



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

This is how you get to five in a row. Streaking Canes find the net, and ways to win.

By Chip Alexander

The Canes finally found a way to beat the New York Islanders, winning 4-3. 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. (No Audio)

By AP Photos

Rod Brind'Amour, as much as anyone, knows how fickle hockey can be.

And winning streaks.

Hours before the Carolina Hurricanes' road game Tuesday against the New York Islanders, Brind'Amour was asked what the Canes were doing differently in winning four in a row.

"Nothing, really," the Canes coach said. "I wish I could say, hey ... The puck's just decided to go in. We're not getting more chances. We've actually gotten less. It's very strange how this game works.

"But we've capitalized. I think that's the difference. The first 20 to 25 games we didn't capitalize. The last three or four the puck's gone in for us."

The Canes (20-17-5) did it for a fifth time Tuesday in a 4-3 victory over the Islanders at Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, N.Y. They now have 21 goals on 145 shots in the winning streak -- 14.5 percent -- despite being outshot in three of the five games. The Islanders had 31 shots to Carolina's 24.

Talk about timely goals. While the first period wasn't the Canes best, it ended with a centering pass from Micheal Ferland hitting forward Greg McKegg in front of the net, the puck then nicking the skate of Islanders defenseman Adam Pelech and sliding past goalie Thomas Greiss.

In the Canes' first three games against the Isles this year, all Carolina losses, Greiss was nearly flawless, nearly impenetrable, allowing three goals. In the first period Tuesday, he gave up a goal to rookie forward Saku Maenalanen -- the Finn's first in the NHL -- and then the McKegg goal with six seconds left in the period as Carolina took a 2-1 lead to the locker room.

Brind'Amour said the game would test his team's mental toughness and it did. With the score tied 2-2 late in the third, the Isles had a power play after a Justin Williams penalty but the Canes killed it off and Williams scored soon after leaving the penalty box. The Canes then scored on a power play, Jaccob Slavin with the shot, for a 4-2 lead.

After a stretch when the Canes went seven games without a power-play goal, they have scored five during the winning streak. They've allowed three power-play goals but picked up a shorthanded goal from Brock McGinn in the 5-4 road win Sunday against the Ottawa Senators.

The Canes' mental toughness also was tested in that game. A 4-2 lead quickly evaporated but a power-play goal by Williams won it.

Williams said he likes the confident vibe the team has, saying, "It's good because we haven't really played our best hockey yet we're finding ways to win games. That's what good teams do. Hopefully we'll wind it up and be better next game."

The Canes' next game is against the best team in the NHL in terms of record (33-8-2) and points (68) -- the Tampa Bay Lightning, who are 18-4-0 at home. That will finish up a three-game road trip for Carolina in which the Canes have continued to play without center Jordan Staal, who is recovering from concussion symptoms.

Staal has been out since Dec. 22, when he left the game against the Pittsburgh Penguins. He was first sidelined with a concussion for five games, returned to play against Detroit and then the Penguins, and now has missed the past eight games.

Brind'Amour has often noted how much the Canes miss the veteran forward, their best checking center and face-off man. Staal's absence has caused center Lucas Wallmark to take on more of that defensive responsibility and Wallmark, for the most part, has handled it well.

Center Clark Bishop, recalled Dec. 26 from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL, was injured during the Jan. 3 game at Philadelphia -- a 5-3 Canes win. That resulted in McKegg being called up from the Checkers.

Talk about an instant impact. McKegg had a goal and assist, and was named the game's first star in his first game, a 4-2 win over Columbus on Friday. Moved up to center the third line Tuesday, he also had a goal and assist against the Islanders in the third game since his recall from the Checkers.

The defense also has done its part in finding the net. Dougie Hamilton, frustrated offensively much of the season, scored in three straight games and Slavin has goals in the past two.

"Our D need to be on the scoresheet," Brind'Amour said of the defensemen.

The Canes continue to have the lowest shooting percentage in the league (7.6 percent). But they're 12th on the penalty kill and now tied for 22nd on the power play.

The goaltending, with Curtis McElhinney and Petr Mrazek, has been solid enough. The two have faced 146 shots during the winning streak, allowing 13 goals for a .917 save percentage.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

The Canes need Staal back in the lineup but his return, after a concussion, remains indefinite. A week, two weeks, two months? No one can say.

That uncertainty makes Brind'Amour uneasy, but the Canes move on, as he said, trying to "scratch and claw our way back into it."

THE ATHLETIC

Happy Return: Still beloved by many, Jeff Skinner heads back to Carolina for the first time as a Sabre

By John Vogl

RALEIGH, N.C. — It was love right from the start.

Jeff Skinner pulled into the parking lot of Backyard Bistro, and his SUV was swallowed up. There were cars and fans everywhere. He needed to turn around, and it took an eight-point turn to make just the slightest headway.

When the 18-year-old rookie walked into the sports bar, fans erupted.

"It was pandemonium," bistro owner Joe Lumbrazo said this week. "It was insane. The room was filled. The halls were filled. People were standing on the pillars. Little kids were crying.

"It was crazy."

Carolina simply couldn't get enough of the baby-faced teen who blew into town in 2011 with hurricane force.

"It was a mob scene," said Dave Droschak, Backyard Bistro's marketing director. "It's like he was a rock star. All the girls wanted to touch him. The Canes sent him with two security guards, and we needed them."

For eight years, Skinner remained the smiling face of Carolina hockey. He scored 204 goals, supported teachers and students, energized fans and appeared at restaurants and ballgames. That ended with a trade to Buffalo last August, but Friday he returns to the place that helped raise him.

Raleigh is ready.

"I love the guy," said Matthew Boyd, a longtime season-ticket holder who is also a Hurricanes sponsor through his Buffalo Brothers Pizza and Wing Co. "No one holds any hard feelings against Jeff Skinner. They'll probably give him the same warm reception they gave Cam Ward and Eric Staal and everyone else they let go over the years.

"I think fans actually look forward to that, to be honest. I know I do. They usually do a video clip, and it's kind of a nice way to say goodbye. As a fan, you're not there for the day he's let go, so this is your best thing you can do is give your round of applause and be part of it."

Skinner, who still has the smiling baby face at age 26, will salute back. Though there were tense moments with coaches during his final years in Carolina, love remains for the people who taught him about Southern cuisine, college basketball and life in a smaller city.

"I liked it a lot," the Toronto native said. "Moving there at 18 years old, you kind of grow up there in a way, you know? You don't have that much experience. I was going to high school the year before, and the next year you're living in Raleigh.

"To get involved in the community and sort of grow up there in a way was pretty cool. It's a nice city with a lot of nice people there. There are a lot of relationships that I built there that are good friendships, and I have a lot of good memories."

The memories go both ways. Beth Campbell smiled repeatedly while recalling her connection to Skinner.

Campbell is a Raleigh-area teacher who was chosen to be part of 53's Difference Makers, a charity set up by Skinner to honor educators. Selected teachers received a \$1,000 donation to their school, a \$100 gift certificate to an education store, four tickets to a Hurricanes game, an autographed jersey and a postgame meet-and-greet.

"To be able to get unexpected support — not from someone who knows the kids, someone who says, 'Hey, I just want to reach out and support teachers in general' — is just really rewarding," Campbell said while watching students and buses depart her middle school. "It made me feel good to know that I was part of a larger community. Within my school, within my classroom, it was me and my kids, but at the same time Jeff Skinner is on our team. It's what keeps you going in a hard job."

Campbell was teaching at-risk teens at an alternative middle school when she was honored last season. She used Skinner's funds to help her students learn about nutrition, buying cookbooks authored by chefs who reflected her class' cultural diversity. She also purchased books that taught the kids about social justice.

She made sure to show the students that a professional athlete cared specifically about them.

"When the books came, I pooled all the kids together and said, 'Jeff Skinner got you these books,'" Campbell recalled. "I had some YouTube videos up for some kids who weren't big hockey fans or familiar with him. I said, 'He bought you these books.' A couple of the kids were like, 'Yeah, Miss Campbell. He just does that.' I was like, 'No, he didn't have to do it. This wasn't something the Hurricanes did. This was something he did. He decided to give our school this money, and the books are from him.'

"The kids were excited. Everyone was excited."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

Campbell discovered how much Skinner meant to the Raleigh hockey community when she arrived home from her meet-and-greet. Her family wasn't a big backer of the sport, so she borrowed Hurricanes gear for the game from her neighbor's third-grade, hockey-loving son.

"Jeff had a jersey for me that was signed, and he said I'll sign anything else that you want," Campbell said. "My kids got his T-shirt signed by Jeff Skinner, and we brought it back to him and he could not even believe it. His mom came to me in tears. She was like, 'Joey wrote you a thank-you card. He's never written anyone a thank-you card.' He drew Jeff Skinner scoring a goal and said, 'Thanks for getting the shirt signed for me. I'm going to keep it forever.' His parents actually got it framed for him and it hangs on the wall.

"It's a trickle down. You do something good, and it reaches farther than you expected it would."

The off-ice stories were made possible by in-game glory. As a rookie, Skinner won the Calder Trophy and was named to the All-Star team. Carolina hosted the game, which prompted the bedlam at Backyard Bistro, located just outside the arena.

"He stayed until everybody got a signature," Lumbrazo said. "Everyone left happy."

That was the goal whenever Skinner made an appearance as team ambassador.

"A kid like Skinner came through, and it was refreshing for everybody," said Droschak, the bistro marketing director who also covered the Hurricanes as a journalist for various outlets. "He was the great hope. He was the next guy. We were yearning for a playoff berth, and we looked at Jeff as he was going to get us there."

It never happened. Though Skinner kept scoring, the team's success was fleeting. With just one year remaining on his contract, both sides agreed to a break up.

Skinner has rebounded extremely well with Buffalo, pouring in 29 goals (second behind Alex Ovechkin who leads the NHL with 30) in the Sabres' 43 games. Carolina fans have noticed.

"Oh, my God, he's putting the knife in and turning it," Boyd of Buffalo Brothers said. "The only peace of mind here that we can sit back on is he's going to make them pay for it, too."

As a pending unrestricted free agent, big bucks await Skinner. His future home is a question mark, but there's no doubt where he got his start. His picture remains on restaurant walls, No. 53 jerseys are still on the fans and kids are reading books that he bought.

Skinner and Carolina will always have a bond.

"It was a pretty cool experience," Skinner said. "I was pretty lucky to go to a place like that."

Early projections for Team USA's 2020 World Cup of Hockey roster

By Craig Custance

If we're being honest, the 2014 Winter Olympics feel like ages ago. Especially if you're an American who would prefer to ignore everything that happened after T.J. Oshie beat the Russians. When you consider the roster turnover from that Winter Olympic tournament for Team USA, it feels even longer than five years.

Just look at the centers. This was the topic of a recent conversation with 2014 U.S. men's Olympic hockey coach Dan Bylsma. His group down the middle in Sochi included Joe Pavelski, Ryan Kesler, David Backes, Paul Stastny and Derek Stepan. Good players. But not exactly the fleetest of foot, a real consideration since the tournament was on big ice.

"Looking forward, now it's Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel, put Dylan Larkin in there," Bylsma said, going over American center options. "Now, there's a different dynamic there in the center of the ice."

These new American centers can absolutely fly. And it's not just them. The entire team can. This would be the fastest U.S. team on record and one that closes the gap down the middle with the Canadians. It's what makes the news expected to come in the next couple weeks so crucial for Americans eager to hit the international reset button and bury the ghosts of the last World Cup of Hockey and those 2014 Olympics. Soon, we'll have a better idea whether or not the 2020 World Cup is going to happen. And while we're depending on cooperation between the NHL and NHLPA to

make it happen, always a bit of a stretch, it could be a great one for the Americans.

Let's dive in. Here is our projected 23-player roster for Team USA 2020 and a brief explanation of how we arrived at our choices.

Forwards

So, would this be the best group of centers in terms of high-end skill and depth that the Americans have ever sent to an international tournament?

"It's definitely the highest speed factor with these guys," Bylsma said.

Watching Auston Matthews and Jack Eichel take on Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby when Team USA plays the Canadians is reason enough to hold this tournament. Let's hope everyone remembers this when negotiations to put this on in 2020 inevitably go sideways in a couple weeks.

This forward group is stacked in terms of speed and skill but it doesn't necessarily have the flexibility that Team Canada can bring to a tournament, with centers in every slot. That's a bit of a disadvantage. But Dylan Larkin can certainly move to the wing if necessary and Joe Pavelski gets the nod over Phil Kessel here because of his ability to move to the middle, too.

Historically, the Americans like to have a little more size and grit than this lineup might provide, but it's been a while since they've finished first, so we're all in on a new identity. There's youth, there're veterans. It's a great mix.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

In terms of tough decisions, it was definitely tough to keep Cam Atkinson off this team with the way he's scoring this year and he'd be on a watch list. If Penguins coach Mike Sullivan is the coach, and he'd be my choice, you wonder if he'd make a push for Jake Guentzel, who certainly is in the conversation.

Defensemen

These decisions were even tougher and it wouldn't be surprising if this group looked different in a year.

The lock is Ryan Suter, in part because you want a veteran around who has been through the battles before. He's this generation's Chris Chelios for the Americans. He'll have a spot as long as he wants one.

The idea of plugging in Zach Werenski and Seth Jones together for instant chemistry is too hard to pass up. If this ends up being anything like that last World Cup, there won't be a lot of time together before games start being played so that familiarity will be an advantage.

"It's natural to play them together on a team," Bylsma said. "Those two guys for sure."

The coach's favorite of the group may end up being Jaccob Slavin. He's emerged as the untouchable on a deep Carolina defense and a tournament like this would definitely raise his profile.

"Slavin would be like, to me, what (Marc-Edouard) Vlasic has been to the Canadians," Bylsma said. "The Canadians have some dynamic players but Vlasic has always been the steady defender, great defender, great player. That would be Slavin to the U.S. team."

Where my roster parts ways with Bylsma's preference is that it doesn't have Ryan McDonagh on it. I wanted a right-handed shot in Jacob Trouba. This is certainly open for debate.

"How can you not have McDonagh in the mix?" Bylsma wondered while considering the defense.

Torey Krug and Dustin Byfuglien are definitely in the mix and the bet here is that Charlie McAvoy re-emerges as an option by the time this tournament rolls around.

Goaltending

The Americans have always had goaltending and this tournament is no different. John Gibson is the man here, immediately giving Team USA an edge in nearly every game.

"I've always been a Gibson fan," said Bylsma. "Four years ago, I said he's going to be a top-five goalie, shortly. He didn't turn into that immediately but I like him."

And now, he has to be considered one of the league's three best goalies.

"I would think so," agreed Bylsma.

It gets interesting after that. You could make a case for Jonathan Quick's experience and track record winning big games. He's also getting older and is a constant injury risk. Right now, it's a coin toss between Ben Bishop and Connor Hellebuyck for the backup spot.

NORTH
STATE
JOURNAL

Hurricanes finally find stability in net

Curtis McElhinney and Petr Mrazek have given Carolina enough saves to make the team's past struggles in goal an afterthought

Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — The Carolina Hurricanes, in the midst of a four-game winning streak heading into Tuesday night's road game against the Islanders, have found their scoring touch. With 17 goals during those four wins, the Hurricanes discovered that offense, not goaltending, has been their Achilles' heel.

"Our goalies have been fine," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said back on Dec. 22 following a 3-0 home loss to the Penguins. "That's certainly not the issue. But when

you don't score, everything gets magnified. The mistakes you make get magnified. But goaltending is certainly not an issue."

But it does help to have reliable goaltending. And for the first time in a long time, the Hurricanes are getting it.

It's been more than five weeks since Carolina came to terms with the fact its big-ticket acquisition from the 2017 offseason, Scott Darling, was not the answer in net.

Instead, the team has hitched its wagon to a career backup in the twilight of his career and an in-his-prime journeyman looking to re-establish himself as a starter.

Darling, who still has two remaining years on a contract that will pay him a combined of \$7.1 million and cost \$4.15 million



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

against the salary cap the next two years, seems a likely candidate for an offseason buyout after he was sent down to the AHL in late November. In two seasons with Carolina, Darling has just 15 wins in 51 appearances with a goals-against average and save percentage on the wrong side of 3.00 and .900.

Enter 35-year-old Curtis McElhinney and Petr Mrazek, who will turn 27 on Valentine's Day, as the two goalies the Hurricanes have leaned on in 2018-19.

Heading into the game against the Islanders, McElhinney (9-5-1, 2.20, .923) has been the better of the two since he was claimed off waivers from Toronto prior to the start of the season, ranking as one of five goalies in the NHL to have played at least 10 games and post a .920 or better save percentage and goals-against average under 2.30.

"He makes the big save when he has to, gets a whistle when he has to to kind of get us to the right change," coach Rod Brind'Amour said of McElhinney following Carolina's 4-2 win Jan. 4 over Columbus, one of seven NHL team's the veteran has played for in his 11-year career. "Whatever we need, he's been great all year."

Mrazek hasn't been as good as McElhinney, but still an improvement over Darling.

At 8-8-2 with a .900 save percentage and 2.69 goals-against average, Mrazek is slightly below his career averages. But after his first start since returning from injury Dec. 2 — days after Darling was first demoted to the Charlotte Checkers — his save percentage has been a respectable .912 with a GAA right around his season average.

When Mrazek has gotten goal support, he's been good. Since coming back from injury, Mrazek has received seven goals of support in his five losses — four came in one game,

a 6-4 defeat in Montreal on Dec. 13. In Mrazek's previous start, captain Justin Williams had lamented the team's inability to provide offense for their goalies.

"I told him we'd get him some, and we didn't," Williams said of the 4-1 loss in Toronto on Dec. 11. "So I feel we let him down, yeah."

The team, however, has picked up Mrazek during the recent winning streak, scoring five times in his recent wins in Philadelphia and Ottawa — particularly timely against the Senators, against whom Mrazek struggled.

So what does the future hold? Both McElhinney and Mrazek are on expiring contracts and will be unrestricted free agents this summer. If Carolina is in the playoff picture come the Feb. 25 trade deadline, the team will likely opt to keep both. As for 2019-20, there are options.

McElhinney would probably welcome a one-way contract that extends his NHL career.

Mrazek came to the Hurricanes with designs on being a No. 1 again, and while he outplayed Darling, he has been bested by McElhinney. The Hurricanes probably wouldn't want to commit to more than Mrazek is getting this season (\$1.5 million on a one-year deal), especially with Darling's contract — buyout or not — on the books.

There's also Charlotte Checkers starter Alex Nedeljkovic, a fourth-year pro who's biggest knock has been his 6-foot, 190-pound Mrazek-esque frame. He is likely ready to assume the backup or 1B job.

Regardless of how things shape up for next season, the Hurricanes have found stability in net for this season. If the goals keep coming, they may be able to think about their offseason moves later than they have in a decade.



Preview: Hurricanes at Lightning

Canes put five-game winning streak on the line in Tampa
by Michael Smith

TAMPA - The Carolina Hurricanes put their season-best, five-game winning streak on the line when they close out their three-game road trip in Tampa.

The Canes snapped the Islanders' six-game winning streak on Tuesday with a 4-3 victory in their return to Nassau Coliseum, and the road trip began with a 5-4 win in Ottawa on Sunday afternoon.

High Five

The Hurricanes are riding a five-game winning streak for the first time since November 2016. During the streak, the Canes have produced at nearly a 42 percent clip on the power play (5-for-12) and have outscored their opponents, 21-13. All 19 skaters who have dressed for the team in the last five games have recorded at least a point, and All-Star Sebastian Aho leads the pack with six points (1g, 5a) in that stretch.

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



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

The Canes will face their stiffest test of this stretch when they square off against the Eastern Conference's top team.

"We haven't played our best hockey, but we're finding ways to win games," Justin Williams said. "That's what good teams do."

Chipping In

Despite not generating the number of scoring chances they typically do, the Canes are finding ways to put the puck in the back of the net, and they're doing so with contributions from up and down the lineup.

Saku Maenalanan scored his first career NHL goal to get the Canes on the board in New York. Greg McKegg chipped in with another two-point game.

"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 theme right now is to just try to get it in deep, work them down low and get pucks to the net," McKegg said. "Try to get to those dirty areas and find loose pucks."

Jacob Slavin's power-play marker, his second goal in as many games, ended up being the game-winner.

"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."

The Last Meeting

Tyler Johnson netted a hat trick and Louie Domingue made 38 saves, as the Canes fell 4-2 to the Lightning in Tampa on Oct. 16. That game also closed out a three-game road trip for the Canes after they began the season 4-1-1.

The Opposition

The Lightning are coming off a 4-0 win over Columbus on Tuesday, in which Brayden Point recorded three points (2g, 1a) and All-Star Andrei Vasilevskiy posted a 31-save shutout. That win came after the Lightning fell 5-2 in San Jose on Saturday, snapping the team's 16-game point streak and seven-game winning streak. At 33-8-2 with 68 points, Tampa Bay sits atop the Eastern Conference.

WORTH A CLICK

News

Tweetmail No. 212: McKegg, McElhinney & Trade Rumors

Recap: Canes Top Islanders to Extend Winning Streak

De Haan, Hurricanes Return to Nassau Coliseum

Photos: Aho and Teravainen Visit NHL Offices in NYC

Canes Reassign Renouf to Charlotte

Videos

Highlights: CAR 4, NYI 3

Aho & Teravainen Answer Instagram Questions

Gameday Links

Cool Bars: Jacksonville

FOX Sports Southeast Channel Finder

First Goal Contest presented by Kayem

WATCH, LISTEN & STREAM

Watch: FOX Sports Southeast, FOX Sports app

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes app, Hurricanes.com/Listen



Summer coaching changes paying major dividends across NHL

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 47-60-11 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.

Jim Montgomery's Dallas Stars are third in the Central Division and Barry Trotz's New York Islanders a point out of a playoff spot with extra games to play, while the New York Rangers are overachieving under David Quinn and the Carolina Hurricanes are taking steps forward after Rod Brind'Amour replaced Peters.

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.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

"(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 fuzzier 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 tied 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 put you over the 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," Treliving 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 six points. 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 Tuesday)

Goals: Alex Ovechkin (Washington), 30; Assists: Nikita Kucherov (Tampa Bay), 50; Points: Kucherov, 71; Ice time: Drew Doughty (Los Angeles), 26:38; Wins: Marc-Andre Fleury (Vegas), 25; Goals-against average: Robin Lehner (Islanders), 2.18; Save percentage: Jack Campbell (Los Angeles), .930.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

SPORTSNET™

31 Thoughts: Pettersson, McDavid could test year-end awards thinking

Elliott Friedman

Clock ticking on Sens' Duchene decision
Pre-deadline stretch crucial for Oilers
Could 'Canes deal Dougie Hamilton?

Midway point of the season, time to start thinking about NHL awards. No need to make any final decisions, but make a list, figure out who's in the running, pay closer attention.

It is also time to reflect on old habits, and consider if there is need for change.

This will be my sixth time voting for the Hart, Norris, Calder, Selke, Lady Byng and Masterton Trophies, along with the All-Star and All-Rookie Teams. You never expect everyone to agree with your choices, which is fine. But I do try to be consistent and keep the same rationale.

This year, two of those standards are going to be tested — possibly even ignored.

In Calder voting, I have always considered Games Played. It is hard to play a full season as a rookie. The Derian Hatchers of the world may be extinct, unfortunately, but this is still a tough game played at high speeds. Injuries are a fact of life, whether caused intentionally or accidentally. Playing a full first season in the NHL is a real accomplishment, considering most of those eligible are not fully physically developed.

If there was a close race, I would look at Games Played to see if there was a major difference. It could be a factor.

For the second time, Vancouver's Elias Pettersson is out of the lineup. He missed six games in October, and is expected to be out approximately two weeks after spraining his knee last Thursday in Montreal. He's going to miss at least 10 games this season.

His top challengers for the Calder appear to be Dallas's Miro Heiskanen (probably the top contender, an all-star selection like Pettersson), Buffalo's Rasmus Dahlin and Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk. The latter has the same injury concerns as Pettersson; he's missed 11 games.

Heiskanen's been a stud on the Stars blue line, holding steady while seemingly everyone on the Dallas defence ended up in a hospital bed. At this point, he'd be a deserving winner.

But there's something transcendent about Pettersson's rookie year. He has breathed new life into the Canucks, altered the direction of the franchise and made his games appointment television. He leads all rookies in goals, assists, points and points per game (by almost half a point). There's still half a season to play, and he's got to be out there for a good chunk of them, but, at the very least, Pettersson has me asking, "How low is too low?"

The last person to lose a Calder because of Games Played was Connor McDavid in 2016. Limited to 45 games, he got

clipped by Artemi Panarin. And McDavid is involved the second part of this discussion.

Hart Trophy winners do not miss the playoffs. That's the history and that's the standard. Taylor Hall was a deserving winner last season. Claude Giroux, Nathan MacKinnon and Anze Kopitar would have been perfectly acceptable, too. McDavid — who was voted by his peers as the Ted Lindsay winner for most outstanding player — fell in the ballots because the Oilers didn't get there.

I don't like to tell anyone else what to do (mainly because I don't like anyone telling me what to do), but I've thought a lot about this since I saw McDavid on stage in Vegas recognized by those who play against him. The awards aren't the same; Most Outstanding and Most Valuable are different, but there has to be some deference to the people out there actually trying to stop him.

He'll have stiff competition from Tampa Bay (Nikita Kucherov) and down the highway (Johnny Gaudreau). Both of them would be extremely deserving if the vote happened now.

You'd think the Oilers were 50 points out of the playoffs the way things are going in Edmonton, but it's only two as we wake up on Wednesday. They might get in, rendering this debate moot. If they don't, we have to reconsider the wisdom of punishing McDavid for things that aren't his fault. Entering last weekend, he had 28 points in 15 games, a lifejacket wearing 97 keeping the Oilers afloat.

31 THOUGHTS

1. Remember when the MLB Washington Nationals admitted in 2012 there was an innings limit for Stephen Strasburg and spent every day answering questions about it? I've understood since then why teams are loathe to make any of their internal deadlines public. Ottawa GM Pierre Dorion is not on the team's trip to California, leading the Senators' scouting meetings in Florida. He's expected to meet with Pat Brisson, agent for unrestricted free agent Matt Duchene, next week. I asked former NHL GMs Brian Burke and Doug MacLean (who now ruin my Wednesday nights) how long a team needs to know before the trade deadline that a player is not going to sign. Burke said "14 days." MacLean agreed. So did two current GMs. So Dorion's got five weeks, if he chooses to wait that long.

2. There is no way Anaheim GM Bob Murray would want to fire Randy Carlyle in-season. He dislikes that route and has said he feels the coach deserves a full roster for proper evaluation. An 0-6-2 stretch will test even Murray's patience, but that's an absolute last resort for him.

3. As hard as Ken Hitchcock ripped the Oilers to the media after Saturday's 4-0 loss in Los Angeles, he apparently went after the players even harder to their faces. He was angry



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

about the poor effort and the lack of protection for McDavid, who was elbowed by Drew Doughty and run over by Jeff Carter. Edmonton was much better physically and emotionally one night later in a 4-0 win over the Ducks. Tuesday night in San Jose was a 7-2 beatdown and the season comes down to the final seven games before All-Star Weekend. Six are at home, and only two against current playoff teams (Buffalo, Calgary).

4. When there was no penalty on Hampus Lindholm for driving McDavid into the boards during that game, I wondered if the Oilers captain had a bad reputation among officials or something. In fact, I'm told it is the exact opposite — that he barely says anything and just goes about his business like a true professional. That penalty has to be called, though. Thankfully, there was no injury. You can't call everything, but McDavid deserves better protection from the officials than that.

5. Second-angriest coach of the week: Florida's Bob Boughner. During Tuesday's 5-1 loss to Pittsburgh, the Panthers gave up shorthanded goals at 3:04 and 8:56 of the second period. Three players on the ice for both — Mike Hoffman, Jonathan Huberdeau and Keith Yandle — didn't see a shift the rest of the night. Boughner said they were "out to lunch."

6. Carolina is not in a position to allow its potential unrestricted free agents to walk for nothing. They are far, far apart in negotiations with Micheal Ferland, so it looks like "when" not "if" for him. Pittsburgh makes sense, and so does Edmonton, but there will be others. The Hurricanes have told teams they would prefer to wait a little longer before deciding on goalies Curtis McElhinney and Petr Mrazek, although it can always change with the "offer you can't refuse." They are trying to re-sign another good depth winger, Jordan Martinook.

7. Here's why I believe Dougie Hamilton could be dealt. It is well-known the Hurricanes are right-shot heavy. That's one. Since Dec. 11, he has more games where he's played under 16 minutes (four) as those where he's played more than 20 (three). He assisted on Jaccob Slavin's winner Tuesday night against the Islanders. Prior to that, he scored in three straight games. He's got value. Contenders need defencemen who can score; Carolina needs scoring forwards. There are matches out there.

8. Add Pat Maroon to the list of available St. Louis Blues. And Tampa Bay is trying to find a new home for Slater Koekkoek, currently on a conditioning stint at AHL Syracuse.

9. Drew Doughty got the All-Star nod, but Jake Muzzin has been Los Angeles's best defenceman. The price is high, but someone is going to seriously consider it.

10. In a league that is starving for goaltending depth, keep an eye on Winnipeg's Laurent Brossoit. He worked hard last summer under Adam Francilia, who repaired Connor Hellebuyck in 2017. Brossoit's been very good for the Jets. One year from unrestricted free agency, teams will be watching to see how both he and the Jets handle his future.

11. Another Jet being watched? Brandon Tanev. Good depth player who is free this summer. Winnipeg will have tough choices to make. Sounds like a few teams have asked about

Jack Roslovic, only to have GM Kevin Cheveldayoff swat their requests Mutombo-like into the upper deck. Roslovic's getting more minutes now, with Nikolaj Ehlers injured.

12. There's an obvious connection for Toronto GM Kyle Dubas to be at Tuesday's Lokomotiv/CSKA KHL game: Lokomotiv's Yegor Korshkov, taken 31st overall by the Maple Leafs in the 2016 draft. He's a left-shot winger, and they like his talent. Injured for a good chunk of the season and only in his fourth game back, the goal could be bringing him to training camp in September.

Toronto has also dipped into the Russian free-agent market with Igor Ozhiganov and Nikita Zaitsev, and there are two potential contenders from that game. The first is 29-year-old left-winger Sergei Andronov, who was selected by St. Louis in 2009 when current Columbus GM Jarmo Kekalainen was running their drafts. He spent two seasons in the AHL before returning home. The other is 22-year-old defenceman Alexander Yelesin. There is definitely interest in him.

13. Several teams and scouts left the World Juniors for a couple of days to attend the Desert Hockey Classic at Arizona State. There were two free agents of particular interest: Minnesota State (Mankato) defender Connor Mackey and Clarkson forward Nico Sturm.

14. In the days leading up to the gold-medal game, there were rumours flying that Quinn Hughes was ready to leave NCAA Michigan for Vancouver. It never got close to that, but what is clear is the Canucks wished to ask him if he would consider the possibility. They decided not to, choosing to honour an agreement to wait until the end of the Wolverines' season. But I suspect they really, really wanted to do it.

15. Michael Del Zotto didn't want to say anything during Vancouver's stop in Toronto, but it's clear he craves a chance to get back into the lineup. Players want to play. I've heard there's interest, but those parties want to wait until closer to the deadline to save cap space.

16. The Canucks were marvelling at Pettersson's blocked pass before he got injured in last Thursday's 2-0 loss to Montreal. "Who even thinks of doing that?" one player said.

17. When Tiger Woods quickly became the most dominant golfer of his generation, other players quickly got sick of talking about him. It is the reverse in Vancouver. His teammates are more than happy to discuss what he can do, marvelling about his brains and his brawn.

"Take a look at his first goal," defenceman Troy Stecher said. "Most players, they step forward on their front foot and shoot it. Not there. He reached back and 'sling-shotted' it. No stride change."

Stecher was even more impressed by another play he witnessed from the bench. He couldn't remember who it was against, but Pettersson had the puck at the opposing blueline.

"Someone was coming at him, and I was saying to myself, 'Dump it in, dump it in.' Then he looked right at the guy, who backed off and gave him room to make a play. I asked him about it later. He said, 'If I look down at the puck on the ice, he can charge right at me. But if I look at him, he has to respect that I could go right past him.'"



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

18. Excellent gesture: Vegas coach Gerard Gallant had replicas of the Jack Adams Award created for all of his assistant coaches.

19. John Hynes's extension in New Jersey keeps him under contract until July 2021.

20. Erik Karlsson was steaming mad when hit with a two-game suspension at Christmas. He's unleashed his anger on the rest of the NHL. In six games since his return, he's got one goal and 15 assists. Karlsson's a zone-entry machine.

21. One executive on Montreal: "They play so much harder than last season." He pointed out they picked up four out of six points when Antti Niemi replaced Carey Price for three straight games just before New Year's, and should have beaten Tampa Bay — which was the loss.

22. There was some concern when Shea Weber returned that he wouldn't fit on the newer, speedier Canadiens. Yeah, no need to worry about that. The Canadiens were outscored 81-74 before Weber returned, but are up 58-54 since he came back. Prior to Nashville's 4-1 win over Montreal on Saturday, the Canadiens were first overall in shot share since he got back. (Explainer: They were taking almost 56 per cent of the shots in games they were playing. That doesn't indicate quality, but it was a higher percentage than anyone else.)

23. The Predators are a great team because they have great players, but it doesn't hurt that they practice very hard.

"I can't remember if it was last year or the year before," defenceman Ryan Ellis said this week, "But we had a practice during the playoffs where three guys went down. The coaches stopped it and said, 'Hey, we have bigger goals we want to accomplish here.'" Ellis laughed. "It's not unusual for guys to say to each other, 'I'm going to get you at practice.'"

24. It would not surprise anyone to hear that one of the most competitive players is Viktor Arvidsson, but another who got a few votes was Craig Smith. He smiled, but added, "There are a lot of guys you could say that about here."

For his part, Smith said the most competitive guy he's ever seen is San Jose's Joe Pavelski. They skate together during the off-season.

"He'll be on the winning teams in most of our three-on-three games. When we golf, he's usually the best. Fishing? He'll have the best catch."

Don't you just hate guys like that?

"Actually, I kind of admire it," Smith said.

25. Stunning admission from this week's 31 Thoughts podcast: Jay Beagle has an iPhone 1. Does he write with a dip pen?

26. A few people have made fun of Toronto's thank-you videos this year for Tyler Bozak, Leo Komarov and Matt Martin. (It was a good gesture with Martin, who was very unhappy at the way things ended for him last season.) I'd much rather that than St. Louis ignoring Kevin Shattenkirk, who didn't get any recognition when he returned for the first time.

27. From the moment he arrived in the NHL, Alex Ovechkin plunged into the world of promotion, trying just about anything even though English was not his first language. As a result, I'm always inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. As part of the upcoming CBA talks, expect the NHLPA to propose a way for players to skip All-Star Weekend without punishment. Maybe, for example, you go to five, you get the option to miss one.

The idea of increasing the penalty for missing the weekend from one game to two was brought up inside the NHL, but there wasn't anywhere near enough support for the idea, thankfully. I know people hate All-Star and think it's a joke, but there's a business aspect to this. NHL cities badly want to host it. Sponsors love the event — it's a big perk for them and their clients. They love the interaction with the players. I always see a ton of kids, and even a minute with a player makes a huge difference. You want to grow your game and your revenues, you have to make nice with your sponsors. Let's call it a necessary evil.

28. Eliminate picking forwards and defencemen for All-Star rosters. Take two goalies per division, then take whatever skaters you want.

29. Everyone's favourite topic — escrow — comes to the forefront as talks between the NHL and NHLPA continue this week in Las Vegas. The NHL wanted a decision on the 2020 World Cup by All-Star Weekend. But that's a small part of the overall CBA discussion, so we're getting to more serious conversations. My sense is both sides want to extend the CBA, but there are always hurdles. Escrow is the biggest, and it's complicated.

It is there to even the split between the players and owners, so capping it or re-jigging the formula will take major concessions from the NHLPA. There's really not much wiggle room because there is little incentive for the NHL to budge. If I were in the union, I would work backwards, knowing that the league would probably want to decrease the length of the maximum contract (currently eight years for your own player, seven for someone else's) and limit the amount of signing bonuses on contracts.

Could the players propose something that would satisfy the league in exchange for something? Just a thought. It will take that kind of creativity.

30. Another way is for the players not to use their "inflator" on the salary cap. (They raised the 2018-19 number by 0.5 per cent to its current \$79.5 million. Next year's estimate of \$83 million includes this as part of the projection.) But that's divisive. Years ago, one team was voting on whether or not to use it, and a top player argued they shouldn't. A pending free agent yelled back, "So, you get the advantage when you're up, but I don't?" The difference between now and then is players have stopped using the full five per cent as allowed by the CBA.

31. Friday night, NBC Sports Washington will air an "alternative feed" of its Bucks/Wizards NBA broadcast. This channel will feature gambling information and pop-up questions allowing viewers to "bet" on the action through the station's website, with the chance to win \$500. That's the future, and it is getting closer. Meanwhile, I'll take the over on uncontested layups scored against the Wizards.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019



NHL Power Rankings: Golden Knights jump into top five as Flyers approach league's cellar

Vegas is rounding into form after a rough start, and Tampa Bay remains our clear-cut No. 1

by Cody Benjamin

New year, new movement. A little over a week into 2019, we've got some significant shifts in our NHL pecking order, even if the top spot firmly belongs to the Tampa Bay Lightning (stop us if you've heard that before).

A handful of anticipated contenders are on the mend thanks to the Boston Bruins and Nashville Predators getting some key pieces back on the ice just in time for a serious second-half run. But the biggest changes this week come from further below in our power rankings, where the once-slumping Vegas Golden Knights are really putting things together behind former Stanley Cup champion Marc-Andre Fleury. Meanwhile, the Bill Peters-led Calgary Flames are legitimate Pacific Division favorites and the Gritty-fied Philadelphia Flyers are creeping toward the NHL's basement in full-out rebuild mode.

Neither Calgary nor Vegas has been a consistent presence in the top 10 of our NHL power rankings this season, but the tides have since turned, with both the Flames and Golden Knights moving up in the top five this week. The Flyers, meanwhile, are bested in incompetence by only one other team (the Ottawa Senators) now that they've embraced new management and figure to shake up their core moving forward.

Other teams rising and falling in this week's rundown include the Carolina Hurricanes, who are streaking upward; and the Winnipeg Jets, who haven't exactly had a major slip but remain a step behind the league's elite:

Biggest Movers

5 Hurricanes

5 Jets

Rk	Teams	Chg	Rcld
	Maple Leafs		
	got all the pieces to challenge Tampa for a deep run.		
3	Flames	2	28-13
	We're all in on this bunch, but goaltending remains a question mark even as Mike Smith and David Rittich have taken turns in the spotlight.		
4	Golden Knights	4	27-15
	Guess who's back, baby? Marc-Andre Fleury is back, and considering some of their biggest names (like Paul Stastny) have yet to work consistently together, they stand to get even better.		
5	Capitals	1	26-12
	There are kinks to be worked out, including on the power play, but they're still about as well-rounded as you'd hope for a defending Stanley Cup champ.		
6	Predators	1	27-15
	As long as their rehabilitated stars return to form, they can easily finish as a top-three team here.		
7	Penguins	1	24-13
	Matt Murray hasn't lost since coming off injured reserve. It's not what we expected, but it's exactly what Pittsburgh needs. Somehow the Pens always find a way.		
8	Jets	5	27-13
	Sure, they've still got the talent to make it out of the West, but their defense, sans Dustin Byfuglien, seems a step or two below the NHL's top contenders.		
9	Sharks	--	25-13
	Speaking of defense in the West, can anyone locate the Martin Jones we knew and loved from a year ago? It's not like San Jose is lacking for big names on the blue line otherwise.		
1	Lightning	--	33-8
	They are so good right now that it's time to wonder if they can peak in the playoffs. No one comes close to matching their production, and if they fall short of a Cup, it's going to be a major disappointment.		
2		--	27-13
	For their sake, we hope Frederik Andersen will be OK down the home stretch. Otherwise, they've		



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

Rk	Teams	Chg	Rcprd	Rk	Teams	Chg	Rcprd
10	Islanders	2	23-14	18	Canucks	1	20-21
	Barry Trotz alert! A six-game winning streak and their improbable success in net warrants a big jump. How fun would it be if this group can keep it up and take its season into the spring?				Same old, same old here: Elias Pettersson is amazing, and the Canucks have other promising pieces. But they don't have enough, as currently constructed, to get into the top 16.		
11	Bruins	--	25-14	19	Hurricanes	5	20-17
	As expected, the reinforcements are making a difference. After enduring injury after injury, they're ready to get serious in the Atlantic.				Normally, we'd say rebuilding is the way to go. (It still is.) But then, of course, they go off and win four in a row.		
12	Blue Jackets	2	24-15	20	Panthers	--	17-17
	All eyes are on two of their biggest names in Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, and depending on what happens with them, the Blue Jackets could lock in for the stretch run or retool at a dangerous time.				Credit to Bob Boughner for getting buy-in. This team stumbled out of the gate in a year it was supposed to challenge for a playoff spot, but they're keeping things close and improving their numbers.		
13	Avalanche	2	20-16	21	Oilers	4	20-20
	They own an incredible first line, as we've said all year, but a 3-5-2 stretch into the new year isn't acceptable for a contender. Beware of a farther fall if they can't get consistent.				Evergreen sentiment: Connor McDavid is doing absolutely everything.		
14	Sabres	1	23-14	22	Ducks	4	19-17
	See: Avalanche. The really intriguing option is if they tap into the trade market for someone to support the Eichels and Skinners of the team.				What a curious case here, with John Gibson having a remarkable year and yet Anaheim being in the unique position of deciding whether it should sell while contracts are hot and losses are frequent. The crazy thing is they're still easily within reach of the playoffs.		
15	Stars	1	23-17	23	Coyotes	1	18-21
	With the way the team's front office has handled the apparent scoring issues, well, it's a wonder Dallas is still functioning. This is a boom-or-bust kind of situation.				Scoring is an absolute drag in Arizona, so that's probably where they should start.		
16	Canadiens	2	23-16	24	Devils	1	16-19
	Here's our annual example of a team caught in the middle. Do the Habs try to beef up their defense and push for the playoffs, or save assets and ride this thing out?				All eyes are on Mackenzie Blackwood once he's back in the net, because, really, the rest of this season should be all about pinpointing who's going to solve their goalie problems.		
17	Wild	2	21-18	25	Rangers	4	17-18
	Let us know if you've got a read on this team, because we don't. If you're looking for the streaky club of the season, it's probably them.				Brace yourselves for February. We might finally be nearing their biggest sell-off yet.		
				26	Blues	1	17-20
					They might be the best worst team of this lower tier. Even typical studs like Vladimir Tarasenko have just not		



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

Tampa Bay right winger Ryan Callahan missed Tuesday night's game with an upper-body injury.

This will be the Lightning's second home game amid a stretch of six of eight games on the road.

Tampa Bay defeated the Hurricanes 4-2 at home in October. Their third meeting of the season comes in March in Raleigh, N.C.



Carolina Hurricanes vs. Tampa Bay Lightning: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The streaking Hurricanes take on the hottest team in the NHL tonight in Tampa Bay in the final game of their three game road trip.

By Andrew Ahr

Carolina Hurricanes (20-17-5) vs. Tampa Bay Lightning (33-8-2)

Thursday, January 10 2019 - 7:30 p.m. ET

The Hurricanes ride a five game winning streak into a matchup against a dangerous Lightning team who have lost only eight games in regulation all season.

Vital Statistics

Hurricanes	Lightning
20-17-5	33-8-2
45	68
5 Metro	1 Atlantic
T10 EC	1 EC
6-4-0	8-1-1
Won 5	Won 1
2.64	4.12
2.83	2.88
36.3	33.1
28.2	32.4
50.2%	50.3%

Hurricanes	Lightning
16.9% (T22)	29.9% (1)
80.8% (12)	82.6% (9)
55.46%	52.26%
97.6	101.6
7:21	8:39

Goaltender #1

Category	Petr Mrazek	Andrei Vasilevskiy
Record	8-8-2	17-4-2
Save %	.900	.923
GAA	2.69	2.55

Goaltender #2

Category	Curtis McElhinney	Louis Domingue
Record	10-5-1	15-4-0
Save %	.922	.904
GAA	2.25	2.99

Game Notes

It's another Fox Sports Southeast broadcast tonight. Click here for the channel listings. Tonight is also a Cool Bars



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

night, coastal style, at the Carolina Ale House in Jacksonville.

Tonight's matchup is the second of three games in the 2018-19 season. Tampa Bay won the first matchup by a score of 4-2 on October 16th at Amalie Arena. Martin Necas scored his first career NHL goal in the loss.

The Lighting will be in Raleigh for the last game of the season series on March 21st.

The Hurricanes have won five games in a row for the first time since November of 2016. The Canes have outscored opponents 21-13 in that span, thanks partially to the power play operating at nearly 42% efficiency.

All 19 skaters that have dressed for the Canes during the five game run have recorded at least a point, led by Sebastian Aho with six points (1g, 5a).

Tonight the Canes will open their ninth of 17 back-to-back sets this season. The Canes are currently 3-3-2 in the first game and 4-3-1 in the second game over the first eight back-to-back sets this season.

Saku Maenalanen scored his first career NHL goal in New York on Tuesday. He became the fourth Hurricanes player to score their first NHL goal this season (Andrei Svechnikov, Martin Necas, Clark Bishop).

Jordan Staal has now missed eight straight games due to a concussion, compounding on the stretch of time that he was out in December.

After being recalled as insurance for Tuesday's game, the Canes returned Dan Renouf to Charlotte yesterday.

The Hurricanes Can't Afford to Lose Micheal Ferland

The Canes and their pending free-agent power forward are reportedly "far, far apart" in contract negotiations. They can't afford to let him slip away without doing everything they can to keep him.

By Brian LeBlanc

Of course it would happen that the Carolina Hurricanes would have a Falls Lake-sized bucket of cold water thrown on their longest winning streak in three years.

What has been speculated for the past couple of weeks, mostly by Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman, seems to be coming into closer focus this week. The Hurricanes and free agent-to-be Micheal Ferland are "far, far apart" on a new contract for the pending unrestricted free agent winger, as relayed in this week's 31 Thoughts column. This, after we heard basically the same thing about the negotiations last summer with Elias Lindholm and Noah Hanifin.

And then, the real alarm bells started ringing: the Hurricanes trading Ferland is apparently "a matter of when, not if."

There are so many levels to this that we could go on all day dissecting it, so let's just focus on a couple. First, the Hurricanes paid dearly to acquire Ferland and Dougie Hamilton in June. Hamilton is already reportedly on the trading block again, although this seems to be more a case of a numbers crunch rather than an inability to pay. There is no such numbers crunch with Ferland. It would be a catastrophically bad look for GM Don Waddell to trade away the two pieces that he got in exchange for one of the league's top scorers, Elias Lindholm, less than a year later.

The Hurricanes, particularly Rod Brind'Amour, have been effusive in their praise of Ferland this season. He has gone far above and beyond what they thought they were getting. Of course, he was a year away from unrestricted free agency when he was acquired, so his hot streak is hitting at a particularly opportune time for him. But it isn't like the Hurricanes didn't know this when they acquired him, and he fills a hole on their roster that has been empty since at least the peak years of Tuomo Ruutu, and perhaps even back before that, to vintage Erik Cole in the mid-2000s.

If the Hurricanes are going to trade Ferland because they can't sign him, what does that say about their ability to identify and appropriately compensate players who fill a specific role? They did a great job identifying Ferland. In fact, they may have done a better job than even they realized at the time. But those players come at a cost, and if the Hurricanes aren't willing to pay market value, then they are going to be consigned to spinning their wheels forever.

To be fair, we don't really know what numbers are being bandied about. It's entirely possible that Ferland's agent, sensing a big payday, is trying to wring out as much as he can from the Hurricanes, which is completely understandable in light of what agents are paid to do.

We have heard nothing from the Hurricanes' front office on Ferland's contract negotiations. In fact, we've heard very little from them on the pending Sebastian Aho contract extension, which is of infinitely more importance than Ferland's. But at least Waddell and Tom Dundon are on the record saying that an Aho extension is being worked on, albeit slowly (and, in fairness to Aho, the longer the negotiation lasts the more money he makes, so it's no surprise it's taking a while).

Aho is the priority, but Ferland is important too. How important does the front office feel he is? We don't know.

Ferland has a more specifically defined and necessary role than Lindholm ever had in his five seasons with the Hurricanes. This isn't an issue of paying him whatever he's asking for. This is recognizing that the Hurricanes have an asset, one that has been quite productive, and ensuring that they strike a fair deal without simply moving him along if they can.

What the Hurricanes can't do is assign a value to Ferland and, when he or his representation do not agree with that valuation, immediately put him on the trade block. If there isn't a deal to be made, then so be it. But the Hurricanes can't afford to give the impression that their first move when negotiations break down is to trade a player. Fair or not, that's the opinion that many in the hockey world will form if they see it happen to three players from the same team in the span of seven months (four, if you count Jeff Skinner,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

although there's much more to that saga than simply a contract number).

The Hurricanes shouldn't overthink this. Ferland fills a role of which the Hurricanes have been in desperate need for many, many years. That has inherent value. They're risking not being able to re-fill that role in free agency or through prospects coming up through the system.

Perhaps a deal isn't meant to be made, but the Hurricanes need to explore every avenue before coming to that conclusion. They can't afford to give Ferland a blank check,

About Last Night: Sweet Justice

Good goaltending, more McKeeg stands, and a NHL first kept the Canes streaking.

By Cody Hagan

The Carolina Hurricanes have faced many challenges this season, but through it all there had been one team and one player who was truly their kryptonite. From the very first game of the year Thomas Greiss and the New York Islanders had been unbeatable and beyond frustrating to play against.

That all changed last night as the Canes got some sweet justice with their 4-3 victory over the Islanders. Thanks to some more stellar goaltending, a first ever NHL goal, and another McKeeg stand, Carolina got the job done extending their winning streak to five games in a row.

The Good - Goal Scoring

There's no coincidence that the Hurricanes' five game streak has seen the team scoring goals in a consistent manner better than they have all season. Scoring at least three goals in every game during the streak, Carolina is finally getting the goal scoring that has eluded them for the majority of the year.

Things got started for the Canes with Saku Maenalanen getting his first ever NHL goal. It was an odd play that was credited to him only because he gloved the puck down, but ultimately it was the first of two pucks the Islanders would put in their own net. But the puck doesn't go in if Saku doesn't drive the net.

Maenalanen is clearly comfortable playing in the NHL and has been producing quality chances unlike other call-ups like Janne Kuokkanen. Slotted in a fourth line role, it's getting easier by the game to see why Saku was so successful in Finland.

The odd bounces would continue later in the first period when Greg McKeeg would be awarded his second goal of the season. Just like the first goal this all starts with the desire to drive the net. Micheal Ferland throws a puck at the net and because McKeeg went to the front he got a lucky bounce that went off him and then off a Islanders defender and into the net.

The ultimate question here is: does it really matter how it went in? We all get to do McKeeg-stands again and that is life.

but they similarly can't afford to throw up their arms two months before the trade deadline and declare it a lost cause. This isn't "pay the man," this is "recognize what you have."

The Hurricanes aren't making the playoffs this season without the contributions that Ferland has provided since his arrival. Hopefully, this is a smokescreen and Waddell will pull a rabbit out of his hat at the eleventh hour. If not, gear up for another lap around the merry-go-round.

The offense quieted down throughout the entire second period and the majority of the third until Justin Williams put the Hurricanes ahead late in the third. After Williams took a bad penalty with just under five minutes left, Canes fans everywhere likely had that all too familiar feeling of "here we go again" popping in to their heads.

But the defense came up huge and once Willy was released from the box he made his way to the offensive zone. The entire play happens because McKeeg found Williams who had worked free and the Captain found the top shelf putting the Canes ahead.

Jacob Slavin added a power play goal at the 18:53 mark that would end up being the game winner. The snipe by Slavin helped continue a stretch that has seen the Hurricanes power play come to life which has been critical during this winning streak.

The Bad - Another Near Collapse

Along with the consistent goal scoring, this five game winning streak has provided one other consistency - nearly blowing the game. It started in Philadelphia when a four goal lead was cut to one in less than five minutes, then continued against Columbus where a three goal lead was cut to one. The last game against Ottawa featured a 4-2 lead turn into a tie that Williams was able to break in the third period. Then last night a 2-1 lead going in to the third was erased only to be salvaged once again by Williams.

For some reason it seems that the Hurricanes are having a problem with letting off the gas for just a few seconds, and it is costing them consistently. Ultimately they have gotten the win in the end, but it could be a lot easier than they are making it out to be.

After Carolina took a 2-1 lead last night they let the Islanders creep back in to the game — not once, but twice. The first time was the tying goal in which the Canes let Devon Toews have too much space in the offensive zone. Meanwhile Lucas Wallmark lost the battle in front of the goal allowing Curtis McElhinney to be screened as that quickly it is a tie game.

The second scare came right after Jacob Slavin scored the power play goal with just over a minute remaining in the game. With a two goal cushion the Hurricanes completely let off the gas, allowing Brock Nelson to skate down as easily score just eight seconds later.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

It's a unusual soft goal by McElhinney and a bad play by Brett Pesce who got turned around by Nelson. The continued mental lapses would continue even after this goal with two very unecessary icings by Slavin and Sebastian Aho when they could have just tapped the puck ahead instead of going for the empty net.

The Canes have been lucky to get away with these lapses over the last four games because of their offense, but that will not be the case every game. This is still a young team and they are learning how to play with the lead, but they need to be more cautious in these scenarios.

The Great - Streaking

Five wins in a row is a truly big feat for this team and it has kept them from flatlining in the wild card race. Beating the Flyers and Senators was somewhat expected, but the wins over Columbus and now the Islanders are huge. If Carolina want to see the postseason they must keep winning in their division. This was the Canes' final game against the Islanders this season, but there are still plenty of games remaining against the Metro division and those game will make or break this team.

Finding a way to win consistenly has been a struggle this season, but multiple four-plus game winning streaks have kept the team alive in the standings. They won't win them all from here, but it will be very interesting to see if they can keep this up and get on a long winning streak.

Moral of the Story

Last night was the definition of a must win game when facing an uphill battle. Things are going great for the team right now and that is reflected by the lucky bounces that are going their way. Winning or losing can be contagious, and right now the Hurricanes are on the healthy side. This game was a great example of everything that has to go right for this team to win but it also shows it is completely possible to take down the teams ahead of them in the standings. Winning is great no matter who it is against but getting some sweet revenge on the Islanders was just an added bonus.

The next three games will be major tests of how good this group is truly coming together. This five game winning streak is very nice but if they lose the next three it will all be for nothing. If they can find a way to knock off a potential Stanley Cup contendor in Tampa, it will go a long ways in detemring the direction of this franchise over the next few months.



Notebook: All Star Reps

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The first to punch his ticket was head coach Mike Vellucci, who will be manning the bench for the Atlantic team by virtue of the Checkers posting the division's best record.

"For myself it's a great honor but it's an honor that the team did for me," said Vellucci. "They've listened, they've worked hard and they want to get better. They've been a pleasure to coach. I'm representing them and I'm representing the Charlotte Checkers and (team owner) Mr. Kahn, which gives me a lot of pride."

As for the team Vellucci will be leading at the event, the Checkers earned two All-Star selections in Janne Kuokkanen and Trevor Carrick. The former has frequently bounced between the AHL and NHL this season, but when suited up for Charlotte has been a lights-out scorer.

"He's consistent," said Vellucci of the 20-year-old forward. "Offensively he's consistently putting up points and that's part of being a pro. Everyone forgets about how young he is

but he's consistently offensive in his effort this year."

"I've just been working everyday and I'm lucky to have these kind of teammates and management," said Kuokkanen. "It's a great honor for me."

As for Carrick, who has been a rock for Charlotte on the blue line this season, this will be his second time donning an AHL All-Star sweater.

"It's about what you bring everyday," said Vellucci. "Trevor has a great attitude, he's tough and he can put up the points. He's a well-rounded defenseman who does everything well and he's a leader on this team and his peers notice."

Two players is the max that any team is sending to the All-Star Classic, but for the top team in the league there's a case to be made for several others who are worthy of the honor.

"For the players selected, they deserve it, but there could have been four more on this team," said Vellucci. "That's the way it goes, but you could say Poturalski, you could say



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

McKeown, you could say Bean, there's so many guys. To me Nedeljkovic should be there, he has 17 wins. You go on down the list, they should all be there."

The two selections will now eagerly wait to take part in the event-filled trip to Springfield, even if one of them is unsure what exactly to expect.

"I don't have any kind of information about what it's going to be but I'm excited, it's going to be fun," said Kuokkanen. "This is my first time to play in this kind of game. It's special."

For Vellucci, getting to share the experience with his players is something to look forward to.

"In the past when I've done All-Star games I've taken them to dinner and gotten to know them a little bit better," said Vellucci. "We'll have conversations and relax in a different environment. I'll spend time with them and make sure we're on the same page and have a little fun while we're doing it."

MAKING STRIDES

The Checkers' scoring depth has been one of the biggest pieces to their success through the first half of the season. Their lineup is chock-full of offensively gifted talent and it has shown – the Checkers boast more double-digit goal scorers than any other team in the league.

Two players have especially picked up the scoring slack as of late – Julien Gauthier and Morgan Geekie.

Gauthier's improvement from his rookie year to now has been much talked about by the coaching staff and is visibly noticeable when he takes the ice. Now the sophomore forward is finding the back of the net, having racked up four goals over the last three games to move into a tie for second on the team.

"He's done nothing but improve," said Vellucci. "Him and I have a great relationship, I can be honest with him and tell him what I need him to do and he's actually trying everything. Give him a lot of credit, he's improving."

So what exactly has been ratcheting up his goal-scoring ability as of late?

"It's the little things," said Vellucci. "One is that we moved his position on the power play to be more of a shooter because that's what he is – a shooter."

The staff has also worked with Gauthier to refine the physical qualities that made him a first-round draft pick out of junior.

"We've been working on puck protection, that's a big thing for him," said Vellucci. "He's so big and strong, if he gets his technique better and does it the right way, nobody can stop him. Get to the net, use two hands, bend his knees more, we've been working on those things and he's been carrying them into the games and he's gotten goals just from doing that."

There have been flashes of what Gauthier can bring to the table as a dominant forward and as he starts to string those

strong performances together, his production is something to keep an eye on going forward.

"Confidence is good for everybody, Goat especially," said Vellucci. "He's got a long way to go but he's made huge strides."

As for Geekie, the rookie forward has found his groove once again, heading into this weekend with 10 points in his last 10 games.

While the gaudy numbers are never a bad thing, it's the other parts of Geekie's game that have drawn praise during this most recent stretch.

"I don't like to grade Geeks by his points because he has to do other things well to be a good player," said Vellucci. "Obviously the points are good, he's put up big points for us, but he's playing the game the right way and he's doing things defensively that are giving him those opportunities to score. That's the key for him. We love to see him put points up without sacrificing the rest of his game."

LINEUP CHALLENGES

The nature of the AHL dictates that there will undoubtedly be times when the roster takes a hit.

For the Checkers, that time came last week.

With injuries piling up in Carolina and reinforcements heading to Raleigh, the Checkers headed into last weekend's three-in-three road trip with a fairly bare-bones group. Those recalls combined with Martin Necas making his way back from World Juniors and Kuokkanen forced out due to an illness led to the Checkers having to make do with just 11 forwards.

"That's the most difficult thing about coaching a minor league team, you've got call ups all the time," said Vellucci. "You could lose two or three guys in a day, so you have to make adjustments. I've been doing it for a long time to where I know what it takes to do that."

You won't see this Checkers team throwing in the towel in that scenario though.

"We use it as motivation," said Vellucci. "You can complain about it, you can whine, but you still have to play the game so let's make the most out of it. Bear down and do the things that make us successful and let's be good teammates and root each other on."

Charlotte emerged from that weekend with a perfect 3-0-0 record and is now staring down more roster decisions come this weekend.

"It was a switch real quick, we were short D and had too many forwards and now it's the other way around," said Vellucci. "But that's minor league hockey. It's been difficult but I like the challenge. Instead of complaining about it let's take the challenge and use it as a positive. There's more ice time for guys and they have the chance to show me what they can do and build off it."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

NHL SUCCESS

The flip side of the Checkers losing players to Carolina over the last week has been those players' big impact on the NHL club.

Saku Maenalanen has been a force on the fourth line for the Canes and has put up his first NHL goal and assist over the last four games, while Greg McKegg's first stint with Carolina has seen him throw up four points (2g, 2a) in three contests.

Given how key of roles the duo has played for Charlotte so far this season, their quick success shouldn't be much of a shock.

"It doesn't surprise me at all because they've been good players here," said Vellucci. "Personally it's a proud moment.

I feel like I had something to do with their development. We work them hard here so when they get up there they can step right in. It's a proud moment to watch those guys do well."

As McKegg-mania takes over Raleigh, it's hard not to root for the guy who got a change of scenery late last season and has turned it on from there.

"A guy like Kegger came to us with not much fanfare and nobody really knew who he was," said Vellucci. "He came in to camp in great shape, he's got a great attitude, he built up his confidence offensively here – he wasn't really known as an offensive guy – and I'm very proud of him."

Dan Renouf Returns To Charlotte

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

After recalling him Tuesday afternoon, the Hurricanes have assigned defenseman Dan Renouf back to Charlotte.

The blue liner joined Carolina for their road win over the New York Islanders but served as a healthy extra.

Renouf, a third-year pro, now returns to Charlotte where he has logged 11 points (1g, 10a) and a team-high 76 penalty minutes over 36 games. The Checkers return to action Friday in Charlotte to kick off a six-game home stand.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/canes-now/article224160370.html>
<https://theathletic.com/758974/2019/01/10/758974/>
<https://theathletic.com/756710/2019/01/09/early-projections-for-team-usas-2020-world-cup-of-hockey-roster/>
<http://nsjonline.com/article/2019/01/hurricanes-finally-find-stability-in-net/>
<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-carolina-hurricanes-tampa-bay-lightning/c-303742354>
<https://apnews.com/53102311b81f42d0a1caff8118863ff1>
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/31-thoughts-connor-mcdavid-elias-pettersson-calder-hart/>
<https://www.cbssports.com/nhl/news/nhl-power-rankings-golden-knights-jump-into-top-five-as-flyers-approach-leagues-cellar/>
<https://sports.yahoo.com/hurricanes-lightning-clash-riding-hot-streaks-200810133--nhl.html>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/1/10/18176018/carolina-hurricanes-tampa-bay-lightning-game-preview-statistics-notes-links>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/1/9/18175502/carolina-hurricanes-micheal-ferland-contract-negotiations-don-waddell-tom-dundon-nhl-free-agency>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/1/9/18174812/about-last-night-sweet-justice-carolina-hurricanes-new-york-islanders-saku-maenalanen-mckegg-slavin>
<http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/notebook-all-star-reps>
<http://gocheckers.com/articles/transactions/dan-renouf-returns-to-charlotte>



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

SportScan

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

1125074 Carolina Hurricanes

This is how you get to five in a row. Streaking Canes find the net, and ways to win.

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Rod Brind'Amour, as much as anyone, knows how fickle hockey can be.

And winning streaks.

Hours before the Carolina Hurricanes' road game Tuesday against the New York Islanders, Brind'Amour was asked what the Canes were doing differently in winning four in a row.

"Nothing, really," the Canes coach said. "I wish I could say, hey ... The puck's just decided to go in. We're not getting more chances. We've actually gotten less. It's very strange how this game works.

"But we've capitalized. I think that's the difference. The first 20 to 25 games we didn't capitalize. The last three or four the puck's gone in for us."

The Canes (20-17-5) did it for a fifth time Tuesday in a 4-3 victory over the Islanders at Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, N.Y. They now have 21 goals on 145 shots in the winning streak -- 14.5 percent -- despite being outshot in three of the five games. The Islanders had 31 shots to Carolina's 24.

Talk about timely goals. While the first period wasn't the Canes best, it ended with a centering pass from Micheal Ferland hitting forward Greg McKegg in front of the net, the puck then nicking the skate of Islanders defenseman Adam Pelech and sliding past goalie Thomas Greiss.

In the Canes' first three games against the Isles this year, all Carolina losses, Greiss was nearly flawless, nearly impenetrable, allowing three goals. In the first period Tuesday, he gave up a goal to rookie forward Saku Maenalanen -- the Finn's first in the NHL -- and then the McKegg goal with six seconds left in the period as Carolina took a 2-1 lead to the locker room.

Brind'Amour said the game would test his team's mental toughness and it did. With the score tied 2-2 late in the third, the Isles had a power play after a Justin Williams penalty but the Canes killed it off and Williams scored soon after leaving the penalty box. The Canes then scored on a power play, Jaccob Slavin with the shot, for a 4-2 lead.

After a stretch when the Canes went seven games without a power-play goal, they have scored five during the winning streak. They've allowed three power-play goals but picked up a shorthanded goal from Brock McGinn in the 5-4 road win Sunday against the Ottawa Senators.

The Canes' mental toughness also was tested in that game. A 4-2 lead quickly evaporated but a power-play goal by Williams won it.

Williams said he likes the confident vibe the team has, saying, "It's good because we haven't really played our best hockey yet we're finding ways to win games. That's what good teams do. Hopefully we'll wind it up and be better next game."

Carolina Hurricanes' Dougie Hamilton (19) celebrates his goal against the Ottawa Senators with teammates Brock McGinn (23) and Sebastian Aho (20) during second-period NHL hockey play in Ottawa, Ontario, Sunday, Jan. 6, 2019.

The Canes' next game is against the best team in the NHL in terms of record (33-8-2) and points (68) -- the Tampa Bay Lightning, who are 18-4-0 at home. That will finish up a three-game road trip for Carolina in which the Canes have continued to play without center Jordan Staal, who is recovering from concussion symptoms.

Staal has been out since Dec. 22, when he left the game against the Pittsburgh Penguins. He was first sidelined with a concussion for five games, returned to play against Detroit and then the Penguins, and now has missed the past eight games.

Brind'Amour has often noted how much the Canes miss the veteran forward, their best checking center and face-off man. Staal's absence has caused center Lucas Wallmark to take on more of that defensive responsibility and Wallmark, for the most part, has handled it well.

Center Clark Bishop, recalled Dec. 26 from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL, was injured during the Jan. 3 game at Philadelphia -- a 5-3 Canes win. That resulted in McKegg being called up from the Checkers.

Talk about an instant impact. McKegg had a goal and assist, and was named the game's first star in his first game, a 4-2 win over Columbus on Friday. Moved up to center the third line Tuesday, he also had a goal and assist against the Islanders in the third game since his recall from the Checkers.

The defense also has done its part in finding the net. Dougie Hamilton, frustrated offensively much of the season, scored in three straight games and Slavin has goals in the past two.

"Our D need to be on the scoresheet," Brind'Amour said of the defensemen.

The Canes continue to have the lowest shooting percentage in the league (7.6 percent). But they're 12th on the penalty kill and now tied for 22nd on the power play.

The goaltending, with Curtis McElhinney and Petr Mrazek, has been solid enough. The two have faced 146 shots during the winning streak, allowing 13 goals for a .917 save percentage.

The Canes need Staal back in the lineup but his return, after a concussion, remains indefinite. A week, two weeks, two months? No one can say.

That uncertainty makes Brind'Amour uneasy, but the Canes move on, as he said, trying to "scratch and claw our way back into it."

News Observer LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125138 NHL



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman says Seattle will get All-Star Game 'within seven years' of team launch

Originally published January 9, 2019 at 2:27 pm Updated January 9, 2019 at 7:18 PM

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, in a one-day visit to Seattle on Wednesday, vowed the league plans to bring some "big events" to KeyArena once it undergoes an \$850 million renovation so a team can play there starting October 2021.

Bettman met with members of the future team's ownership group, additional prospective investors and Mayor Jenny Durkan and toured the site of the team's planned \$70 million practice facility at Northgate Mall. Then, in an afternoon news conference at the Space Needle, he said the league has already promised the NHL Seattle group that the city will be awarded an All-Star Game and will likely get to stage either an entry or expansion draft before that.

"We've promised an All-Star Game to Seattle within seven years of playing," Bettman said. "It doesn't mean we're going to wait seven years. We've got to look at scheduling — both ours and in terms of the city's availability to host all of our guests in our hotels and everything. But we're going to be bringing big events here. This is where we want to be."

Bettman also said: "We're looking at when it would be appropriate to bring the draft here. Obviously, we need to have an expansion draft, so we're looking at the possibility."

The NHL Seattle group has also asked the league to stage an outdoor game. Bettman said the rainy weather could be an issue with that and — while not ruling anything out — seemed cool to the idea of holding it under the retractable open-air roof at T-Mobile Park.

An expansion draft would take place in June 2021 ahead of the Seattle team's first season. NHL Seattle president and CEO Tod Leiweke has been adamant he'd like to host the expansion draft as the Vegas Golden Knights did in 2017 before making their league debut.

Leiweke, seated next to Bettman and NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly on the podium Wednesday, said his group plans to put out a computer portal within 60 days where about 33,000 season-ticket deposit holders will get a detailed look at the timeline of how things with the team — including its name choice — are expected to progress.

"We're going to have them weigh in on all sorts of things," Leiweke said. "If I have my way, their fingerprints are going to be all over this franchise. Certainly team name, but they're going to help us build this up."

Bettman and Daly arrived in town just after midnight Wednesday and left for Las Vegas after the news conference. It was their first visit since the league last month awarded a team to a Seattle group headed by David Bonderman and Jerry Bruckheimer.

"If you talk about it in the terms of kicking the tires — the tires are in great shape," Bettman said. He added: "This is going to be great not just for Seattle but for the NHL as well."

Bettman said the league has long wanted to be in Seattle. During a 2014 visit here, he met with city leaders to gauge the time frame for completing a proposed arena in the city's Sodo District. But that proposed venue didn't materialize — nor did other proposals in 2015

for arenas in Bellevue or Tukwila — and the league went in to a yearslong holding pattern.

"The problem was there was no place to play," he said. "Lots of people came to us with notions or ideas to have a building and none of those buildings ever materialized."

That changed, he added, when Tim Leiweke and the Oak View Group proposed renovating KeyArena in 2016.

"The vision, with the reality of having a building that was actually going to happen is what made this possible."

Bettman said he's aware of the recent change in general contractors from Skanska Hunt to Mortenson and that costs of the renovation have ballooned up toward \$850 million — and \$1.5 billion when the team cost and practice facility at Northgate are factored in.

On that practice venue, with three sheets of public ice: "This is going to be a state-of-the-art facility, which will be good for the community."

Bettman said he'd toured the ticket preview center near KeyArena and that it's almost completed.

He added that he's excited to see the rest unfold. While he understands the local "frenzy" that's built up around what the team name will be, he cautioned that it can't be rushed.

"We need some lead time for the branding and creating a logo and an identity," Bettman said. "This is an era where trademarks, even in sports, but anywhere, there are a lot of hoops you have to jump through to make sure you've got a good trademark."

"So, they've got to come up with the branding that they're comfortable with. And I think they're going to go through a process that involves all the constituent groups. And then, they can come up with a name that they think is the greatest name ever and it will turn out that they can't trademark it."

"So, this is going to be a process that is going to take time to do it right. But it's got to be done right."

Seattle Times LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125139 NHL

NHL commissioner Bettman says new Seattle hockey team will host draft, all-star game within years

BY GREGG BELL

JANUARY 09, 2019 06:30 PM

SEATTLE

The NHL is bringing more than an expansion team to Seattle.

League commissioner Gary Bettman on Wednesday took the occasion of visiting Seattle and sitting inside the Space Needle, next to what will become the new hockey arena in Seattle Center, to promise the city will host the league's all-star game plus the draft in the coming years.

The puck drop for Seattle's still-to-be-named new NHL team will be in the fall of 2021.

"We've promised an all-star game to Seattle within seven years of playing. Doesn't mean we're going to wait seven years," Bettman said, sitting next to NHL Seattle chief executive officer Tod Leiweke



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

"We are going to be bringing league events here. This is where we want to be."

The draft date that makes sense to be in Seattle to kickoff its arrival in the league is the summer of 2021. That's when the new team will have its expansion draft to round out its roster four months ahead of its first game. In the past the expansion draft has been separate from the general player draft for all other NHL teams.

"We are looking at when it would be appropriate to bring the draft here," Bettman said. "Obviously, we need to have an expansion draft. So we are looking at the possibilities. Nothing has been decided (on a date)."

He did say the draft would come to Seattle before the All-Star game does.

The last time the league expanded, to Las Vegas, the NHL conducted its expansion draft over three days the week before the league's regular annual draft. The Vegas franchise's selections in that expansion draft were announced in Las Vegas two days before the general draft, in its city during the NHL's annual season awards ceremony.

Bettman and Leiweke met with the Seattle team's local ownership group. They met with Seattle mayor Jenny Durkan. They met with many among the tens of thousands who put down deposits on season tickets for the team's first season, within minutes of that opportunity becoming available online early last year.

Leiweke, the former president of the NHL's Minnesota Wild, the CEO of the Seahawks from 2007-10 and CEO of the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning from 2010-15, also detailed more for Bettman the new Seattle hockey team's training facility and headquarters.

"The mother of all training centers," as Leiweke called it. The facility will have three full-sized ice sheets for city- and recreational-league use in addition to the team's. The main sheet will have a seating capacity of 1,000.

The complex will be at Northgate, part of that mall's reinvention into a combined transit-living-shopping community along Interstate 5 north of downtown Seattle.

"It's one thing to tell a commissioner how good things are going to be," Leiweke said. "It's another thing to have that commissioner come to town, and kick the tires, and see what we are really talking about."

"And that's what's happened today."

Leiweke is absolutely intent to make the Seattle NHL team an integrated an invested member of the Puget Sound community.

One example of that is the portal he said the team will have up and running in about two months. Season-ticket depositors will be able to suggest and vote on the team name, see details and progress on arena plans, transportation projects for getting to and from its Seattle Center location and more.

"If I have my way their fingerprints will be all over this," Leiweke said of season-ticket depositors, calling them "the wings" that allowed this team to take off.

Also Wednesday, Leiweke did something not every sports executive would do. He had Bettman join him in meeting with workers and staff at Seattle Center and KeyArena, the people and building the NBA left behind 11 years ago. Leiweke thought that was important, to explain his vision for the team, the arena and the city park to the workers there who have been, as he put it, in limbo and "through a lot" since the Sonics left Seattle Center in 2008.

The longest-serving commissioner in sports sounded wowed by what he saw in Seattle Wednesday.

"You talk about in terms of 'kicking the tires,' Bettman said. "The tires are in great shape."

"We couldn't be more excited. When the (NHL's) board (of governors) made the decision to come to Seattle (this winter), we knew it was the right decision, that it would be a great decision. And everything that has transpired has not only lived up to expectation but has exceeded our expectations."

"We know as the arena gets built, as the team gets built, as the training center gets built and the connection with the community gets deeper, this is going to be great not just for Seattle but for the NHL, as well."

Bettman reiterated what the NHL announced on Dec. 4 when its board of governors unanimously approved Seattle to become its 32nd franchise: the Seattle team will get the same expansion rules Vegas got when it had its inaugural draft 19 months ago.

"It was important to us to ensure that every team in our league, including an expansion team, come in with a team that can be competitive," Bettman said.

"As with Vegas, the existing 30 teams—because Vegas doesn't participate—the prior 30 teams will be able to protect one goaltender and seven forwards and three defensemen, or one goaltender and eight skaters and players two years (in the league) or less don't have to be protected."

Those are the rules Vegas used to have the most wildly successful debut season in league history in 2017-18.

Using deft acquisitions and management from experienced hockey executives, Vegas advanced all the way to last summer's Stanley Cup finals in its first season.

"What happened, there were other things at play last year in Vegas," Bettman said.

He was referring chiefly to the killing of 58 people and injuring of more than 850 during a mass shooting into the Route 91 Harvest music festival along the Las Vegas Strip on Oct. 1, 2017.

That was nine days before Vegas played its inaugural home game in the city.

"There was a lot of energy and drive and emotion that wasn't typical (last season for Vegas). Although they are playing well this year," Bettman said.

"Who knows what's going to happen? There's a reason we play the games. But this team will have the opportunity, under the rules that were the same for Vegas, to accomplish whatever they are capable of. I have no doubt that the organization, from a hockey standpoint, that is going to be put together will be first-class in terms of development, scouting, training. And they are going to be able to compete."

Leiweke said nothing to discourage hockey fans in Western Washington from expecting something approaching Vegas-like success in the Seattle team's expansion season.

"We have great admiration for what they did there (in Vegas)," the former CEO of the Seahawks said. "And it didn't happen by chance. Commissioner Bettman has talked more than once about the tragedy that happened there about a week and a half before the puck dropped. And I don't think opening night was what they anticipated. But an amazing thing happened...That team, they owned..."

"That's why I love sports, and why I specifically love hockey. There's inspiration in this game, and they found it there..."

"I watch games every night. And I look and dream that, you know, some of those players are going to be wearing "SEATTLE" across their chests. And it's a pretty cool thing."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

News Tribune LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125140 NHL

Bettman: Seattle will host NHL draft and All-Star weekend

BY TIM BOOTH AP SPORTS WRITER

JANUARY 09, 2019 04:30 PM

SEATTLE

On his first trip to Seattle since the city was granted the NHL's 32nd franchise, Commissioner Gary Bettman announced a couple more rewards for the future franchise's investment.

Bettman said the league has promised Seattle it will host All-Star weekend within its first seven seasons, with the team slated to begin play in 2021-22. Bettman also says Seattle will host the NHL draft, and that event will likely be awarded before the All-Star Game arrives.

"It doesn't mean we are going to wait seven years," Bettman said. "We're going to be bringing league events here. This is where we want to be."

Bettman's unexpected and informal announcement was part of his first visit to Seattle since the franchise was approved by the league's Board of Governors in early December. Bettman met with members of the ownership group, political leaders in the city, fans who have placed deposits on season tickets and reviewed the status of the massive renovation of the arena at Seattle Center where the team will play.

Seattle's ownership group has put up over \$1.5 billion in expansion fees, upgrades to the building formerly known as KeyArena, and a state-of-the-art practice facility that is expected to open in time to host the first training camp.

"If you talk about in terms of kicking the tires, the tires are in great shape," Bettman said. "We couldn't be more excited. When the board made the decision to come to Seattle, we knew it was the right decision, it would be a great decision and everything that has transpired has not only lived up to expectation but has exceeded our expectations."

The franchise initially hoped to open for the 2020 season, but it is using the additional year to ensure the arena is operational well ahead of the team's home opener. It also gives the team more time to put together its hockey staff.

The team still doesn't have a name or color scheme. Bettman said the league would mostly stay out of the selection process, aside from working with the Seattle franchise in colors, trademarks and other logistical parts of the expansion name. Seattle team president and CEO Tod Leiweke said the goal is to have a name announced by the middle of 2019. The franchise will be taking major input from fans that have put deposits down on season tickets.

Leiweke said the team's goal is to have a portal launched within the next 60 days for season-ticket depositors to provide feedback and to inform them of the timeframe for decisions and announcements moving forward.

"If I have my way, their fingerprints are going to be all over this franchise. Certainly a team name, but they're going to help us build this," Leiweke said.

Some fans are hoping to see a return of the Seattle Metropolitan — a historic name in Seattle, since the Metropolitan won the Stanley Cup in 1917. That name might be off the table, though, since the NHL has a division with that name.

Bettman was asked if that name can be ruled out.

"Viscerally, yes," he said, "but I never say never to anything."

News Tribune LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125171 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning's Mikhail Sergachev puts together strong offensive performances

By Nick Kelly

TAMPA — For a while, it seemed as if the Mikhail Sergachev who tallied 40 points in 2017-18 was a thing of the past.

In the first 25 games of the season, Sergachev had seven points, none of which were goals.

The past 16 games have been a different story. Sergachev has picked up nine points, two of which came against Columbus on Tuesday. He scored his first goal of the season against San Jose this past Saturday.

One assist on Tuesday came via Sergachev pinching down low to set up Mathieu Joseph's goal, the first of the game.

Lightning coach Jon Cooper said this recent surge in points can serve as a confidence booster for Sergachev as the offensive production is lining up with the defensive production.

"It definitely wears on guys when you don't score," Cooper said. "He went 40-plus games without one, but it's not an indication of how he's been playing. A lot of times, guys judge themselves personally on how many points they have, but that's not how coaches judge them. He has improved so much on his own end in the way he has played."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125172 Tampa Bay Lightning

The Lightning is a runaway success. Now comes the hard part.

By Martin Fennelly

TAMPA — The Lightning blew the roof off the NHL in the first half of the season. Tampa Bay is 33-8-2 with 68 points, just off a 15-0-1 stretch that had it on track to approach season records for wins and points.

Now comes the hard part.

There is less than half a season left. The Lightning began its second half with a 5-2 loss in San Jose. Bolts Nation, thoroughly spoiled, is in a slight panic. Its heroes have allowed five goals in three of their past six games, though they won two of those three.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

Everyone needs to get it through their frozen skulls that the first half was a dream.

"It was unrealistic," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "It was unreal."

But just what will this team do with itself the rest of the way, which amounts to three months of a regular season, save for a week sabbatical and the All-Star break? The Lightning entered Wednesday 10 points better than anyone else in hockey. It has the best home record in the NHL and the best road record. Anyplace feels like home when you're 33-8-2.

The Lightning has been so good that we're already on to the next thing: winning the Stanley Cup.

Does this team have a choice at this point? And how does it make use of the rest of the way, which began Tuesday with a 4-0 win over coach John Tortorella and the Columbus Blue Jackets at Amalie Arena.

The Lightning wanted to make a statement and back up goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy. Check, and check. #TBLightning #GoBolts @TBLightning #BlueJackets @BlueJacketsNHL @dianacnearhos @TB_Times <https://t.co/7Lt34xplab>

— TampaBayTimesSports (@TBTimes_Sports) January 9, 2019

"I think it will be hard to maintain that level," Cooper said. "There are a lot of good teams in this league we haven't played yet. I think our schedule gets a little bit tougher down the stretch. But for us, it's all about making the playoffs. That's the process, to get there in the end."

I've got news for the Lightning: It's already in the playoffs. It's just a matter of whether it loses a few games to keep the fear up heading into the postseason.

RELATED: Tampa Bay Lightning schedule

Maybe the Lightning needs it. Case in point: The Washington Capitals had the most points in the league two and three seasons ago. It didn't matter in the playoffs, as they fell to the Pittsburgh Penguins both times in the second round. Last season the Caps were good, but the Lightning was better — and was bumped off by Washington in the Eastern Conference final. That was supposed to be the Lightning's year. Remember?

Now here we go again.

Hey, guys, lose a few, will you?

"If we lost a bunch in a row, everyone will go 'What's wrong with them?'" Cooper said, grinning.

"I don't know if you need to top the first half, record wise," defenseman Anton Stralman said. "It's about the closeness of the team, how we grow as a team. It's how we play our game and how we prepare ourselves for the playoffs."

But how does this team maintain a fighting edge through the sled-dog days? Cooper the people manager has his work cut out for him.

At a recent Lightning game, I talked to Hall of Fame coach Scotty Bowman, the king of runway trains. Bowman's Montreal Canadiens won the Stanley Cup from 1976 to 1979 and lost only 46 games in those four seasons. I asked Bowman how those Montreal teams stayed razor sharp all the way through.

Bowman answered without blinking.

"We had (10) Hall of Famers," he said.

Oh, yeah.

But down the hall at Amalie on Tuesday was another expert: former Lightning coach Tortorella. After succinctly analyzing the Blue Jackets' season as only he can ("Up and down like a toilet seat") Tortorella considered Cooper and the Lightning's dilemma.

Tortorella has a unique perspective, having won the Cup here in 2004. The Lightning didn't lead the league in points but won the Eastern Conference on the strength of a 10-0-1 stretch from late February to mid March. They got after it.

John Tortorella thinks Martin St. Louis would make a "really good" NHL coach. #TBLightning #GoBolts @tblightning @mstlouis_26 #BlueJackets @BlueJacketsNHL @TB_Times @_nickkelly <https://t.co/mdNwYyuO64>

— TampaBayTimesSports (@TBTimes_Sports) January 9, 2019

"That was a really young team, a young coaching staff at that time," Tortorella said. "I thought our guys were going to be in at 11 o'clock at night. I thought they were asleep in bed. As I find, as I have get-togethers with them, they were out, and they were going hard off the ice, too. So, who the hell knows? We didn't know what we were doing. We were just playing."

"We had a strut about ourselves, an arrogance about ourselves, that far outreached X's and O's. That's very important, especially with today's athlete. It's about that strut, that certain type of arrogance. We had it then. And it carried us through."

Tortorella added, "Two years ago, (the Blue Jackets) went on a run. We won 16 games in a row. The way I looked at that when we were going on that run, I knew we weren't playing very good games, that we were getting sloppy. I wasn't sure where to go. Leave them alone, they were feeling good about themselves, or knock them down and start teaching structure. You have to ask 'Coop.' I don't know how he feels about it. But when we were going through it, not at (the Lightning's) level, but pretty close, I was fighting myself. Do I coach them, or do I ride the wave? I chose to ride it."

"I don't want to speak for (the Lightning). But to me, I think you need to go through some tough times during the regular season. Come playoff time, I don't think it's a bad thing to have had some bad runs during the regular season. It's a long year. You can't always be perfect. Your guys have to be tested. Your leadership group has to be tested (about) how to get (out) of some situations when you do get in trouble."

Scary thing: The Lightning has already been through some tough times this season, losing defenseman Victor Hedman for eight games, then goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy for 14 games. The Lightning went 12-2-0 without Vasilevskiy.

"I think the boys feel like they have something special going on here. They don't want to screw it up," Cooper said.

Tortorella smiled.

"I hope they get their (butt) kicked (Tuesday night), if you're asking me."

The Lightning is back in the win column.

But be brave, Lightning fans. There still may be hope.

"Who knows, we might hit a 16-game losing streak," Stralman said.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125173 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning blocked all kinds of shots against Columbus

By Diana Nearhos



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

TAMPA — Block the shot or clear the lane. D Ryan McDonagh didn't put it quite so succinctly, but that was the point he got across.

Those were the two options for defensemen as they tried to give G Andrei Vasilevskiy better support against the Blue Jackets in the Lightning's 4-0 win Tuesday.

"We're obviously thinking about (supporting Vasilevskiy) and trying to block as many shots as we can, trying to get in lanes," D Mikhail Sergachev said. "(The Blue Jackets) have a good group of (defensemen) and good forwards who can shoot the puck. We tried to block as many as we can."

The Lightning did a lot that in the win. It blocked 22 shots, led by D Dan Girardi and D Anton Stralman with four apiece. LW Ondrej Palat led the forwards with three, more than you'd expect from a top-line forward not on the penalty kill.

"It's just kind of the way the game shaped up," McDonagh said about the high number of blocked shots. "We have guys that are willing; we know that. Ideally we don't want to give up that many (shot) attempts. But if we have to, it's a good sign that we're in the right lane there, blocking those and helping 'Vasy' out there."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125174 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning-Blue Jackets: Rewinding Tampa Bay's shutout win

By Nick Kelly

TAMPA — The Lightning left the losing in San Jose.

Tampa Bay responded with a 4-0 victory over Columbus on Tuesday, after losing 5-2 to the Sharks on Saturday.

Here are some odds and ends from the game:

Another game, another Nikita Kucherov record. He was the first player to hit 70 points in 43 games since Jaromir Jagr did it in 38 games in the 1999-2000 season. He's the fastest player to do it in Lightning history. Martin St. Louis took 53 games in 2006-07. He is also the 10th player in NHL history to tally 50 assist within the first 43 games of the season. It's the first time since 1995-96. Kucherov is in good company. The four players to reach that mark in that season: Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Jaromir Jagr and Ron Francis.

Vasilevskiy moves into a tie for second-place on the Lightning's all-time shutout list. His 14 shutouts tied Nikolai Khabibulin. Ben Bishop holds the No. 1 spot with 17. To earn the shutout Tuesday, Vasilevskiy had to make 31 saves, 17 of which came in the second period.

Up and down like a toilet seat. That's how Columbus coach John Tortorella described his team before the game. Forget the normal rollercoaster metaphor. Tortorella is creating the cliches of the future. Tuesday was a down day for the Blue Jackets.

Domination continues. The Lightning improved to 11-0-0 against the Metropolitan Division. It is also the second win this season over the Blue Jackets, whom the Lightning has out-scored 12-2. It's also the Lightning's fifth consecutive victory over Columbus and the third shutout over that span.

More goals for the rookie. Mathieu Joseph scored the first goal of the game when he tapped in a Mikhail Sergachev pass to the front of the net in the first period. The goal bumped Joseph from third to second on the NHL rookie goal list with 11. He is tied for second with Carolina's Andrei Svechnikov.

It's not just millennials, folks. The Lightning debuted the Oblivious Cam on Tuesday, looking for fans who had no idea they were on camera, and it was a hit. The camera operator got a pair of middle-aged men on their phones with no clue for a good 15 seconds.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125175 Tampa Bay Lightning

Smitty's Seven: How Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy got his groove back

By Joe Smith Jan 9, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — The Lightning's streak-snapping loss in San Jose was barely over Saturday night, yet it seemed like Andrei Vasilevskiy's work had just begun.

The Tampa Bay goaltender had just given up five goals, including a couple of softies by his standards. And after a seven-day, three-game West Coast trip, it would have been understandable for Vasilevskiy to just shower, change and get the heck out of there.

But here was Vasilevskiy doing sit-ups and other postgame exercises in the hallway of the dressing room.

He was ticked off.

For a competitor who hates giving up goals in practice, allowing that many did not sit well with the reigning Vezina Trophy finalist. Vasilevskiy didn't want to wait long for another shot.

"You always want to bounce back and show guys you're accountable," goalie coach Frantz Jean said. "And make sure you come back with a solid performance."

The Lightning started Vasilevskiy for the seventh straight game Tuesday night against Columbus. Part of that was due to the spaced-out schedule, but part of it was also to get their No. 1 goalie back into a rhythm. It had been a struggle for Vasilevskiy since he returned in early December after missing a month with a fractured foot.

That's why Tuesday's brilliant performance by the Russian was so encouraging. Vasilevskiy made 31 saves in a 4-0 victory over the Blue Jackets, his second shutout of the season.

On the same day Vasilevskiy was named a replacement on the Atlantic Division's NHL All-Star team, he showed precisely why he's so deserving. Vasilevskiy was in control. He bailed out the Lightning when they were outshot 17-3 in the second period. And he closed it out.

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

It's not like the Lightning, now in a remarkable 16-1-1 stretch, were worried about Vasilevskiy, who has been their backbone the past few seasons. But it was important for the 24-year-old to feel good about himself and to get back into that groove for the second half of the season.

You could tell right away Tuesday that Vasilevskiy was on his game. He was at his best in a 17-save second period, including his point-blank stops on Columbus star Artemi Panarin. They were both game-changing.

"He played great," Blue Jackets All-Star defenseman Seth Jones said. "He's a big guy in there, tough to score on him, tough to get the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

puck by him. He takes up a lot of space around the ice and the lower half of the net. We had some pretty good looks around the crease and the hashmark areas. That save on (Panarin) really stood out.... If we score that goal, who knows with the pressure we have in the second? That was a huge save — kind of the turning point of the game.”

In previous games, Vasilevskiy had some issues with shots from long distances. Anytime you miss an extended period, timing can be tricky — and seeing pucks can be, too. Case in point was this Evander Kane goal from Saturday that went through traffic.

“It is reads; making sure you make the right reads,” Jean said. “There’s so many little details you have to pick up: Who is shooting? What side is he on? Reading the puck off the blade, seeing options he has. Who is the passer? Who is the shooter? It takes a couple games to get that back. So we wanted to make sure he had the opportunity to really jump in the water and get swimming again real quick.”

The Lightning also did their best to help Vasilevskiy out. Teammates did a better job of boxing out to clear out shooting lanes and blocked some dangerous shots, like Ryan McDonagh’s on Jones in the first period. Vasilevskiy didn’t have to face as many grade-A chances.

“We work on it in practice, boxing out,” McDonagh said. “San Jose did a good job of having guys cross in front and taking away his eyes and pucks hitting bodies. You just try and clear that lane. If you’re not going to block the shot, at least clear the lane so he can see it. If he’s able to see the puck in traffic, he’s going to gobble it up and not create a rebound, which he did a bunch of times tonight. It’s tough to do at times, but our group is working on it and we’ve got to continue to get better at it.”

Coaches were eager to see how the Lightning responded after losing their first game in regulation since Nov. 27. It would be natural to have a letdown, especially coming off a long road trip. But players took it to heart, and had an “exceptional” first period, according to coach Jon Cooper, before needing some help from Vasilevskiy. Players say knowing Vasilevskiy is there, in that zone, gives them an added sense of security.

“He’s feeling it,” defenseman Mikhail Sergachev said. “When you have Vasilevskiy behind you, sometimes you can risk it. That’s why we’re having success: We can play risky and still play good defense.”

Vasilevskiy’s numbers are worthy of an All-Star selection: 17-4-2 with a 2.55 goals-against average and a .923 save percentage. But Vasilevskiy was surprised to get the nod, replacing injured Canadiens star Carey Price.

“I think I got lucky on that one,” Vasilevskiy said. “Obviously our team is playing really well this season. That’s probably the only reason why I get to play there.”

But teammates know better.

“He’s super-competitive, super-focused and every day it’s a 24/7 job for him,” McDonagh said. “He doesn’t take a day off. Even if we’re not coming to the rink that day, he’s doing a great job taking care of himself, and you want your goaltender to do that. It makes you play so much harder for him. But I just like that he keeps that even-keel focus about him, and maybe if it doesn’t go his way in one game, he doesn’t change up his routine in practice. He continues to battle and take shots and comes with a positive attitude come game time.”

Another level

Nikita Kucherov had his career-high 12-game points streak snapped Saturday. So how did he respond on Tuesday? With a goal and an assist, giving him 71 points in the season’s first 43 games.

Kucherov, coming off a career-best 100-point season, is on pace to shatter that. He is now in some elite company, too, the first player to

hit 70 points in 43 games since Jaromir Jagr did it in 38 games in the 1999-2000 season. He’s the fastest player to do it in Lightning history (Martin St. Louis took 53 games in 2006-07). Only four others have reached 50 assists in the first 43 games since 1995-96. The others? Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Jagr and Ron Francis.

We broke down last week how his elite hockey mind helps set Kucherov apart. And we got his friend, Columbus star Artemi Panarin, to break down his game.

What shouldn’t be lost in this is that Lightning fans are witnessing a truly special season for Kucherov. At this point, Kucherov’s eight-year extension signed in July worth \$9.5 million AAV will end up being a bargain.

FEWEST TEAM GAMES TO 70 POINTS – LAST 20 SEASONS

1999-00 JAROMIR JAGR 39

2018-19 NIKITA KUCHEROV43

2006-07 SIDNEY CROSBY46

1998-99 JAROMIR JAGR 46 PIC.TWITTER.COM/IF0YBWBSZN

— BUCCI MANE (@BUCCIGROSS) JANUARY 9, 2019

Sergachev’s swag

When defenseman Mikhail Sergachev scored his first goal of the season Saturday in San Jose, it might have given him the spark he needed. Sergachev, 20, joked that he felt like he’d never score again.

Well, one game after Sergachev’s first tally, he made a highlight-reel setup on Mathieu Joseph’s goal Tuesday. Sergachev made his trademark dangle at the blueline to create space and then drove toward the net before dropping a backhand pass.

It could be the breakthrough Sergachev needed.

“I feel a lot better after that goal, more confidence,” Sergachev said. “I see different plays now, for some reason.”

Lightning fans had fun with Sergachev’s slick move, looking for good nicknames for it.

ALRIGHT PEOPLE. WE NEED A NAME FOR MIKHAIL SERGACHEV’S SIGNATURE MOVE. SOME SUGGESTIONS:

THE MISHA SHAKE

BLUE LINE JUKE

THE CHEVY SHIMMY

— TYLER MOORE (@THEREVTV) JANUARY 9, 2019

Medical matters

Ryan Callahan was scratched Tuesday after Cooper said he “re-aggravated something.” Callahan is listed as day to day.

Callahan had his back lock up on him during the mid-December trip to western Canada, forcing him to miss a couple of games. So that could be it. Either way, Danick Martel got to play, and he did well in limited minutes (plus-1, three shots in 12:35 of ice time).

With J.T. Miller (upper body) participating in another team skate Tuesday (in a regular jersey) and getting closer to a return, the Lightning will have to make a roster decision soon to make room. So it was good to get another look at Martel, who would have to clear waivers to get sent down to Syracuse in the AHL. Slater Koekoek’s conditioning assignment in Syracuse ends this weekend, too, so he’ll be back.

Trade talk



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

With the trade deadline a month and a half away (Feb. 25), our Craig Custance wrote a very interesting, well-reported piece on the top 20 players who could be moved. It's worth looking at.

That said, it is unclear whom the Lightning might be targeting at this point. As GM Julien BriseBois said a few weeks ago, there are not many needs at this point.

"We're always looking for ways to improve," BriseBois said. "We need to be diligent and can't leave any stone unturned. I am talking to other teams, trying to see what's out there. If something can make us better short-term, medium-term ... if something does pop up that makes sense, I'd do it. I don't know what that would be. I can't say right now, 'I'm not looking to do this.'"

"Earlier in the year, I was looking at the deadline and could see us maybe adding a right-shot defenseman to add depth in case we had injuries. But Erik Cernak has taken that role, so now that's less of a priority. (The depth) makes it harder for us to do something that would make sense or that would make our organization stronger because right now, we're ... scoring a lot. It just makes it hard to find something that makes sense."

On Point

There are a few more days to vote for Brayden Point as the "last man in" for the NHL All-Star Game (voting ends Thursday at 11:59 p.m). Point put on one heck of a performance Tuesday, with two goals, an assist and a plus-3 (he won 69 percent of his faceoffs).

To vote for the "last man in," go to www.nhl.com/vote.

Quote of the day

"It's hard to tell with 'Vasy' because every game he's locked in. His competitiveness is unbelievable."

— Brayden Point on if he could tell Vasilevskiy was on his game early Tuesday

The Athletic LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125067 Buffalo Sabres

Longtime Sabres executive Mike Gilbert, HarborCenter VP Nik Fattey resign

Mike Harrington | Published Wed, Jan 9, 2019

Longtime Buffalo Sabres executive Michael Gilbert has resigned as senior vice president of administration and general manager of HarborCenter, the team announced Wednesday.

"Terry and I would like to personally thank Mike for his 21 years of commitment to the Buffalo Sabres, and for his dedication to the growth of amateur hockey in Western New York. We wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors," Sabres co-owner and president Kim Pegula said in a statement.

The resignation of Gilbert, a Tonawanda native who joined the Sabres in 1997, comes on the heels of the departure of Nik Fattey, who served as the general manager of the Buffalo Beauts of the National Women's Hockey League as well as the vice president and director of hockey at HarborCenter. A source confirmed Wednesday that Fattey resigned on Tuesday but insisted the two departures are unrelated.

Gilbert, who joined the Sabres after two years with the New Jersey Devils, served in a variety of roles with the club. He was the team's longtime director of public relations and its most prominent media contact before transitioning to a vice president role in 2011 and his new jobs with HarborCenter in 2016.

In a statement also issued through the Sabres, Gilbert said he was looking at other job prospects.

"I would like to thank Terry and Kim Pegula for all they have done for my family and me over the past eight years," Gilbert said. "I would also like to thank all of the Sabres and HarborCenter employees, as well as all of the players, coaches and hockey staff that I have worked with during my 21 years at the Buffalo Sabres. I believe now is the best time for me to explore some other opportunities in the private sector here in my hometown of Buffalo."

Gilbert did not respond to text messages from The Buffalo News. His community endeavors included a spot on the Buffalo Place board of trustees.

"I am shocked. Mike is a great guy, and was great to sit with and work with on the Buffalo Place board," said local architect and fellow board member Steve Carmina. "I hope whatever he's doing and wherever he's going, he lands on his feet."

Said developer and board member Carl Paladino: "He was a good guy. Mike Gilbert's one of the big stand-up guys for Buffalo."

Gilbert was assistant director of public relations for the Philadelphia Eagles from 1991-1995 and had spent three years with the Buffalo Bills (1988-1990) as a graduate assistant while a student at Canisius College. Gilbert became Terry Pegula's right-hand man for PR during the quest to buy the Bills and escorted the Pegulas to the NFL owners meetings in New York when their \$1.4 billion purchase of the team was finalized in October, 2014.

Gilbert also operated the public and community relations departments of the Sabres and Bandits, supervising the youth hockey and fan development initiatives of the organizations. He also helped the lead the organization's effort to bring the IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship to Buffalo last year.

But the efforts of Gilbert and the local organizing team for that event were sharply criticized. High ticket prices, unsold ticket packages and brutally cold weather combined to produce thousands of empty seats in KeyBank Center for many games, a major departure from the sold-out crowds when the World Juniors were here in 2011.

Gilbert was currently a key cog in the organizing group for the NCAA Frozen Four, which is slated to return to Buffalo for the first time since 2003 when it's held in KeyBank Center on April 11 and 13.

Gilbert is a graduate of St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute. His nephew, Dennis, was also a St. Joe's grad and was a third-round draft pick of the Chicago Blackhawks in 2015 out of Notre Dame. Dennis Gilbert is currently playing for the Rockford IceHogs in the AHL.

Buffalo News LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125068 Buffalo Sabres

C.J. Smith scores first NHL goal; now he wants to remain with Sabres

Jason Wolf | Published Wed, Jan 9, 2019

C.J. Smith always dreamed about scoring his first NHL goal.

But he never pictured it quite like this, the puck dribbling in slow motion past New Jersey Devils goalie Keith Kinkaid, it momentarily coming to rest just inside the far post, a question rippling through the arena as to whether defenseman Sami Vatanen had dug it out with his stick before it crossed the goal line. Smith had no doubt.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

"When I shot it and went behind the net there, I saw it was in," Smith said. "It's kind of funny, nobody else really knew it was in, so I kind of celebrated by myself there. But it felt good."

The shot, called a goal on the ice and upheld on review, gave the Buffalo Sabres a 2-1 lead 4:14 into the second period and helped spark an explosive and unanswered five-goal middle stanza, as the Sabres buried the Devils in an avalanche of secondary scoring, 5-1, Tuesday night at KeyBank Center, no small feat without injured captain Jack Eichel.

Buffalo has been preaching about the importance of secondary scoring since its 10-game win streak ended in late November. The Sabres have since mustered a 6-8-4 record while hanging on to playoff positioning. The Sabres scored five goals on 15 shots in the second period against the Devils. Jeff Skinner's blast to put Buffalo on the board was followed by goals from Smith, Casey Mittelstadt, Jake McCabe and Lawrence Pilut, Smith's roommate in Rochester who also recorded his first NHL goal Tuesday night.

No one I'd rather share it with! Roommates in roch and now scoring our first together. Congrats buddy! @LPilut <https://t.co/lzH0k3i2Vt>

— CJ Smith (@_CJ_Smith_) January 9, 2019

"We know what he can do," Johan Larsson said of Smith after centering the Sabres' third line between the rookie and veteran forward Kyle Okposo. "He's a smart hockey player and you can see he's got skills. He's a guy who knows where to go on the ice, works hard and it was nice to see him rewarded with a first goal."

It was the Sabres' most prolific period at home in a decade – since they scored five in the third period against Carolina on Nov. 28, 2009. They had scored only 15 goals in their previous eight games.

Smith, 24, was playing in just his fourth game since being called up from Rochester to make his season debut against the New York Islanders on New Year's Eve after Zengus Girgensons had been placed on injured reserve. At the time, Smith led all Rochester forwards in scoring with 29 points, 13 goals and 16 assists in 33 games.

The Sabres hoped Smith would provide a spark, and though he'd been skating well, he hadn't done much, recording six shots in three games before taking the ice Tuesday night.

Smith attempted three shots against the Devils, two of them on goal, one ricocheting off the post on the first shift of the game.

Buffalo Sabres 5, New Jersey Devils 1

"I just think he attacked the game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "I think everybody was in attack mode and paying attention to detail when the puck got turned over. They're one of those teams that a possession change in the offensive zone, they're getting out to attack. But I just liked (how) he was poised, he was composed, he found a way to get that one by Kinkaid, and it was a big goal, the second (Sabres) goal of the game, and it's good to see him contribute."

Smith signed with the Sabres as an undrafted free agent out of UMass Lowell in March 2017. He had 56 goals in three seasons in college and was named to the Hockey East All-Rookie Team in 2015.

Smith appeared in two games with the Sabres to end the 2016-17 season, recording his first NHL point on an assist in his debut against the Islanders, and had starred for Rochester ever since.

Last season, Smith tied for the Amerks' team lead with 17 goals. His 44 points were tied for 10th among AHL rookies. And he was named MVP of the league's All-Star Classic.

This was despite missing more than a month with an ankle injury that continued to hamper his production over the final 15 regular-season games and playoffs.

"I worked really hard to get back here in Buffalo and I think I had a good season in Roch last year, with a little injury that hurt me along the way," Smith said. "But you know what? You've got to stay positive and keep working and I came out to a hot start in Roch this year and we were playing really well, and I was excited to get the call-up and get that first goal."

Smith signed a one-year contract extension with the Sabres in July and participated in training camp before being assigned to Rochester.

It's possible Smith will be sent back as soon as Friday should Eichel return from an upper body injury that has caused him to miss the last three games. But Smith intends to stay.

"I've got to do whatever I can to help contribute to the team, help them win," Smith said. "Some nights that may not be scoring, but I've just got to do whatever I can to stay up, and that's my goal for the rest of the year."

Buffalo News LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125069 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres' Scott Wilson clears waivers, assigned to Rochester

Jason Wolf | Published Wed, Jan 9, 2019

Scott Wilson cleared waivers and was assigned to Rochester for a conditioning assignment on Wednesday, the Buffalo Sabres announced.

The forward, who hasn't played since breaking his ankle during a late September practice, was expected to be medically cleared for game action this week. The Amerks host the defending Calder Cup champion Toronto Marlies on Friday at 7:05 p.m. at Blue Cross Arena.

Wilson, 26, resumed practicing with the Sabres, but he has not played in an NHL regular-season game since April 7, 2018. He had six goals and 14 points with a minus-20 rating in 69 games between Pittsburgh, Detroit and Buffalo last season.

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

The Amerks assigned Judd Peterson to Cincinnati of the ECHL to make room for Wilson.

Buffalo News LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125070 Buffalo Sabres

In three games without Jack Eichel, Sabres stick to keeping it simple

By Joe Yerdon Jan 9, 2019

Anytime an NHL team loses a key player to injury, it's going to challenge the resolve in the locker room. When a team like the Sabres loses a player of Jack Eichel's caliber, it could downright swing the psyche of the entire roster.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

The Sabres have played the past three games without Eichel due to an upper-body injury and while he's on track to return Friday in Raleigh against the Carolina Hurricanes, figuring out how to win and balance the lineup without him has been a test for coach Phil Housley.

Although the lineups changed through each game, the message was the same: Keep it simple.

Keeping an uncomplicated game plan when there's still Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart (despite an illness nearly keeping him out against the Devils on Tuesday) is a little easier, but losing the dynamic play of a guy like Eichel is hard to overcome even for a team that's dealt with losing him for an extended time in each of the previous two seasons.

Sticking to simplicity makes sense in theory, but can be made more difficult under the circumstances. The playoff race has tightened up in the Eastern Conference and since the Sabres' 10-game win streak, success has mellowed out (6-8-4) and the goals have been a little harder to come by.

"There's only one Jack Eichel and there's nobody here trying to play like him, just I think as a group, knowing your role and guys are going to get bigger roles now continuing to strive for the opportunity to play more," defenseman Zach Bogosian said. "I don't think guys think about it too, too much but everyone knows there's only one Jack and he's a real special player... I think it's just important that we play a team-structured game."

Clichés run rampant when players are asked about how they deal with losing a star player. Players know they have to "play a team game" or "get pucks in deep and go to work" and stress the need to "put in a full 60 minutes." You'll hear that kind of stuff even if a star player is in the lineup, but when a point-per-game player goes out, the game is about "keeping things simple." But what does that even mean?

"If you're facing different forechecks, neutral zone forechecks, part of game plan is managing that part of the game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said Tuesday morning. "Obviously we want to get back as five and break out, we want to transition quickly and there are times that we can't, but we have to pull it back, there might be a line change. But from that point we have a set plan that when that happens we've got to make the right decisions and we have to execute."

Star players can dictate how much of the game is played on their whim. Great teamwork can nullify their effects, but for a player to simplify their game means different things depending on their position.

"For me it's moving my feet and making the next play and being aggressive when I do get my opportunities. For some guys it's chipping a puck out, for some defensemen it's making a first pass, it's just different things," right wing Kyle Okposo said. "When you're kind of in that zone and you're playing at that high level like someone like Eichel has been the whole year, things are just coming to him. They're coming to him naturally and you just find yourself in that zone and it's not an easy place to get to as an athlete. That's something you have to work at and then you play well and then you find yourself in it. For most guys, you kind of go through those peaks and valleys, but you have to stay as even-keeled as possible and keep it simple when times aren't going well and just play when you're having success. I think it's different for everybody."

When it comes to defensemen, keeping it simple can just mean playing the game as straight up as possible and doing your best to not be noticed by anyone. After all, if you're getting noticed as a defenseman it's generally not for positive reasons. That's how things used to be though. The Sabres have had more success this season from the blue line seeing guys jump into the play and take risks offensively. Still, knowing your role and doing your job has been something this year's Sabres have made their mantra.

"The players that are out, they have the potential to make some real high-end plays and with high-end plays their risk/reward... they can probably execute those a little better than some guys," Bogosian said. "I think it's just getting back to our team game knowing that we're not going to be having a few of those guys in the lineup that are used to making those big time plays and maybe we can simplify it a little bit and have a good team structured game."

Younger players sometimes don't get a lot of leeway in how they're supposed to play, especially if they're adjusting to the NHL on the job.

"You want to be able to make plays, but if there's no play to be made, not forcing it," forward Tage Thompson said. "If there's nothing there, you've got to be smart with the puck and manage it at times in the games. Playing simple is making sure to get pucks out of your zone and getting pucks behind their 'D' and when you have a chance to make a play, make a play. I think it all comes down to execution, but yeah, you don't want to force things that aren't there."

If Tuesday's 5-1 win against the Devils was any indication, the message worked. While the Sabres struggled for a good part of a 2-1 loss to the Bruins, they took care of business against the Panthers in a 4-3 win as well.

Going 2-1-0 with Eichel out of the lineup is a good sign for a team that is lacking in NHL-ready depth. Seeing five different players score a goal and 14 in all earn points against New Jersey shows that the message of simplicity got through.

"This was exactly like (what I'd draw up)," Housley said after the game. "(New Jersey) is very good in the neutral zone and their checking and it was just a straight-line north-south mindset tonight and I think the guys did a really good job of that just managing in that area. When we did get pucks behind them, everybody was getting up the ice; even our 'D' would slide the walls to keep pucks in the offensive zone. Simplicity in our game was really important tonight."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125071 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres prospects update: Luukkonen shows gold medal mettle at World Juniors

By Kris Baker Jan 9, 2019

The 2019 IIHF World Junior Championship was a meaningful experience for its various participants, but for Sabres goaltending hopeful Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (2017, second round), it was all about redemption.

A year removed from the 2018 event in Buffalo where Luukkonen performed lukewarm at best with an .879 save%, the prized prospect progressed by posting a 5-1 record, 1.80 GAA, and radically improved .932 save% to backstop Finland to their third gold medal in the last six years.

The erudite Luukkonen, who missed the opening week of the Ontario Hockey League season to attend to educational obligations back home in Finland, graded out highly in five of his six appearances at the tournament. His weakest outing came in a 4-1 loss to the U.S. when he had a few lapses with his tracking that allowed pucks to get through him and saw his large five-hole exposed by the American shooters in the final game of group play.

That learning experience against Team USA set the stage for a test of his bounce-back ability, one which he passed with flying colors by



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

stopping a combined 40 of 42 shots in quarterfinal and semifinal victories over Canada and Switzerland, and culminating with a stellar 26-save outing as the Finns exacted revenge against the Americans with a 3-2 victory in the gold medal game.

Luukkonen's calmness and poise was put on display in overtime of the quarterfinal matchup with Canada when he held firm and did not sink deep into his crease when flashing the right leg to stop Maxime Comtois (ANA) on a penalty shot. One could sense that the Finns were the favorite to claim gold once that save was made.

When drafted two summers ago, Luukkonen was an aggressive netminder with a need to scramble less. Now he is one that exhibits exceptional positioning. The training he's received has him getting his full body squared to the shooter, limiting instances of reaching and flopping to make a stop. While it would be beneficial for him to become a shade quicker moving post-to-post, he's become much less susceptible to getting beat on backdoor plays.

The biggest takeaway from Luukkonen's game, though, is that he's become a large goalie that can play compact. That's not always an easy task, yet he is starting to introduce some of the same elements that fellow big-bodied Finn Pekka Rinne has leveraged to become one of the most successful netminders of the last decade.

With his game clearly progressing and the big international win on his resume, the next steps for Luukkonen involve him resuming his excellence back in Sudbury, where he is ranked among the top five goaltenders in wins, goals against average, and save percentage in the Ontario Hockey League.

Lots to like with Laaksonen

With Luukkonen performing at a high level in the Finnish crease, defenseman Oskari Laaksonen (2017, third round) executed with equal excellence during their march to the gold medal.

Aside from showing himself as a well-rounded player, the biggest standout attribute in Laaksonen's game was his pace, and it wasn't just the way he moved with the puck. He was quick to react defensively and fast to assess options and make decisions. He played quick both with his feet and his mind as he fed the attackers at even strength and on the second power-play unit. The tempo and more importantly, the efficiency that Laaksonen displayed in the intense environment was noteworthy given how he's relatively inexperienced playing on the smaller North American ice surface.

Laaksonen's only goal of the tournament, scored in a 5-1 group stage victory over Slovakia, was the result of a smart read. As the Slovak defenders were drawn to the puck carrier circling behind the net, Laaksonen, who was following the play in the neutral zone, saw an opening to jump forward to the right faceoff circle with his stick cocked. The puck came to him and he rifled a one-timer home.

Defensively, Laaksonen was more than adequate in averaging 20:45 of work through the seven-game stanza. He was not successful with every zone-clearing attempt, but other than that he was strong with his coverage and very disciplined with his stick.

For a prospect that was deemed "slight" or "waifish" when drafted, the 165-pound Laaksonen also put his physical game on display by initiating a heavy hit on Swiss forward Sandro Schmid in the quarterfinal victory. The energy and engagement level were exactly where scouts needed them to be.

Laaksonen's performance was a welcome breath of fresh air for a Sabres organization searching for quality right-handed defensive depth. There is still growth to be had prior to making a push for a North American job, but all signs point to the Sabres having themselves a calculated risk-taker that will pinch in the offensive zone, take the ice that's given to him to advance the puck, and rotate into position to generate a high volume of shot attempts.

Simple Samuelsson

In an era of fleet-footed, pace-pushing defensemen (and intense social media debate), the methodical, defense-first style of Mattias Samuelsson (2018, second round) is going to be a polarizing topic for Sabres fans.

While he is not a track star with the straight-line speed of a Laaksonen, Samuelsson's skating fundamentals and pivoting are in line with most high-caliber prospects of his size. His feet aren't world class by any means, but they didn't hold him back from doing his job at the tournament and likely won't be a barrier to success down the road either.

The Sabres' scouting staff drafted Samuelsson to be a territorial, shutdown defender that can use his size and reach to push plays to the edge and impose some nastiness on opposing skaters. That's essentially what he did while averaging 16:42 in the tourney's seven games. He was good with his positioning and willing to sacrifice his body to block shots, along the way being a key component to Team USA's second-ranked 87.5 penalty kill percentage. He kept his game simple, rounding off his effort with 10 shots on goal and a plus-3 rating.

There were some flaws to critique, however, the largest of which came in Team USA's 5-4 overtime loss to Sweden, when Erik Brannstrom (VGK) blitzed down the left side and breezed right past Samuelsson on his way to cutting to the front and scoring a backhand goal.

It's hard to understand what exactly Samuelsson was thinking on the play, as he didn't defend the body, yet he didn't fully commit to stripping the puck either. It was an indefensible moment for an otherwise steady defender, and frankly the goaltender may have been better off if Samuelsson wasn't there guarding the post. A puzzling play for sure, but regardless it will serve as a teaching moment for a player that should be in line to take another run at World Junior glory next winter.

Pekar limited

A surprise addition to the Czech Republic's roster, winger Matej Pekar (2018, fourth round) was noticeable in limited duty as a checker in what should be considered a precursor to a larger role in the 2020 tournament next winter.

Pekar saw his usage increase as group play progressed, receiving 10 shifts in the opening day win over Switzerland before playing games of 14, 18, and 18 to close out the group stage. He peaked with 11:23 of work in a 5-1 loss to Canada. He slid back down to just 9:41 of action in the 3-1 quarterfinal loss to the United States.

The sample size was small given his role, but he did what he was asked to do. His shifts often saw the puck chipped deep into the offensive zone with Pekar doing yeoman's work along the walls to kick the puck back to the point before crashing towards the goal. He was strong in pursuit and made the most of his limited time with a total of 10 shots on goal in the five-game set. Early in the tilt versus Russia, a rebound of his shot on goal forced a defender to take a penalty.

The most interesting observation is that Pekar has been a dangerous short-handed player in Barrie this season with four of his 12 goals (prior to leaving for the tournament) coming on the penalty kill, yet he wasn't given the chance to work in that capacity.

For a player relied upon as a top-six offensive producer in the Ontario Hockey League, the adaptability that Pekar showed as more of a grinder, not dissimilar to how he was used at the Prospects Challenge, should be an encouraging development for the Sabres staff.

Pekar seems better for the experience. Upon returning from Vancouver, Barrie Colts bench boss Dale Hawerchuk tossed the young forward right into the lineup on just two days rest. He didn't score in his first game back, but he potted a pair of goals plus an



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

assist the very next night to earn First Star honors in a 3-2 win at Kingston.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125125 Nashville Predators

Wednesday's recap: Predators 4, Blackhawks 3 (OT)

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean

Published 9:41 p.m. CT Jan. 9, 2019 | Updated 10:10 p.m. CT Jan. 9, 2019

CHICAGO - Filip Forsberg, Ryan Johansen and Viktor Arvidsson were reunited at the United Center on Wednesday night.

And it felt so good, most of the time, for the Predators' top line, which started a game together for the first time since Nov. 10.

Forsberg's second goal of the game proved to be the winner a minute into overtime of a 4-3 victory against the Blackhawks.

The shot came minutes after Forsberg's costly turnover allowed Artem Anisimov to tie it 3-all with 2:21 left in the third.

Arvidsson also scored, and Johansen had two assists to help the Preds move to 5-0-1 in their last six games.

Forsberg was playing in his second game since missing the previous 17 with an upper-body injury. Arvidsson missed 21 games with a broken thumb before returning Dec. 27.

Colton Sissons put the Predators ahead 1-0 with his ninth goal of the season in the first. That tied his career high set last season in 81 games.

Eight seconds after Alex DeBrincat tied the score 1-1 with a power-play goal, Arvidsson made it 2-1 with his fifth score since returning. Forsberg's power-play goal made it 3-1 before the Preds allowed a shorthanded goal to Jonathan Toews with 20 seconds left in the second.

Notable: Predators defenseman Yannick Weber was on the ice for the team's morning skate Wednesday. He has been on injured reserve since Dec. 27 with an undisclosed injury.

Quotable: "It's nice to get guys back in there. There's still a couple pieces out. Everybody has to deal with that. The guys that have come in have really worked hard to keep us moving in the right direction." -- Predators coach Peter Laviolette on guys returning from injury.

Trending: Kevin Fiala has nine points in his last seven games. Mattias Ekholm has two goals and seven assists in his last seven games.

Milestone: 150. Career points for Ekholm after his assist on Sissons' first-period goal Wednesday.

Tennessean LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125126 Nashville Predators

Predators' Mattias Ekholm proving his worth and then some

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean

Published 3:35 p.m. CT Jan. 9, 2019 | Updated 10:54 p.m. CT Jan. 9, 2019

CHICAGO — Mattias Ekholm won't have to work when he's done working.

Such a notion is good enough for the Predators defenseman.

Ekholm will have earned \$22.5 million by the time his six-year contract with the Predators expires after the 2020-21 season.

By NHL standards, though, some could argue he is underpaid. Argue he is a bargain for that price. Argue that perhaps the 28-year-old should argue for more next time.

Ekholm isn't the one making that argument, though. He said he makes more money than he can imagine spending. More than he ever dreamed while growing up a soccer- and hockey-loving kid in a small town in Sweden. More than he needs to care for his family, which grew by one when his baby was born in March.

"These numbers, the money we get paid, it's crazy how some people discuss small details in contracts," he said. "I'm just really happy with the deal I got. I know I'm going to be set for my entire life.

"I don't have to work a day in my life if I don't want to when my career is done. I'm trying to focus on that instead of trying to be sour or mad about maybe I could have made a dollar more here or there. It's not relevant in my mind at least."

Ekholm might be the Predators' most invaluable player.

That hasn't been more evident than the past couple of months, when the Predators have endured an orchestra of injuries, including one that kept Ekholm's partner, P.K. Subban, out for 19 games.

Ekholm, who is 6-foot-4, 215 pounds, has had to play on his off side. He's had to add more offensive ingredients to his game.

He's been, in the spirit of coach Peter Laviolette's words, invaluable.

"The way he plays at times, it's irreplaceable," Laviolette said. "If you imagine what we've gone through (with injuries) and (not) having him, there's nobody that can do that. He's as big a part as any part of this team."

The defense has been there. The recent offensive surge – two goals and seven assists in his last six games after recording two assist in Wednesday's 4-3 overtime win over the Blackhawks – has stood out as pieces such as Subban, Viktor Arvidsson and Filip Forsberg have returned from injured reserve.

His 32 points are second on the team and are three shy of tying his career-high set in 2015-16.

"He's that guy you want out there no matter what situation," Josi said.

Ekholm's value, Josi said, has only increased in light of all the injuries.

"He plays 25 minutes a game," Josi said. "You never see him make a mistake. All the little things ... he's hard to play against."

Fellow defenseman Ryan Ellis signed a team-friendly deal (six years, \$37.5 million extension that kicks in next year) to stay with the Predators – and to play with guys such as Ekholm.

So he understands Ekholm's perspective about money – and wanting to win.

"We've been together for so long, the core anyway," Ellis said. "I don't think anyone has any intentions of going anywhere. That's a special feeling.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

"Decisions like that become easier. There are decisions personally guys have to make regarding whatever finances or family. All those factors that go together, we've been lucky with the guys we have. We want to be in Nashville together for a long time."

Ekhholm was raised in a small city in Sweden. His family didn't have a whole lot but never went without.

He's not much different now.

"To have a house there and to have a good living there, you don't need to be rich or anything," he said.

"He's right," Ellis added. "We make a lot of money. At some point, it's about happiness, your family."

Something Ekhholm said a little more money couldn't buy.

Tennessean LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125127 Nashville Predators

LeBrun Notebook: The year of the UFA winger, 'Nashville dollars' and where Matthews and Marnier stand

By Pierre LeBrun

Jan 9, 2019

This is an important month for a number of high-profile players on expiring contracts.

It's decision time. To some degree.

From Mark Stone and Matt Duchene to Artemi Panarin, Jeff Skinner and Wayne Simmonds, high-profile, pending UFAs have conversations looming ahead of the Feb. 25 trade deadline.

Sabres GM Jason Botterill and veteran agent Don Meehan of Newport Sports have traded messages this week trying to firm up when both sides can get going on Skinner, who is having a monster year after being acquired from Carolina.

Meehan is expected to be in attendance Saturday for the Tampa-Buffalo game but Botterill won't be back yet from out-of-town scouting meetings. So it's not clear yet when exactly preliminary contract discussions will begin other than both sides seem eager to get it going in the very near future.

What will that number look like if a deal gets done?

"He's an interesting case because he's been previously inconsistent," said one rival agent obviously not involved in it.

Skinner is on pace for his first 50-goal season after putting up 24 last year in Carolina. He had 37 goals two years ago after putting up 28 the year before that and 18 goals the season before that.

But he's found some magic with Jack Eichel and one presumes finds appealing the idea of continuing to ride shotgun with the Sabres captain.

Skinner, making \$5.725 million this season, turns 27 in May so term will figure into this negotiation just as much as the AAV.

Funny what varying responses I got on Skinner from other agents around the league. One agent Tuesday suggested \$8 million a year made sense. Another said \$10-million plus.

Said yet another agent: "Pay him ahead of Evander Kane (\$7 million) but behind Tyler Seguin (\$9.85 million)."

And it's worth pointing out that if for whatever reason the Sabres slide out of playoff contention closer to Feb. 25 — which I doubt but you never know — and if Skinner remains unsigned ... well, the Sabres would have to consider trading him in that scenario.

Hopefully, it doesn't come to that. I like the Skinner fit in Buffalo and I do think both sides get an extension figured out.

It's the year of the UFA winger: Skinner, Panarin, Stone, Simmonds. Talk about some high-end talent.

Panarin's agent Dan Milstein told us during the holidays that his plan was to meet with his client during the NHL All-Star break later this month and get a read on the player's future plans.

Again, most fascinating to me will be if Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen, even if he can't re-sign Panarin, decides to make the star winger a self-rental at the trade deadline in the hopes of finally seeing his team go on a deep playoff run. To a lesser degree, it's exactly what he did with pending UFA Jack Johnson last year. Kekalainen determined that the offers he was getting at the deadline for the defenceman didn't equal the worth he felt Johnson would give his team down the stretch.

So in this case, a lot will depend on how crazy a contender will be in terms of a trade offer to Columbus on Panarin.

And if Stone isn't re-signed by the deadline, suddenly Columbus would have competition as far as high-end wingers on the market.

I take Stone to his word in his comments with the Ottawa media recently that he's interested in staying put and signing an extension. Hockey players are most often loyal, that much we know. Perhaps he sees the light at the end of the Ottawa rebuilding tunnel.

But so much, of course, will depend on how much Eugene Melnyk opens up the vault. I wouldn't screw around with this one. Stone is such an underrated superstar. After trading away Erik Karlsson, the franchise needs a win. Keeping Stone long-term would be a big one.

Teams are drooling at the prospect of Stone hitting the market, both Feb. 25 and/or July 1. I'd keep an eye on Vegas. Assistant GM Kelly McCrimmon has a close relationship with Stone dating back to their WHL days together.

Senators GM Pierre Dorion is at scouting meetings this week. The expectation is that he could get the ball rolling on Stone with the Newport camp as early as next week. Both sides Tuesday were trying to firm up plans to meet. The same is expected on the Duchene front. His agent Pat Brisson has already had a few chats with Dorion since the start of the season but both sides plan to talk again next week.

New Flyers GM Chuck Fletcher and the agent for Simmonds, Eustace King, have had regular communication of late. My sense is that King will soon put a bit of heat on Fletcher to make a decision on this front. Expect another conversation between both sides before the end of the week.

Term will be key there if Fletcher decides to attempt to re-sign the power forward.

If he doesn't, talk about a powerful addition for a Cup contender. Wow. Adding Simmonds to any lineup that has a chance to win is a game-changer. His unique skill set of physicality and offensive talent stands alone on the market. I could make the argument of how good he'd look in Tampa Bay, Winnipeg or Toronto.

And what of Karlsson? There's no bigger name, of course, among the pending UFAs. My understanding is that Meehan and Sharks GM Doug Wilson have traded messages this week and there could be a plan afoot to meet at some point after the All-Star break.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

That one is going to be fascinating. Karlsson has really played well since some early-season struggles. Does he want to stay in San Jose? A reminder that the Sharks can't sign him to to the max eight years until Feb. 25 at the earliest as per a rule in the CBA related to acquiring pending UFAs after the prior year's trade deadline.

Roman Josi greeted agent Jeff Jackson with a warm smile and handshake before the morning skate in Toronto on Monday. It was a reminder that he had changed agents this year and his now being represented by Jackson and Judd Moldover.

This summer looms large for the Nashville Predators captain. He's got one year left on his contract next season at a \$4-million cap hit and both sides will no doubt be eager to get an extension done a year ahead of time.

"Hopefully," smiled Josi on Monday morning.

The Predators were keen to get Ryan Ellis extended one year ahead of time this past summer and will make Josi a similar priority after this season.

He can't see himself anywhere else.

"Yeah definitely, it's the only team I've played with my whole life, I love the city, I've met a lot of people there and made a lot of friends, so yeah I'm really happy in Nashville," Josi said. "It's a great organization and a great group of guys."

It will be interesting, as it always is, when negotiations begin. Veteran GM David Poile will no doubt talk to the Josi camp about "Nashville dollars." Which is code for: sign for less to stay in Nashville. The Predators not only have a number of under-market contracts that way on their payroll but also refuse to doll out no-trade clauses. So it's a double whammy for agents negotiating with Poile. Normally if a player is taking less to stay somewhere, they at least get no-trade protection to ensure that the contract doesn't travel. But the Predators have created the kind of culture where it's hard for agents to negotiate something that nobody else has on the team.

Players and their families love it in Nashville. There's no state income tax. And the team is a contender. As long as those three things remain true, the team can probably continue to prolong that type of culture when negotiating contracts.

World Cup of Hockey in 2020?

Time is of the essence if there's ever going to be a 2020 World Cup of Hockey.

I think the league would have wanted this decided by Jan. 1, so we're in overtime here.

The NHL and NHLPA are meeting later this week to again discuss the World Cup. I could certainly classify it as a fairly crucial meeting.

Of course when both sides meet, as they did a few times over the past few months, these conversations tend to spill over into bigger picture CBA chats, too. It's kind of hard to avoid. The larger vision for international hockey ties both sides together. Can they figure this out? And can these World Cup chats pave the way for labour peace down the road? I know, I know, let's not get ahead of ourselves. But I'm allowed to dream.

Where Matthews and Marner stand

One thing I picked up on when I sat down with Leafs GM Kyle Dubas last month was the first mention that I can remember of him connecting the trade deadline to the contract talks with Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner.

Basically, Dubas suggested that it would be helpful to know at some level where those talks are going in terms of knowing what the Leafs can do at the trade deadline in terms of being able to add a contract or two. Why? Because Dubas, at least when we spoke, didn't fancy adding a rental player. So if he makes a trade it appears it will be for

a player with term past this season. Which is why it would be nice for the Leafs to know to some degree how much Marner and Matthews will cost starting next year.

But I don't think Marner's camp is backing down from the idea of waiting until after the season to get a deal done.

Agent Darren Ferris reiterated in a text message Tuesday that he will not waver on that.

"Yes, 100 percent," he said. "Mitch wants to concentrate on this season."

Again, that strategy can only bring the number up. Makes sense from Marner's perspective to wait.

There have been no such pronouncements from the Matthews camp. The sense I've gotten all along is that his agents Judd Moldover and Jeff Jackson are ready to negotiate whenever the Leafs want to get serious and come to the table.

I should note that Moldover and Jackson are meeting later this week and obviously Matthews will be among the topics.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125202 Websites

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

By Craig Custance Jan 9, 2019 132

If we're being honest, the 2014 Winter Olympics feel like ages ago. Especially if you're an American who would prefer to ignore everything that happened after T.J. Oshie beat the Russians. When you consider the roster turnover from that Winter Olympic tournament for Team USA, it feels even longer than five years.

Just look at the centers. This was the topic of a recent conversation with 2014 U.S. men's Olympic hockey coach Dan Bylsma. His group down the middle in Sochi included Joe Pavelski, Ryan Kesler, David Backes, Paul Stastny and Derek Stepan. Good players. But not exactly the fleetest of foot, a real consideration since the tournament was on big ice.

"Looking forward, now it's Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel, put Dylan Larkin in there," Bylsma said, going over American center options. "Now, there's a different dynamic there in the center of the ice."

These new American centers can absolutely fly. And it's not just them. The entire team can. This would be the fastest U.S. team on record and one that closes the gap down the middle with the Canadians. It's what makes the news expected to come in the next couple weeks so crucial for Americans eager to hit the international reset button and bury the ghosts of the last World Cup of Hockey and those 2014 Olympics. Soon, we'll have a better idea whether or not the 2020 World Cup is going to happen. And while we're depending on cooperation between the NHL and NHLPA to make it happen, always a bit of a stretch, it could be a great one for the Americans.

Let's dive in. Here is our projected 23-player roster for Team USA 2020 and a brief explanation of how we arrived at our choices.

Forwards



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

So, would this be the best group of centers in terms of high-end skill and depth that the Americans have ever sent to an international tournament?

"It's definitely the highest speed factor with these guys," Bylsma said.

Watching Auston Matthews and Jack Eichel take on Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby when Team USA plays the Canadians is reason enough to hold this tournament. Let's hope everyone remembers this when negotiations to put this on in 2020 inevitably go sideways in a couple weeks.

This forward group is stacked in terms of speed and skill but it doesn't necessarily have the flexibility that Team Canada can bring to a tournament, with centers in every slot. That's a bit of a disadvantage. But Dylan Larkin can certainly move to the wing if necessary and Joe Pavelski gets the nod over Phil Kessel here because of his ability to move to the middle, too.

Historically, the Americans like to have a little more size and grit than this lineup might provide, but it's been a while since they've finished first, so we're all in on a new identity. There's youth, there're veterans. It's a great mix.

In terms of tough decisions, it was definitely tough to keep Cam Atkinson off this team with the way he's scoring this year and he'd be on a watch list. If Penguins coach Mike Sullivan is the coach, and he'd be my choice, you wonder if he'd make a push for Jake Guentzel, who certainly is in the conversation.

Defensemen

These decisions were even tougher and it wouldn't be surprising if this group looked different in a year.

The lock is Ryan Suter, in part because you want a veteran around who has been through the battles before. He's this generation's Chris Chelios for the Americans. He'll have a spot as long as he wants one.

The idea of plugging in Zach Werenski and Seth Jones together for instant chemistry is too hard to pass up. If this ends up being anything like that last World Cup, there won't be a lot of time together before games start being played so that familiarity will be an advantage.

"It's natural to play them together on a team," Bylsma said. "Those two guys for sure."

The coach's favorite of the group may end up being Jaccob Slavin. He's emerged as the untouchable on a deep Carolina defense and a tournament like this would definitely raise his profile.

"Slavin would be like, to me, what (Marc-Edouard) Vlasic has been to the Canadians," Bylsma said. "The Canadians have some dynamic players but Vlasic has always been the steady defender, great defender, great player. That would be Slavin to the U.S. team."

Where my roster parts ways with Bylsma's preference is that it doesn't have Ryan McDonagh on it. I wanted a right-handed shot in Jacob Trouba. This is certainly open for debate.

"How can you not have McDonagh in the mix?" Bylsma wondered while considering the defense.

Torey Krug and Dustin Byfuglien are definitely in the mix and the bet here is that Charlie McAvoy re-emerges as an option by the time this tournament rolls around.

Goaltending

The Americans have always had goaltending and this tournament is no different. John Gibson is the man here, immediately giving Team USA an edge in nearly every game.

"I've always been a Gibson fan," said Bylsma. "Four years ago, I said he's going to be a top-five goalie, shortly. He didn't turn into that immediately but I like him."

And now, he has to be considered one of the league's three best goalies.

"I would think so," agreed Bylsma.

It gets interesting after that. You could make a case for Jonathan Quick's experience and track record winning big games. He's also getting older and is a constant injury risk. Right now, it's a coin toss between Ben Bishop and Connor Hellebuyck for the backup spot.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125203 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Rittich steals win for Flames against NHL's best line

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis January 10, 2019, 1:54 AM

CALGARY — Matthew Tkachuk isn't too sure how it got to this, but the brotherly love he and David Rittich have been showing ever since their trip to Philadelphia is attracting attention.

At the conclusion of the Calgary Flames' last three wins, Tkachuk has wrapped up high-fives with every teammate with a jubilant, one-on-one embrace with Rittich that both find hard to describe.

"I don't know how it started but a little hug turned into a big hug, turned into a jump and hug and now it turned into a big jump and hug – it kind of keeps going, we keep creating something," said Tkachuk Wednesday morning, laughing when a staffer suggested he didn't want to see how much further their enthusiasm might take them.

"This might be the last stage of that."

Hours later the Tkachuk jump/hug was executed once again after "Big Save Dave" absolutely stole one for the Flames.

They kept it civil, with Tkachuk bouncing several times before leaping into Rittich as the horn sounded and teammates saluted the fans.

This time the whole squad likely wanted to jump into the arms of the 26-year-old goaltending godsend who has played as big a role in the Flames' turnaround season as anyone.

On this night, the ask was to make 35 saves against a Colorado team spearheaded by the best line in hockey.

He made 32 of them in a 5-3 win the Flames otherwise didn't deserve.

A fluke goal off the pants of Michael Frolik wound up the difference in a game that saw the Flames throw just 15 shots at a still-struggling Semyon Varlamov.

Thus, the Flames' third-straight win with Rittich back from injury ended with man-hugs.

"I did it because he saved my ass," laughed Rittich when asked how the animated embrace came to be following a late comeback orchestrated by Tkachuk in Philly.

This time Rittich was returning the favour, moving his record to a remarkable 16-4-3.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

Heading into the first of five straight home dates, the focus was on the top two lines in the NHL.

Including Tkachuk, the game included seven of the NHL's top 17 scorers. Only two NHL games dating back to 1992 have had as many top-20 snipers.

The storyline by night's end was how much better the Avs trio of Mikko Rantanen, Gabriel Landeskog and Nathan MacKinnon was in a game they appeared to be taking over in the second period.

After one period, they were the only Avs forwards to record shots on goal.

By the end of the second, only two other Colorado forwards had added to the shot count, as the top guns alone were on the verge of breaking a 2-2 game wide open with relentless pressure. The big three finished with 23 total shots, including 12 by Landeskog.

If not for Rittich things might have gotten out of hand.

Sportsnet NOW gives you access to over 500 NHL games this season, blackout-free, including Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the entire 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs and more.

Alas, a Flames power-play goal by Elias Lindholm with seven minutes left in the second turned the entire game around.

Rittich helped them hang on from there.

"I think they were the quicker team from the first period right until the end and the shots would support that," said Bill Peters of an opportunistic bunch coming off a four-game roadie on which they won three times.

"Their pace throughout the lineup gave us trouble at times. We found a way to grind it out. That was a timely goal by Lindy for sure. That's a dangerous group."

Johnny Gaudreau's five-game goal streak ended, but his six-game point binge continued with two assists, giving him 15 points in that stretch.

Five-on-five, his line with Sean Monahan and Lindholm was vastly overshadowed by the Avalanche Aces, who ended the night dealing with a verbal meltdown on the bench by MacKinnon that appeared to be directed at coach Jared Bednar. Colorado has one win in its last nine.

"It wasn't our A game for sure but good teams find a way to win and I think we got better as the game went on – our third period was our best period and that's what you've got to do at this time of year," said Mark Jankowski, who spearheaded a penalty kill that stopped all four Avalanche advantages.

"(Rittich) has been a star a lot of games this year – he held us in when we shouldn't have been in there and held the door tight for us to get a couple."

Jankowski and Mikael Backlund also scored first-period goals to open the game.

Frolik's lucky goal midway through the third period put the Flames up 4-2 and had fans on edge in the final 90 seconds when the two top lines faced off against each other.

A missed empty-net opportunity by the Flames led to a Rantanen goal that forced Tkachuk to score an empty-netter in the final 10 seconds.

Cue the hug.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125204 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Pettersson, McDavid could test year-end awards thinking

Elliotte Friedman January 9, 2019, 11:29 AM

Midway point of the season, time to start thinking about NHL awards. No need to make any final decisions, but make a list, figure out who's in the running, pay closer attention.

It is also time to reflect on old habits, and consider if there is need for change.

This will be my sixth time voting for the Hart, Norris, Calder, Selke, Lady Byng and Masterton Trophies, along with the All-Star and All-Rookie Teams. You never expect everyone to agree with your choices, which is fine. But I do try to be consistent and keep the same rationale.

This year, two of those standards are going to be tested — possibly even ignored.

In Calder voting, I have always considered Games Played. It is hard to play a full season as a rookie. The Derian Hatchers of the world may be extinct, unfortunately, but this is still a tough game played at high speeds. Injuries are a fact of life, whether caused intentionally or accidentally. Playing a full first season in the NHL is a real accomplishment, considering most of those eligible are not fully physically developed.

If there was a close race, I would look at Games Played to see if there was a major difference. It could be a factor.

For the second time, Vancouver's Elias Pettersson is out of the lineup. He missed six games in October, and is expected to be out approximately two weeks after spraining his knee last Thursday in Montreal. He's going to miss at least 10 games this season.

His top challengers for the Calder appear to be Dallas's Miro Heiskanen (probably the top contender, an all-star selection like Pettersson), Buffalo's Rasmus Dahlin and Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk. The latter has the same injury concerns as Pettersson; he's missed 11 games.

Heiskanen's been a stud on the Stars blue line, holding steady while seemingly everyone on the Dallas defence ended up in a hospital bed. At this point, he'd be a deserving winner.

But there's something transcendent about Pettersson's rookie year. He has breathed new life into the Canucks, altered the direction of the franchise and made his games appointment television. He leads all rookies in goals, assists, points and points per game (by almost half a point). There's still half a season to play, and he's got to be out there for a good chunk of them, but, at the very least, Pettersson has me asking, "How low is too low?"

The last person to lose a Calder because of Games Played was Connor McDavid in 2016. Limited to 45 games, he got clipped by Artemi Panarin. And McDavid is involved the second part of this discussion.

Hart Trophy winners do not miss the playoffs. That's the history and that's the standard. Taylor Hall was a deserving winner last season. Claude Giroux, Nathan MacKinnon and Anze Kopitar would have been perfectly acceptable, too. McDavid — who was voted by his peers as the Ted Lindsay winner for most outstanding player — fell in the ballots because the Oilers didn't get there.

I don't like to tell anyone else what to do (mainly because I don't like anyone telling me what to do), but I've thought a lot about this since I saw McDavid on stage in Vegas recognized by those who play against him. The awards aren't the same; Most Outstanding and



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

Most Valuable are different, but there has to be some deference to the people out there actually trying to stop him.

He'll have stiff competition from Tampa Bay (Nikita Kucherov) and down the highway (Johnny Gaudreau). Both of them would be extremely deserving if the vote happened now.

You'd think the Oilers were 50 points out of the playoffs the way things are going in Edmonton, but it's only two as we wake up on Wednesday. They might get in, rendering this debate moot. If they don't, we have to reconsider the wisdom of punishing McDavid for things that aren't his fault. Entering last weekend, he had 28 points in 15 games, a lifejacket wearing 97 keeping the Oilers afloat.

31 THOUGHTS

1. Remember when the MLB Washington Nationals admitted in 2012 there was an innings limit for Stephen Strasburg and spent every day answering questions about it? I've understood since then why teams are loathe to make any of their internal deadlines public. Ottawa GM Pierre Dorion is not on the team's trip to California, leading the Senators' scouting meetings in Florida. He's expected to meet with Pat Brisson, agent for unrestricted free agent Matt Duchene, next week. I asked former NHL GMs Brian Burke and Doug MacLean (who now ruin my Wednesday nights) how long a team needs to know before the trade deadline that a player is not going to sign. Burke said "14 days." MacLean agreed. So did two current GMs. So Dorion's got five weeks, if he chooses to wait that long.

2. There is no way Anaheim GM Bob Murray would want to fire Randy Carlyle in-season. He dislikes that route and has said he feels the coach deserves a full roster for proper evaluation. An 0-6-2 stretch will test even Murray's patience, but that's an absolute last resort for him.

3. As hard as Ken Hitchcock ripped the Oilers to the media after Saturday's 4-0 loss in Los Angeles, he apparently went after the players even harder to their faces. He was angry about the poor effort and the lack of protection for McDavid, who was elbowed by Drew Doughty and run over by Jeff Carter. Edmonton was much better physically and emotionally one night later in a 4-0 win over the Ducks. Tuesday night in San Jose was a 7-2 beatdown and the season comes down to the final seven games before All-Star Weekend. Six are at home, and only two against current playoff teams (Buffalo, Calgary).

4. When there was no penalty on Hampus Lindholm for driving McDavid into the boards during that game, I wondered if the Oilers captain had a bad reputation among officials or something. In fact, I'm told it is the exact opposite — that he barely says anything and just goes about his business like a true professional. That penalty has to be called, though. Thankfully, there was no injury. You can't call everything, but McDavid deserves better protection from the officials than that.

5. Second-angriest coach of the week: Florida's Bob Boughner. During Tuesday's 5-1 loss to Pittsburgh, the Panthers gave up shorthanded goals at 3:04 and 8:56 of the second period. Three players on the ice for both — Mike Hoffman, Jonathan Huberdeau and Keith Yandle — didn't see a shift the rest of the night. Boughner said they were "out to lunch."

6. Carolina is not in a position to allow its potential unrestricted free agents to walk for nothing. They are far, far apart in negotiations with Micheal Ferland, so it looks like "when" not "if" for him. Pittsburgh makes sense, and so does Edmonton, but there will be others. The Hurricanes have told teams they would prefer to wait a little longer before deciding on goalies Curtis McElhinney and Petr Mrazek, although it can always change with the "offer you can't refuse." They are trying to re-sign another good depth winger, Jordan Martinook.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

7. Here's why I believe Dougie Hamilton could be dealt. It is well-known the Hurricanes are right-shot heavy. That's one. Since Dec. 11, he has more games where he's played under 16 minutes (four) as those where he's played more than 20 (three). He assisted on Jacob Slavin's winner Tuesday night against the Islanders. Prior to that, he scored in three straight games. He's got value. Contenders need defencemen who can score; Carolina needs scoring forwards. There are matches out there.

8. Add Pat Maroon to the list of available St. Louis Blues. And Tampa Bay is trying to find a new home for Slater Koekkoek, currently on a conditioning stint at AHL Syracuse.

9. Drew Doughty got the All-Star nod, but Jake Muzzin has been Los Angeles's best defenceman. The price is high, but someone is going to seriously consider it.

10. In a league that is starving for goaltending depth, keep an eye on Winnipeg's Laurent Brossoit. He worked hard last summer under Adam Francillia, who repaired Connor Hellebuyck in 2017. Brossoit's been very good for the Jets. One year from unrestricted free agency, teams will be watching to see how both he and the Jets handle his future.

11. Another Jet being watched? Brandon Tanev. Good depth player who is free this summer. Winnipeg will have tough choices to make. Sounds like a few teams have asked about Jack Roslovic, only to have GM Kevin Cheveldayoff swat their requests Mutombo-like into the upper deck. Roslovic's getting more minutes now, with Nikolaj Ehlers injured.

12. There's an obvious connection for Toronto GM Kyle Dubas to be at Tuesday's Lokomotiv/CSKA KHL game: Lokomotiv's Yegor Korshkov, taken 31st overall by the Maple Leafs in the 2016 draft. He's a left-shot winger, and they like his talent. Injured for a good chunk of the season and only in his fourth game back, the goal could be bringing him to training camp in September.

Toronto has also dipped into the Russian free-agent market with Igor Ozhiganov and Nikita Zaitsev, and there are two potential contenders from that game. The first is 29-year-old left-winger Sergei Andronov, who was selected by St. Louis in 2009 when current Columbus GM Jarmo Kekalainen was running their drafts. He spent two seasons in the AHL before returning home. The other is 22-year-old defenceman Alexander Yelesin. There is definitely interest in him.

Stream over 500 NHL games blackout-free, including the Flames, Oilers, Leafs and Canucks. Plus Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey and more.

13. Several teams and scouts left the World Juniors for a couple of days to attend the Desert Hockey Classic at Arizona State. There were two free agents of particular interest: Minnesota State (Mankato) defender Connor Mackey and Clarkson forward Nico Sturm.

14. In the days leading up to the gold-medal game, there were rumours flying that Quinn Hughes was ready to leave NCAA Michigan for Vancouver. It never got close to that, but what is clear is the Canucks wished to ask him if he would consider the possibility. They decided not to, choosing to honour an agreement to wait until the end of the Wolverines' season. But I suspect they really, really wanted to do it.

15. Michael Del Zotto didn't want to say anything during Vancouver's stop in Toronto, but it's clear he craves a chance to get back into the lineup. Players want to play. I've heard there's interest, but those parties want to wait until closer to the deadline to save cap space.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

16. The Canucks were marvelling at Pettersson's blocked pass before he got injured in last Thursday's 2-0 loss to Montreal. "Who even thinks of doing that?" one player said.

17. When Tiger Woods quickly became the most dominant golfer of his generation, other players quickly got sick of talking about him. It is the reverse in Vancouver. His teammates are more than happy to discuss what he can do, marvelling about his brains and his brawn.

"Take a look at his first goal," defenceman Troy Stecher said. "Most players, they step forward on their front foot and shoot it. Not there. He reached back and 'sling-shotted' it. No stride change."

Stecher was even more impressed by another play he witnessed from the bench. He couldn't remember who it was against, but Pettersson had the puck at the opposing blueline.

"Someone was coming at him, and I was saying to myself, 'Dump it in, dump it in.' Then he looked right at the guy, who backed off and gave him room to make a play. I asked him about it later. He said, 'If I look down at the puck on the ice, he can charge right at me. But if I look at him, he has to respect that I could go right past him.'"

18. Excellent gesture: Vegas coach Gerard Gallant had replicas of the Jack Adams Award created for all of his assistant coaches.

19. John Hynes's extension in New Jersey keeps him under contract until July 2021.

20. Erik Karlsson was steaming mad when hit with a two-game suspension at Christmas. He's unleashed his anger on the rest of the NHL. In six games since his return, he's got one goal and 15 assists. Karlsson's a zone-entry machine.

21. One executive on Montreal: "They play so much harder than last season." He pointed out they picked up four out of six points when Antti Niemi replaced Carey Price for three straight games just before New Year's, and should have beaten Tampa Bay — which was the loss.

22. There was some concern when Shea Weber returned that he wouldn't fit on the newer, speedier Canadiens. Yeah, no need to worry about that. The Canadiens were outscored 81-74 before Weber returned, but are up 58-54 since he came back. Prior to Nashville's 4-1 win over Montreal on Saturday, the Canadiens were first overall in shot share since he got back. (Explainer: They were taking almost 56 per cent of the shots in games they were playing. That doesn't indicate quality, but it was a higher percentage than anyone else.)

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.

23. The Predators are a great team because they have great players, but it doesn't hurt that they practice very hard.

"I can't remember if it was last year or the year before," defenceman Ryan Ellis said this week, "But we had a practice during the playoffs where three guys went down. The coaches stopped it and said, 'Hey, we have bigger goals we want to accomplish here.'" Ellis laughed. "It's not unusual for guys to say to each other, 'I'm going to get you at practice.'"

24. It would not surprise anyone to hear that one of the most competitive players is Viktor Arvidsson, but another who got a few votes was Craig Smith. He smiled, but added, "There are a lot of guys you could say that about here."

For his part, Smith said the most competitive guy he's ever seen is San Jose's Joe Pavelski. They skate together during the off-season.

"He'll be on the winning teams in most of our three-on-three games. When we golf, he's usually the best. Fishing? He'll have the best catch."

Don't you just hate guys like that?

"Actually, I kind of admire it," Smith said.

25. Stunning admission from this week's 31 Thoughts podcast: Jay Beagle has an iPhone 1. Does he write with a dip pen?

26. A few people have made fun of Toronto's thank-you videos this year for Tyler Bozak, Leo Komarov and Matt Martin. (It was a good gesture with Martin, who was very unhappy at the way things ended for him last season.) I'd much rather that than St. Louis ignoring Kevin Shattenkirk, who didn't get any recognition when he returned for the first time.

27. From the moment he arrived in the NHL, Alex Ovechkin plunged into the world of promotion, trying just about anything even though English was not his first language. As a result, I'm always inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. As part of the upcoming CBA talks, expect the NHLPA to propose a way for players to skip All-Star Weekend without punishment. Maybe, for example, you go to five, you get the option to miss one.

The idea of increasing the penalty for missing the weekend from one game to two was brought up inside the NHL, but there wasn't anywhere near enough support for the idea, thankfully. I know people hate All-Star and think it's a joke, but there's a business aspect to this. NHL cities badly want to host it. Sponsors love the event — it's a big perk for them and their clients. They love the interaction with the players. I always see a ton of kids, and even a minute with a player makes a huge difference. You want to grow your game and your revenues, you have to make nice with your sponsors. Let's call it a necessary evil.

28. Eliminate picking forwards and defencemen for All-Star rosters. Take two goalies per division, then take whatever skaters you want.

29. Everyone's favourite topic — escrow — comes to the forefront as talks between the NHL and NHLPA continue this week in Las Vegas. The NHL wanted a decision on the 2020 World Cup by All-Star Weekend. But that's a small part of the overall CBA discussion, so we're getting to more serious conversations. My sense is both sides want to extend the CBA, but there are always hurdles. Escrow is the biggest, and it's complicated.

It is there to even the split between the players and owners, so capping it or re-jigging the formula will take major concessions from the NHLPA. There's really not much wiggle room because there is little incentive for the NHL to budge. If I were in the union, I would work backwards, knowing that the league would probably want to decrease the length of the maximum contract (currently eight years for your own player, seven for someone else's) and limit the amount of signing bonuses on contracts.

Could the players propose something that would satisfy the league in exchange for something? Just a thought. It will take that kind of creativity.

30. Another way is for the players not to use their "inflator" on the salary cap. (They raised the 2018-19 number by 0.5 per cent to its current \$79.5 million. Next year's estimate of \$83 million includes this as part of the projection.) But that's divisive. Years ago, one team was voting on whether or not to use it, and a top player argued they shouldn't. A pending free agent yelled back, "So, you get the advantage when you're up, but I don't?" The difference between now and then is players have stopped using the full five per cent as allowed by the CBA.

31. Friday night, NBC Sports Washington will air an "alternative feed" of its Bucks/Wizards NBA broadcast. This channel will feature gambling information and pop-up questions allowing viewers to "bet" on the action through the station's website, with the chance to win \$500. That's the future, and it is getting closer. Meanwhile, I'll take the over on uncontested layups scored against the Wizards.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.10.2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

1125205 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / What should the Canucks do with upcoming UFA Alexander Edler?

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet January 9, 2019, 8:17 PM

VANCOUVER – There are four things the Vancouver Canucks can do with Alexander Edler. At least two of them would be good, but both of those scenarios hinge on the defenceman returning to the National Hockey League team next season.

The most important meeting of Canucks on Wednesday was not the gathering of players for a morning practice at Rogers Arena, but the summit of hockey operations staff upstairs in the afternoon.

General manager Jim Benning and his staff are meeting this week to plot the Canucks' course through the NHL trade deadline on Feb. 25. By far the most pressing file is Edler, who, through his full no-trade clause and looming unrestricted free agency, is empowered to severely limit management's options.

Sportsnet NOW gives you access to over 500 NHL games this season, blackout-free, including Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the entire 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs and more.

The 32-year-old Swede, a career Canuck who is having one of his best seasons in years, is on an expiring contract. A majority of respondents to a Sportsnet 650 Radio poll said the Canucks should trade Edler and Chris Tanev, a 29-year-old whose contract expires after next season.

The poll says a lot about the market in which they play.

Edler and Tanev are easily Vancouver's best defencemen. The Canucks, driven by young forward stars Elias Pettersson, Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser, are more competitive than anyone thought they'd be this season. But Vancouver's defence hasn't been rebuilt to the same level as the forward group. The Canucks need more good defencemen, not fewer of them.

"We don't have anybody in our organization right now who's ready to step in and fill Alex's shoes," Benning said Wednesday. "He's probably our best penalty killer on the back end and he plays on our power play. He's physical. He plays a good all-around game for us. We don't have anyone in our system right now who can replace that."

So, let's start from there and proceed.

The four options with Edler are: trade him at the deadline but try to re-sign him on July 1, trade him at the deadline and move on, re-sign him before free agency, or let him leave for nothing on July 1.

The fourth option would be a disaster. No NHL team that doesn't win the Stanley Cup can squander a valuable asset by getting nothing in return.

Obviously, the first option is the best. Obtain something for Edler before the deadline and see it become free money when the defenceman re-signs July 1 in Vancouver. Makes sense. It's the most popular option for armchair GMs, a win-win.

But the reality is it simply doesn't happen in the NHL very often where a traded player happily and immediately returns.

Roman Polak re-signed with the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2016 after being traded to the San Jose Sharks. But he returned on a one-year

deal for \$2.25 million US. There wasn't exactly a frenzied bidding war for Polak in free agency.

The previous summer, Antoine Vermette found his way home to the Arizona Coyotes after being ransomed to the Chicago Blackhawks at the 2015 trade deadline. He signed for two years at \$3.75 million.

Edler leads the Canucks with 23:13 of ice time and is their best defenceman. He is on pace for 46 points, which would be his most productive season since 2011-12, and would be a highly-attractive UFA who could command a multi-year deal for at least the \$5 million annually he is earning now.

But he loves Vancouver. Surely he would return on July 1 if traded? Well, no matter how strong the napkin on which the Canucks write their I.O.U. to Edler if they trade him, he is beyond their control the moment he leaves. He may find playing in Tampa or Vegas quite pleasant, especially if he wins there. Or maybe he resents being pressured by the Canucks to accept a trade.

It's all a non-issue if Edler flexes his NTC.

"I don't know what their plan is but I'll focus on what I can control and just play my best," Edler told Sportsnet. "If that time comes, then I'll make a decision then. But right now I'm fully committed to this season and this team and I'm excited to be part of this group."

"Whether it's on or off the ice, I just try to do the right thing, whether it's go out there and play hard or just approach every day with a positive mindset and show what I've been shown by leaders in the past. I've always said that I like it here, and I want to be part of this franchise. (But) sometimes it's not your decision, so I'm prepared for anything."

Your browser does not support the audio element.

It's unknown how strong the trade market would be for Edler as a rental. Benning needs to explore that. But what's almost certain is that whatever the Canucks could fetch for Edler, his departure would make the organization's defence weaker next season.

Considering the impressive progress coach Travis Green's team has made this season, Pettersson's brilliant emergence, and ownership's impatience to win, Benning can't make moves on defence that diminish the Canucks' chances of making the playoffs next season when the franchise celebrates 50 years in the NHL.

One way or another, the Canucks need Edler back.

"There's a lot of different things," Edler said of his desire to stay. "I've lived here for most of my adult life. I started a family here and the city feels like home. But the organization has been good to me, too. I've been treated well and given chances to improve and play a lot."

"My best scenario is to get that chance (to win again) here. We have some work to do and there's a lot of learning and a lot of teaching. But for sure, we have young, talented players who are going to keep developing. It's no fun to lose like we did last year, but it's exciting to go through a change like this and be part of it until we get good again."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125206 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs hope line shuffling sparks 'stale' power play

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox January 9, 2019, 2:14 PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

TORONTO – The Voltron of power-plays has been disassembled.

Yes, the much-hyped, three-centre, five-star PP1 of the Toronto Maple Leafs — Morgan Rielly, Auston Matthews, John Tavares, Mitch Marner, Nazem Kadri — was chopped up for the first time (with all components healthy) at practice Wednesday.

And the new, more balanced deployment falls in line with coach Mike Babcock's preferred man-advantage philosophy.

"When you've got a total of one group, you don't got as much competition on your team," Babcock explained.

"I still like when you have two and you compete to see who's out there. We're gonna make a change here and see how it goes, then we'll go from there. We can always change back at any time."

The skill dropoff between PP1 and PP2 is now a baby step, and we'd expect the gap in ice time between the two units to shrink as well.

Here's a peek at the groups expected to be unveiled Thursday in New Jersey:

Matthews, who spent the bulk of last season on the "second" unit as well and leads all Leafs with seven power-play goals, is the man on the move.

It's no secret the franchise centre enjoys being on the ice with Marner — the NHL leader in primary assists — but, unprompted, Matthews let it be known that he's cool with the shuffle.

"I have no problem with the switch," Matthews said, well aware that opponents began to nullify the cross-seam pass Marner was using to tee him up for that wicked wrister on the left flank.

"Some things work for a couple games or one game, and you feel good. Next game, that play's not there," Matthews said.

"Maybe we got a bit too stale and were just bringing the same thing over and over again. So, I think it's important to switch it up once in a while and give them something different and get them back on their heels."

The numbers support a need for change.

Toronto has tumbled to eighth league-wide in the category (22.3 per cent), down from when it spread its weapons across two groups in 2017-18 (25 per cent) and 2016-17 (23.8 per cent). The club's PP finished second overall in both those seasons.

Toronto's stacked 5-on-4 formation terrorized the league in October, faded slightly in November, and has turned bone-dry of late, succeeding only once in its past 15 opportunities. The sum has become less than its parts.

The Leafs are now enduring their fourth stretch of power-play futility lasting four games or longer, and in tight, meaningful contests, special teams are often the difference.

The Predators defeated Toronto Monday, in part, because they went 1-for-2 on the PP while the Leafs went 0-for-3 and watched some missed-net plays rim out of the offensive zone.

"Especially in games like the one we were in against Nashville, those momentum swings can really change the game," Matthews said.

The increasing ineffectiveness of the all-star quintet can be credited to opponents' diligent pre-scouting and ramped-up effort.

"People take their penalty-killing very seriously," Rielly noted. "Some guys, that's their main role on the team."

Ironically, the day the struggling Nylander drops out of the top six and off Matthews' wing (replaced by the speedy Kapanen), he welcomes the sniper to his power-play group.

"For sure, that'll help get something going for our unit," Nylander said.

Adds Tavares: "It's a good opportunity for both units to take advantage of it, knowing we've got two really strong groups with a great skill-set and can move the puck around and get the puck to the net.

"Whatever adjustments teams make we'd like to believe in our ability and our foundation to overcome that and find a way to get the production we need."

Babcock believes strongly in the importance of set schemes and the complementary role they serve in his skill players' ability to act spontaneous on the ice.

"If you're not organized and you don't have good structure, they can't be creative because they don't know what each other is supposed to do. What it's supposed to do is give the creative players more room," the coach said.

"You've got four penalty killers out there, and they get paid to work hard. And so, the other guys gotta work harder. You gotta outwork the penalty kill. If you don't, you don't score."

Babcock on Nylander: "When you decide you want to play here, you take the good with the bad. And sometimes the bad is, they're pointing out what you're doing. That's what the country music channel is for and the huntin' channel. Wild TV, 393—it's dialed in."

— luke fox (@lukefoxjukebox) January 9, 2019

ONE-TIMERS

Zach Hyman returns to the Leafs' top line Thursday after missing eight games with an ankle injury. "His skill is being able to get to the net, get the puck back, play with good players, play heavy, penalty-kill, take right hand face-offs," Babcock said. "Those things are important for us."... Frederik Andersen (groin) said the Leafs are targeting his return for Saturday versus Boston... In New Jersey Thursday, Michael Hutchinson will get his fourth consecutive start; expect Kasimir Kaskisuo to be recalled as his backup.... Garret Sparks skated on his own Tuesday but has yet to be cleared for practice since suffering a concussion.... And Jake Gardiner, who played some centre in high school, held his own in a spirited face-off contest with Nazem Kadri to wrap up the skate.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125207 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Edmonton Oilers first half report: Subpar depth still a key concern

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec January 9, 2019, 8:55 AM

EDMONTON — Two games into their second half, the Edmonton Oilers sit just two points out of a wild-card spot. That could be construed as the good news.

A six-game losing streak has taken them nearly out of contention in the Pacific however, as they trail first-place Calgary by 15 points and third-place San Jose by 14 points after a 7-2 loss in the Shark Tank Tuesday night.

So, lets define success in Edmonton, shall we?

Well, when you've missed the playoffs in 11 of 12 seasons, and have the player many consider to be the best currently playing the sport, a berth in the post-season has to be considered a must,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

doesn't it? That sounds like a low bar, but here in Edmonton — where general manager Peter Chiarelli's job security absolutely depends on a round of playoffs — you've got to start somewhere.

A 20-20-3 record through 43 games is, as defined, pretty average. Let's take a look at how the Oilers got there, with a series of streaks and, yes, yet another fired head coach.

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

The good news is a year ago the Oilers were 18-22-3, with about a 2.3 per cent chance of making the playoffs. More good news? They've still got Connor McDavid and he's still hovering around Art Ross territory, fifth in NHL scoring with 62 points, while Leon Draisaitl is tied for 10th place with 52 points. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is having a career year with 38 points in 42 games, and PTO pick-up Alex Chiasson has 16 goals

In goal, free-agent pick-up Mikko Koskinen allowed Edmonton to survive a slow start by Cam Talbot, and just as Koskinen cools, Talbot has found his game. So, with a few elite scorers and some goaltending, the Oilers have hung in there out West.

THE BAD

Where to start?

- Milan Lucic has two goals in the calendar year 2018. That's \$3 million per goal. He does some other things, sure. But having \$6 million tied up in a two-goal man is a cap killer.
- The depth scoring — everyone below the Big 4 forwards — has let the Oilers down. The only other forward with more than four goals — Drake Caggiola — was dealt away for defenceman Brandon Manning in a head-scratcher of a deal.
- The general manager has failed this team. In his fourth season, his blue line is still so thin that simultaneous injuries to Oscar Klefbom and Kris Russell paralyzed Edmonton. Chiarelli fired Todd McLellan, and within two weeks new coach Ken Hitchcock was complaining of the same lineup flaws that cost McLellan his job. And attempts to improve by picking up Chris Wideman, Ryan Spooner, Manning and Alex Petrovic have mostly fallen flat.

Edmonton Oilers goalie Mikko Koskinen. (Jason Franson/CP)

TRADE DEADLINE LOOKAHEAD

Desperate to keep his job, if the Oilers are anywhere close to a playoff spot on Feb. 25, Edmonton will be adding. The fear is that Chiarelli mortgages the future to save an average lineup today. His batting average in big trades does not inspire confidence among Oilers fans.

Scoring winger: With McDavid, Draisaitl and Nugent-Hopkins all natural centremen, there aren't enough compatible wingers here — especially on the right side. Edmonton needs a sniper for either McDavid's right side, or to play with Nugent-Hopkins while Draisaitl plays with McDavid. They need a finisher, like Jordan Eberle or Taylor Hall.

Top-2 Defencemen: The Oilers arguably do not have a top-pairing defenceman. Klefbom has filled in admirably when healthy, as has Adam Larsson. But certainly, neither is a legit No. 1, and we'd say that they would be a heck of a second pairing on a true contender. Edmonton needs high-end D-men, a tough find.

MOST IMPORTANT STORYLINE OF THE SECOND HALF

This has to be about the front office, starting with Chiarelli.

If the GM goes, it signals yet another do-over in Edmonton, the town that put the 're' in rebuild. Head coach Ken Hitchcock is only signed

through the end of the season, and is unlikely to return under a new GM, meaning the Oilers would hire their ninth coach in 12 seasons.

Frankly, we're not even sure that a first-round exit would save Chiarelli here, when one considers the meager improvements made to this team in his four-year reign as GM.

The one thing Chiarelli and right-hand man Keith Gretzky have done well is drafting. So as much as Oilers fans don't want to hear it, the future actually looks pretty bright with guys like Evan Bouchard, Dmitri Samorukov, Kailer Yamamoto and Ryan McLeod. But this is McDavid's fourth season, and despite his heroics this team is stuck in neutral.

Either it shifts into drive in Edmonton quickly, or the guy behind the wheel is going to get replaced.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125208 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sportsnet's 2019 NHL Draft Prospect Rankings: January

Sam Cosentino January 9, 2019, 12:55 PM

Three more valuable pieces to the scouting puzzle have been completed with the World Junior A Challenge, the World Junior Championship and the USHL Top Prospects Game in the rearview mirror.

All three events had their own storylines. At the WJAC a second tier of US-born players took gold in Bonneyville, AB. We saw draft eligibles Jack Hughes, Vasilii Podkolzin and gold medal winner Kaapo Kakko take centre stage in Vancouver/Victoria at the WJC. And in the USHL Top Prospects Game, Robert Mastro Simone earned the East's top player award as he continues to battle for first round attention.

In a time span stretching from the world juniors through the Sherwin Williams CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game in Red Deer on Jan. 23, NHL teams will meet with their scouts to come up with their mid-term lists and set a plan for whom to key-in on in the second half of the season.

While there are a few players who have shifted inside the top 15 this month, there have also been some who have broken into the first round. Here's a look at our January rankings.

1. Jack Hughes, C, USNTDP, 5-foot-10, 168 pounds: Not at his best due to injury at the WJC, but it doesn't matter, he's the top dog for 2019.
2. Kaapo Kakko, RW, TPS (Liiga), 6-foot-4, 207 pounds: The only thing missing is a dynamic element that Hughes has shown. His WJC performance has him anchored in the two-hole.
3. Vasily Podkolzin, RW, SKA St. Petersburg (MHL), 6-foot-1, 183 pounds: Continues to prove he can be leaned on when playing against older competition. He did it at the WJAC and stepped up a notch in class to perform well at the WJC.
4. Dylan Cozens, C, Lethbridge Hurricanes (WHL), 6-foot-3, 185 pounds: Didn't hang his head after not getting a chance to go to Canada's WJC selection camp. Skating ability and smarts make him a legit threat every night.
5. Matthew Boldy, LW, USNTDP, 6-foot-1, 187 pounds: Continues to grow, which can only help an already electric package.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

6. Kirby Dach, C, Saskatoon Blades (WHL), 6-foot-3, 195 pounds: A beast of a man who is bound and determined to be a pro. A big part of a long-awaited turnaround in Saskatoon.

7. Peyton Krebs, C, Kootenay Ice (WHL), 5-foot-11, 180 pounds: Does being the best player on a poor team make it easier or harder for scouts?

8. Bowen Byram, D, Vancouver Giants (WHL), 6-foot-1, 195 pounds: Has done enough on both sides of the puck to project as a top-four two-way defenceman.

9. Alex Turcotte, C, USNTDP, 5-foot-11, 189 pounds: Just starting to get his game legs back after missing a month and a half. Details and reliability are the hallmarks of his game.

10. Raphael Lavoie, C/RW, Halifax Mooseheads (QMJHL), 6-foot-4, 192 pounds: Truly an enigma who you'd love to see play with the urgency of a fire drill.

11. Arthur Kaliyev, RW, Hamilton Bulldogs (OHL), 6-foot-1, 190 pounds: Will get a chance to play a lead role with key offensive players moving on. But that also means there's less of a supporting cast.

12. Cam York, D, USNTDP, 5-foot-11, 171 pounds: Underrated in the defensive details. Puck movement, gap control and shot-blocking are above average thanks to a great skating foundation.

13. Spencer Knight, G, USNTDP, 6-foot-3, 197 pounds: Hard to argue not playing him at the WJC, but it would've made for some great scouting opportunities.

14. Trevor Zegras, C, USNTDP, 6-foot, 166 pounds: Plays with attitude, dangerous one-on-one and is a PP magician.

15. Cole Caufield, RW, USNTDP, 5-foot-6, 155 pounds: Continues to light the lamp, especially against college competition, which is a good indicator.

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.

16. Philip Broberg, D, AIK (Allsvenskan), 6-foot-3, 190 pounds: He's big and he skates well, but the jury is out on his stick/puck skills. Took advantage of an injury just to make Sweden's WJC team, but was well down on their depth chart.

17. Alex Newhook, C, Victoria Grizzlies (BCHL), 5-foot-11, 190 pounds: Explosive forward missed four league games to play in WJAC and still has a big lead in the BCHL scoring race with 63 points in 35 games.

18. Jakob Pelletier, LW, Moncton Wildcats (QMJHL), 5-foot-9, 161 pounds: Smaller players have to exhibit a dynamic element with off the charts compete. Both boxes are checked for Pelletier.

19. Brett Leason, RW, Prince Albert Raiders (WHL), 6-foot-4, 207 pounds: Questions about pace and skating have quelled. Agility needs to improve, but he's got a great stick and is especially effective on the forecheck. Not only can he finish, but is an underrated playmaker.

20. Ryan Suzuki, C, Barrie Colts (OHL), 6-foot, 172 pounds: Must prove there are more dimensions to his game, but his hockey IQ will keep him afloat until then.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

21. Thomas Harley, D, Mississauga Steelheads (OHL), 6-foot-3, 188 pounds: As calm as the day is long, even when making the high risk play. Has been a pleasant surprise in an otherwise down year for the OHL.

22. Victor Soderstrom, D, Brynas (Sweden U20) 5-foot-11, 179 pounds: Steadiness always plays. He is like the Isac Lundestrom of defencemen.

23. Ville Heinola, D, Lukko (Liiga) 5-foot-11, 178 pounds: World junior injury notwithstanding, has continued a steady rise that has seen him maintain big minutes in Finland's top pro league all season.

24. Nolan Foote, LW, Kelowna Rockets (WHL), 6-foot-3, 190 pounds: Goal scoring is his calling card, but there's been steady progression in other areas.

25. Vladislav Kolyachonok, D, Flint Firebirds (WHL), 6-foot, 176 pounds: Matches high-end skating with high-end hockey IQ. Stories of his work ethic are legendary.

26. Pavel Dorofeyev, LW, Magnitogorsk (MHL) 6-foot-1, 167 pounds: Works hard to create offence and is an analytics darling with ability to consistently get chances from the "home plate area."

27. Alex Vlasic, D, USNTDP, 6-foot-5, 193 pounds: An excellent skater with size who plays with bite. Has a great stick to make him difficult to beat in the defensive zone.

28. Matthew Robertson, D, Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL), 6-foot-3, 201 pounds: When he's healthy he's going to have to answer the question: "What kind of player will he be at the next level?"

29. Moritz Seider, D, Mannheim (DEL) 6-foot-3, 183 pounds: Being named captain for the U20 team as an underager speaks to the intangibles he brings to the table that complement his size.

30. Philip Tomasino, RW, Niagara IceDogs (OHL), 5-foot-11, 178 pounds: Used an injury to current linemate Akil Thomas to rise to the top of the Dogs' lineup and has not relinquished his spot.

31. Simon Holmstrom, RW, HV71 (Sweden U20) 6-foot-1, 183 pounds: Has some ground to make up based on injuries that felled him for the November tournaments and the Hlinka-Gretzky tournament before that.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125209 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs shake up power-play units at practice

Kristen Shilton

The Maple Leafs held a noon practice at MasterCard Centre. TSN's Kristen Shilton has more in her Wednesday notes.

The Maple Leafs' power play has needed a shake up for some time. Now it's finally getting one.

Toronto started the season scorching hot with the extra man, tallying nine goals in the team's first seven games. But since Nov. 1, those units rank 15th overall in the NHL (18.5 per cent), with only 15 goals.

The power play has been anemic at best over the last 15 games, dating back to Dec. 4 at Buffalo, producing just five goals in 43 attempts (11.6 per cent) – and three of those goals came in a single game against the Florida Panthers.

On the heels of going 0-for-3 on the power play Monday against Nashville, coach Mike Babcock changed things up at Wednesday's practice, moving Auston Matthews to the second group and Kasperii Kapanen to the top unit.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

"It wasn't going the way we wanted," Babcock said of the alterations. "When you have a total of one group, you don't have as much competition on your team. I still like when you have two and you compete to see who's out there. We're going to make a change here and see how it goes."

Matthews and John Tavares currently lead the Leafs in power-play goals with seven, while Mitch Marner and Morgan Rielly are the top point-getters with 14 each. There appears to be ample talent available for those units to rebound. It's a matter of execution now.

"[The coaching staff] probably wants to see some different results, some different looks and get us playing more efficiently on the power play," Tavares said. "It's a good opportunity for both units to take advantage of it and knowing we have two really strong groups that have a great skill set and can move the puck around."

One of the Leafs' most lethal man-advantage plays early in the season was a seam pass from Marner to Matthews that opposing penalty kills have become wise to and now often take away, which has made the power play predictable. Toronto has talked for weeks about making tweaks, but now the personnel rotation will force the issue.

"We're working through the challenges we're facing now and whatever adjustments teams make, we'd like to believe in our ability and our foundation," Tavares said. "...We're the one with one extra guy."

But having the other team outnumbered hasn't been as much of a coup for the Leafs of late as they'd like.

"You've got four penalty killers out there and they get paid to work hard," Babcock said. "You have to outwork the penalty kill because if you don't, you don't score. Your scheme in everything you do is important and that frees up the players to be creative. Organization [is supposed to] give the good players more room."

William Nylander had hoped when he scored his first goal of the season on Jan. 3 it would get him started on a roll. So far that's where his scoring production has started and ended.

In 14 games, the Leafs' second-highest paid player has come up with three points total (one goal, two assists). After Monday's 4-0 loss to the Nashville Predators, Babcock said the "urgency has to be there" for his winger.

Like everything else about his game, that is coming along slowly for Nylander. But he's optimistic about the direction he's headed.

"I feel like I'm starting to get there, starting to get confident with the puck and being able to create stuff," he said. "Starting to feel really good with the puck and all areas of the game are starting to feel better and better."

Until the 22-year-old is back where he wants to be, avoiding his many critics has been the best policy.

"I haven't been really paying attention to anything," he said. "I just know what I'm capable of and I know that's going to come. You're going to have tough times, and especially now it's tougher than others. Once the puck starts going in, it'll keep going in."

With Toronto having lost three of its last four, Babcock moved Nylander off Matthews' line at Wednesday's practice and on to Nazem Kadri's unit with Patrick Marleau, the latter of whom has tried to connect with Nylander since his return from a lengthy contract negotiation in early December.

"I try to talk to him; I don't know if I'm helping our not," Marleau said. "But I think just telling him that I think he's doing well. I think coaches are talking to him and he's doing a lot of great things out there, so he's just got to stick with it."

Babcock's advice to Nylander is even more succinct.

"I only know one way [to improve], and that's work," Babcock claimed. "When it's going real good, you work hard every day because you want to keep it going good. When it's not going good, you want to work real hard because you want to get it going. It's simple: work."

If Nylander needs any recommendations on how to avoid the negativity out there, Babcock has a few suggestions.

"When you decide you want to play here, you take the good with the bad and sometimes the bad is they're pointing out what you're doing," he explained. "That's what the country music channel and the hunting channel is for. Wild TV, 393, it's dialed in. They never talk about hockey once."

The Leafs' quest to become a heavier team will get a much-needed boost on Thursday when winger Zach Hyman steps back into the lineup after missing eight games with an ankle injury.

In fact, Hyman will be returning to the very scene of the crime: Prudential Center in New Jersey, where he went crashing uncomfortably into the boards on Dec. 18.

Less than a month later, that's all ancient history. Hyman just wants to get out there again.

"I'm more excited [than anything], I'm not really worried about other stuff," Hyman said.

As the team's best forechecker and a premier penalty killer, Hyman's brand of toughness will be well-received by a Leafs' team criticized for being too easy to play against.

"It's just the way I play – go into corners, battle and try to get the puck," Hyman said. "Just part of my game."

It may not amount to a pile of points at the end of the season, but Hyman's presence is felt in ways his teammates feel is irreplaceable.

"He's just got different kinds of skill," Babcock said. "But his ability to get the puck back, get to the net, play with good players, play heavy, penalty kill, take right-hand faceoffs, I think those things are important for us. We missed him."

"His consistency and predictability for us, and the trust you have with what he brings to the game, his contributions on a nightly basis, makes it easy for me and Mitch to do what we do," Tavares said. "Great to have him back. I know he's hungry to get back at it, and he's an impact player for us."

Meanwhile, goaltender Frederik Andersen (groin) won't be available for Thursday's game, but he said he's eyeing a return on Saturday against Boston.

Babcock isn't so sure.

"I don't think Freddie will be going until Colorado [on Monday] from what I hear," he said. "We'll just see. He's got to get ready and he's got to be ready to stop the puck when you go in."

The team will recall Kasimir Kaskisuo to backup Michael Hutchinson in New Jersey.

Maple Leafs lines at practice:

Hyman-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen

Marleau-Kadri-Nylander

Lindholm-Gauthier-Brown



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Ozhiganov

Marincin-Holl

Andersen

Hutchinson

TSN.CA LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125210 Websites

USA TODAY / Capitals invite youth hockey team that stood up for player who heard racial taunts

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY Published 9:39 p.m. ET Jan. 9, 2019 | Updated 10:51 p.m. ET Jan. 9, 2019

The Washington Capitals had a surprise for a local youth hockey team that stood up after an African-American teammate was subjected to racial taunts.

Capitals forward Devante Smith-Pelly and defenseman John Carlson told the Metro Maple Leafs, based in nearby Odenton, Md., via video that they would be getting tickets to Monday's home game against the St. Louis Blues at Capital One Arena.

Divyne Apollon II, 13, was the player who heard the taunts at a tournament in late December. According to The Washington Post, he heard monkey sounds and chants that he should play basketball. When he was suspended for getting into a fight, his teammates wore a sticker decrying racism — featuring the word racism surrounded by a circle with a hockey stick crossing through it — at the next game.

The story caught the attention of Smith-Pelly, who had heard basketball chants last season while he sat in the penalty box during a game at the Chicago Blackhawks.

His video with Carlson was played for the Metro Maple Leafs, earning excited cheers from the team. Sixty tickets are being made available, and team members will get to meet with Capitals players afterward.

"For me to meet him (Apollon) and look him in the face as someone who's gone through it and can talk to him and share my experience is important to me," Smith-Pelly told the Capitals' website. "It's a pretty gross thing to be happening."

USA TODAY LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125211 Websites

USA TODAY / NHL All-Star jerseys will be made out of ocean garbage

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 4:03 p.m. ET Jan. 9, 2019

The NHL All-Star Game's jerseys will be garbage, and the league is proud of that distinction.

The league has announced that the NHL All-Star weekend in San Jose, California, will feature eco-innovative Adidas jerseys made from upcycled marine debris.

The ADIZERO jerseys, featuring player's team logos for the first time instead of an NHL logo, will be worn during the skills competition on Jan. 25 and the main four-division, three-on-three tournament on Jan. 26.

Embracing eco-friendly projects has been an NHL mandate.

Adidas has partnered with Parley for the Oceans in a bid to end marine plastic pollution and protect the oceans by using plastic waste in eco-friendly projects.

Other sports teams, such as the University of Miami football team, have worn jerseys made from ocean waste.

Adidas and Parley rework the ocean waste into technical fibers that can be transformed into a breathable fabric, which can be made into a jersey.

The jerseys will be available for sale to the public.

USA TODAY LOADED: 01.10.2019

1125212 Websites

USA TODAY / Distillery offers Blue Jackets' Artemi Panarin a lifetime supply of vodka if he re-signs

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY Published 5:47 p.m. ET Jan. 9, 2019 | Updated 6:43 p.m. ET Jan. 9, 2019

Columbus Blue Jackets fans are worried about whether their team will be able to hang on to leading scorer and pending free agent Artemi Panarin.

A Columbus-based distillery/restaurant has come up with a tempting offer in an attempt to keep Panarin.

High Bank Distillery has a billboard near the Blue Jackets' workplace, Nationwide Arena, offering the Russian-born forward a lifetime supply of vodka if he re-signs.

Panarin is in the final year of a two-year, \$12 million extension that he signed when he was with the Chicago Blackhawks. The Blackhawks, afraid they would be unable to sign him long-term, traded him to the Blue Jackets in June 2017 in what has become a lopsided deal.

Panarin has scored 127 points over the last season-and-a-half since the trade, ranking 18th in the league during that period. He has 45 points in 40 games this season.

Needless to say, his next deal will be worth much more than \$6 million a year, and the Blue Jackets also have to re-sign star goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

In September, Panarin released a statement, leaving open how he would handle his pending free agency next summer.

"I was welcomed here with open arms by pretty much everyone in the organization, the fans and, you know, the fans love me and I love the fans," he said. "I want people to understand that it's not often that a player really has the opportunity to kind of decide the future, so I'm going to take the time to decide."

No word on whether the distillery's offer might sway him, but he did spot the billboard.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 10, 2019

"Columbus, you keep amazing me," Panarin wrote on his Instagram account. "Thank you for your brilliance. Now I have a new spot to dine at."

Panarin is nicknamed Bread Man, a play on words from then-Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville on the similarity of his last name to the bakery chain.

Panera might have to step up, too, with a lifetime offer.

USA TODAY LOADED: 01.10.2019