightning's Jersey City hotel to watch his friend Panarin tear it up.

After both Panarin's highlight-reel assist and goal, Kucherov would comment in a Russian text exchange with agent Dan Milstein, who represents both stars. After Panarin's double-dangle on Capitals defenseman Jay Beagle, Kucherov quipped it didn't even look human.

"Unbelievable," Kucherov said.



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It inspired Kucherov, who put the Lightning on his back the following night, racking up two goals and an assist in a 3-1 victory over the Devils.

"He's a top player in the league, definitely," Kucherov said of Panarin. "He brings so much offense to any team he plays on. He's got an unbelievable skill set. He helped (Blackhawks star Patrick) Kane improve his game. Right now, on Columbus, he makes everybody better. Panarin brings so much offense."

It was also during the playoffs where the idea was hatched for Kucherov and Panarin to train together in Tampa last summer, where the following infamous tweet was sent out from Clearwater Beach.

VASY AND I SHOWING @9ARTEMI HOW GOOD IT IS TO PLAY IN TAMPA PIC.TWITTER.COM/I1SWJGWINZ

— NIKITA KUCHEROV (@86KUCHEROV) AUGUST 23, 2018

Panarin will be a highly sought-after unrestricted free agent this offseason.

And Kucherov, 25, and Panarin, 27, will be reunited Tuesday when the Lightning host the Blue Jackets at Amalie Arena. With the two star wingers facing off, The Athletic asked them to break down each other's games and what they've learned from each other.

The admiration is indeed mutual.

"I like the way (Kucherov) makes passes," Panarin said through interpreter Vlad Spektor. "He makes excellent, timely passes and shots and uses his best qualities."

The beginnings

Both Kucherov and Panarin had humble beginnings growing up in Russia, as colleague Aaron Portzline and I have detailed.

They were also both a bit overlooked when it came to the NHL draft. Panarin went undrafted in 2010 before getting signed by the Blackhawks. Kucherov went 58th overall in 2011 and recently became the first player in his draft class to reach the 400-point milestone.

"I think teams were reluctant to draft players from Russia for a couple years," said Hall of Fame coach Scotty Bowman, now an advisor with the Blackhawks. "Both guys ended up being steals."

The shot

What strikes Bowman about both Kucherov and Panarin is their unique ability to pull off one-timers off long passes. You see this often on Kucherov's power-play goals, which are regularly set up by cross-ice feeds from Steven Stamkos or Victor Hedman.

"They both have terrific one-timers," Bowman said. "Their one-timers, they can shoot off the pass. You have to be really good on timing, and that's one of their big similarities. Many do one-timers, but if the puck is moving across at a distance with a little bit on it, that's a special art on timing."

What strikes Kucherov about Panarin is his accuracy and quick release:

"Quick shot. Good technique. Unpredictable," said Kucherov. "In this league, anybody can shoot. But he's got really good accuracy. That's what he's all about. Accuracy and a quick shot, quick release."

Panarin said Kucherov's shot is similar in terms of having a quick release and that there are no extra movements. It's on and off his stick really fast.

"Biggest respect because he uses his best qualities to his advantage without too much unnecessary stuff," Panarin said.

Did Panarin pick up anything from Kucherov over the summer?

"We were practicing this shot over the summer together that he told me about," Panarin said. "But I won't say what it was so it'll be a surprise to goalies."

Passing/playmaking

Kucherov is known for being deceptive in the way he plays, finding ways to get lost in the offensive zone despite opponents trying to track him.

Part of this is due to Kucherov's off-the-charts hockey IQ, which we detailed last week.

Lightning assistant coach Derek Lalonde said Panarin and Kucherov are similar in that way, how they think and read the game.

"Those guys have world-class hockey sense, anticipation. They see the game on a different level," Lalonde said. "Today's NHL, it's a positive in that it really sets up well for those skilled players, the vision, making plays and the coaching staff allowing those guys to make plays. (Coach Jon Cooper) does a great job managing that. He knows he's got a world-class player and world-class thinker, and he gives him some rope to do that. I see that in both of these players."

This slick one-time setup by Kucherov for Stamkos is an example of him anticipating and thinking a play ahead.

Both Bowman and NBC analyst Brian Boucher said Kucherov is the better playmaker of the two and is more often the one that carries the puck. But Panarin has shown his creativity with his slick setups, including banking this one off the end boards to Pierre-Luc Dubois for the finish.

"He sees the ice. He's unpredictable how he can make plays," Kucherov said of Panarin. "He's always improvising on the ice. Always wanting to create something. He looks for the open guy. He just makes everybody better. Plays that he makes that everybody sees, they can probably learn from him. That's what makes him such a great player, being around him, good players can learn from him."

What did Kucherov learn from Panarin? They're also similar in their silence.

"I don't want to say anything," Kucherov said, smiling.

How can you defend them?

Veteran Lightning defenseman Ryan McDonagh, thanks to his years with the Rangers, has plenty of experience trying to shut down both Kucherov and Panarin. Kucherov is currently the league's leading scorer with 69 points in 42 games, averaging nearly a point per game in his career. Panarin's numbers are similar with 278 points in 282 career games.

So, good luck stopping them.

"No. 1, it's tough to be physical on those guys," McDonagh said. "It's tough to line them up and get in position to be physical to play the body. So you have to be good with your gap and close to take away passing angles or get a stick on their shot."

"Both are very good off the rush, deceptive shots, unselfish players that like to share the puck. So, it's a tough combination."

Personality

In Kucherov and Panarin's last meeting on New Year's Eve 2017 in Columbus, the Lightning star got the better of his buddy.

Kucherov had a goal and an assist in a 5-0 victory over the Blue Jackets. Panarin was a minus-1. But in postgame chats with his clients, Milstein couldn't tell who had won and who had lost.

"Panarin was more relaxed than Kucherov," Milstein said. "Panarin called me after the game, and said, 'No matter what, I'm doing better than your buddy Kuch.' Even though Kucherov had just won 5-0 and had points, he wasn't satisfied."

They both watch their diets carefully. In fact, Milstein notes Kucherov didn't even have a drink or dessert at a celebratory dinner for his eight-year, \$76 million extension signed in July. The next morning, Kucherov was back on the ice in Clearwater for his individual workouts.

"They're both dialed in, both great professionals. The difference is Kucherov would rather stay in town and work on himself and practice and shoot, 24/7, 365. Where Panarin does that (too), he's still more of an outgoing guy than Kuch."

"Once you get to know Kuch, he's got a great personality, great guy. When we all go out, we're laughing at crazy jokes on anything other than hockey."

The future



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Kucherov is locked into Tampa Bay long term, with his eight-year extension not kicking in until next season.

Panarin's future is a lot less certain. He'll be an unrestricted free agent this summer and could draw similar interest to John Tavares before he signed with the Maple Leafs last July. Milstein is scheduled to meet with the Blue Jackets brass during the late-January All-Star break. Columbus is in playoff contention and Panarin appears happy, so he could at least finish the season there.

But there's a reason our Craig Custance has Panarin No. 1 on his list of the top 20 players who could be moved before the deadline. As Portzline wrote last summer, does Panarin want to spend the next eight years in Columbus?

It's hard to imagine the Lightning fitting Panarin into their salary cap, especially with their challenging crunch coming this summer and RFA Brayden Point still needing to be signed. As much as Kucherov drew attention for his playful beach tweet with Panarin on what it's like to play in Tampa, it's probably a pipe dream.

"I'd definitely (like to play with Panarin)," Kucherov said. "But he plays for another team. Whatever happens, happens. But we've got a good team, so I'm not complaining."

Said Panarin: "I think internationally we'll play more than once (going forward) for the Russian national team. Other than that? We will see."

Joe Smith can be reached at Follow @JoeSmithTB.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103595 Buffalo Sabres

Mike Harrington: Okposo's tough nights continue

Mike Harrington | Published Tue, Jan 8, 2019

The Sabres scored five goals Tuesday night without Jack Eichel in the lineup. Kyle Okposo didn't have any. It's been that way most of the season.

Okposo was far from a zero on this night, however. He started the game with Johan Larsson and C.J. Smith, dominated three New Jersey players in the neutral zone on the night's first shift to get the puck headed toward the offensive end and Smith nearly potted his first NHL goal. Okposo later assisted when Smith did, in fact, get that goal early in the second period.

"We talked about what kind of line we are," Larsson said after the 5-1 victory that bedeviled New Jersey. "We've got to be heavy on pucks and that's how we're going to create chances. We may not get too much on the rush. It will be more grind and win battles and he did a real good job of that tonight."

Coaches and teammates notice that kind of play. The scoresheet does not.

With that in mind, here's where Okposo stands while playing in all 43 games: He has six goals and 11 assists for 17 points, with three goals at even strength and three on the power play. He has a minus-six rating and a 47.8 Corsi rating. He has one goal in his last 25 games, one goal and one assist in his last 18 games, and two goals in his last 29 games.

Now a brief pause for the fairness doctrines: Okposo's 77.3 Corsi rating Tuesday night was his best game of the season, as he was on the ice for 17 shots for and only five against. And his plus-minus is hugely improved from last year's hideous minus-34 that was the worst in the NHL among forwards.

But those offensive figures? Those are not pretty for anybody. And when you're talking about a guy who has a seven-year, \$42-million free agent contract, they're hard to fathom.

Okposo knows that, too. He's not hiding from anything. Barring an epic hot streak, he's not scoring 25 or 30 goals this year. The way he's going right now, he's going to be lucky to get to 10.

"If I end up with, say, eight goals this year, that would be pretty tough," he said. "I went through a stretch at the beginning of the season where I scored a few (tallying three straight games in October). I know I can do it. I haven't had very many stretches the whole year where I haven't gotten opportunities. That's a good sign but I need to keep finding different ways to do it."

He sure does. The Sabres have a very rough situation at hand here. This is an alternate captain, a respected figure in the dressing room. When former GM Tim Murray signed him on July 1, 2016, this was the consolation prize to not getting Steven Stamkos. Folks around the game blanched at seven years even more than the \$6 million annual price tag for someone with three 20-goal seasons on his resume, and three others that ended at 18 or 19.

That's what you pay in free agency. The Sabres were willing to do it and Okposo was willing to leave John Tavares' side for it. So far, he's turned into Matt Moulson Lite.

Of course, there's deeper things going on. Everyone remembers the difficult summer of 2017. A concussion and reaction to medication landed Okposo in the hospital. There were months of hard days and nights. Emotional trauma. Doubts about life itself, let alone resuming a hockey career.

Okposo was enthusiastic when this season started because he got in a real summer of training after being unable to train last year. The impact has been minimal.

"It's tough to look at the numbers. I'm pretty aware. I know exactly where I am," he said. "Of course there's a bigger picture that I'm going to be more aware of than most people for sure. At the same time, if I always go back to that, I'm just not going to be very good at my job. So I don't really look at it like that too much

"You still want to be elite. You want to do things to produce and play at a high level so you have to find ways to actively push for that. Otherwise, you're going to stay stagnant and you're just not going to score."

Okposo's ice-time and shot numbers are up the last five games. He's had 11 shots on goal and twice cracked 14 minutes after playing just 10:08 and 10:53, respectively, the last two games before Christmas.

"As long as I'm in this league, I still feel I can play at a high level and you can never be satisfied with what you're doing," he said. "My numbers are down and my ice time was down for quite a while. That's never easy but you just have to expect more of yourself. Your mentality has to be about making them put you on the ice."

"He's a professional," Larsson said. "Sometimes it goes against you. He's sticking with it. He's contributing and he's a good leader."

Coach Phil Housley has said ad nauseum his team needs to get to the net more. Okposo is one of those guys he's referring to. At 6 feet and 220 pounds, it should be a requisite part of his game. But Okposo has been on the outside far too much.

You wonder where this is headed. There's four more years of this contract. Four more. The Sabres aren't going to buy it out because that would land Okposo on their cap until 2027. Even if Buffalo kept half the money, what team would trade for him right now?

You get limited savings on the cap by sending Okposo to the minors and the Sabres would not do that because they would a) not embarrass one of their alternate captains or b) take up any ice time from the Amerks.



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Through 18 games, Okposo had five goals and five assists. Then everything just plain stopped. He's not scoring, nor is he setting up anything.

"The puck has been dying on my stick too many times as far as offense goes," he said. "I have to be aggressive, get it moving and make that play, no matter what it is. I want to score. I'm trying to get to the net and find ways. It feels like I haven't been there enough.

"You have to keep shooting, have to go volume with it. You have to trust it's going to go in. Opportunities present themselves when you go volume."

The Sabres are in a bad spot. Okposo is in a worse one. There's still time for him to get things rolling. But his clock is ticking.

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1103596 Buffalo Sabres

Council: Send parking complaints to commissioner, not us

Deidre Williams | Published Tue, Jan 8, 2019

If drivers still have concerns, complaints or are confused by Buffalo's new parking policy, Common Council members say don't call them, call the Brown administration, which originated the plan.

"This parking plan has already been confusing enough, I don't want the public to think that they have two different groups working on this from City Hall," said Council President Darius G. Pridgen, adding that Parking Commissioner Kevin Helfer "has committed to this Council" to talk and meet directly with people.

The Brown administration presented the parking plan last month to the Common Council, which unanimously approved it with the condition that Helfer report back to the Council by April with a review.

"If people want to talk to the person who is going to bring back to the Council in April a plan, they should go to the commissioner of parking directly, so that their concerns be heard now, so by the time it comes back to the Council in April, we will know that people are heard," Pridgen said. Those who do call Council members with concerns will be referred to the parking department.

Once the administration comes back with any revisions in April, Pridgen said, "We then begin a process of it going to committee and people can then talk about what the commissioner has brought."

Rather than calling his office, Helfer said emailing him at khelfer@city-buffalo.com is the "best way" to keep track of correspondences about the new plan.

"So nobody says, 'I called you. You didn't respond.' I hate when that happens, but an email has an electronic (trail)," Helfer said.

But whether people call or email, he or someone on his staff will get back to people and try to address their concerns, Helfer said.

"Everybody will get an answer within 48 to 72 hours," he said.

The city's new policy called for reduced free parking and higher rates in and around downtown. But some complained that the new policy adds parking zones where the only way to park is through the Buffalo Roam app available only on smartphones. Helfer said last Friday that the city is looking at other options "for the small percentage who do not have a smartphone."

Following public outcry and an online petition opposing the new parking plan, Pridgen and Mayor Byron W. Brown agreed last week to return to

some free parking on weeknights and Saturdays. Metered parking during those times would be in effect only for major events downtown, such as games and concerts at KeyBank Center, Canalside, Shea's Performing Arts Center and Sahlen Field.

Those changes were adopted during Tuesday's Council meeting.

The new event parking with a \$2 fee was in place from 4 to 10 p.m. Tuesday for the Buffalo Sabres game at KeyBank Center.

The new parking spaces are "pay by cell" only by using the Buffalo Roam app at Buffaloroamapp.com.

The city rolled out the new policy with changes for last Thursday's Sabres game at the arena in anticipation that the Council would adopt the changes.

City officials said of the approximately 115 new on-street parking spots in and around the arena, including the Canalside area, 103 were used during Thursday's game.

For Saturday night's Bandits game at the arena, 115 spots were used, city officials said.

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1103597 Buffalo Sabres

The Wraparound: Sabres 5, Devils 1

Lance Lysowski | Published Tue, Jan 8, 2019

The crowd's roar began with under a minute remaining in the second period and did not quiet until the Buffalo Sabres left the ice for intermission Tuesday night in KeyBank Center.

Following an angst-filled month of inconsistent hockey, the Sabres had just erupted for five goals in the second period despite playing without Jack Eichel for a third consecutive game.

They didn't slow down in the third period, either, and held on for a 5-1 win over the New Jersey Devils to keep pace in the Atlantic Division.

It was the Sabres' first five-goal period since they had five in the third of a 5-1 win over Carolina in Nov. 28, 2009. With the victory, the Sabres improved to 23-14-6 with 52 points and are two wins away from matching last season's total.

Five different players scored — including defensemen Lawrence Pilut and Jake McCabe — and 14 different players recorded one point in the second period. Carter Hutton made 20 saves, and Buffalo finished with 33 shots on goal.

Jeff Skinner's 29th goal of the season tied the score early in the second period. C.J. Smith and Casey Mittelstadt also scored for Buffalo. Blake Coleman had the only goal for New Jersey, which led 1-0 after the first period and fell to 16-19-7 with the loss.

Sabres Notebook: Drew Stafford returns to Buffalo after 800-game milestone

Opening salvo: The Devils took a 1-0 lead 1:28 into the first period when Miles Wood passed to the front of the net, where Coleman directed the puck past Hutton.

Opening statement: Aside from the one-goal deficit, the Sabres played an outstanding first period. They outshot the Devils, 11-4, had 13 more shot attempts and won 16 of 23 faceoffs.



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A breakthrough: The Sabres scored five second-period goals on 15 shots, including their second shorthanded goal of the season.

Milestones: Smith and Pilut each scored their first career NHL goals in the second period. Smith, playing in his fourth game since being recalled from Rochester, scored 4:14 into the period when his shot snuck below Keith Kinkaid's right arm and barely crossed the goal line. Pilut's wrist shot from the right point made it 5-1.

It was the sixth time in franchise history that two Sabres recorded their first NHL goals in the same game.

30-goal plateau: Skinner scored from below the left faceoff dot when his wrist shot went off the crossbar and in at 1:29 into the second period. Skinner is one goal away from becoming the Sabres' first 30-goal scorer since Jason Pominville in 2011-12.

Growing pains: Mittelstadt's sixth goal of the season and his second in 20 games made it 3-1 at 10:42 into the second period when he skated around Devils defenseman Damon Severson and poked his own rebound past Kinkaid.

Penalty kill: The Sabres' penalty kill improved to 41-for-45 over the past 16 games by not allowing a power-play goal against the Devils.

Lineup: Winger Remi Elie was a late scratch with Sam Reinhart able to play. Additionally, Nathan Beaulieu and Matt Hunwick were healthy scratches.

Changes: In a surprising move, coach Phil Housley moved Reinhart to the second line with Rodrigues and Conor Sheary. Skinner remained on the top line, skating with Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson.

Also, Rasmus Dahlin, a left-handed defenseman, was moved back to the left side and paired with Zach Bogosian.

Injuries: Sabres winger Zemgus Girgensons returned to the lineup after missing four games with an upper-body injury. Devils winger Taylor Hall, who won the Hart Trophy as the NHL's most valuable player last season, missed his seventh consecutive game with a lower-body injury. New Jersey also was without center Marcus Johansson and goalie Cory Schneider.

Streak continues: Eichel and Reinhart have not missed the same regular-season game since Eichel was drafted second overall by the Sabres in 2015.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to return to practice Wednesday in preparation for a Friday night game in Raleigh, N.C., against the Carolina Hurricanes.

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Sabres Notebook: Drew Stafford returns to Buffalo after 800-game milestone

Lance Lysowski | Published Tue, Jan 8, 2019

Drew Stafford admitted he was a naive rookie when the Buffalo Sabres lost to the Ottawa Senators in the 2006-07 Eastern Conference Finals.

Stafford, then a 21-year-old winger, had two goals among four points in the playoffs and thought the Sabres would reach the conference final every year.

"It just doesn't work out that way and before you know it, the years go by and you're still kind of chasing after it," Stafford, now 33, said in his New

Jersey Devils practice jersey Tuesday before he faced the Sabres in KeyBank Center.

Stafford, a first-round draft pick of the Sabres in 2004, could not help but look back on those early years over the past week. Stafford played in his 800th career NHL game Friday in Arizona and scored the shootout winner for New Jersey.

Though he entered his matchup with the Sabres averaging a career-low ice time of 10:23 per game, Stafford, like some of his former teammates in Buffalo, has been able to adapt.

"It flies by, really," Stafford, who played parts of nine seasons with Sabres, said of his milestone. "It's one of those things where you kind of take a step back and I guess reflect on a few things. It's one of those things it reminds you how much of a privilege it is to play in the league and every day it's an honor to be here. Try not to take it for granted because it goes by fast."

Stafford has appeared in only 18 games this season because of injury and healthy scratches. Entering Tuesday, he had scored one goal – not including the shootout winner – with two assists and a plus-3 rating in his previous four games.

His reliable play on the fourth line helped the Devils enter Tuesday with four wins in their previous six games.

When Stafford joined the Sabres from Rochester in October 2006, he was a young player thrust into a dressing room dotted with proven veterans. Now, he and two teammates on that 2006-07 Sabres team are passionate leaders on their respective teams.

Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek, who now plays for Detroit, were 24 and 23 years old, respectively, when the Sabres reached the conference final in Stafford's rookie season. Pominville and Vanek surpassed 1,000 NHL games this season and, like Stafford, are being asked to fill different roles.

Stafford has spent much of this season on the fourth line and is learning how to make an impact despite spending long stretches of the game on the bench.

"Anything you have to do to stay relevant and you have to adapt as the career goes on if you want to stay in the league, and stay with this group, because we have such a good group in here," Stafford said.

Stafford had eight goals among 15 points in 59 games to help the Devils reach the playoffs last season. His average ice time of 13:52 was his lowest since 2007-08 with the Sabres.

Stafford made three playoff appearances with the Sabres – he averaged 20:01 in seven games in 2010-11 – but has not reached the conference finals since his first season.

He was expected to skate on the fourth line with Brian Boyle and Brett Seney against the Sabres on Tuesday night. Stafford, who was traded to Winnipeg in February 2015 after three 20-goal seasons with Buffalo, is an unrestricted free agent at season's end.

Stafford does not plan to stop chasing the Cup.

"Play as long as you can – until they tell you not to play anymore," Stafford said. "That's pretty much it. I'm grateful for the opportunity to come back here."

Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reported Tuesday the Sabres placed center Scott Wilson on waivers. Wilson, 26, has yet to play this season after breaking his ankle during a practice in late September.

Wilson is unlikely to be claimed by another team since he has not played a regular-season game since April and had only 14 points with a minus-20 rating in 69 games last season.

The Sabres want Wilson to play more than a few conditioning assignment games with Rochester, and he can join the Amerks if he goes unclaimed.



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Cincinnati Cyclones coach Matt Thomas will serve as the Western Conference's coach for the ECHL All-Star Game on Monday, Jan. 21, in Toledo. He was selected because the Cyclones have the conference's highest winning percentage at .735 with a 23-7-4 record.

Thomas was hired in August to replace former coach Matt Macdonald, who left to become an assistant coach with the Grand Rapids Griffins of the AHL.

The Buffalo Sabres Foundation will host its second mega raffle Sunday, Feb. 17, in the Lexus Club at KeyBank Center, featuring prizes that include autographed items, team experiences and tickets.

Doors open at 1 p.m. with the first raffle spin at 2 p.m. Sabres alumni will be on hand for the event, which will include 15 raffle rounds with three to four spins per round and a grand finale.

Raffle tickets will range from \$2-5 and the \$25 admission cost covers lunch. Tables of 10 can be reserved with all proceeds benefiting the Buffalo Sabres Foundation. Fans can purchase tickets or reserve tables online at Sabres.com/megaraffle.

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1103599 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres vs. Devils: Five Things to Know

Mike Harrington

Without Jack Eichel and maybe without Sam Reinhart, the Buffalo Sabres host the New Jersey Devils Tuesday night in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres are 2-5-1 in their last eight games and just 5-8-4 since their 10-game winning streak ended on Nov. 29. And now Eichel's upper-body injury and Reinhart's illness has them in danger of playing a game without two of their top three scorers.

"Your mindset can't change no matter who is in your lineup," winger Kyle Okposo said today. "You're trying to win a game and to do that, we need to get more consistency back. Play a good game, play a bad game, a couple good games here or there. I don't like the way it's gone the last month or so. We're not playing bad entire games. It's a period here or there and that shows we can clean it up."

Here are Five Things to Know about tonight's game:

1. Jack isn't back but Sam is close to saying I am (ready): Eichel took the morning skate but wasn't on a line and will sit out his third straight game tonight. Coach Phil Housley said the Sabres are taking a cautious approach, and it would seem the goal for Eichel is Friday night's game in Carolina.

Reinhart said he feels better and Housley said the winger is a game-time decision. Reinhart also skated this morning and was not on a line but did do some power-play work. Zemgus Girgensons (upper body) is going to play after missing four games. Nathan Beaulieu and Matt Hunwick will be healthy scratches.

Sabres' Jack Eichel out, Sam Reinhart game-time decision vs. Devils

Defensive pairings different from Boston, too:

Pilut-Ristolainen

Scandella-McCabe

Dahlin-Bogosian

— Lance Lysowski (@LLysowski) January 8, 2019

2. Bedeviled by New Jersey: Much like the Florida Panthers, this is another opponent that has given the Sabres major trouble in recent seasons. The Sabres are just 2-8-2 against the Devils in their last 12 meetings – and 0-5-1 in the last six at home. The last Buffalo win in KeyBank Center was a 3-2 shootout decision on April 1, 2014. New Jersey has scored 18 goals in the last five games against the Sabres.

This is the Devils' only trip to Buffalo this season; the Sabres play at the Prudential Center in Newark on Feb. 17 and March 25. New Jersey is playing without two major cogs in reigning Hart Trophy winner Taylor Hall (lower body) and Marcus Johansson (upper body)

3. In the nets: Carter Hutton returns as the starter for Buffalo after Linus Ullmark split the last two games. It will be Hutton's first start of the New Year after a difficult December that saw him go 1-5-2/2.61/.917. In November, Hutton was 8-3-0/2.38/.923. The Devils are going with starter Keith Kinkaid, who is 13-11-6/3.00/.900 in 31 games.

4. Devils connections: Former Sabres winger Drew Stafford, now 33, played his 800th career game Friday at Arizona. Now playing on the fourth line, Stafford has two goals and three assists in 17 games. Stafford returned for his second season in New Jersey after signing a one-year tryout agreement in the fall for \$810,000. He had 145 goals and 322 points in 563 games with the Sabres from 2006-2015, when he was sent to Winnipeg in the Evander Kane trade. Another former Sabres winger, Mike Grier, is in his first year as a New Jersey assistant coach.

5. By the numbers: Sabres winger Jeff Skinner enters tonight's game with 28 goals, two behind Washington's Alex Ovechkin for the NHL lead. The Caps host Philadelphia tonight. Kyle Palmeri leads the Devils in goals (20) and points (36). ... The Devils have very little comeback ability, as they are 1-12-2 when trailing after one period and 2-15-2 when trailing after two. New Jersey is also 2-7 in overtime (1-5 in game-winning goals). ... But New Jersey locks things down with the lead after two – 13-0-3 this season and 87-0-14 since the start of the 2015-16 season. ... Both teams are strong on penalty kill, with New Jersey second in the league at 85.2 percent and Buffalo fifth at 83.6.

Spying a familiar name on that fourth line. <https://t.co/tJS6aq0VU2>

— Mike Harrington (@ByMHarrington) January 8, 2019

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1103600 Buffalo Sabres

Report: Sabres place center Scott Wilson on waivers

Lance Lysowski | Published Tue, Jan 8, 2019

Scott Wilson will have to wait at least a little while longer to return to the Buffalo Sabres' lineup.

Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reported Tuesday afternoon that Wilson, who has yet to play this season after breaking his ankle during a late September practice, was placed on waivers by the Sabres.

Wilson was expected to be cleared for game action this week, but he would require a conditioning assignment. The team is likely confident the 26-year-old will clear waivers, which would allow him to begin playing games with Rochester.

Wilson resumed practicing with the Sabres, but he has not played in an NHL regular-season game since April 7, 2018. He scored six goals among 14 points with a minus-20 rating in 69 games between Pittsburgh, Detroit and Buffalo last season.

The Sabres' roster is crowded with eight healthy defensemen, and it's unlikely Wilson would unseat any forward given the length of his



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absence. Winger Zemgus Girgensons will be activated from injured reserve in time for Tuesday's game against New Jersey, and defenseman Casey Nelson is also likely to return in the coming weeks.

Winger Remi Elie has only one point in 14 games with the Sabres since being claimed off waivers from Dallas, but he would likely be lost on waivers since the Stars would have first rights to claim him. Elie was a second-round draft pick of Dallas in 2013 and appeared in 72 games with the Stars.

The Sabres can also ill-afford to lose a game-ready forward since Eichel is out for at least one more game. Another roster move will be needed to activate Eichel, who is likely to be moved to injured reserve with Girgensons back.

Buffalo General Manager Jason Botterill and his staff likely thought Wilson would need more than a brief conditioning stint to rejoin the Sabres. Choosing to send Wilson on a conditioning assignment first could make it more likely that another team would claim him.

Any team can put in a claim for Wilson, but he would need to be placed back on waivers if they attempt to send him to the AHL for any reason other than a conditioning assignment and the Sabres would have first rights.

Wilson won two Stanley Cup rings with the Penguins, scoring three goals among six assists in the 2016-17 playoffs. He is under contract through next season with an annual cap hit of \$1.05 million.

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1103601 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres' Jack Eichel out, Sam Reinhart in lineup vs. Devils

Lance Lysowski | Published Tue, Jan 8, 2019

Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel missed a third consecutive game Tuesday night, but Sam Reinhart was in the lineup against the New Jersey Devils at KeyBank Center.

Eichel participated in the morning skate but was ruled out with an upper-body injury. Reinhart, meanwhile, was a game-time decision after missing practice the previous two days with an illness.

It would have been the first time since Eichel was drafted second overall in 2015 that he and Reinhart missed the same game. With Eichel out, Reinhart skated on the Sabres' second line with Evan Rodrigues and Connor Sheary.

"[Eichel] had a good skate yesterday for part of the practice, today a good skate," Housley said. "We're just being cautious with that, but he will not be playing tonight."

The Sabres (22-14-6) have gone 1-1 without Eichel the past two games. The captain and star center returned to practice Monday in HarborCenter, though he was not on the ice for the first 20 minutes.

Eichel told reporters afterward he was encouraged by his progress but added he was "not in a rush" to return. An All-Star selection for a second consecutive season, Eichel has 15 goals among a team-high 49 points in 40 games this season.

In his absence, Rodrigues has received the most playing time as the top-line center. Casey Mittelstadt was given the opportunity to skate with Reinhart and Jeff Skinner in the third period of the 2-1 loss in Boston on Saturday.

Skinner remained on the first line with Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson during the morning skate and against the Devils.

Reinhart has 40 points, including a career-high 31 assists, in 42 games. He is on pace for 18 goals and 62 assists, the latter of which would more than double his previous career high.

"The good news I feel really good today and back to my normal self," Reinhart said following the morning skate. "I'm excited about the possibility of getting into another game tonight."

Eichel, on the other hand, has participated in less than two full practices since he left in the first period of a 3-1 home loss to the New York Islanders on Dec. 31. He only helped with the Sabres' penalty kill during Tuesday's morning skate.

The Sabres, who are clinging to the second wild-card spot entering tonight's game, have a difficult schedule ahead. They play in Carolina on Friday, followed by a home game against Tampa Bay on Saturday before a three-game trip to Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver.

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1103602 Buffalo Sabres

Stimson: How we can measure Phil Housley's performance at midseason

By Ryan Stimson Jan 8, 2019

On Nov. 27, the Sabres were coming off a 3-2 win over San Jose to improve their winning streak to 10. With their team atop the Eastern Conference, Sabres fans were thinking of playoff tickets with home ice. The good times were back.

That seems like a lifetime ago.

The Sabres have gone 5-8-4 since then, a 71-point pace over a full season, with four of those wins coming in regulation. They have managed to squander all the points they've banked and now find themselves in a fight for one of the final two wild card spots. Everyone knows you need some luck to win 10 straight, but many fans wondered just how good this team really was. When a team goes on a streak like that it tends to alter perception and expectation.

Similarly enough, when a team's results go the other way as they have since the end of November, it's normal for fans to go from elation and hope to anger and pessimism. What can be improved upon? I'll spend some time digging into the roster again during the All-Star break, but today I want spend some time on the coaches — Phil Housley, Davis Payne, and Steve Smith. All data in this piece is from EvolvingHockey unless specified otherwise.

How can we measure a coach's impact? In a since-deleted post from fall 2016 prior to his hiring by Kroenke Sports, Dawson Sprigings used a coaching variable (simply who was the coach of each team) in his regression model on his way to building his WAR model. Sprigings found that the coach was a stronger variable in terms of the coefficient produced by the regression than a player's quality of teammates, which is often touted as one of the most important factors in evaluating player performance. Coaching matters.

But what specifically are the coaches responsible for? To me, it comes down to two things most of all: special teams and lineup optimization. 5v5 play is important, but is generally on the talent at the highest level of the game, especially considering so many teams play similar styles and systems.

Special teams

On most NHL teams, the head coach will task an assistant with running the power play and another with the penalty kill. Davis Payne runs the power play for the Sabres and Steve Smith handles the penalty kill.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Housley certainly has input into these aspects of the team's performance. According to EvolvingHockey, the Sabres have the sixth-best power play in terms of expected goals for per 60 minutes. They also have the sixth-worst penalty kill in terms of expected goals against per 60 minutes. This is consistent with my findings on the Sabres' tactical approaches at both ends of the ice.

Payne has done a good job on the power play and the unit is underperforming when it comes to expected goals, by almost half a goal per 60 minutes. This is one of the reasons for the team's below-average conversion rate, but not the only one.

This is a chart from the excellent Meghan Hall on Twitter. It shows the Sabres create about as much volume shooting as anyone else in the league. They lag slightly behind Toronto in this area. Their scoring isn't on par with the Leafs or many other teams, but the Sabres are only shooting 11 percent on the power play, well below the league average of 14.5 percent. More scoring will come for the Sabres with the player advantage. I'll dig into more areas where this can be improved upon soon.

Steve Smith came from Carolina to run the penalty kill and his success there was referenced as a reason for his hire. As I wrote early in the season, based on how passive the team was and has continued to be during the forechecking phase, I think it raises the question of talent versus coaching impact as the reason behind his success in Carolina. After all, Carolina sits as the second-best penalty killing unit by expected goals against per 60 minutes.

So, there are tactical choices they need to refine on the penalty kill, something I'll dig into in another piece. It's fair to say that this isn't necessarily Housley's fault, but at the end of the day the unit has to be working or the head coach should take more control of the plan.

It's important not to be fooled by the Sabres' sixth-best PK percentage, as it's almost entirely the result of unsustainable goaltending. The Sabres have a save percentage of 0.914 when down a player, which is among the best in the league. Historical averages tell us that should come down anywhere from 10 to 20 percentage points. League average currently is .904, which is a bit higher than the historical .870 to .880 range. Considering the volume and quality of chances the Sabres yield, this could turn quite ugly in a hurry.

Overall, there appear to be two sides to the Sabres' special teams spectrum, so let's give Housley an average grade in this area. I'd say he and Payne have done a great job on the PP and more goals are on the way. I'd also argue he needs to work with Smith a bit more on the PK.

Roster optimization

This is where things get a bit ugly. This is entirely on Housley and I'd argue he hasn't been up to the task in this area. Let's have a quick look at the team's rolling expected goal difference per 60 minutes, courtesy of Sean Tierney and Corsica.

You can say that the Sabres don't have the depth a team ideally wants, but a coach has to maximize his team's output based on the talent available to him. According to Sean's chart, the Sabres were an average to slightly-above average team in xG differential in the early part of the season. Then, on Nov. 17, the team's rate difference plummeted and really hasn't recovered. What happened?

Nov. 17 was the team's 20th game of the year. Looking at the above chart from Micah Blake McCurdy and his site, HockeyViz, we can see how Housley is configuring his lines throughout the season. Just before that 20-game mark, Housley reunited the Jeff Skinner-Jack Eichel-Sam Reinhart line. Since then, the team's overall performance has fallen off a cliff.

That line has 273 minutes at 5v5 together and, according to NaturalStatTrick, only produces a 48.7 percent shot share. If that's the best they can do and the rest of the team suffers without them (46.2 percent shot share with none of those three players on the ice), then Housley must retool the lines.

But what's the best way to do that? Sean Tierney has created a lineup tool to allow folks to play around with the impacts of swapping out linemates and promoting others up the lineup. The player values are from EvolvingWild's WAR metric for each player and determines the net overall impact on the team if you move a specific player up or down a lineup to reallocate ice time. It's a way to see if a coach is getting the most value from the minutes they have to assign.

I played around with it a few times and this is one of the best options currently available for the team.

There's not a whole lot to do with the forwards other than split up the top line and see where they can balance out the team. The lack of depth is quickly laid clear for all to see. The big changes would have to be on the back end in ensuring Pilut and Dahlin get maximum top-4 minutes the rest of the season.

I wrote this on opening night way back in October and stand by it. The quickest way to sink the season is to load up the top line with Eichel – Skinner – Reinhart and simply hope someone steps up behind them. The Sabres don't have that kind of depth. Also, Dahlin should be on the first pair and Pilut should be on the second in order to help stabilize Rasmus Ristolainen.

I find it inexcusable for coaches at this level to not optimize their lineups as that should be the bare minimum expected of them. To me, loading up a top line and playing musical chairs behind them isn't a sign of a clear plan – it's the simplest option available and isn't considering what it does to the rest of the team.

Should he stay or should he go?

It's a strange question to ask during the season, but many folks are considering it.

GOOD EVENING. IF THE SABRES MISS THE PLAYOFFS THEY SHOULD CONSIDER CHANGING COACH. THE HEAD START WAS HUGE, AND THERE'S NO REASON TO MISS GIVEN HOW THEY WERE CARRIED TO A HUGE LEAD BY THEIR TOP LINE AND GOOD GOALTENDING.

HAPPY NEW YEAR.

— JEREMY WHITE (@JEREMYWGR) JANUARY 1, 2019

I'VE BEEN SEEING SOME OF THE "FIRE HOUSLEY" CHATTER ON HERE IN THE LAST WEEK OR SO. DO SABRES FANS THINK HE NEEDS TO GO IF THEY DON'T MAKE THE PLAYOFFS? I MAY WRITE ABOUT THIS.

— RYAN STIMSON (@RK_STIMP) JANUARY 2, 2019

This isn't a shot against Jeremy or anything. I put the poll out there and a third of voters agreed with him for the most part. I think teams should always be looking to get better in every position throughout the organization, and that doesn't simply apply to players. With someone like Joel Quenneville available and Housley underwhelming as a whole, is that a phone call that should be made?

I can see the argument for it. I would hope Housley sees the need to evaluate the team's lines and pairings and stats to optimize their performance. I would hope that Jason Nightingale and whomever else the Sabres employ on the analytics front are presenting this type of report to the coaching staff. There are many ways the team can improve from within before any changes are made to the roster or staff. I haven't seen much evidence the Sabres are doing that right now. I will dig into the special teams and 5v5 play again in the near future, but from a high-level viewpoint, Housley is about average to slightly below average right now in the areas he has most control over.

Conclusions

I think how Housley performs over the final 40 games will be huge. This isn't about making or missing the playoffs, but how he can maximize the special teams and lineup with what he has. You can't put all of this on



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him because Jason Botterill still has a lot of work to do with this roster. He could help Housley by moving pieces like Marco Scandella and Vladimir Sobotka to bring in better players, or simply evaluating players in Rochester. There's only so much you can do at once, but if Housley's strategies for lineup optimization and special teams play is average at best now, why should we trust him with a more talented roster? Will he continue to make mistakes? Or will the talent level simply make his decisions look better?

To be clear, I don't think you can fire the coach on his own at the moment, but the seat gets hot if he continues to scratch obviously-good players like Pilut and refuses to balance out the roster or improve the penalty kill. Even if Housley improves and passes through the latter half of the season with flying colors, you have to wonder if they can get better with a coach like Quenneville. He may not be a popular choice, but I do think they should at least gauge Quenneville's interest if Housley refuses to change.

I don't think the Sabres make a move for the sake of doing it, but addition by subtraction would even be beneficial to Housley at this point. I want to see Viktor Oloffson, Rasmus Asplund, C.J. Smith (thankfully he's in Buffalo now), and Brendan Guhle more than I want to see Sobotka, Tage Thompson, and Scandella. The playoffs would be nice, but the Sabres have a better chance of making them this year and in subsequent seasons with a better process of optimizing their team.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103666 Nashville Predators

Predators mailbag: How close is P.K. Subban to 100 percent, roster maneuvers, numbers and more

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean

Published 4:59 p.m. CT Jan. 8, 2019 | Updated 5:07 p.m. CT Jan. 8, 2019

CHICAGO — The mailbag holiday hiatus is over.

We're a little past the halfway point of the regular season, and the Predators have managed to find themselves in first place despite a steady diet of injuries.

They head into their game Wednesday against the Blackhawks (7 p.m., NBC SN) with 55 points and some familiar faces such as Filip Forsberg, P.K. Subban and Viktor Arvidsson back in the mix.

They're also coming off an impressive 4-0 win against the Maple Leafs as their season-long six-game road trip continues. The Predators' are on a 4-0-1 run, which began with the "Mom Game" on New Year's Eve in Washington, D.C.

I'd say 76.76 percent.

Don't mean to go all Peter Laviolette on you, but as the Predators coach would say, "Every player is different" when it comes to recovery.

Unlike Forsberg and Arvidsson, who had "upper-body" (i.e. hand) injuries that allowed them to skate a lot sooner, Subban's lower-body ailment didn't permit that.

The defenseman has two goals since his return, and he's also made some really bad plays that led to goals. But instead of guessing, I'll let Subban answer for you.

"You don't realize how good a shape you're in before you get injured," he said Friday. "After you come back, the game is fast. Just trying to get my timing and feel comfortable.

"Usually you get to that second period and you're settled in. It seems like when I get to the second and third period, I'm tired. I have to keep working on that."

Hockey players don't wear sweaters anymore. I'm past that whole stupid thing.

And I'm with Blagr on this one: Some numbers just aren't terribly pleasing to the eye on some uniforms.

I'm in favor of every matching double-digit number, save for 00 and 11.

Twenty-three is iconic and transcends all sports, of course, because of Michael Jordan. Rocco Grimaldi wears it in his honor.

Thirty-six, though, is a weird hockey number to me. Feels like it belongs on a backup goalie. Or no one. I don't know how defensive Rinaldo is about his number, but I'm not going to ask him, or Reaves for that matter.

As I've said before in this space, speculation and rumor aren't part of my game.

But for the sake of this exercise and your question, we'll play along a little bit.

Wayne Simmonds seems to be a popular candidate to come to Nashville. The 30-year-old Flyers right winger brings grit and depth and will be a free agent after this season.

But the Predators don't have much to give up (are they going to trade Eeli Tolvanen?). Is Poile willing to deal more draft picks (which won't be that high)? What kind of names and numbers work with the salary cap?

Right now, nobody. Miikka Salomaki was put on injured reserve to make room for Forsberg. But decisions will have to be made eventually, assuming current Predators don't keep getting hurt.

The return of Kyle Turris, Salomaki or Yannick Weber will again put the Predators in position to have to make a decision.

The answer a couple of weeks ago would have been either Grimaldi, Rinaldo or Frederick Gaudreau. Think it's safe to take Grimaldi off that list. He's fresh off a career-best four-game point streak and just plain has proved he deserves to be with the Predators. Gaudreau also has been solid for his role.

My guess would be Rinaldo.

Tennessean LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103667 Nashville Predators

Pekka Rinne, Predators shut out Maple Leafs in Toronto

Staff Report

Published 9:08 p.m. CT Jan. 7, 2019

TORONTO (AP) — Pekka Rinne made 18 saves for his third shutout of the season and the 54th of his career as the Nashville Predators defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-0 Monday night.

Kevin Fiala had a goal and an assist, and Mattias Ekholm, P.K. Subban and Colton Sissons scored for Nashville.



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Michael Hutchinson stopped 28 shots for the Maple Leafs, who hit the post three times and had a goal called back for offside.

The Maple Leafs were coming off one of their most complete performances of the season in Saturday's 5-0 shutout of Vancouver, but have lost three of their last four after a five-game winning streak.

The Predators were playing for the third in in four nights. They opened their season-long six-game trip with a 4-3 overtime loss to the Detroit Red Wings on Friday — a performance that head coach Peter Laviolette described as "awful" — and then beat the Montreal Canadiens 4-1 on Saturday.

Rinne is now tied with Marc-Andre Fleury, Bernie Parent and Ed Giacomin for 21st on the all-time shutout list.

After a scoreless opening 20 minutes, the Predators went ahead at 4:08 of the second period when Ekholm's shot from the point, through traffic, beat Hutchinson for his fifth of the season.

Hutchinson was making his third consecutive start with No. 1 goalie Frederik Andersen and backup Garret Sparks out injured.

Ekholm has 29 points in 43 games. His career best was 35 points in 2015-16.

Toronto appeared to tie the game 43 seconds later when Auston Matthews connected on a no-look pass from Andreas Johnsson. But the goal was called back after the Predators correctly challenged that William Nylander was just ahead of the play.

After Rinne stopped Johnsson in front, Subban made it 2-0 with his fourth goal at 13:11. The Predators won an offensive zone faceoff before the Nashville defenseman, who was playing his seventh game back after missing 19 with an upper-body injury, ripped a one-timer that deflected off Nylander's stick at the point and sailed past Hutchinson.

Subban, a Toronto native whose parents were on hand at Scotiabank Arena, dropped to one knee and pumped his fist in celebration at center ice, before being congratulated by teammates.

Rinne stopped Mitch Marner late in the period as Toronto managed just 14 shots through 40 minutes.

Nashville, which came in having won three of its last four on the heels of a six-game skid, got a power play early in the third. The best chance came on a partial breakaway by Toronto center Frederik Gauthier, who shot over the Predators' goal.

Toronto got its third opportunity with the man advantage later in the period, but Matthews hit the post for the second time with Rinne out of position.

Hutchinson kept his team in it with a glove save on Viktor Arvidsson with six minute left in regulation, but lost control of a rebound and Sissons scored his eighth with 2:37 left in regulation.

Fiala added his eighth goal with 37.3 seconds left.

Matthews blasted a shot off the post for the game's first real chance before Filip Forsberg, who returned to the Nashville lineup after missing 17 games with a hand injury, forced a good stop by Hutchinson at the other end.

With just two goals over his last nine games coming into Monday, Kasperi Kapanen hit the post off a nice feed from Connor Brown on an odd-man rush later in the period.

NOTES

Leafs head coach Mike Babcock said before the game he doesn't know when Andersen (groin) or Sparks (concussion) will return to action. Andersen has practiced twice in recent days. ... Despite his prolonged absence, Forsberg's 14 goals are still tied with Craig Smith for Nashville's team lead heading into Monday.

Tennessean LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103769 Websites

The Athletic / Early projections for Team Canada's 2020 World Cup of Hockey roster

By Eric Duhatschek

Jan 8, 2019

Right around this time last year, Dave King was preparing for his fourth turn behind the bench of Canada's Olympic team. After taking the lead coaching role for three consecutive Olympics between 1984 and 1992, King was an assistant in 2018 on Willie Desjardins' staff. The team was being cobbled together mostly from Canadian pros playing in Europe and Asia, supplemented by a few NHL minor leaguers.

In the end, Canada came away from the 2018 Games with a hard-earned bronze medal and a renewed appreciation for what an international hockey tournament conducted without NHL pros looks like.

Here's the good news. In the hopes of averting a work stoppage in the fall of 2019, the NHL and the players association will be getting together soon to see if they can find a way of keeping the labor peace until the current collective bargaining agreement officially expires in 2022.

One of the key elements of those talks will be to try and hammer out an international playing calendar, beginning with a World Cup of Hockey in 2020, which would be the next available opportunity to stage a best-on-best tournament — but will only go forward if there is no labor strife on the horizon.

On the assumption that reasonable people can find a reasonable solution there, your helpful friends here at The Athletic are ready to help sort out the potential rosters that teams could potentially assemble for the next World Cup.

Because of King's vast international experience and his long affiliation with Hockey Canada, we asked him to contribute his expertise to select a Canadian roster. (Other projected teams will be rolled out later this week).

It didn't take long to come to one important conclusion — there'll be a significant changing of the guard from the 2014 Olympics and the 2016 World Cup teams.

Time waits for no man, especially for 30-somethings in the new fast-paced NHL.

When we first mentioned this project to him, King immediately made an important distinction — that choosing a team that would play an event imminently (say next month) would be a lot different than selecting a roster for an event that's 20 months out (as the World Cup would be).

Naturally, a handful of players would bridge the gap, beginning with the Edmonton Oilers' Connor McDavid. Sidney Crosby, a lynchpin of both the last Olympic and World Cup teams, will be in the thick of things too despite being 33 in September 2020. But a surprising number of players who were mainstays on the 2014 Olympic team — from defencemen Duncan Keith and Jay Bouwmeester to forwards Jeff Carter, Corey Perry, Rick Nash, Martin St. Louis, Patrick Sharp and Chris Kunitz — have aged out already, and others could join them on the outside looking in by the time 2020 roster selections are made.

In examining the overall Canadian player pool by position, there is a genuine shortage of quality goaltending prospects coming through the



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pipeline and parts of the defence corps may be in transition as well. By contrast, there is a dazzling collection of candidates up front – players who can score and defend and win faceoffs and block shots and otherwise give whoever happens to be coaching the team untold options to roll out four fast, skilled lines. A 'B' version of Team Canada, at forward, would be a gold-medal contender in any World Cup or Olympics.

King agreed to assist in the process of selecting a team and to provide his view, from ice level, on what it would be like to coach a team of this caliber. Just as with the real Team Canada, we arrived at an immediate consensus on about 90 percent of the preliminary roster, and then tweaked the bottom end, while freely acknowledging that there really weren't a lot of bad choices to be made, only too many good ones.

So, without further preamble, here is our projected 23-player roster for Team Canada 2020 and a brief explanation of how we arrived at our choices.

The biggest question mark is in goal, simply because so many of the current generation of quality Canadian netminders are having just so-so seasons and how there really isn't anyone bursting on the scene, ready to take over when Marc-André Fleury, Braden Holtby and Carey Price eventually cede their spots on the team. Somebody either needs to be developing in the system – or Matt Murray, the one shining Canadian light among the early 20-somethings in goal – needs to get his groove back (which he has of late).

Eventually, the Philadelphia Flyers' Carter Hart may become that guy, but unlike the U.S. or Russia, which would be faced with hard choices when it comes to naming a starter, really, it pretty much falls to Fleury at this point. Fleury is leading the NHL in wins and while others have shown flashes of good form, he has been the most consistent Canadian netminder by far this season. Holtby did get the better of him in last year's Stanley Cup final, proving he has the ability to make the key save when it matters the most, so that puts him in the top three. And while Price has had his moments – good and bad – this season, his pedigree, and the way he played for Canada in Sochi, would put him on the roster as well.

Maybe the only good news is that with all of Canada's firepower up front, you don't necessarily need your goaltender to steal a game for you very often. Other teams might tie their gold-medal hopes to riding a hot goaltender. For Canada, it would likely be enough to play a steady game and just get the saves that any legitimate NHL goaltender generally makes. There was no debate in goal – we both picked the same three candidates.

"I like Fleury, Holtby and Price – they're the best three right now," King said. "It's almost automatic. For our international future in Canada, I'm hoping someone comes through the pipeline and actually starts to develop to the potential we think these kids have – because there's not a guy now, a young goalie, who I think is the answer. Some guys like Hart, it's too soon to know because they're just starting out. But right now, there's a huge gap behind our top guys – and I'm worried about that for our future."

On defense, Drew Doughty remains firmly entrenched in the top four but there is room for a new generation of players. A couple older guys who are drinking from the fountain of youth this season should compete for spots too. Mark Giordano is in the Norris Trophy conversation this season and was essentially ninth on the list for 2014. Giordano has good chemistry with TJ Brodie in Calgary, which means the adjustment to a partner like Kris Letang should be relatively simple. If they are performing as well a year from now as they are today, they would both be on the team.

Josh Morrissey is becoming an exceptional shutdown defenseman and Shea Weber seems reborn in Montreal this year. Doughty would be a natural complement to Morgan Rielly. That group of six would be hard to dispute at this stage. Giordano, Letang and Weber are all in their thirties, so there is no telling when the eventual drop-off in their respective games will occur, but all three are performing so well now it's hard to imagine that decline is imminent.

"Not just this season, but looking back on Giordano the past couple of seasons, this guy has been consistently good," King said. "I had Josh Morrissey at the world championships a couple of years ago and he was just a young pup, but this guy's got an edge and he's a good player. I really like Morgan Rielly. Doughty isn't playing as well as he has in the past, but he's a quality, quality defender."

The hardest decision is who gets the extra spot. A lot of that will depend upon the development of Thomas Chabot, the Senators' emerging star, who could be to the 2020 World Cup team what Doughty was to the 2010 Olympic team – a young talent who was a factor in the outcome, even if he started out as a longshot to make team. The right side of the defence features two high-risk options, PK Subban and Brent Burns, plus the underrated Ryan Ellis who has evolved into a two-way force with Nashville. He too is a right-handed shot and that's an area of extreme depth on the Canadian team. There is less depth on the left side.

"Subban is a bit of a wild card, and Burns is the same way – I might not have those two guys on the same team on the right side," King said. "Subban likes to make a statement on the game – and I don't think you can play that way (at this level). He's a bit of a gambler."

Up front is where it got complicated because no matter who you move on or off the roster, the bottom line is half-a-dozen or more deserving forwards end up on the outside looking in.

The Oilers have had a hard time finding the right players to click with McDavid, but in the World Cup, where he played for Team North America, he demonstrated that he had some chemistry with Mark Scheifele. And while it might be tempting to put the Nova Scotia neighbors – Nathan MacKinnon and Crosby – on a line together it makes far more sense to deploy MacKinnon, with his speed, on a line with McDavid. Besides, Crosby demonstrated a lot of chemistry with Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand in the 2016 World Cup and that unit would be a handful for any team to defend or score against.

It gets more complicated as you move down the depth chart. Because most international tournaments require players to find their way in a hurry, it would make sense to deploy two Maple Leafs together – John Tavares and Mitch Marner. Tavares could swing to the wing potentially, but the left side of the third line seems like a logical place to play the NHL's reigning MVP, Taylor Hall. Alternatively, you could swing Hall up onto McDavid's line and drop MacKinnon down to play with Tavares and Marner. Both seem like great options.

You could mix and match just about everybody that's left over and cobble together multiple extraordinary fourth lines, but we're putting together three of the best two-way players in the NHL – Jonathan Toews, who is having a quality year in Chicago, along with Brayden Point, who is in the midst of a breakout season for Tampa, plus Ryan O'Reilly, one of the most well-rounded forwards in the NHL.

Beyond the first 12, you now have some seriously difficult choices to make for just one extra spot. I opted for Claude Giroux because of his ability to play center or the wing. There are half-a-dozen quality forwards that miss the cut here, and the hardest to leave off is arguably Steven Stamkos. But if you put him on, you need to take someone else off.

King put Jamie Benn on his team ahead of Giroux though the case for Mathew Barzal, Benn, Stamkos, Sean Monahan, Jeff Skinner, Mark Stone, Matt Duchene and a handful of others is compelling.

As a coach, the primary challenge of having so much depth at one position is dividing the ice time equitably among players who are all used to being the ice-time leaders on their NHL teams.

But King said in his experience, the vast majority of players on these high-end teams willingly adapt to a different role. According to King, Marchand was a good example of that on the 2016 World Cup team when he focused on the defensive side of the game and penalty killing.

"When a guy gets the honor of playing for Canada, and you have the knowledge in the back of your mind that 'we've really got a shot at a gold medal here,' I think the buy-in is terrific," King said. "The players know."



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They're always the first to know. They think, 'I don't care where I play, or how much I play. I just want to be on this team.'"

In 2014 at the Olympics and in 2016 at the World Cup, Canada won with a brutally efficient brand of hockey that didn't necessarily dazzle anyone. But hockey's changed since then and if Canada's strength is its forwards, maybe the next international team will play an all-out-attacking style, the way Team North America did at the World Cup.

Wouldn't that be fun to watch?

"The strength of the team is at forward," King said. "It's not in goal. That's probably the weakest area. The defense is a good group, but your forwards are exceptional. Point's really a centerman, playing the wing. O'Reilly can play both. I had Point, Marnier, O'Reilly and Scheifele at my last world championship and geez, they're such good players.

"Over the next three or four years, we have so many decisions up front. That will be the toughest part of the selection process."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.09.2019

1103770 Websites

The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: What's the best team you can build in 2021-22 using existing contracts?

By Sean McIndoe

Jan 8, 2019

From time to time, readers will send me story ideas. Some are good, some not so much, but they're always appreciated. Every now and then someone will come up with something that is just the right mix of weird and fun and it turns into something cool.

But by far, there's one idea that gets suggested the most: What's the best cap-compliant roster you could build using all of today's contracts?

It's a neat idea, and we've seen it done well in other sports. But it never quite works in the NHL, because you just wind up with a roster stacked with entry-level deals. In an era where players (especially forwards) peak so quickly, those first contracts often represent such outrageous bargains that they make the exercise too easy. Let me start with Auston Matthews, Mikko Rantanen, Patrik Laine, Elias Pettersson and Brayden Point all at \$900,000 or so, and I can stack the rest of the roster with pretty much whoever I want. Heck, give them all the bonuses too, they're still dirt cheap. There's no challenge to it.

You could get around that by limiting how many entry-level deals you could use. But today, let's try something a little more challenging. We're going to see if we can make the best cap-compliant roster that we can by using just existing contracts. But instead of building that team for this year, we're going to try to do it for 2021-22.

Why 2021-22? The first reason is that it's three years away, which means we lose access to all of those entry-level deals. Matthews, Rantanen and friends will all be on their second deals and making just slightly more than they are right now and the Jack Hughes cohort isn't in the league yet so we can't use them either. Three years also has the benefit of not being so far away that we're just guessing about who'll still be good by then. And there are more players than you'd think who already have contracts that reach into the 2021-22 season – 165 as of today according to Cap Friendly, including many of the league's best players.

The idea comes with a couple of hurdles. The first is that we'll probably have a new CBA by 2021-22, meaning there's a chance that the cap

system or HRR split could work differently by then. And even if we assume that nothing important will change, we don't actually know what the salary cap is going to be by then.

That second problem is easy enough to solve by just picking a number that seems reasonable. Let's go with \$90 million, which would represent an increase of just over \$10 million from where we are right now. The cap went up \$8.1 million over the last three years, so mix in a little inflation and \$90 million seems about right for 2021-22.

That leaves us with 165 players to choose from and a \$90 million cap to work with to put together a 2021-22 roster that fits under the cap and looks like a Cup contender. How hard could that be? Spoiler: Harder than you might think ...

(All salary information in this piece comes from CapFriendly.com. Also, all values listed are a player's cap hit; we don't care about the actual dollars due on the contract.)

Goaltenders

They say that you should build from the net out, so we'll follow that advice. But when we do, we run into our first problem almost immediately. Of those 165 players signed through 2022, only nine are goaltenders. And none of them look like major bargains.

When you think about it, that makes sense. There's more supply than demand for goaltending these days, so teams aren't making long-term commitments to guys unless they think they're foundational pieces. Mix in deals like Henrik Lundqvist, Frederik Andersen and Tuukka Rask that all expire the year before our 2021-22 season, and it's no surprise that the pickings are slim.

But it's a problem for our roster because we're going to be spending way more on goaltending than we'd like. Even if we went with the two most inexpensive options we can find, Ben Bishop and Roberto Luongo, we're still paying over \$10 million for a position where it's often smart to go as cheap as possible. And even Luongo can't realistically be a pick for three years down the road since he'll be 42 years old by then.

Instead, we'll hand the starting job to one of the few guys on the list who looks like he could be a bargain: Anaheim's John Gibson at \$6.4 million. He's performing at a Vezina or even Hart Trophy level these days, and while that doesn't guarantee anything about how he'll be playing in three years (or even three weeks), we'll take our chances.

The other option here would have been Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck at \$6.166 million. He was great last year but has looked pretty ordinary this season. Hellebuyck should be fine, but I prefer Gibson enough to spend a few extra bucks. Ideally, we'd pick both guys, but \$12.5 million will be too much to spend on goaltending, so we have to make a call here.

For the backup spot, we'll go with Ben Bishop at \$4.917 million, mainly because he's the cheapest option available. Do I feel good about this pick? No, I do not – he'll be turning 35 in 2021-22, and he's a big guy who's had hip problems. There's a good chance he's not an effective goaltender in three years' time and we just wasted a big chunk of our cap on a guy who'll be on LTIR or a buyout target. We're two picks into this thing and I'm already angry.

But really, what other choice do we have? Carey Price at \$10.5 million? No thanks. Cory Schneider at \$6 million? Not a chance. Marc-Andre Fleury at \$7 million? Maybe, but he'll turn 37 during the 2021-22 season. Jonathan Quick (\$5.8 million) and Martin Jones (\$5.75 million) are at least worth considering, but we're going to need every penny we can scrounge to fill out the rest of the roster.

That means it's Gibson and Bishop, at a total cost of over \$11 million. That's pricey. Let's see if we can claw back some of that space on the blueline.

Cap space spent so far: \$11.317 million on two players, an average of \$5.66 million each. We have \$78.683 million left for 18 roster spots, an average of just over \$4.37 million per player.



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Defensemen

Since we've already overspent on goaltending, we'll need to stay away from the big-ticket defensemen. That means that we can't even seriously consider guys like Drew Doughty at \$11 million, P.K. Subban at \$9 million or Brent Burns at \$8 million. In fact, we're going to have a hard time going above \$5.5 million on any of our six defensemen, which rules out 24 of the 58 players we have to choose from.

Still, there's some decent value available. Let's start with a Norris candidate in Blue Jackets' stud Seth Jones at \$5.4 million. That's a fantastic deal from a team perspective, and we'll happily build our blueline around Jones. We'll pair him with another bargain in Toronto's Morgan Rielly at \$5 million; for all the talk of the Leafs pending cap crunch, that's a steal of a contract for a guy who's in this year's Norris conversation. That gives us a strong top pairing and we're spending less on it than we are on our goaltenders. Things are looking up.

We'll start our second pairing with a guy who can give us some offense and man the powerplay: Dallas's John Klingberg at \$4.25 million. We'll pair him with a lefty who can focus on his own end while chipping in the occasional goal, in Nashville's Mattias Ekholm at \$3.75 million.

We're already trying to squeeze cap room with Ekholm, but we run into another problem: even at \$3.75 million, he still ranks 50th among the 58 defensemen we have to choose from, so there isn't much left if we want to go cheap on our third pair. The next guy on the list would be a 34-year-old Jack Johnson, so that's a hard no. It would be great to grab a relative bargain like Oscar Klefbom at \$4.167 million or maybe even Shayne Gostisbehere at \$4.5 million, and I was hoping to find room for Hampus Lindholm at \$5.205 million. But if we do any of that, then the situation at forward is going to look pretty dire.

It gets to the point where we end up seriously considering a warm body like Scott Mayfield (\$1.45 million) or Robert Bortuzzo (\$1.375 million) just to save some money for somewhere else in the lineup. But instead, I think we can cobble together a decent third pair at a reasonable price by going with Columbus's Markus Nutivaara at \$2.7 million and Vegas's Brayden McNabb at \$2.5 million. Yes, they're both lefties, but luckily for us, Nutivaara can play on the right side. After all, we wouldn't want this exercise in time-travelling fantasy roster construction to be unrealistic.

Cap space spent so far: \$34.917 million on eight players, an average of about \$4.36 million each. We have \$55.083 million left for 12 players, an average of just over \$4.59 million each. We did manage to save some money on the blueline, but only a little.

Forwards

I have a confession. When I first started to put this team together, I had a basic plan in place for the forwards, and it went like this: Get Connor McDavid. That's it. Nice and simple. Figure out a way to fit McDavid's \$12.5 million onto the roster, then do whatever it takes to build around him knowing I had the very best player in the world.

After all, that's how you'd do it in the real world. In a league where elite talent drives results, the very best young players don't make anywhere near what they probably should. McDavid may be the highest-paid player in the league right now in terms of cap hit by a healthy margin, but he still represents phenomenal value. Three years from now, when he's just turning 25 and might already have four or five scoring titles? He'll be an absolute steal.

The initial plan was to start with McDavid and then go bargain-hunting elsewhere to make the numbers work. Again, just like real life. If you're lucky enough to have a McDavid or a Jack Eichel or a Nikita Kucherov, you pay them whatever you need to and then go cheap on the fourth line. But that's where we run into yet another problem: There really isn't any cheap depth available to us. There are 98 forwards signed through 2021-22, and only one of them – the Islanders' Ross Johnston – carries a cap hit of less than \$2 million. Only two more are under \$3 million.

That makes sense. Nobody is out here signing interchangeable depth guys to long-term deals. (OK, fine, nobody other than the Canucks.) But

it makes it just about impossible for us to fit a big-ticket forward like McDavid on the roster. We just can't make it work. So it's on the Plan B.

But while we can't afford any of the top 20 or 25 contracts, we'll still be willing to pay up for somewhat less expensive deals that represent irresistible value. That's the case for our first three forwards: Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon at \$6.3 million, Winnipeg's Mark Scheifele at \$6.125 million, and Boston's David Pastrnak at \$6.66 million. Those are three of the most team-friendly contracts in the league and they let us build our first two lines around borderline Hart contenders. Not a bad start.

We'll fill out the first line by putting MacKinnon and Pastrnak with Jonathan Marchessault at \$5 million on the left side. We also could have gone with Josh Bailey with the same price tag, but since we're projecting into the future we'll lean towards the slightly younger guy.

Scheifele is the second-line center, and we'll give him a pair of capable wingers in Calgary's Elias Lindholm at \$4.85 million and Anaheim Rickard Rakell at \$3.789 million. As you can see, we're already starting to get a bit thin; Lindholm's having a great year, but we're counting on Rakell to get back to something approaching his 30-goal form of recent years.

The good news is that we can start the third line with what's probably the last of the no-brainer contracts that we just have to have: Florida's Aleksander Barkov at \$5.9 million. A point-per-game Selke candidate who'll have just turned 26? Sign us up. But we're running out of money to give him much help on the wing, as we'll go with Boone Jenner at \$3.75 million and Paul Byron at \$3.4 million. Neither of those guys are exactly cheap, and you might even be able to argue over whether Jenner is bringing much in the way of value to the table at all. But even at those prices they rank 88th and 92nd on our list the 98 forwards available to us, so we're squeezing in what we can.

We'll build our fourth line around one more two-way center in Philadelphia's Sean Couturier at \$4.33 million; a difference of a few hundred thousand dollars means he beats out Vincent Trochek (\$4.75 million), Nazem Kadri (\$4.5 million) and the struggling Alexander Wennberg (\$4.9 million) for the job. As his wingers, he'll have to make due with just about the only forwards left that we can afford: New Jersey's Miles Wood at \$2.75 million, and Nashville's Calle Jarnkrok at \$2 million. We'll need Jarnkrok to play out of position to make that work, but it was either him or Ross Johnston, so here we are.

Cap space spent so far: After spending \$54.857 million on 12 forwards for an average of \$4.57 million each, we reach our grand total of \$89.774 million. We're cap compliant, with just over \$200,000 left to spare.

How'd we do?

Here's what the final roster looks like:

That's pretty good, right? We've got four solid lines, led by legitimate superstars in MacKinnon, Scheifele, Barkov and Pastrnak (who comes in as our highest-paid player), plus some useful pieces around them. The blueline is anchored by two Norris candidates and some solid specialists and we've got a Vezina threat in goal. Like I said, pretty good.

Then again, this was basically an exercise in picking a fantasy team – you'd figure that "pretty good" is the bare minimum we should be aiming for. The whole thing turned out to be tougher than you'd probably expect. Those NHL GMs who are always crying about the tyranny of the salary cap may be on to something.

Still, this looks like a roster that would absolutely contend for a Cup in year one. (At least for now – it will be fun to look back on this in three years and laugh at some of the players we thought would be good who saw their production nosedive.) And they'll definitely be in a "win now" mode, since we're losing a huge chunk of the roster to free agency at the end of the 2021-22 season, including Barkov, Lindholm, Couturier and (gulp) all six of our defensemen.

In the real world, we'd probably get to work on trading Bishop to balance out the roster a little better. And we should save some money for a top-



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notch training staff, since you may have noticed that we don't have any depth in case of injury. I was originally planning to include a spare forward and defenseman but, uh, I ran out of money. Tyranny, I tell you.

Could you do any better? If so, let me know who you'd add and who you'd cut to make room. In the meantime, I'll be over here counting pennies, cursing the cap and remembering how much I love those entry-level deals.

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The Athletic / NHL Power Rankings: What to watch for in the second half

By Sarah Goldstein

Jan 8, 2019

It isn't often that you get a few dozen people to agree on one thing. And in a league with as much parity as the NHL, agreeing on which team is the best is even more remarkable.

That goes to show you how dominant the Tampa Bay Lightning look this season. No math needed. One hundred percent of voters put them in the No. 1 spot.

But that doesn't mean there is nothing left to watch for. After all, history shows that the front-runner rarely raises the Stanley Cup in June.

So what is The Athletic's NHL team watching for?

Justin Bourne: The Lightning are up a whopping 10 points on the team with the league's second-most points (Toronto), just 42 games into their season. So I have my eye toward how Jon Cooper manages the second half. If they continue to pull away, could we see Tampa's best players – not just the goalie – get nights off? Could they tinker with new systems and lines, experimenting for inevitable postseason adjustments? How do they handle the expectations of being the clear favorite? In some cases, managing teams that good can be as hard as managing less talented teams (as much as you'd always prefer the former).

Sean McIndoe: I'm going to be watching league scoring rates. As we all know, they've been up this year, although nobody seems completely sure why. It's not a huge jump – we're still talking about an extra goal every few games at most – but it's been enough to make everything feel more fun. But almost every season we see scoring rates dip in the second half as the games get tighter and teams go into defensive mode late in games to play for overtime and the loser point. Maybe this year is different, and we don't see much of a drop. Or maybe we just look back on the first half as a reminder of how entertaining this sport can be when the NHL is a 4-3 league instead of a 3-2 one.

Dom Luszczyszyn: The East playoff race with Buffalo, Montreal and the Islanders all fighting for spots – all of whom weren't expected to do much this season. Also, Carolina potentially regressing and finding a way into the mix out of the hole they dug will be interesting.

The Athletic invited all of its NHL writers to rank the teams from 1 to 31 and combined the results here.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (100 percent of first-place votes)

Previous Ranking: 2

The Lightning's remarkable 16-game points streak was snapped Saturday, but they appear the team to beat. Only issues are potential injuries and their goals against (2.95, 16th in NHL), which is too high for a

team with this caliber goaltending. There is really only one question left with this team: Is this the year they take the final step from contender to champion? — Joe Smith

2. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous Ranking: 3

The health of Frederik Andersen. It's that simple. His recent injury – and his health heading into the playoffs – will be the biggest single determining factor in the Leafs' ability to go all the way. With him, they're one of a handful of realistic Cup favorites. Without him, they aren't. — Scott Wheeler

3. Winnipeg Jets

Previous Ranking: 4

Will the defense hold up?

With Dustin Byfuglien injured, Winnipeg is running all of Tyler Myers, Ben Chiarot, Dmitry Kulikov and Joe Morrow in its top six. That's not Stanley Cup caliber defense; and, if you're into fancy stats, it has been much easier to get chances against Winnipeg this season than it was last season.

The reason this is so important? With contract extensions presumably on the way for Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor, this team is about to get expensive in a hurry. The Jets are going to be good for a long time, but given that cap hell is on its way soon, this season is a unique opportunity for Winnipeg to be great. — Murat Ates

4. Calgary Flames

Previous Ranking: 12

The biggest question facing the Flames? Goaltending. And not just going forward, as in next season (which also happens to be an issue), but going forward, as in next week. Backup-now-starter David Rittich suffered a lower-body injury just as his workload was being ramped up. Mike Smith's resurrection, meanwhile, is something of an ongoing/never-ending project. — Scott Cruickshank

With just a few exceptions, the team's nominal No. 1 goalie, Mike Smith, has really struggled to return to the form he showed in the first half of last year, so one of three things needs to happen: 1. He needs to be better; 2. David Rittich's strong play must continue; or 3. they'll have to tip into the trade market to land a netminding insurance policy. — Eric Duhatschek

5. Washington Capitals

Previous Ranking: 10

The Capitals have to find a way to jump-start their normally lethal power play. The Capitals are 1-for-31 with a man advantage in their past nine contests. That is very uncharacteristic of the defending Stanley Cup champions, and they will need a potent power play down the stretch. — Chris Kuc

6. Nashville Predators

Previous Ranking: 1

The Predators, depleted by serious injuries to key players for the past two months, are on the mend. Viktor Arvidsson, Filip Forsberg and P.K. Subban are back after lengthy absences. The Predators faced little adversity on their way to the Presidents' Trophy last season, so will experiencing some turmoil this season make them a better team when it counts? — Adam Vingan

7. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous Ranking: 18

The Golden Knights appear to have finally hit their stride, with the best record in the Western Conference over the past 20 games. But Vegas is



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still trying to develop chemistry between offseason editions Max Pacioretty and Paul Stastny on the second line. Both missed time due to injury but are finally playing alongside one another. If those two — along with the team's points leader, Alex Tuch — can provide the team with a potent second line, Vegas could be in line for another long postseason. — Jesse Granger

8. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous Ranking: 19

The Penguins are hoping the real Matt Murray is back. Murray is 7-0 since returning from a lower-body injury and has allowed only nine goals in that stretch. If the Penguins are getting this version of Murray for the remainder of the season, they'll be a concern for the rest of the East. — Josh Yohe

9. San Jose Sharks

Previous Ranking: 11

Will the Sharks get improved goaltending? They entered Saturday night's action with the worst even strength save percentage in the league (.897), as both Martin Jones and Aaron Dell have been inconsistent. They'll have to hope Jones has the kind of second half he did last season, when he was 16-10-2 with a .922 save percentage and 2.35 goals-against average after January. — Kevin Kurz

10. Boston Bruins

Previous Ranking: 9

How will the Bruins improve their five-on-five scoring? Will they target a No. 3 center or a No. 2 right wing? — Fluto Shinzawa

The Bruins are getting healthy and are starting to hit their stride. Boston is getting contributions throughout the lineup, and both goalies are playing well. The biggest thing for the Bruins now is to get defenseman Charlie McAvoy healthy. He's expected to return to the lineup at some point in the coming week, so that will be a good sign for the team moving forward. — Joe McDonald

11. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous Ranking: 7

Will Artemi Panarin be traded at the Feb. 25 trade deadline? Or can the Blue Jackets sign their star forward to a contract extension? Sitting third in the division and on pace for 100 points, the Blue Jackets have played pretty well despite the nightmare contract situation with Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky. — Aaron Portzline

12. Buffalo Sabres

Previous Ranking: 6

Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart are dynamic, forming one of the best lines in the league. They're good for a goal or two per game. The rest of the scoring lines range from struggling to invisible. Though the minor-league team in Rochester is winning, no one is filling the net at a "call me up" rate. If Phil Housley can't find combinations that work, GM Jason Botterill will have to start looking elsewhere for help. Buffalo believes it has a playoff team, but lack of goals could derail the postseason hopes. — John Vogl

Scoring depth is by far the Sabres' biggest issue. If they're unable to get help for Eichel, Skinner and Reinhart, their fight to make the playoffs will be very hard. — Joe Yerdon

13. Colorado Avalanche

Previous Ranking: 8

A six-game losing streak curbed the Avalanche's early-season momentum and is starting to eat away at the equity they built in terms of overall record. It's about finding consistency in all areas of the game. If

the Avs do that, they should be fine. If not, it could make for an interesting season. — Ryan S. Clark

14. New York Islanders

Previous Ranking: 17

Can the Isles keep up their insane level of goaltending? Robin Lehner and Thomas Greiss don't exactly strike fear into any opposing hearts, but they lead the NHL in save percentage almost halfway through the season. Didn't see that one in the "Farmers' Almanac." — Arthur Staple

15. Montreal Canadiens

Previous Ranking: 15

Considering their special teams struggles, can the Canadiens stay enough in the black at 5-on-5 to finish ahead of teams like the Sabres and Islanders? — Marc Antoine Godin

A top pairing defenseman is the most glaring hole on the roster. While going with a No. 2 defenseman by committee is fine in the regular season, having an effective top matchup pairing becomes vitally important in the playoffs. Of course, teams don't often trade top pairing guys, and if one does become available, it would probably be so cost prohibitive it would risk setting the Canadiens' long-term building plan back a bit. But that's by far the biggest need for this team, and it's not even close. — Arpon Basu

16. Dallas Stars

Previous Ranking: 14

The Stars' lack of depth scoring is the biggest issue. But if you ask the front office, it's the play of Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin. The Stars have created a distraction with public internal feuding, which could have gone even more nuclear than it did. — Sean Shapiro

17. Minnesota Wild

Previous Ranking: 5

Climbing. The Wild have taken a nosedive since our last power rankings in November, losing 11 of 16 games before Saturday's win. Now, they're in a spot where they'll have to string some wins together, something they haven't done in seven weeks. They're only two points behind last season's pace, however. — Michael Russo

18. Anaheim Ducks

Previous Ranking: 20

Incredibly, the Ducks are still within the playoff picture in the Western Conference despite a losing streak that's now at eight games (0-6-2). Consider that they also endured a seven-game drought in October. But they have to decide whether they're really a playoff team or not, and the next month should help GM Bob Murray get a clearer idea of whether to be a buyer and augment a low-scoring lineup or look to sell off potentially attractive pieces for future assets to aid in its current transition to a younger roster. The biggest piece would be right winger Jakob Silfverberg, a fine two-way player whose a UFA on July 1. Silfverberg has been out of the mix when it comes to extensions handed out by the club. If a new deal isn't in the works — and, especially, if they spiral further out of playoff contention — as they move toward the Feb. 25 trade deadline, the Ducks could fetch a decent return from a contending club that could see him as a helpful piece to fill a hole within its top-nine forward group as it prepares for a Stanley Cup run. — Eric Stephens

19. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous Ranking: 13

Carolina wants to add scoring and also create a path for Adam Fox; the Harvard defenseman still needs to sign. Multiple sources confirmed that the Hurricanes are open to trading Dougie Hamilton, not necessarily because they've soured on him but because they're trying to get the best possible offer for a defenseman not named Jacob Slavin. It would be



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surprising if the Hurricanes don't trade Hamilton, Justin Faulk or Brett Pesce at some point, although the best deal might not be until the draft. — Craig Custance

20. Vancouver Canucks

Previous Ranking: 26

The question in Vancouver remains the same as it was at the start of the season. But with Elias Pettersson's sublime play as a rookie, the timeline for an answer has been moved up. It's all about identifying the pieces that will move forward with Pettersson, Brock Boeser and Bo Horvat as the Canucks' core. If they can do that while winning games and staying in some sort of playoff chase, even better. Special attention will be paid to goaltender Thatcher Demko's play down the stretch and whether Quinn Hughes gets into a few games for the Canucks at the conclusion of his college season. — Israel Fehr

21. Florida Panthers

Previous Ranking: 28

The Panthers had won six of eight coming into the New Year, but their goaltending hasn't been as strong as it traditionally has been. Consistency here would be a big step forward. — George Richards

22. Edmonton Oilers

Previous Ranking: 22

Without question the biggest issue facing the Oilers is the continued employment of GM Peter Chiarelli. On the ice, it's how the defense will survive with Oscar Klefbom out and/or how the Oilers can possibly get secondary scoring out of this group, but both of those issues feed into Chiarelli's status. It's hard to imagine him staying on if Edmonton misses the playoffs. — Jonathan Willis

Who is going to score goals for the Oilers other than Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Alex Chiasson? — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

23. New York Rangers

Previous Ranking: 16

The Rangers have hit a fairly lengthy skid (following a 9-1-1 stretch in November), which should have been expected. The question is now, how much worse will it get, especially with another trade deadline sell-off coming in February? And how many ping-pong balls can they accumulate? — Rick Carpinello

24. New Jersey Devils

Previous Ranking: 23

Is Mackenzie Blackwood a potential long-term solution in net? He's looked great in a tiny NHL sample size and is now dealing with a groin injury. Regardless of whether or not the Devils climb back into the playoff chase, how Blackwood plays (not to mention Cory Schneider, once he also returns from injury) could be the biggest storyline of the second half of the season. — Corey Masisak

25. Arizona Coyotes

Previous Ranking: 27

Can they get enough bodies healthy to finish strong over the second half and allow GM John Chayka a fair evaluation of what he has on this scoring-challenged team? — Craig Morgan

26. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous Ranking: 25

The Blackhawks need to begin preparing for next season. Part of that process is deciding which players you project to be part of next year's team and which might be expendable. I'd be surprised if the Blackhawks didn't sell off a few players before the trade deadline. — Scott Powers

27. Detroit Red Wings

Previous Ranking: 21

Now that the Red Wings have fallen back down toward the league's cellar, the biggest question facing them in the next two months will be who stays and who goes at the trade deadline. Despite their record, they should have multiple pieces that are intriguing to contenders, starting with forward Gustav Nyquist (having a career year) and goaltender Jimmy Howard. In the short term, though, we'll see how well Detroit can survive a severely banged up blueline — a similar situation to the one that saw them lose their first seven games this season. Big minutes are coming for rookies Dennis Cholowski and Filip Hronek. — Max Bultman

28. St. Louis Blues

Previous Ranking: 29

Get Vladimir Tarasenko going. He scored his 12th goal of the season in Philadelphia on Monday, but it was just his fourth point in his past 15 games. He is suffering through a career-low 7.8 shooting percentage. — Jeremy Rutherford

29. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous Ranking: 24

What will the roster look like by the end of the season? The Flyers' disappointing first half has made a playoff berth extremely unlikely, and new GM Chuck Fletcher has yet to really put his stamp on the club. Is he going to "shake up" the core of the team as the deadline approaches? — Charlie O'Connor

30. Los Angeles Kings

Previous Ranking: 31

Which Kings are most likely to be traded? Who stays, and who goes? The end of the regular season used to be the most important day on the Kings' schedule as it signaled the start of their playoff run. Now, the Feb. 25 trade deadline is the day to watch to see what GM Rob Blake will do with a team that has failed to meet expectations. — Lisa Dillman

31. Ottawa Senators

Previous Ranking: 30

Will Mark Stone and Matt Duchene be signed to contract extensions or be traded at the trade deadline? I think Stone is the priority. If they can't sign him, they'll shift their sights to Duchene. Convincing one to sign would be an epic coup at this point. — Chris Stevenson

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Jekyll and Hyde Oilers turn in listless effort vs. Sharks

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

January 9, 2019, 1:38 AM

Battle level, goaltending, and zero support for Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins.

Sometimes it's one or two of those things that cost the Edmonton Oilers two points. On others, like Tuesday in San Jose, it's the whole enchilada.



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A .500 team capped a .500 road trip with a listless, not-so-competitive loss at the Shark Tank, falling a full 14 points behind third-place San Jose in the Pacific. It's safe to say Edmonton will be, at best, a wild-card team, with the second wild-card spot still well within the Oilers' reach.

How did they manage to lose a game like this in San Jose — the second straight game against the Oilers where San Jose has put up seven goals — just two days after shutting out the Anaheim Ducks? Well, let's talk about that.

Win One, Lose One

It's amazing how the same group of players can maintain this Jekyll and Hyde look, flying one night, then looking like they'd rather be anywhere but a hockey rink the next.

For us, it's a sign of two things: One, the team goes how McDavid goes. Far too seldom does the third and fourth line dictate the pace, or score enough to give McDavid a night off the scoresheet and still win.

And secondly, goaltending. Cam Talbot didn't have a chance behind this kind of effort, but he wasn't good enough and was pulled. Just when it looked like he'd found his game, Talbot gave up four goals on 17 shots. In the end, he wasn't the worst Oiler, but was nowhere near the best.

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Goals Against

Edmonton is allowing too many goals, as the seven-tally Sharks outburst puts the Oilers into the bottom third in the NHL in goals allowed (138). They're struggling down low, as the Sharks owned the dirty area in front of the Edmonton goal all night long Tuesday.

Newly-traded-for defenceman Alex Petrovic left the game with an injury in the second period, while the other D-man recently brought in, Brandon Manning, was not in the lineup for the second straight game. And it was a tough night for young Caleb Jones, who was minus-3 and had his first real rocky night in the NHL.

Four years into his tenure as GM, Peter Chiarelli has improved his blue line perhaps not one iota. It was a weak point when he arrived, and still isn't deep enough to deal with an injury or two.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

Lucic Scores!

After scoring just two goals in the calendar year of 2018, and just two in 86 games overall, Milan Lucic buried a Nugent-Hopkins feed for his second of the season. He hadn't scored since the Oilers' season opener in Sweden, and the relief on Lucic's face was obvious.

Oh boy, could this club use a guy like Lucic to get productive. There isn't a support player in this lineup with more scoring pedigree, but it's fair to ask if that was from a former lifetime. His goal on Tuesday was Lucic's first even-strength goal since March 5, 2018, a span of 59 games.

The Good News

From here until the all-star break, the Oilers couldn't ask for a better schedule to get back into the playoff picture in the West. Six of their seven remaining games before the break are at home, against some opponents that you had better be able to beat if you consider yourself a playoff team.

The Oilers get Florida, Arizona, Buffalo, Vancouver (only road game), Calgary, Carolina and Detroit. Not that Edmonton can look down its nose at anyone, but a bunch of those teams will miss the playoffs this year, and that should smell like opportunity to the Oilers.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens Takeaways: Jeff Petry gets redemption

Eric Engels

January 8, 2019, 11:23 PM

With just over four minutes left in Tuesday's game, with his Montreal Canadiens sitting on a one-goal lead, Brendan Gallagher stepped on the ice with linemates Phillip Danault and Tomas Tatar. He skated the width of the surface, wheeled into his right-wing position on the breakout, received a pass, and got absolutely levelled by Detroit Red Wings defenceman Nick Kronwall.

We're talking pancaked.

But Gallagher hopped back up to his skates immediately. Then the puck was fired back into Montreal's zone before it inevitably found him in the same position, and that's when Kronwall caught him with another hit.

Gallagher held his ground this time, he collected the puck, and he made sure to get it deep into Red Wings territory before finally heading off the ice.

It doesn't sound like much, but the whole sequence is a perfect example of the kind of leadership he provides the Canadiens on a nightly basis. He will sacrifice himself to make plays all over the ice, no matter the score. It's the stuff his game is made of, the stuff that had him considered one of the favourites to wear the captain's 'C' before it was etched onto Shea Weber's jersey at the beginning of the season.

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Gallagher showed it all game long but particularly on that sequence, and also on the one that saw him score a goal from his backside to put the Canadiens up 2-0 early in the second period, helping deliver a huge 3-2 win when his team needed it most.

Montreal was facing a third consecutive loss on a night that saw Atlantic Division rivals Boston and Buffalo hold their ground in the Eastern Conference playoff race with wins. The Canadiens were in tough against a rested Detroit team, having reached their hotel in the city at 4:00 am — roughly six hours after losing a hard-fought game to the Minnesota Wild at the Bell Centre.

It's fair to say they'd have not won this game without Gallagher leading the way.

There were other contributing factors, as well. Let's get to them.

Antti Niemi came up huge

Niemi was particularly strong in Period 1, when the Canadiens looked like they were skating in quick sand.

Niemi came up with nine saves and faced at least five quality scoring chances in the frame, surrendering no goals to keep the score 0-0 headed to intermission.

In the second period, he made 11 stops and was beat only by a perfect shot from Andreas Athanasiou, who took advantage of a Tatar turnover to carry a two-on-one towards Niemi before freezing everyone on the play by looking pass the whole way.



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And in the third, Niemi saved another 10 shots and appeared in full control towards the end when Detroit tilted the ice towards Montreal's zone.

Athanasios beat him on a Red Wings power play early in the frame, but he was sensational to close.

Jeff Petry redeemed

Petry was responsible for the only goal against in the loss to Minnesota Monday when he made a fancy play coming out from behind his own net and got caught turning over the puck to Wild forward Mikael Granlund.

Petry tried to save the play by covering off Jordan Greenway, but he ended up pushing Greenway into Canadiens goaltender Carey Price while Granlund shimmied past the three of them and shoveled the puck into a wide open net.

So you can imagine how Petry felt when the puck came to him in the slot of the offensive zone with no defender in sight on the first shift of the third period Tuesday.

He corralled it, picked up his head, chose his spot and nailed it for what turned out to be the game-winner.

It was Petry's ninth of the season, which put him just three goals away from the career-high he set over 82 games last year. It was also his 30th point in his 44th game, which sets him on pace to shatter his career-high of 44 last year.

Tatar with the assist(s)

It was Tatar who set up Petry's goal, just as he did Gallagher's.

That's five points this season in two games against the team he started his career with and played seven seasons for.

Tatar now has 33 points in 44 games since coming over in the September trade that sent former Canadiens captain Max Pacioretty to the Vegas Golden Knights.

A regulation loss for the New York Islanders to the Carolina Hurricanes Tuesday helped the Canadiens retake the second wild-card position in the Eastern Conference.

The Islanders hold three games in hand on the Canadiens. The Buffalo Sabres, who are one point up on Montreal, hold a game in hand, too. And the Boston Bruins, who are sitting three points ahead and in third place in the Atlantic, have one as well.

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Sportsnet.ca / Mike Babcock imploring Maple Leafs to play 'heavier'

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjokebox

January 8, 2019, 9:01 AM

TORONTO – The Mike Babcock who steps to the podium fresh off a win over a bad team barely resembles the Mike Babcock who emerges after a tough loss to a good one.

When his Toronto Maple Leafs dismantled a tired .500 Vancouver Canucks squad Saturday, one trying to hang in a lopsided affair without their most dynamic player, Babcock was subdued and curt. He was complimentary, sure, but far from effusive about his roster's dominance

and downplayed his brand-new goalie's shutout on account of a lack of Grade-A stops.

Following defeats to a pair of tested, edgy Western Conference squads with elite goalies and deep defences, Minnesota on Thursday and Nashville on Monday, a more verbose Babcock struck a different tone, inspired by a chance to dish out lessons.

The teacher/preacher described last week's 4-3 home loss to Minny, one in which Toronto blew two leads, as "a great game for our team because it's what we're susceptible to."

Few can praise the enemy like Babcock, happy to Xerox and hand out copies of the A+ paper to remind the B+ students what excellence looks like.

"They jumped harder, they worked harder, they had checked the puck back, they spent lots of time [in the offensive zone] and put miles on our D. They got to the net on us. I thought they did a really good job," Babcock said.

He was similarly gushy about Nashville, minutes after getting thumped 4-0 by the reigning Presidents' Trophy winners.

"I thought we got a lesson from a veteran team here today," Babcock said. "They just stayed patient and were right. They were heavy on the puck, heavy on their sticks, detailed, blocked shots, competed. I liked their game."

For all of the positive numbers we could spit out regarding a Maple Leafs club that is on track to break a franchise record for its most productive regular season — again — there is this:

Ignore for a minute the Vancouvers and Floridas and New Jerseys — i.e., the teams a talent-flush group with Stanley Cup dreams should beat — and over the past month, Toronto has played six teams currently in a playoff position.

The Leafs are just 1-5 in those tests and have been outscored 28-11. Half of those contests, including two in which Toronto was shutout 4-zip, were at home.

"This was a real hockey game. That's a real team over there," Mitch Marner said in the wake of Monday's loss to the Preds. "It's something that, going forward, we're going to need to be ready for these games and be ready to beat those teams."

Alarming? Maybe not quite.

Stud starting goalie Frederik Andersen was either toiling through a minor groin ailment or sidelined for these games, top-six staple Zach Hyman (ankle) has also been absent for a stretch, and William Nylander apparently needs more warm-up time.

Cause for pause? Definitely.

Toronto will be favoured Thursday in New Jersey, especially with Taylor Hall banged up. More telling will be how the Leafs measure up against Boston Saturday and divisional leaders Tampa and Washington later this month.

Those around this dressing room and others are convinced hockey's thermostat gets cranked in deep winter, after the last of the Christmas turkey leftovers are devoured. Screws tighten. Space evaporates. Offence dries.

Until we see evidence to the contrary, we're not convinced this style suits these Leafs as currently constructed.

"At the halfway mark, teams are looking at the standings and seeing where they're at. Teams are trying to solidify their spot and trying to get in," Patrick Marleau says.

"That makes every game more intense."

The return of Andersen and club hit leader Hyman, who are both now practising with the club and may dress as early as Thursday, should help.



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"We're not as good a hockey team without [Hyman]," Babcock says. "We're not as heavy. We don't forecheck as good. We don't hang on to the puck in the O-zone. We're not as good on the penalty kill."

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Yes, the coach can be critical. That's because he, like the hordes of patient fans, sees what might be if the Leafs can dig deeper, discover another gear.

"I like lots of things about us. I like our people. I like how bad we want to be good. I like our leadership. I like our depth," Babcock says. "I think we've got to be a way heavier team."

"We still think there's lots of growth from within because we're a young group."

Please, don't misconstrue the need for heavy as a desire to trade for a crash-and-bang forward or a sudden urge to climb into the top 10 in hits per game or a reason to bench-press Holsteins and chug raw eggs.

"Being heavy isn't getting on a scale and measuring yourself; it's a state of mind. I think we can do a better job there. And I think we can get better defensively so we can spend more time offensively and have the puck more. We got a lot of work to do," Babcock says.

"It's heavy on offence. It's having the puck. It's getting the puck back all the time. It's checking it back. It's putting your work in front of your skill. It's being determined offensively, not coming down, having a rush and being one-and-done. It's multiple-shot shifts."

"It's having some jam."

Preach.

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Sportsnet.ca / Winnipeg Jets first half report: Jets among favourites to win it all

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen

January 8, 2019, 1:12 PM

The Winnipeg Jets finish 41 games just one point behind Nashville for first place in the division with three games in hand. Their power play scores on 28 per cent of its opportunities, making it the second-most dangerous unit in the league, and their collection of high-end talent is on pace for career years.

Whether you think Winnipeg is Canada's best, second-best, or third-best Stanley Cup hope, it's clear that is the expectation for this team. Here's a look at the Winnipeg Jets through 41 games.

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.

THE GOOD

There's a lot to like about one of Canada's three legitimate Stanley Cup hopefuls.

Let's start from the top, where Mark Scheifele (50 points) and Blake Wheeler (51 points) are on pace for career seasons. Wheeler, who really stepped up as one of the NHL's premier set up men in 2017-18 is already 66 per cent of the way to his assist total from last year and sits only behind Nikita Kucherov and Mikko Rantanen league-wide. And his linemate, Scheifele, is a top-20 goal scorer on track for his first 40-goal season.

Some teams lack that strong secondary unit, but the Jets have one of the top snipers in the game on their second line. Patrik Laine has put together a slow start (just three goals in October) well behind him and is third in goals since Nov. 1 with 21, one behind both Jeff Skinner and Alex Ovechkin. After all the worry about his October struggles, Laine could very well hit 50 goals for the first time this season.

Backup Laurent Brossoit was picked up over the summer with little attention, but he has been a big addition to the Jets. If Connor Hellebuyck is to be healthy and rested for the playoffs he can't be playing 67 games as he did last season. The Jets couldn't count on their backups in 2017-18, but Brossoit has already played 10 games with a .939 save percentage. That kind of performance should give Winnipeg more confidence to rest their starter more often than they had in the past.

The mark of a great team, Winnipeg is remarkably consistent. Lucky to be mostly healthy to this point, the Jets have lost two in a row only twice — Nov. 21 and 23, and Dec. 27 and 29. Funny enough, in both instances the Jets lost to Calgary and Minnesota in sequence. Winnipeg has yet to lose three games in a row and hit the halfway mark winners of nine of their past 13.

THE BAD

With a 26-13-2 record that has them as the seventh-best team after 41 games, there's not really a lot of bad to look at here. If there is one area that could use improvement, though, it's five-on-five play. The Jets were a top-five offence in this category last season, but with 81 goals to this point they currently sit in the bottom half of the league as scoring goes up.

But even this can be offset with some good news as they don't give up a lot at five-on-five either. Winnipeg is still plus-two in goal differential, which is 13th-best in the league, but still well behind the likes of Toronto (plus-26), Washington (plus-25) and rival Nashville (plus-20).

A key to turning this around will be adding more depth scoring. While the top two lines are elite, the offence falls off fairly rapidly after that. Mathieu Perreault's 16 points are the most from a bottom-six player and only two others, Brandon Tanev (15) and Adam Lowry (12) have more than 10 points.

GM Kevin Cheveldayoff finally shook his reputation as a deadline day observer and jumped head-first into the market last season by acquiring Paul Stastny after striking out on Derick Brassard a few days before. Stastny's addition moved Bryan Little down to the third line and gave opponents a heck of a lot more to worry about.

The question for the Jets is: who is this year's Stastny? The Jets will start facing a cap crunch next season when Patrik Laine, Kyle Connor and Jacob Trouba (if he's not dealt this summer) will all return with new, much bigger contracts. And Josh Morrissey is owed a new deal one year later.

So although Winnipeg is still on the younger side, the reality is tough decisions are ahead.

Cheveldayoff has been quiet more often than not on the trade market, but it's time for him to be more aggressive to try and push this group to a championship. If they can add another second-line centre this year it'd be a huge win.

On top of that, Winnipeg may also be interested in some experienced depth up front and for the third-pair on defence. Some of the kids such as Mason Appleton and Sami Niku are just about NHL-ready, but it may be



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more helpful to pick up a couple of semi-cheap players who have been there before.

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Things haven't been as easy for Hellebuyck this season, but for Winnipeg to have any chance at the Cup he needs to be in prime form.

In 2017-18 every month was a good one for Hellebuyck, with a .911 save percentage in February being the low point. This year he hits the halfway mark with a .910 save percentage that ranks 20th in the league, mostly due to a slow start by his standards. He has a .757 high danger save percentage that is nothing special at all — Hellebuyck has allowed the third-most goals from this area of the ice league-wide.

The good thing is that he's gotten better as the season has gone along. His performance is something to watch in the second half. But make no mistake — this team is very much one of the top favourites to win it all.

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Sportsnet.ca / Coyotes centre Nick Schmaltz done for season with knee injury

Josh Beneteau | @jbenny15

January 8, 2019, 2:47 PM

The Arizona Coyotes have been hit with another major loss to injury, as centre Nick Schmaltz will miss the remainder of the season with what the team is calling a "lower-body injury."

Craig Morgan of The Athletic reports that Schmaltz has a knee injury.

Forward Christian Dvorak (chest), defenceman Jason Demers (knee) and goalie Antti Raanta (lower-body) have all missed significant time with injuries and all remain out indefinitely.

Schmaltz last played on Dec. 29, when he scored the game-winning goal against the Anaheim Ducks.

The Coyotes acquired Schmaltz in a trade with the Chicago Blackhawks for Dylan Strome and Brendan Perlini at the end of November. Since the trade, the former first-round pick has been a valuable offensive option for the Coyotes, scoring five goals and 14 points in 17 games. In 23 games before the trade with the Blackhawks, he had two goals and 11 points.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks hoping other forwards will thrive without Pettersson

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

January 7, 2019, 8:18 PM

VANCOUVER – Even injured, Elias Pettersson continues to perform miracles as a Vancouver Canuck.

On Monday, four days after his knee bent like a cartoon figure when he was wrestled to the ice in Montreal, Pettersson jogged down some stairs on his way to a workout as the Canucks practised without him at the University of B.C.

It looked like Pettersson, the NHL's top rookie, would be out for weeks when he was trapped in Jesperi Kotkaniemi's leg hold as the Canadiens pulled him down last Thursday. Instead, the 20-year-old may miss only two or three games. The power of youth and flexibility.

"If you're going to sprain your knee, that's probably the best-case scenario," Canucks coach Travis Green told reporters. "He's not going to be as long as we've seen other knee injuries in the past.

"I've seen a lot of bad things over the years. I don't really get too worried about it until I actually know. The fact that he skated off, I thought was a good sign. I was pressing for him to come back in the game. That's how I think."

But Pettersson did not return for the final 34 minutes of the game, nor for the one two nights later in Toronto. Beaten 2-0 by the Canadiens and rolled 5-0 by the Maple Leafs, the Canucks have yet to generate a goal without Pettersson.

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Even missing six games in October with a concussion, the Swede still leads the Canucks in scoring with 22 goals and 42 points in 38 games. His seven game-winning goals are tied for the lead in the NHL. In Vancouver's last 10 wins, Pettersson has scored the deciding goal in six of them.

But unless the Canucks can find a way to win 0-0, someone else will need to score Thursday against the Arizona Coyotes. Pettersson is expected to miss that game. Any mortal would.

"We're not going to rush him back," Green said. "He'll be back when he's good and ready.

"When you lose your most offensive guy, it's going to take away a whole lot of your offence. (But) we're not going to ask guys to do stuff that they're not capable of. There's no magic (formula) for scoring in this league. Off your breakouts, off your neutral-zone play, if you can score on the rush, it's a good thing. And in the offensive zone, you've got to be hard, you've got to win puck battles, you've got to play quick."

After leading the NHL in games-played and road games, the Canucks finally have time to practise as they play only six games – all at Rogers Arena – in the next four weeks. So, on Monday, Green ran the team through a physical practice that featured a pile of battle drills. How else is a team supposed to score?

"The last two games we've been shut out," veteran centre Jay Beagle said. "We're talking about it. Today, the emphasis was going to the net and just battling. Battling to get in greasy areas, that's where you score those goals. Battling to get into those areas is not easy. It was a high-paced practice with a lot of battle drills. It's a simple message."

There is a psychological element to losing your best offensive player. The Canucks went 3-3 without Pettersson in October but scored just 11 goals in regulation in those six games.

They've fired 61 shots the last two games without scoring. Vancouver was also shut out in two of the last five games Pettersson played, so the offence was starting to struggle even before he was injured. The Canucks failed to score only twice in their first 38 games.



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"If the top scorer goes out on any team, it takes a toll and other guys would be pressing maybe too hard," centre Bo Horvat said. "It does affect guys mentally. For us, we've just got to simplify our game and capitalize on our opportunities. If we weren't getting opportunities, we'd be a little more worried."

Winger Brock Boeser said: "When you're not scoring goals like we have the last couple of games, that's when you really need to get gritty and put pucks to the net and get bodies there. Once you bang home a couple, others will start coming."

That's the hope, which is what this season is really about for the Canucks.

"We're not battling harder right now than we were in November, than we were the first game when we played Calgary (opening night)," Green said. "The culture that we want is that will to win is high every night. It's not all of sudden, 'Hey, we're going to try harder because we're closer to .500 now.' If you're going to only play hard at certain times of the year, you're not going to be very a successful team and you're not going to have a very successful culture. We've kept the pedal down from Day 1 and that's the mindset that we want and the culture we want to build for years to come."

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