



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 11, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Tampa Bay's late rally ends Canes' five-game win streak

By Chip Alexander

To beat the best, you have to play your best.

For much of their game Thursday against the Tampa Bay Lightning, the NHL's best team this season, the Carolina Hurricanes did that. They played with an edge, gave up few good scoring chances, took the lead on Justin Williams' 300th career goal and got one of Petr Mrazek's best goaltending games of the season.

But it couldn't keep the Lightning from winning. Tampa Bay scored two power-play goals in the final eight minutes -- from Ondrej Palat and then Brayden Point -- to win 3-1 at Amalie Arena and end the Canes' five-game winning streak.

Rookie Andrei Svechnikov had the first Canes penalty in the third period and Greg McKegg the second with an undisciplined slash with 3:55 left in regulation. The Canes' penalty killing, which has been aggressive and become a strength, couldn't prevent the Lightning from scoring.

Point, denied a goal by a coach's challenge in the second period, picked up a late empty-netter for a second goal.

"I couldn't complain. The effort was phenomenal," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We worked hard. We always work hard. We're a hard-working team. Obviously we knew coming in we couldn't take penalties and we did. That's the killer."

The Lightning improved to 34-8-2, the NHL's best record. The Bolts, called the "perfect package" by Brind'Amour before the game, are 17-1-1 since Nov. 29 and have won nine straight at home at Amalie.

After a scoreless first in which the Lightning managed three shots, Williams' milestone goal at 4:24 of the second pushed the Canes (20-18-5) in front. Williams, crashing the net, followed up a shot by defenseman Dougie Hamilton to beat goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy for his 11th of the season.

The game took a more intense turn later in the second period after the Lightning was denied a tying goal by Point.

Point took a stretch pass, got behind defensemen Justin Faulk and Calvin de Haan and beat Mrazek, who denied Point's first shot only to have Point whack the puck out of the air and into the net.

Brind'Amour issued a coach's challenge, claiming offside. But not on Point. On Tyler Johnson.

Canes goaltending coach Mike Bales, sitting with general manager Don Waddell high above the Amalie ice, was said to have spotted Johnson leaving the ice but not completely off the ice when Point entered the zone. The goal was negated and the Canes kept the 1-0 lead, much to the displeasure of the home fans.

The Canes kept the lead until Svechnikov was called for hooking at 11:15 of the third, his second penalty of the game. Palat's power-play score, off a fortunate bounce, tied it.

McKegg then was called for what was a retaliation move. After being elbowed by Alex Killorn, with no call, McKegg slashed Killorn on the back of the leg with 3:55 left in regulation.

"Tough call at the end," Brind'Amour said. "Good game going on and the guy embellishes a little tap on the back of the legs."

Point, open in the slot, ripped a shot past Mrazek and the Lightning had the lead. His empty-netter gave him 29 goals for the season.

The Canes returned to Raleigh after the game to complete a back-to-back against the Buffalo Sabres on Friday at PNC Arena. It will be the return game for winger Jeff Skinner, who was traded by the Canes in the offseason after eight years with Carolina, has put together a terrific first season with Buffalo and also has 29 goals.

"When you play a team like Tampa, where we were in a good position, and then to lose it that way, that's a tough way to lose," Brind'Amour said. "You almost rather lose 8-0. That's going to be tough but we have to pick the guys up tomorrow and be ready to go."

Former Canes general manager Ron Francis 'reinvents' himself with new business job

By Chip Alexander

It has taken a while, and understandably so, but Ron Francis is making a move away from hockey.

Not from Raleigh. He and his family are staying. But hockey.

Francis, the former executive vice president and general manager of the Carolina Hurricanes, has joined NAI Carolantic Realty, company chairman Steve Stroud

announced Thursday. Francis will work with clients on commercial real estate investments, Stroud said.

"I've known Steve for a long time and stayed in touch over the years," Francis said in an interview. "When things changed for me he said, 'What are you going to do?' and he said I would be good at this. We talked about it, I hemmed and hawed, and made the decision to go back to school and take the class and learn about real estate in November and



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December, passed all the exams and got my brokerage license.

"I talked with Steve and said, 'Let's give it a try.' Here we are."

Francis, 55, used the word "reinvent" in describing his move into the business world. For nearly all of his life, it was all hockey.

He was a Canadian junior star, an NHL star, a two-time Stanley Cup winner and judged worthy of the Hockey Hall of Fame after he retired as a player. He had his number retired by the Hurricanes and was the first hockey player selected for the N.C. Sports Hall of Fame.

Moving to the Hurricanes front office, he was the director of player development, vice president of hockey operations and also associate head coach, then named general manager and executive vice president in April 2014.

Everything changed when Tom Dundon became majority owner of the Hurricanes a year ago. Dundon, citing personality differences, first reassigned Francis to president of hockey operations in March 2018, then fired him the next month.

Francis has remained an investor in the team as a member of Hurricanes Holdings LLC and said he will continue that financial relationship until November 2019. He said his contract with the team ends June 30, 2019, and said he preferred not to comment on the team or his departure from the Canes while still under contract.

Francis said he has not attended any Hurricanes games this season or seen the telecasts. He was once Rod Brind'Amour's teammate and later his boss as GM, but has watched from afar during Brind'Amour's first year as a head coach.

"This will be a dramatic change from what I have been doing in hockey, there's no question," Francis said of his new position "I do think a lot that you learn in hockey and learn in sports in general translate well to the business world in terms of communication, teamwork.

"It's a new challenge. But I certainly feel more comfortable that I'm doing it with NAI Carolantic Realty and Steve Stroud and the people he has here, who have an outstanding reputation and are known for their hard work and knowledge. I've got some learning to do but some good people to learn with."

In terms of hockey, Francis said he believes he could have "stayed in the game" and his name has been mentioned as a potential candidate for other GM jobs. But he said that could not have happened while maintaining his investment in the team, and likely would mean moving his family.

"At this point in our life, we thought this isn't exactly what we're looking to do," he said. "So this is a new venture. I'm sure not a lot of people at 55 reinvent themselves."

Francis did agree to serve as co-general manager, along with Sean Burke, of the Canadian team in the recent Spengler Cup in Davos, Switzerland. Another former teammate, Kevin Dineen, was the Canada coach although the Canadians did not win a fourth straight title.

It has been a busy time, Francis said. He said he and his wife, Mary Lou, celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary with a two-week trip to Italy. While there, he said, their daughter, Kaitlyn, was engaged and will be married in 2020.

Now, he has a new non-hockey job and said he was at his desk Thursday at the NAI Carolantic Realty office off Trinity Road, not far from PNC Arena.

"I've been in this area 20-plus years, been in this market and made a lot of good friends," Francis said. "I'm excited about this opportunity."

THE ATHLETIC

LeBrun Notebook: Power forward rental market emerges, potential trade candidates for the Avalanche

By Pierre LeBrun

We know it's the year of the UFA winger but a more specific market has emerged that intrigues me even more.

The rental power forward.

Wayne Simmonds, as discussed earlier this week, may very well become available if the Flyers decide not to re-sign him. And there's a decent chance pending UFA Micheal Ferland gets dealt by the Hurricanes.

Both bring similar characteristics and bring a unique set of physical tools to a contender looking for that skill set.

What I think will end up happening over the next 6-7 weeks is that some of the same teams inquiring on Simmonds will also check in on Ferland.

Of the two, Simmonds, 30, has the more polished pedigree, a former All-Star Game MVP who averaged 30 goals a season four straight years before dipping to 24 last year while playing through an array of injuries. He's got 13 goals this season for a struggling Flyers team.

On the other hand, Ferland is younger at 26 and one assumes will cost less in a trade than Simmonds. So there's that. Mind you, my sense is that Carolina would begin its ask at least this far out from the deadline at a first-round pick and a prospect. Whether they get it, well, we shall see.

Why might Ferland get dealt? Well, he hasn't signed an extension to this point. I'm told there haven't been any discussions between both sides in well over a month. Which isn't to say that can't be salvaged but until further notice, Carolina has to see what's out there. No way the Canes can



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afford to get nothing in return for him if he walks into free agency July 1.

There will be interest in Ferland for sure. These power forwards are a rare commodity. Having two potentially on the trade market at the same time is quite interesting.

Let's start with Simmonds. Might be easier to say which playoff team doesn't have interest rather than try to limit the teams that will no doubt inquire if they haven't already.

"Any contending team will have interest, regardless of what they may tell you," one Western Conference team exec said.

Imagine him in Tampa Bay. I'd love to see the Bolts inquire. The NHL's first-place team is loaded up front and has very few holes in its lineup but a little more muscle in the form of a very good player wouldn't hurt. When the Lightning acquired J.T. Miller last year they cited wanting more size up front. I think they can use more. Having Simmonds in the lineup would certainly keep Tom Wilson a little honest if the Capitals and Lightning play again.

In his top 20 trade targets story, my colleague Craig Custance mentioned Nashville as a good fit for Simmonds. Agreed. Just like my TSN colleague Darren Dreger mentioning Winnipeg as a potential landing spot. Again, love that fit. And yes, I'm also told both those teams are keeping an eye on Simmonds.

Which is why if you're Hurricanes GM Don Waddell you make sure you call those teams to talk Ferland, too. If Simmonds is indeed traded, and that's still not a certainty, only one team can get him. Others will lose out. Ferland will be there for the other teams.

Calgary and Vegas are other potential fits for Simmonds, in my mind. The Bruins have called around looking to add more depth up front in their top nine. Of course, the Leafs have been linked, too, but GM Kyle Dubas is on record with me saying he didn't see a rental player that fit his eye, or at least that was as of last month when we sat down. Plus Toronto's No. 1 priority remains defence ahead of the trade deadline. Still, Simmonds in Toronto, especially if the Leafs are going to play Boston in the first round...

Whatever happens, the Simmonds/Ferland market will be intertwined. Fun times ahead.

Avs need scoring depth

The Avalanche are a top-10 scoring team in the league and so at first blush you wouldn't think offence would be a trade deadline focus.

But secondary scoring is an issue for the young, entertaining and right now struggling Avs, who are on the playoff bubble.

There's arguably no better offensive trio in the NHL than Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen and Gabriel Landeskog but after that, the offensive numbers drop dramatically among Avs forwards.

A lot will depend on where Colorado is in the standings closer to the Feb. 25 deadline but rest assured the idea of adding some secondary scoring would be the prime objective if the Avs decide to pull the trigger. Teams that have heard

from the Avs aren't sure yet how committed Colorado might be to making that kind of move. But there's been chatter.

This is what I think: The Avs aren't going to spend high-end, future assets in exchange for a big-name rental player. My sense is GM Joe Sakic and his front office still have the bigger picture in mind as far as where this team is headed over the next few years. They've got more coming in the system. They've got the Senators first-round pick this June in addition to their own. They're going to be a really good team.

But for now?

If Colorado does act, you get the feeling it's either a medium-priced rental or a hockey deal, a player the Avs would still have on the roster past this season. The latter would be more ideal but of course harder to pull off in-season because rentals are the more common commodity before the trade deadline.

With that in mind, here are some potential targets (in no particular order) who would make sense to me if the Avs do indeed decide to go down this path:

Mats Zuccarello, 31, \$4.5 million AAV, UFA July 1

It's been a tough go this season for the veteran forward but he's basically been a 50-plus point player most of his career. The Avs have two third-round picks in June, their own plus Ottawa's. Could the high Sens third-rounder do it?

Andrei Burakovsky, 23, \$3 million AAV, RFA July 1

He seems to have fallen out of favour in Washington, scratched again Thursday night. Coming off back to back 12-goal seasons, there's potential there in the 2013 first-round pick. And he's not a rental. So this would perhaps fit the Avs' needs better. But the reigning Cup champs aren't sellers. Is there a trade that makes sense that can also help Washington?

Gustav Nyquist, 29, \$4.75 million AAV, UFA July 1

He's having a nice year for the struggling Red Wings. But he's got a full no-trade clause. Also, it's not out of the question he re-signs. His camp is slated to speak again with Wings management later this month.

Ryan Dzingel, 26, \$1.8 million AAV, UFA July 1

He really came on last year with 23 goals on a struggling team and this season has continued his fine play, on pace for 30-plus goals. Of course, the Senators would like to re-sign him. But if they can't get that done before Feb. 25, it will make sense to listen. He'd fit in perfectly on Colorado's second line.

Tyler Toffoli, 26, \$4.6 million AAV, signed through next season

It's been a struggle for Toffoli this season, like many of his teammates. But he's a three-time 20-plus goal scorer. Could a change of scenery reignite him? What I like about this possibility is that the Avs aren't getting a rental here, they'd be making a hockey deal.

There are lots of other options but those are just some that make sense to me. The Avs, at some point, have to decide how they want to approach the rest of this season and how



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important the playoffs are right now within the bigger, long-term vision.

By the numbers: How each team's performance is expected to change in the second half

By Dom Luszczyzyn

"Why do you hate my favourite team?"

It's a common question that's asked anytime I post my season projections, generally when a team's projected point total is significantly different from a team's point pace. In that sense, it's a fair question to ask as it seems from an outside perspective that the model is seeing something very different from the on-ice results.

In a game as random as hockey though, the threat of regression is ever-looming and that's essentially what a model with eyes towards the future is saying: the farther a projection is from a team's pace, the more regression is expected.

That's all well and good, but it doesn't answer that first pivotal question, which is what I plan to do here – framed with point distributions.

The above chart is available on our daily projections page, but it generally gets glossed over as most fans focus on a team's average projection. It's a single number that best represents a team's likely future, but at this point, it still only represents around seven-to-eight percent of the total range after 50,000 simulations. Even at the halfway point of the season, there's still a very wide range of expected outcomes, roughly 25 points, meaning a team projected for 100 points likely lands anywhere between 88 and 112, with half of all simulations landing in a six-point range between 98 and 103 points.

The season is half over, but things can still change quickly.

With all that being said, let's take a dive into why some teams are projected to move away from their current pace, for better or worse.

Projections and data as of January 9, 2019

Keep rounding errors in mind if records don't "add up" perfectly

Status Quo

Zero-to-two point difference between pace and projection

Before Wednesday night's win against Chicago, the Predators were on pace for 102.5 points and projected for 102.4. It doesn't get closer than that. Nashville is a weird team in that regard because the status quo includes two stretches: one where the team is healthy and excellent, and the other where the team is injured and not so excellent. Expect something in the middle going forward as the team likely isn't as good as that first group, even when healthy, nor is it as bad as that second group, even when injured.

Like Nashville, Pittsburgh went through two swings: an ugly first quarter where everyone wrote the Penguins off and a sterling second quarter where everyone remembered the

Penguins were, and still are, Cup contenders. Again, the answer is somewhere in the middle: their current pace.

In Toronto it always feels like the sky is falling even when it's not. Toronto is tied for second in the league in points percentage with Washington and Winnipeg and are on pace for 109 points. Of those three teams, my model is more bullish on Toronto's talent level being actually 110-point calibre – a very high bar that only Tampa Bay comfortably clears. It hinges on what the team has looked like under-the-hood since Auston Matthews returned to health and William Nylander returned, results aside. With a league-high PDO, my model still expects the team to go under their current pace though.

After a brief injured-filled lull the Bruins are back to where they should be: third in the Atlantic. There's a chance the team can still catch the Leafs for home ice in the first round, but it's not a very strong one. Injuries derailed parts of the teams season, but they're back on track now, posting a record of 16-8-3 with Patrice Bergeron in the lineup.

This looked like the year Arizona could finally make its way out of the bottom five. With a slowish start and a season-ending injury to starting goalie Antti Raanta, that's become less and less likely by the day. A season-ending injury to Nick Schmaltz only furthers that doom and gloom. The Coyotes aren't currently in the bottom five, but my model expects their pace to maintain while other teams below them rise above them over the season's second half.

Everyone knew they would be bad, and they are in fact, nearly exactly as bad as predicted. Thank you, next.

Before the season started my model expected Columbus to be a 101-point team and it looks like the Blue Jackets will settle in right around that range this season. That was despite a bleak outlook for the future due to the team's pending free agents, Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, but the sky has not fallen as some foretold. Having said that, the team is expected to drop slightly and finish below 100 points, largely due to their slight decline at 5-on-5. Last year the team had a 51.7 percent shot share and 53.5 percent goal share. This year those numbers are 50.0 and 52.1 respectively.

Canucks fans are excited about their team for the first time in a long time and for good reason. Elias Pettersson's star-powered introduction to the league has reignited the team, paving the way to Vancouver's best record in four seasons. The Canucks are on pace for 80 points, but that includes an injury-filled lull in the middle – they could finish a little higher than that when all is said and done. Still, those hoping for the playoffs should keep expectations tempered as the team's chances of hitting over 90 points are under 10 percent.

The Stars are an average hockey team. Whether that's enough to get into the playoffs or not is anybody's guess at this point, but with John Klingberg back the team found its bearings, going 6-3-1. It seems as if Tyler Seguin has found



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his stride too and that should go a long way. What is concerning though is that the team still isn't carrying the play (even with Klingberg back), posting a 47.6 percent Corsi which is the seventh-worst mark in the league. I'm not sold on them, but in a weak West, they could still be a wildcard team.

There were many wondering if the Erik Karlsson led Sharks would live up to the hype. Well, they're starting to, turning into one of the league's hottest teams while maintaining their excellent shot rate. San Jose has a 68 percent chance of finishing with 100 points or more this season.

Minor Movement

Two-to-four point difference

The Rangers were expected to be one of the league's worst teams this season, and yet have found a way to stay outside of the bottom five for the majority of the season, currently ranking 23rd in points percentage. I'd expect that to change as teams below them improve and the Rangers start selling. Only Ottawa has a worse possession rate at 5-on-5 this season.

After a red-hot start to the season where Colorado was 15-6-5 at the end of November, the team has gone off the rails quickly winning just five of their last 17 games, ahead of only Philadelphia, Detroit and Ottawa over that span (and that was before Wednesday's demoralizing loss to Calgary). The Avalanche have been an average 5-on-5 club during the time frame, but have been victimized by the league's worst shooting percentage at 5.6 percent, a stark contrast from the fourth-ranked 9.8 percent in the team's previous 26 games. Regression was expected based on the hot starts from the team's top line which collectively shot 12.7 percent up until December and have been at 7.2 percent since. Again, somewhere in the middle is what should be expected of them going forward. The team lacks depth outside that potent line, yes, but grade out as an above average team because of said line, one of the league's best. The team has also had some really bad luck in close games, going 4-14 in one-goal games which is the league's worst figure. They're 16-10 otherwise, tied for seventh in the league. Generally speaking, it's that second number that's more meaningful when all is said and done as one-goal games tend to be more subject to the whims of puck luck.

Since Nate Schmidt came back on Nov. 18, Vegas has been the league's second-best team with a 19-4-3 record; a 129-point pace. The team was regularly out-chancing other teams in the early going, but not getting the bounces. Those bounces have arrived and now the team is back up to a 103-point pace – close to where they were in their inaugural season. The Golden Knights are good, but I'm not convinced they're this good and should see a slow down after heating up over the last two months.

Since Shea Weber came back the Canadiens have been up there among the league's best outfits, but my model still isn't convinced, not with Carey Price not fully himself yet (though he is improving) and without a true difference-maker up front. This might be a case where the team is better than the sum of its parts (or they're simply overachieving) and the projections aren't being fair to a team that many saw as a bottom-10 team to start the season. In any case, whether

you're high on the team or not, it feels like somewhere between 90-to-100 points is a safe bet for the Habs: it's where they land 57 percent of the time.

The Flames are projected to finish with the West's highest total at 105 points, but that's still a touch below the team's current pace. On average, the league usually has five teams above 105 points per year and while I have no doubt the story will be the same this season, it's still too early to call which teams will get there (aside from Tampa Bay). Add up every team's probability and you get 423 percent or 4.2 teams. Calgary has a 46 percent chance, which ranks third, as expected.

Tampa Bay: 99 percent

Toronto: 69 percent

Calgary: 46 percent

Winnipeg: 36 percent

Pittsburgh: 32 percent

Nashville: 29 percent

San Jose: 27 percent

Boston: 26 percent

Washington: 24 percent

Vegas: 18 percent

It's still possible Calgary maintains its pace and goes above and beyond, but there are reasons to suggest regression is possible due to the team's insane shorthanded scoring rate and its massive 16-4 goal-differential when either team's net is empty. Small qualms, really, but worth mentioning.

The glory days spanning from October 2016 to May 2017 may be long gone in the rearview window, but I still suspect the Oilers are better than their current 82-point pace. Since losing Oscar Klefbom and Kris Russell to injury the defence has been in a state of disarray with the team's shot attempts against at 5-on-5 ballooning from 56 to 61 per 60 minutes and their Corsi percentage dropping from 50.3 to 42.4 percent, the second-worst mark in the league. The team has struggled to keep pucks out of the net as a result and have gone 4-8-1 in the process. Even with the injuries, the Oilers probably aren't that bad and with the two defenders likely returning soon it's likely the Oilers pick things up and finish somewhere between 80-to-90 points.

The Wild are on pace for 88 points and have struggled without Matt Dumba, but they're a stronger team than they've currently shown. Despite a middling Corsi rate, Minnesota remains a dominant team via expected goals at 54 percent, but don't have the actual goal rate to match at a shade under breakeven. I'd expect that to even out, but it largely depends on Devan Dubnyk regaining his past form. Dubnyk has been generally overrated since entering the Wild system, propped up by the team's staunch defence, but that hasn't been the case this season. Over the past two seasons, Dubnyk's save percentage has been 0.6 percent worse than what's expected of him. This year it's at 1.5 percent, his worst mark since the catastrophic 2013-14 season where he was exiled from Edmonton. Even at the pedestrian mark he was at the last two seasons, Dubnyk would grade out as a .925 goalie



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at 5-on-5, saving the Wild seven goals in the process. That would be enough to put the team closer to a 90-point pace and reason to expect a stronger second half from the team.

A recent five-game winning streak has changed things drastically for Carolina. It seemed like all playoff hopes were lost for the Hurricanes, but regression hit the team hard and now they're back up to an 88-point pace, just under four points away from where my model currently projects them. As much as people like to think analytics overrates the Canes, there are 13 teams expected to see a larger change over the league's second half than Carolina. If the Hurricanes move away from the goalie timeshare and rely more on Curtis McElhinney they could shift further as he's been surprisingly one of the league's strongest goalies over the last three seasons (in an admittedly small sample size). Really though, it all comes down to the team finding its scoring touch. They're still last at 5-on-5 shooting percentage, but have slowly crept up past the six percent barrier and I don't doubt that the team has even further to go in that regard given they were at seven percent last season.

Sizeable Shift

Four-to-six point difference

The playoffs are a pipe dream at this point, but the Panthers should at least be able to surge to a more respectable point total than their current pace. This one largely comes down to goaltending as the Panthers have an .886 on the season, the second-worst mark in the league. This could be a case where Roberto Luongo has simply fallen off a cliff after countless injuries at the age of 39, but even a cliff this steep seems a bit hard to believe. He was at .929 just last year and above .915 in every season with Florida, but is at .892 this season.

Two things the model is agnostic too when it comes to projecting future games, both of which heavily influence where the Senators will end up:

The trade deadline

Effort level after the trade deadline

Ottawa has two mammoth UFA decisions to monitor in Matt Duchene and Mark Stone, who equate to 5.6 combined wins of value – 41 percent of Ottawa's total value. Without either, this team could be one of the worst teams assembled in the salary cap era and might drop even farther than its current 67-point pace. Post-trade deadline, bad teams usually play worse too as there's little left to play for, exacerbating the issue further. My model thinks the team can bounce back above 70 points, especially now with an NHL goalie at backup, but it's difficult to give that much credence with the extraneous issues surrounding the team.

In St. Louis the problem might be as simple as this:

Vladimir Tarasenko – 5-on-5 Points-Per-60

2013-14 – 2.41

2014-15 – 2.79

2015-16 – 2.29

2016-17 – 2.21

2017-18 – 2.12

2018-19 – 1.18

When your superstar isn't playing like one, with a points-per-60 rate that ranks 289th in the league, you're asking for trouble. That's a fourth line rate. Of course, we know that's not exactly Tarasenko's fault as he's firing as many shots as ever, but only scoring on five percent rather than his usual 11. The NHL is a star-driven league and the Blues have sputtered without Tarasenko leading the way, but it goes beyond that. Brayden Schenn has regressed after looking like a promising top line centre in his first year as a Blue. Others have too. The team as a whole is a below average possession group. And Jake Allen, whose bar was painfully low to start the year, somehow has managed to be worse than expected. The Blues aren't as bad as their current standing (they're third worst in one-goal games, but have a .500 win percentage otherwise) and I think we'll see a team closer to what many expected in the second half – it'll just be too little, too late.

It's getting harder and harder to argue that a bottom five possession team deserves more than they're getting, especially after a loss to the league's worst team on Wednesday. After a sluggish start, it seems like the Ducks found their mojo in November and early December, but have spiralled back into old patterns since, dropping nine straight games to fall out of the playoffs. What should help more than anything is becoming fully healthy. Rickard Rakell and Cam Fowler both rejoined the team this week after lengthy absences and will be the keys to getting Anaheim back on track. Aside from Corey Perry, who won't be back until March, this will be the first time this season that the Ducks are fully healthy. With the league's best goalie, all they have to do is get back to the level they were at last season. Judging from how they looked this season, that might be easier said than done and I wouldn't blame you for viewing the Ducks as a model "blind-spot," a team it refuses to downgrade no matter how many games it loses or how often they get out-played in said games. Time will tell.

It takes a special kind of awful to be a true talent sub-70 point team (for reference, I have the worst team, Ottawa at 72) so any team on pace for anything below that will likely see a bump. That includes the awful Kings who should settle in around 70-to-75 points. This one is pretty easy to spot as the team's best players – aside from Dustin Brown who has maintained his 60-point pace from year-to-year – have been well below the pace they played last season.

Point pace vs. last season

Anze Kopitar: 55 vs. 92

Jeff Carter: 36 vs. 67

Tyler Toffoli: 30 vs. 47

Drew Doughty: 47 vs. 60

Jake Muzzin: 32 vs. 47

That's in a year when scoring was up across the board too. In fairness, it was clear that a lot of those totals from last year were poised to drop, just not to this degree and it wouldn't be a surprise to see players pick it up in the second



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half, if nothing more than to salvage their pride after a lost season. Even Jonathan Quick has dropped from .921 last season to .902 this season.

This one might be a controversial one as the Jets are widely viewed as one of the league's best teams, and while my model doesn't doubt that, it's bearish on a team that will be missing Nikolaj Ehlers and Dustin Byfuglien for an extended period of time. That's about five wins of value out of the lineup. There's also a red-hot power play that might be just flying a touch too high right now. The team is fourth in shooting percentage this season – the same as last year – but at 18.7 percent rather than 15.5 percent. Last year, only one team was above 16 percent for the season. Of all the expected contenders, the Jets and Capitals are the only teams below 50 percent in expected goals at 5-on-5. The Jets are also second in the league in winning one-goal games and seventh otherwise.

Drastic Deviation

Six point difference or more

I'm guessing many Devils fans didn't expect to see me vouching that the team was better than it looked at any point this season, but such is life for a team that's failing to live up to expectations. My model sees them as a .500 team, well above their current pace at around 76 points. New Jersey does well in getting to the dangerous areas of the ice and even better at keeping other teams out, but it hasn't translated to the scoresheet yet. What really hurts is the realization of the fickleness that is a team's record in one-goal games. This season the Devils have a .250 win percentage in one-goal games and are at .462 otherwise. Last year they were at .595 and .475 respectively. If you want to know why a very similar team has drastically different results from year-to-year, there's your answer.

The Sabres surprisingly find themselves in a playoff spot at the halfway point, so it's only natural that there's some reserved skepticism about their success this season. While Carter Hutton is a decent goalie, it's still difficult to fathom that the league's third-best goaltending results this season would be from a tandem led by him. My model is high on the underrated duo that includes Linus Ullmark, but still figures that will regress slightly. The real problem with Buffalo is on offence where outside of the team's top line it's difficult to imagine where scoring is coming from. We're seeing that play out since the end of the team's 10-game winning streak

Of the team's 14 regular forwards, eight (!!!) are scoring at a fourth line rate or lower and Kyle Okposo, the team's sixth most efficient scorer at evens, is close at 1.33 points-per-60. That is some weak depth and I'm not even sure how much room for regression there is there considering how devoid of talent that group of eight is. Perhaps more concerning is that the team's leading scorer, Jeff Skinner, looks likely to fall back down to earth too after scoring on nearly 1-in-5 shots at 5-on-5 in his first 43 games. His previous high was 15 percent back in his rookie season and he was closer to 10 percent in his previous three seasons. The Sabres are currently on pace for 99 points, but my model believes that they'll fall much closer to 90-to-95 points, entering a dog fight for one of the final wildcard spots.

Islanders fans are an ornery bunch when it comes to giving their team some respect. To their credit, I think they're truly better than many expected and very much deserve to be in the playoff hunt, but I don't see them hitting 100 points as their current pace suggests. Over the second half I suspect they'll be in a similar boat as Buffalo: falling back towards the playoff cutline in a desperate fight to the finish for one of the final playoff spots. For the Islanders, it's about the percentages. The Barry Trotz effect may be real, but not to the point where the team is top five in both shooting and save percentage at 5-on-5 – the only team in the league to manage the feat. If it's not Tampa Bay or Toronto doing so, two teams with a lethal offence and a top-five goalie at its disposal, then why should we trust the Islanders? In net it's difficult to have faith in Robin Lehner and Thomas Greiss to maintain those marks going forward despite what they've shown through the first half of the season. Lehner was underrated in Buffalo, but being at .927 is a bit rich. Up front, Cal Clutterbuck is the only Islander forward who isn't scoring on 10 percent or more of his shots at 5-on-5 this season. Even more damning is that five of the top six – all of whom are above 15 percent – are players in the Isles bottom six: Valtteri Filppula, Tom Kuhnhackl, Matt Martin, Casey Cizikas and Andrew Ladd. Collectively, they're scoring on 19.1 percent of their shots. Last year that number was 8.0 percent. If the depth scoring dries up don't be surprised and the Islanders should see a very different second half as a result.

Only three teams are expected to regress more than Washington, but it's becoming harder to ignore that the Capitals are a difficult team to measure using current public data. Having said that, I'm not so convinced the team can maintain its current 1032 PDO on the strength of a league-leading 10.7 shooting percentage and top-10 save percentage. It's the former number that's most alarming. The team's fourth liners are currently in way over their head with Travis Boyd (23.5 percent), Nic Dowd (19.1), Chandler Stephenson (18.2) and Devante Smith-Pelly (11.4) unlikely to keep up their current efficiency. And no disrespect to Alex Ovechkin, but it's similarly unlikely he'll continue to score on 18.4 percent of his shots when he's only been above 10 percent five other times, topping out at 12.8 percent last year. Maybe there's something in the water in Washington, but even if that's the case, it's difficult to believe this is something the team can keep up.

This is a tricky one. On the one hand the Blackhawks have the talent not to be this bad with guys like Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and Alex DeBrincat up front and have shown so recently with a slight return to form, going 7-3-4 in their last 14 games. On the other hand, the team has been demonstrably bad under new coach Jeremy Colliton with a 46.6 percent Corsi rate that's almost five percent worse than under Joel Quenneville and ranks in the league's bottom five, en route to a 66-point pace. Again, it takes a special kind of team combined with horrible luck to be sub-70 point bad. I suspect Chicago will regress from there but it's clear this team isn't the same under new coaching, something my model isn't readily apparent of.

The Lightning are on pace for 130 points, which would be the third highest single-season mark ever. That should be more than enough reason. They're the best team in the league,



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hands-down, but not to the degree that they continue winning over 75 percent of their games going forward.

A team many expected to be, at the very least, above average ranks dead last in the league with a 15-22-6 record, a 69-point pace. That's reason enough to expect a turnaround going forward with my model suggesting there's only a three percent chance it gets any worse. Under new coach Scott Gordon it sure feels like it has with the team going 3-7-2, scoring on just 5.6 percent of shots at 5-on-5 since. What would help is if one of the team's seven goalies figured it out. While Brian Elliott likely isn't the answer, it's hard to imagine the team would be this low in the standings if he wasn't limited to just 14 games this season – 14 games where he's played at an above average .911 rate. The other six goalies? They're at .865 collectively on almost 1,000 shots. That's not a typo. If they played at just .890 – a terrible rate that only Florida is worse than – the Flyers would've allowed 23 fewer goals (!!!), which equates to about four-to-

five more wins in the standings. That would bump the Flyers pace up to 88 points. That's a team that would still have a chance in the playoff race, which is what many expected from them at the start of the year. Elliott's last game was Nov. 15 and it's no coincidence that the team is 6-13-5 since, the league's worst record. There's more. The Flyers, who had a league average power play at 20.7 percent last year sits 29th this season at 13.3 percent. The cause of that is a league-worst 7.9 percent shooting percentage, a full 1.7 percent worse than the next worst team and five percent worse than last season. It's also somehow equal to the Flyers rate at 5-on-5. With their best players on, and with a man advantage, the Flyers are scoring as often as they do as a team at 5-on-5. That's just plain ol' bad luck and it's arguable no team has been hit worse by it than the Flyers. Philadelphia is the team that's been furthest from expectations this season, but it seems very likely that their luck will change in the season's second half, especially when Elliott comes back. Really, it can't get any worse, right?



Preview: Sabres vs. Hurricanes

Skinner makes his return to Raleigh
by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes return home from a three-game road trip to host Jeff Skinner and the Buffalo Sabres.

The Canes saw their season-best, five-game winning streak snap in Tampa on Thursday night, as the Lightning's league-best power play converted twice in the third period en route to a 3-1 victory.

A Stinging Defeat

The Hurricanes brought a 1-0 lead against the league's top team into the third period on Thursday night, but their discipline wasn't as sharp as it could have been, and it ended up costing them two points.

The Lightning netted two power-play goals in the latter half of the third period to snatch a 2-1 lead, and Brayden Point, who scored the game-winning goal, sealed the deal with an empty-net tally in the waning minutes.

"We knew coming in we couldn't take penalties, and we did. That's the killer. It's a tough call at the end. That's a good game going on, and the guy embellishes a little tap on the back of the legs. I kind of knew that was coming," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's too bad. It was a good game. Both teams played pretty hard, I thought, but they got the better of us. Their talent took over on the power plays, and that was the difference."

It was a stinging defeat for the Canes, who played a hard-working game and were just about 10 minutes from extending their winning streak to six games.

"That's a tough one to swallow," Williams said. "You live and you learn through experience. We've won some close games, but this one stings a little bit."

"We played a really good game on the road. We battled hard," said Petr Mrazek, who was named the third star of the game. "Too bad we didn't get any points on it."

"The effort was phenomenal. We were working hard," Brind'Amour said. "We always work hard. We're a hard-working team."

The challenge ahead is for the Canes to park the tough loss and come ready to play less than 24 hours later.

"When you play a team like Tampa, we're in a good position and then to lose it that way, that's a tough way to lose it," Brind'Amour said. "It's going to be tough, but we're going to have to pick the guys up tomorrow and be ready to go."

"It's important to hop back on it, keep playing well and not let this be a turning point in the season for us," Williams said. "Let it be something we learn from. Get back and play the way we can tomorrow."

Skinner Returns

Friday's contest marks the return of former Canes forward Jeff Skinner. The 26-year old winger, who is set to become an unrestricted free agent this summer, was dealt to Buffalo on Aug. 2.



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In eight seasons with the Canes, Skinner totaled 204 goals and 379 points in 579 games. The Canes' seventh overall pick from 2010 crossed the 30-goal threshold thrice, including in his rookie season when he appeared in the All-Star Game in Raleigh and became the first player in franchise history to win the Calder Trophy. Skinner ranks fifth in franchise history in goals, seventh in points and ninth in games played.

And, through his charity work, including his 53's Difference Makers program, Skinner left a memorable mark on the community.

The Opposition

The Sabres have won two of their first three games to open the new year, and they're coming off a 5-1 victory over the New Jersey Devils at home on Tuesday. In that game, the Sabres netted all five goals in the second period, beginning with Skinner's 29th goal of the season, which ranks second in the NHL behind only Alex Ovechkin. The Sabres are just 9-9-3 away from home, but their 23-14-6 record (52 points)

slots them in the Eastern Conference's second wild card spot.

AT THE RINK

Tonight marks the fourth game in the 2018-19 Hurricanes Homegrown Series, which showcases the best this local community has to offer in t-shirts, food, beer, art and music. Before heading out to PNC Arena, be sure to check out this rundown of everything that encompasses the Homegrown Series.

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

WATCH, LISTEN & STREAM

Watch: FOX Sports Carolinas, FOX Sports app

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

Recap: Tampa Bay Snaps Canes' Winning Streak

Bolts score two power-play goals in third to edge Canes by Michael Smith

TAMPA - The Carolina Hurricanes had their season-best, five-game winning streak snapped in Tampa in a 3-1 loss to the NHL's top team.

The Canes led the Lightning until the third period, when the league's most lethal power play connected for two goals on the man advantage.

Here are five takeaways from the Canes' road trip finale.

One

The Canes don't have too much to hang their heads about after this one. They went toe-to-toe with a team that just put together a 15-0-1 stretch. For much of the game, the Canes controlled play, slowed Tampa Bay down in the neutral zone and limited their 5-on-5 chances. The loss wasn't for a lack of effort, that's for sure.

"That's a tough one to swallow," Justin Williams said. "You live and you learn through experience. We've won some close games, but this one stings a little bit."

"We played a really good game on the road. We battled hard," Petr Mrazek said. "Too bad we didn't get any points on it."

"The effort was phenomenal. We were working hard," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We always work hard. We're a hard-working team."

Two

On Oct. 30, the Canes allowed two power-play goals, and their penalty kill ranked last in the NHL at just 66.7 percent.

Coming into tonight's game, the Canes had killed penalties at an 87.5 percent clip (77-for-88) since Nov. 1, which ranked second in the league.

Tonight, they faced a stiff test against the league's top power play that converts nearly one in every three opportunities on the man advantage. Twice, Sebastian Aho drew penalties early on the kill to negate Tampa Bay's power play, but the Canes tempted fate one too many times.

Andrei Svechnikov took his second stick penalty of the game, a hook on Steven Stamkos, and the Lightning converted on the ensuing power play to tie the game at one, as Ondrej Palat tapped in a slow roller with 8:04 left in regulation.

"You adapt to what the refs call, and you can figure it out. They were calling some stick penalties tonight, and they called them, which is fine," Williams said. "We obviously have to stay out of the box. That's the best power play in the league."

"Their power play is good. We all know that," Mrazek said. "In the first two periods, when we were shorthanded, we played really good. We kept them to the outside. Too bad in the third period we couldn't finish it."

With 3:55 left in regulation, Greg McKeeg was whistled for a slashing minor, a retaliation after being elbowed by Alex Killorn, who then sold the slash after taking a stride. On the ensuing power play, Brayden Point one-timed the go-ahead goal from the slot.

"We knew coming in we couldn't take penalties, and we did. That's the killer. It's a tough call at the end. That's a good game going on, and the guy embellishes a little tap on the back of the legs. I kind of knew that was coming," Brind'Amour said. "It's too bad. It was a good game. Both teams played pretty hard, I thought, but they got the better of us. Their talent took over on the power plays, and that was the difference."

Three



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Mrazek took the tough loss in this one, but his 27-save performance earned him third star of the game honors. He made a number of crucial saves to keep the Canes in the game, including a point-blank stop on Tyler Johnson, who was open in the slot in the third period in a 1-0 game.

"Guys in front of me were great all game long," Mrazek said. "We battled hard and put pucks behind them to play in the offensive zone. It's nice to see we play against anyone."

"He made some real big saves. They had some good looks. We had some breakdowns," Brind'Amour said. "That's what both guys have been doing for us. Unfortunately, we didn't get enough offense to support him tonight."

Four

The Canes got on the board first in the second period. Dougie Hamilton put a shot on goal, and Williams crashed the net to clean up the juicy rebound left by Andrei Vasilevskiy. It was the 300th career goal for the Canes' captain, who is riding a five-game point streak (4g, 1a). Hamilton also has points in five straight games (3g, 3a).

Five

For the second game in a row, the Hurricanes utilized the coach's challenge and had an opponent's goal overturned due to an offside zone entry.

In 4-on-4 action, Point broke in alone. His initial shot was saved by Mrazek, but Point whacked the rebound in out of midair.

Hurricanes Homegrown Guide: Jan. 11

by Michael Smith

The fourth game of the 2018-19 Hurricanes Homegrown Series is Friday, Jan. 11, when the Carolina Hurricanes host the Buffalo Sabres in the second half of a back-to-back set.

Refined for its third season, the Hurricanes Homegrown Series features six games that showcase the best our local community has to offer in t-shirts, food, beer, art and music.

Here's an in-depth look at each Homegrown aspect for Friday night at PNC Arena.

T-Shirt

Oak City Collection t-shirt: \$30 at north end location of The Eye (limited quantity of 250)

Oak City Collection designed and produced this North Carolina-centric t-shirt. When doors open at 6 p.m., 250 of these shirts will be available at the north end location of The Eye team store (section 112). Each \$30 shirt is marked by a unique printed tag that denotes the game and shirt series, and there is a limit of two shirts per person per purchase.

Food

Carolina fried pork chop sandwich: \$11 at section 109

The featured in-house, signature entrée is a Carolina fried pork chop sandwich: a 6 oz. pork chop topped with sweet,

It seemed like a pretty cut-and-dry sequence at first, but not so fast. Tyler Johnson was at the bench door - which is inside the offensive zone - mid-line change, and his skate was still on the ice before Point entered the zone. That's offside. Credit Canes General Manager and President Don Waddell and goaltending coach Mike Bales for the sharp eyes in the sky and video coaches Chris Huffine and LJ Scarpace for their quick work in the video room behind the scenes.

"It was good that those guys picked it up. We don't really see much on the bench," Brind'Amour said. "There's good communication here."

Up Next

The Canes return home to host Jeff Skinner and the Buffalo Sabres on Friday night.

"When you play a team like Tampa, we're in a good position and then to lose it that way, that's a tough way to lose it," Brind'Amour said. "It's going to be tough, but we're going to have to pick the guys up tomorrow and be ready to go."

"It's important to hop back on it, keep playing well and not let this be a turning point in the season for us," Williams said. "Let it be something we learn from. Get back and play the way we can tomorrow."

sautéed onions, served on a house-made kaiser roll and paired with tater tots. You can get this for \$11 at the section 109 concessions stand (where all Homegrown entrées are available this season).

Banana pudding: \$8 at section 111

The featured in-house, signature dessert is banana pudding: warm banana pudding with wafers and meringue topping. This classic treat is available for \$8 at the Homegrown Series dessert cart at section 111.

Beer

Deep River Brewing Co.: \$13 flights at section 102

Flights, featuring four six-ounce pours, of Deep River Brewing Co.'s beer will be available at section 102. You can select any combinations of the brews they offer, and the flights are priced at \$13.

Art

This poster, designed by local artist Mike Inscho, will be available free to the first 1,000 fans. Swing by section 108 to pick one up and chat with the artist, as well.

Music

Frontside, a local progressive pop-punk band, will perform live during the first and second intermissions.



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Lightning rally to end Hurricanes' winning streak at five

Score two power-play goals in third period; Williams gets 300th NHL goal

by Corey Long

Kucherov feeds Point for PPG

Brayden Point one-times a feed from Nikita Kucherov past Petr Mrazek for a power-play goal, and the Lightning grab a 2-1 lead late in the 3rd

TAMPA -- The Carolina Hurricanes allowed three third-period goals and their five-game winning streak ended with a 3-1 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning at Amalie Arena on Thursday.

Brayden Point scored twice and Ondrej Palat scored for Tampa Bay (34-8-2), which is 17-1-1 in its past 19 games and 12-0-0 against the Metropolitan Division teams.

"We have confidence in our room and if we keep sticking with it something will happen," Point said. "I think our effort was there and we were able to get some chances on the power play in the third."

Justin Williams scored his 300th NHL goal for Carolina (20-18-5).

"I thought we played a really good game," Williams said. "We didn't give them anything 5-on-5. They scored two power-play goals off penalties. We obviously needed to stay out of the box."

Palat tied it 1-1 on the power play at 11:56 of the third period. Steven Stamkos made a cross-ice pass that went off Hurricanes defenseman Calvin de Haan and off Palat's stick and knee.

"I think it hit my blade a little bit and my leg," Palat said. "It counts. I'm good with it."

Point put the Lightning ahead 2-1 with a power-play goal at 16:45 with a shot from the high slot off a pass from Nikita Kucherov. Point scored an empty-net goal to make it 3-1 at 19:34.

Williams put the Hurricanes up 1-0 at 4:34 of the second period when he chipped in a rebound off a shot from Dougie Hamilton. It was his 11th goal of the season.

"We played a really good game on the road," Hurricanes goalie Petr Mrazek said. "We battled hard and it's too bad we didn't get any points from it."

The Hurricanes outshot the Lightning 12-3 in the first period and held a 24-17 shot advantage with 11 minutes left in the third. Mrazek made 27 saves; Andrei Vasilevskiy made 26.

"We just didn't have our legs," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said. "It seemed like we were in quicksand. It was both teams probably. They got a little life there at the end of the first. It took us a bit to get going, but when we did it was good."

The Hurricanes were called for six penalties.

"We knew coming in we couldn't take penalties and we did," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's too bad. It was a good game. Both teams played pretty hard, I thought, and they got the better of us."

They said it

"It's not easy. When you play a team like Tampa, we're in a good position, and then to lose it that way, that's a tough way to lose. You almost rather lose 8-0." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

"We found a way again. Carolina is a good team. They were on top of us and they were hard to play against. But we got two points." -- Lightning forward Ondrej Palat

Need to know

Williams has four goals and an assist during a five-game point streak. He has played 1,205 NHL games in 18 seasons with the Hurricanes, Philadelphia Flyers, Los Angeles Kings and Washington Capitals. ... Victor Hedman broke the Lightning record for most games played by a defenseman (663). He was tied with Pavel Kubina. ... Point has 19 points (seven goals, 12 assists) in the past 11 games. ... Lightning defenseman Dan Girardi had five hits and five blocked shots.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Buffalo Sabres on Friday (7:30 p.m.; NHLN, FS-CR, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Lightning: At the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday (7 p.m.; MSG-B, SUN, NHL.TV)



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Skinner to play against Hurricanes for first time with Sabres

Forward traded this offseason on pace for NHL career high in goals

by Heather Engel

BUFFALO -- Jeff Skinner doesn't know what to expect.

The Buffalo Sabres forward will play against his former team, the Carolina Hurricanes, for the first time at PNC Arena in Raleigh, North Carolina on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET, NHLN, FS-CR, MSG-B, NHL.TV).

Skinner, who played his first eight NHL seasons for Carolina before being traded to Buffalo for forward Cliff Pu and three draft picks Aug. 2, said he thinks the game will be fun but may not be that easy.

"There'll definitely be some emotions, but it's just part of the game, part of life," Skinner said. "You just have to find a way to channel it and use some of it to your advantage. Other than that, just focus on the game because we've got a big job in front of us."

Sabres coach Phil Housley has been in Skinner's skates. Housley played his first nine NHL seasons for Buffalo before playing his first game against them for the Winnipeg Jets on Jan. 4, 1991.

"You can prepare all you want for it, but until you get there and you get on the ice and you're facing your ex-teammates, it gets a little emotional," Housley said. "He's going to have to manage that."

"We know the importance of this game for him, so we're going to try to do everything possible for him to help him through it. But at the same time, it can be an exciting time. He's done a terrific job, is a good teammate here, contributing offensively, doing everything that we asked of him. We're going to give him the full support he needs going into Carolina."

Skinner, selected by the Hurricanes with the No. 7 pick in the 2010 NHL Draft, said he didn't know what to expect when he was traded to the Sabres.

Everyone's been "super welcoming," he said. "It's been fun so far."

It's been a seamless fit, playing most of the season on Jack Eichel's left wing. Skinner leads the Sabres with 29 goals, tied for second in the NHL with Toronto Maple Leafs forward John Tavares, three behind Washington Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin, and is second on Buffalo with 42 points (Eichel has 49).

Skinner is on pace for 55 goals and 80 points, which would surpass his previous NHL highs (37 goals in 2016-17 and 63 points in 2010-11 and 2016-17).

"When you get to play with a guy that talented and that skilled, he makes the game a little bit easier for his linemates," Skinner said of Eichel. "The first thing when you play with any new linemate is you try to build chemistry and communicate. When you play with a guy like that, sometimes that process gets accelerated because he's so smart and he's able to adapt so quickly."

"Getting to be around a guy like that every day and see what he does in practice and every game, it's pretty fun to watch."

Jason Pominville also knows what Skinner is going through. After playing 578 NHL games for the Sabres, he returned to Buffalo and scored for the Minnesota Wild on Oct. 14, 2013. Traded back to the Sabres before last season, he had an assist against the Wild on Nov. 22, 2017.

"Embrace the moment, enjoy it," Pominville said. "He'll prepare the same way he usually does. He'll get some chirps here and there, guys will be all over him [Friday]; actually, it started [Thursday], but it's fun. Guys like it, appreciate it. Once it's over with, you can move on, but that first game is always pretty special."

Eichel could return for Sabres against Hurricanes

Center full participant in practice, missed three games with upper-body injury

by Heather Engel

BUFFALO -- Jack Eichel could return to the Buffalo Sabres lineup when they visit the Carolina Hurricanes at PNC Arena on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET, NHLN, FS-CR, MSG-B, NHL.TV).

The center, who has missed three games with an upper-body injury, was a full participant in practice Thursday, and skated on the Sabres' top line with Jeff Skinner and Tage Thompson.

Coach Phil Housley would not commit to Eichel playing against the Hurricanes and said he wanted to see how the 22-year-old reacts to a full practice.

"I thought he did quite well, a pretty high-tempo, bump-and-grind practice," Housley said. "It's good to see him out there. I thought he did a good job today."

Eichel, who leads Buffalo with 49 points (15 goals, 34 assists) in 40 games, said he feels he's ready to return.

"I felt good today, back to 100 percent," he said. "I'm just excited for the game tomorrow."

"It's huge for our group. It's a tight race right now. You try not to look at the standings every day but it just seems like the teams in the Atlantic [Division] win every night. For us, it's about controlling what we can control, and that's our group and putting a good effort on the ice every night."

Skinner will play at the Hurricanes for the first time since Carolina traded him to the Sabres for forward Cliff Pu and three draft picks Aug. 2.



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Point has 2 late goals, Lightning beat Hurricanes 3-1

By MARK DITLER

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Brayden Point's prettiest goal didn't count.

The two that did helped the red-hot Tampa Bay Lightning win, again.

Point had a tiebreaking power-play goal in the third period and added a late empty-netter in the NHL-leading Lightning's 3-1 comeback victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday night.

"We have confidence if we keep sticking with it," Point said.

After Point scored from in-close with 3:15 left, the center got his 28th goal into the empty net during the final minute.

Tampa Bay had a nifty breakaway goal by Point with 9:51 left in the second disallowed after a video review requested by the Hurricanes that determined the play was offside because Tyler Johnson had not completely left the ice on a line change.

Point had his original shot stopped by Petr Mrazek but put home a rebound by knocking in an ankle puck.

"A pretty clear offside," Point said.

Tampa Bay has 70 points with 38 games to play.

Ondrej Palat also scored, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 26 saves. Point also had an assist.

Tampa Bay is 18-2-2 against Carolina since the start of the 2012-13 season. The Lightning are 12-0-0 against the Metropolitan Division.

Justin Williams picked up his 300th NHL goal for the Hurricanes, who had a five-game winning streak end. Mrazek 27 stopped shots.

"It's not easy," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

"When you play a team like Tampa, we're in a good position and then to lose it that way, that's a tough way to lose. You almost rather lose 8-0."

The Lightning, 17-1-1 over the last 19 games, won their ninth consecutive at home.

The Lightning's NHL-best power play converted its fifth chance when Steven Stamkos' shot was blocked and the puck went through the slot to Palat, who tied it at 1 at 11:56 of the third.

Williams opened the scoring with a rebound goal from the low left circle 4:34 into the second.

Mzarek is 1-10-2 with a shutout in the regular season against the Lightning. He went 4-6 against Tampa Bay in the playoffs while with Detroit, including a key role in a near upset of the eventual Eastern Conference champion Lightning in a seven-game opening round series in 2015.

"He made some real big saves," Brind'Amour said.

"Unfortunately we didn't get enough offense to support him tonight."

Tampa Bay star Nikita Kucherov got his 72nd point with an assist. He has been held pointless in just nine games.

NOTES: Tampa Bay is 6-5-0 when trailing after two periods. "It was like we were in quicksand," Cooper said of the first two periods. . Williams has 18 goals in 52 games against Tampa Bay. ... Lightning RW Ryan Callahan (upper body) missed his second straight game and is day to day. ... Victor Hedman played in his 663rd game and moved past Pavel Kubina for the most by a Tampa Bay defenseman.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host Buffalo on Friday night.

Lightning: At Buffalo on Saturday night.



NHL Power Rankings after Week 14: Final point-total projections

Greg Wyshynski

All 31 NHL teams have reached the official midway point of their season, so in addition to this week's updated rankings,

we are offering our take on which teams will finish under or over their current projected points pace.

How we rank: We use a panel of voters, and these rankings reflect which teams voters think would win head-to-head



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matchups. Higher-ranked teams are favored over lower-ranked teams. A run of wins doesn't guarantee a jump, and a couple of losses doesn't guarantee a fall.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 1 ↔

Points pace: 130. The Lightning are on pace for the best regular season since the Red Wings amassed 131 points in 1995-96. They're a full-on juggernaut, but there's a reason no one has cracked 130 points in 23 years. Under.

2. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 2 ↔

Points pace: 109. The Leafs were a 105-point team last season, so this mark is very much in reach. As long as goaltender Frederik Andersen remains steady (and healthy), this team will hit 110 points or better. Over.

3. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 5 ▲

Points pace: 109. The Flames are for real, and that plus-31 goal differential isn't just a product of better-than-expected goaltending. (And a .902 save percentage is ahead of where we thought they'd be.) Getting to 108 points in the wacky West is a tall order, but they're 100 percent a 100-point team. Under.

4. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 8 ▲

Points pace: 104. Due respect to the Sharks' recent roll and the return of Erik Karlsson to public adulation, but I can't trust a team with a .893 save percentage to stay on this pace. However, it's a playoff team, for sure. Under.

5. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 6 ▲

Points pace: 104. The Predators were a 117-point team last season, and this current pace comes after three months of significant injuries to top players like Filip Forsberg and P.K. Subban. A fully armed and operational Predators team will power past this current pace. Over.

6. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 4 ▼

Points pace: 109. This would be ahead of where the Capitals finished last season. As Alex Ovechkin showed with his All-Star Game decision, Washington knows that slow and steady can win the race again. Under.

7. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 3 ▼

Points pace: 109. The Jets are at this pace with Connor Hellebuyck playing to a .909 save percentage and Patrik Laine with one goal since Dec. 16. Those trends are going to reverse, and GM Kevin Cheveldayoff is going to pull off another Paul Stastny-esque move at the deadline. Over.

8. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 9 ▲

Points pace: 103. The Knights are probably a team that lands at around 100 points, but if there's anything we've learned in the past year, it's to not bet against Vegas. Over.

9. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 10 ▲

Points pace: 103. The goaltending has figured itself out, Sidney Crosby is playing at an MVP level and they're on an 11-2-0 roll. To quote an ancient ad campaign for an adult beverage: Beware of the Penguins. Over.

10. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 7 ▼

Points pace: 103. The Bruins and Leafs will flip-flop in the standings, with Toronto getting the No. 2 seed and home ice and Boston getting right around 103 points. Conservatively, we'll say they're just a shade below it. Under.

11. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 11 ↔

Points pace: 100. The teams chasing the top three in the Metropolitan are starting to close the gap a bit. We're a little worried about what GM Jarmo Kekalainen does with Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky. The Jackets have been a 100-point team only once in franchise history. John Tortorella has hit that number only three times in 14 full seasons as an NHL coach. Under.

12. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 14 ▲

Points pace: 100. The Islanders are riding the PDO train this season (102.82 in combined shooting and save percentages). They're an amazing story, and they could very well be a playoff team, but they're probably also crossing the finish line with double-digit points. Under.

13. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 12 ▼

Points pace: 99. Are the Sabres going to have a 37-point improvement from last season? No. But they're going to have a 30-plus-point improvement, which is nothing to be ashamed of. Under.

14. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 18 ▲

Points pace: 93. If team president Jim Lites can savage his best players in profanity-laced tirades to the media every month or so, they're money. (Also, it'll be a big help if Ben Bishop keeps doing what he's been doing.) Over.

15. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 13 ▼

Points pace: 89. This pace has steadily decreased in the past two weeks, as the Avs have tried everything, including



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breaking up their heralded top line. The West is an absolute meat grinder, but I think the Avs can get back around that 95-point plateau. Over.

16. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 15 ▼

Points pace: 95. Middle of the pack in offense and defense, but not too reliant on one line to carry them. Claude Julien is a stealth Jack Adams candidate for squeezing as much juice out of this team as he has. Under.

17. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 17 ↔

Points pace: 88. It's a Bruce Boudreau team, which means it will ultimately exceed expectations and end up in a playoff spot even if it has no business being there. Over.

18. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 16 ▼

Points pace: 86. The Ducks have come back down to earth with the velocity of Skylab, as John Gibson's back strains from carrying the sixth-worst possession team and second-worst offensive team to the playoff bubble. We were right about Randy Carlyle, you guys. Under.

19. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 19 ↔

Points pace: 80. The Canucks are a team with some true offensive dynamos, but one that has trouble preventing both shot attempts and goals from opponents. This is, like, an 82-point team, but one that's at least going to be exciting to watch even as their playoff hopes fade. Over.

20. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 23 ▲

Points pace: 88. I refuse to believe that we're witnessing yet another season of incredible possession numbers that are submarined by either terrible goaltending or invisible offense. This year, it's the latter, as the Canes have a 7.3 shooting percentage, worst in the NHL. Ugh ... but they're better than 88 points. They have to be. Over.

21. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 22 ▲

Points pace: 82. Fun fact: Ken Hitchcock hasn't had a team finish with a points percentage lower than .625 since his final campaign with the Blue Jackets. It's going to happen this season, for sure, but the Oil are going to be better than 82 points in Peter Chiarelli's swan song. Over.

22. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 21 ▼

Points pace: 82. One of my chillier freezing cold takes is that the Panthers would be a 100-point team this season, which they most certainly will not be. Unless, of course, they go on some ridiculous winning streak, on which I've now dolloped a freezing cold take on top of a now-much-warmer take. Over.

23. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 20 ▼

Points pace: 80. This points pace doesn't take into account the roster pruning that most certainly will occur again at the trade deadline for the Rangers. Under.

24. Arizona Coyotes

Previous ranking: 26 ▲

Points pace: 76. If the Coyotes finish with 76 points, it will be the first six-point year-over-year improvement that ultimately feels like a downgrade. Over.

25. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 24 ▼

Points pace: 76. Wait: Are you saying we shouldn't expect a team with only two true finishers at forward and goaltending that's ranked 26th in save percentage will hit 97 points again? We still wager they get over 80. Over.

26. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 28 ▲

Points pace: 71. While doing as poorly as possible would behoove the Hawks in the long term, the fact is that this combination of prideful veterans and young players trying to earn their keep will be better than this current pace by season's end. Over.

27. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 25 ▼

Points pace: 71. This is right around where we expect the Wings to end up before a really, really interesting summer in Detroit when it comes to managerial decisions. Eh, we'll take the under for the sake of the draft. Under.

28. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 29 ▲

Points pace: 76. It's a lost season for the Blues, but one that'll see them beat this current pace. Perhaps via copious amounts of starts for Jordan Binnington over Jake Allen. Over.

29. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 31 ▲

Points pace: 69. Who ends up with more points: the Kings in the standings, or their leading scorer this season? In any case ... Under.

30. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 27 ▼

Points pace: 69. In the time it took you to read this, the Flyers just started five more goaltenders. Over.

31. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 30 ▼

Points pace: 67. Hey, great news, Colorado. Under.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap: Canes Streak Snapped After 3-1 Loss To Lightning

The Hurricanes win streak ends at five games after a third period comeback from the Lightning.

By Justin Lape

The Hurricanes five-game winning streak was snapped Thursday night at Amalie Arena as the Canes dropped a 3-1 decision to the Tampa Bay Lightning. The Lightning extended their home winning streak to nine straight games with the win..

The Lightning pushed hard in the early part of the first period and quickly established their uptempo game that has been successful for them so far this season. Tampa Bay's Stamkos line cycled the puck for a few good potential chances but not many shots on goal.

At the 15:57 mark, Teuvo Teravainen committed a tripping penalty that sent the Lightning to the power play. Tampa's top-ranked power play was not able to capitalize on the opportunity after not sustaining much offensive pressure. With around seven minutes left in the period, the Canes were gifted their first power play opportunity after Yanni Gourde was whistled for interference. Carolina controlled the puck well on the man advantage but was not able to get one past Andrei Vasilevskiy.

Dougie Hamilton was sent to the box for tripping Brayden Point on a play in which Hamilton pushed Point with his hand, not his stick and Point crashed into the boards. Just 13 seconds later, Victor Hedman hooked Sebastian Aho and a man-advantage for Tampa turned into 4-on-4 play. Neither team found the back of the net in the opening period and Carolina led in shots 12-3.

Early into the second period, the Canes got an advantageous zone entry after Tampa went off on line change. Dougie Hamilton saw Justin Williams streaking on the left side and fired a shot that would generate a rebound off Vasilevskiy. The puck bounced off the Tampa goalie cleanly and Williams fired a shot in the back of the net to give the Hurricanes the 1-0 lead.

Shortly after the Williams goal, Warren Foegele was whistled for high-sticking but the Canes killed off their third penalty of

the night. After Foegele got out of the box, the Canes showed lack of discipline and Andrei Svechnikov was quickly assessed a minor for slashing to give Tampa Bay another opportunity with the man advantage. Rod Brind'Amour was incensed at the soft call, and it didn't take long for the officials to even things up again and make it 4-on-4 hockey. This time, Brayden Point scored initially but Brind'Amour challenged the call and it was determined Tyler Johnson still had his skate on the ice in the offensive zone while entering the bench, so the call was reversed and Carolina remained on top 1-0.

On a odd-man rush minutes later, Petr Mrazek stopped a tough shot from Nikita Kucherov to keep the Lightning scoreless. The two teams exchanged chances over the remaining five minutes of the period but Carolina held the 1-0 lead heading into the third period.

Carolina pressed early in the third with a great shift from Justin Williams and Greg McKegg but the Lightning quickly responded with a strong few shifts of their own. With 10:45 to go in the final frame, Johnson fired a shot from the slot but Mrazek stoned him to keep the Hurricanes in it.

With 8:45 to go, Andrei Svechnikov was whistled for a minor penalty to give the Lightning a chance to get back in it. This time, it cost the Hurricanes. Ondrej Palat scored after Stamkos drew Mrazek out of his net and fired a pass across the crease onto Palat's stick. A late penalty on a slash from Greg McKegg turned into a power play goal from Point. Mrazek was pulled for the extra man with a little over a minute to go but the Hurricanes could not find the equalizer. Point added another goal into the empty net after Mrazek was pulled to secure the win for Tampa Bay.

The Hurricanes lost their first game in regulation this season when leading after two periods, after coming into the game at 15-0-2 in that situation. The Canes will take on the Buffalo Sabres tomorrow night at home at 7:30 p.m. It's the return of longtime Canes forward Jeff Skinner who now is just one goal behind league goals leader Alex Ovechkin with 29 goals in 43 games.

Metropolitan Division Weekly Roundup: The Climbing Canes

The Canes are up to fifth in the Metro with their fifth win in a row. But how has the rest of the division fared?

By Zeke Lukow

1. Washington Capitals: 56 Points (26-12-4)

The Capitals would be in buy mode to try to go back-to-back, but what more can they really add? They are rotating their healthy scratches because no one truly deserves to be there. Currently Nic Dowd and Travis Boyd have been rotating in and out every game because both are playing well when they are in the lineup. The only player who is being



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scratched regularly is Dmitrij Jaskin who they claimed off of waivers before the season.

Jaskin is by far the odd man out, but Todd Rearden believes that he is improving every day and deserves more playing time, but what can the Caps do? They have only \$13,000 in cap space so they are unlikely to be able to really add another high dollar player. This highlights Andre Burakovsky's redundancy; he is not needed in a top six role and there are cheaper bottom six options for the team. Moving him would allow the Caps to dump \$3mil in salary and get a solid return as he is a pending RFA. A Burakovsky trade would also open up more time to the players down stream to get larger roles with the team and more time on ice.

2. Pittsburgh Penguins: 54 Points (24-13-6)

The Penguins have been dominant recently. They are 9-1-0 in their last 10 games and 14-4-1 since the start of December. The Penguins entered the final month of 2018 in second to last in the Metro before rocketing up to second place, just one point behind the Capitals for first. In their last 18 games, three separate players have scored at over a point per game pace: Sidney Crosby, Jake Guentzel, and Phil Kessel. Just outside of this threshold, Jake Guentzel has 16 points and 10 goals in this same time span.

The crazy thing is that their defense hasn't been stellar during this time span. They have allowed the third most shots since December began but have only let in the second-fewest goals in this time. Their .946 even strength save percentage is the highest in the league and when you combine that with their 9.6% shooting percentage, they are playing out of their minds. Their 104.2 PDO since December shows that this level play is likely not sustainable, and it's probable that they will level off later in the season.

3. Columbus Blue Jackets: 51 Points (24-15-3)

Well...it looks like the Artemi Panarin saga is over. High-Bank Distillery, a Columbus-based institution, is offering him a lifetime supply of vodka if he re-signs.

Granted, I don't know if it's good vodka, but that is worth at least an additional million per year. I don't see any Chicago, New York, or LA based distillery offering this same deal. Seems like they are going to need to step up their game.

In other news, it looks like the Canes did make the right move with Riley Nash. In 41 games this season, the forward has only registered one goal and three assists on just a 2.7% shooting percentage and a below average 48.57% corsi for. It actually looks more like the Bruins are incredible using Hurricanes re-treads like Nash and now Joakim Nordstrom, not that they are incredible players.

4. New York Islanders: 50 Points (23-14-4)

The Islanders came into Tuesday's game against the Hurricanes on a six-game win streak that predated Christmas, thanks largely to contributions from their young players Devon Toews and Josh Ho-Sang. However, with Valtterii Filppula being activated off of IR, Ho-Sang was returned to the AHL. In his 10 game stint with the Islanders Ho-Sang had just two points, but was effective on the ice.

Ho-Sang leads the Islanders in possession with a 58.88% corsi for, and 75% goals for.

Crazier yet, every player that has played on the ice with Ho-Sang has a better Corsi percentage than without him. He played the most time on a line with Brock Nelson and Anders Lee who both had 57% corsi for with him on the ice. When they play without him, those rates fall to just 42% and 47% respectively. The 13% average difference increases when you look at his second line. His second most used deployment was with Leo Komarov and Filppula who see a drop in their corsi for by an average of 17% when Ho-Sang is not on the ice. It is no surprise that when they sent him down they lost their first game without him.

5. Carolina Hurricanes: 45 Points (20-17-5)

The Hurricanes are 6-2-0 in their last eight games and currently have a five-game winning streak, their first since 2016. They are managing this while without one of their top players, Jordan Staal. During this five-game span Justin Williams has scored three goals and has five total points, mainly from his net-front presence. In 2019 he has been an impact player that is affecting the outcome of matches as much as he is leading from the locker room.

The defense has also been getting involved in the scoring sheet. Since the start of the year Dougie Hamilton and Jaccob Slavin have combined for five goals, including a goal and four assists on the power play. Hamilton has been playing as advertised when he first came to Carolina. It is obvious that he is a natural power play quarterback. When Justin Faulk is on the ice, they rely on him for shots from the point, whereas Hamilton has a better ability to find the open player with quick passes and get into high danger areas.

The last piece of the Canes win streak is Greg McKegg. The forward came over from Pittsburgh via the Josh Jooris trade and re-signed with the Canes in this past offseason. In the 2017-2018 season McKegg played 26 games before getting traded. He has proven to be a valuable bottom six player, as he drives to get the puck and gives the Canes toughness and more physical presence in front of the net. In his three games with the Canes he has two goals and two assists and is making a strong case to stay with the team after Jordan Staal returns.

6. New York Rangers: 41 Points (17-18-7)

The Rangers are starting to play like everyone expected them to, but the good news is that the sell-off at the deadline will come as a much easier pill to swallow. The Rangers have now lost four straight games and have only four wins since the start of December. In their last four games they have been outscored 22-5, which is what happens when you have the league worst .899 even strength save percentage combined with a second-worst 71.7% penalty kill since December.

The Rangers issues don't end there. They have been struggling offensively with the fewest shots and the third-fewest goals in the league in this same time span. In their last 16 games only two players have five or more even strength goals: Chris Kreider and Jesper Fast, who missed two weeks in December. Now the Rangers are without their top scorer, Kevin Hayes, who is day-to-day with an upper-



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body injury. The Rangers have the fewest ROW in the league and will slowly continue to fall in the standings until they get to the bottom.

7. New Jersey Devils: 39 Points (16-19-7)

The Devils will obviously be sellers at the deadline, but the main issue will be who to sell. They have six unrestricted free agents, only three of whom are under the age of 30 and could bring significant return: Egor Yakovlev, Marcus Johansson, and Keith Kinkaid. There normally isn't a large market for goalies at the deadline, and the last two times a team has traded for a goalie it's been due to injury: Ben Bishop going to the Kings in 2017 and Petr Mrazek to the Flyers in 2018. The other issue is that most teams making a playoff push are in that position due to goaltending.

This leaves only Yakovlev and Johansson under 30, but Johansson is the only player that could bring significant return. Johansson has struggled with injuries the past two seasons only playing a combined 60 games with 11 goals and 29 total points. However, he does have top six still and has produced 40 or more points in five of his nine seasons. Drew Stafford, Brian Boyle, and Ben Lovejoy are 34, 33, and

34 respectively and are far less likely to return any legitimate value for the future. The Devils have a LONG rebuild ahead.

8. Philadelphia Flyers: 36 Points (15-22-6)

The Flyers are a ship without a captain...and crew...and wind...and a current. They still don't have a long-term coach in place and they have now tied an NHL record by starting their seventh goalie — and it's only midway through the season. On Tuesday the Flyers started Mike McKenna, who was claimed off of waivers from the Vancouver Canucks. The Flyers are now using a combination of McKenna and rookie Carter Hart as they lost Calvin Pickard on waivers and lost Brian Elliott, Anthony Stolarz, and Michal Neuvirth to injuries.

They have to ask themselves now if they really want to have Carter Hart, their hopeful savior, stay around this team. Goalie development is tough, and when you keep him around to get shelled on a bad team without much leadership, is it good for him long term? Since winning his first two games he has now lost five straight, with a .895 save percentage. The Flyers would be better off letting him succeed in the AHL for the next season or two and let him come in when the team is ready to compete again.



PNC Arena has generated \$4 billion, according to report

Staff Report

There was a sellout crowd of 19,500 people at PNC Arena for the 96-89 loss to UNC in PNC Arena on Saturday, Feb. 10, 2018.

According to an article from News and Observer, PNC Arena, which is where the NC State men's basketball team currently plays home games and is home to the Carolina Hurricanes, has had an estimated \$4 billion impact on Wake County since its opening in 1999. Additionally, it has had a \$262 million impact in 2018 alone.

The economic impact study stated that 46 percent of people attending events at PNC Arena are not residents of the county, so they in turn generate \$14 million in hotel

expenditure revenue and \$6 million in restaurant revenue in Wake County, according to The News & Observer.

Centennial Authority, the owner of PNC Arena, requested the information from Wake County and is currently working on hospitality projects and enhancements to the facility that would cost an estimated \$200-\$300 million. According to the article, the authority is seeking funds to enhance Carter-Finley Stadium, new club and concession spaces in PNC and new office and meeting spaces for the Carolina Hurricanes staff.

The request to expand the PNC Arena and Carter-Finley Stadium still needs approval from Wake County and the city of Raleigh, according to The News & Observer.



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Bobby Sanguinetti's Winding Hockey Journey Brings Him Back To Charlotte

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

A lot has happened for Bobby Sanguinetti since he last donned a Checkers sweater.

He made a full-time jump to the NHL. He headed overseas for the first time. He returned for two more AHL seasons. He carved out a pair of impressive campaigns in Switzerland. He represented his country at the Olympics.

And while his hockey journey has taken him around the world, it's now brought him back to the Queen City.

"Charlotte is a great city," said Sanguinetti. "I'm really excited to be back."

Sanguinetti, a first-round pick in 2006 by the Rangers, was traded to Carolina in 2010 and spent three seasons in Charlotte from 2010 to 2013 before departing. The path that the now 30-year-old has taken to get back to the Checkers is a winding one that dates back to the offseason.

"It was something that, coming into the summer, my wife and I wanted to see if we could explore again," said Sanguinetti of returning to Charlotte. "We just had our first son and so we wanted to be closer to home and family. Spots were filled up early on so it didn't make sense on their end."

Sanguinetti, who has called Wilmington, North Carolina, home since 2013, then turned his sights back overseas.

"We just kind of waited it out and by the time we started looking back in Europe the jobs were filled over there," he said. "We had a few offers that we kind of entertained but nothing really jumped out as anything we really wanted to commit to."

While he remained a free agent without a team, the defenseman got a chance to get back into the swing of things over the holidays.

"I had the opportunity to play in the Spengler Cup for Davos which was really cool and a good experience," said Sanguinetti. "It was good to get back out on the ice too and play some games again. They're not league games or anything but that was good."

Meanwhile the once-crowded blue line in Charlotte was beginning to thin out. Offseason signee Michael Fora had departed the team to return to Europe early on in the season and Michal Cajkovsky did the same over the holiday break.

"We lost Big Mike, he wanted to leave and I don't want to hold anyone back," said Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci. "I understood his opportunity, it was great for him. We just want guys who want to be here."

Lucky for the Checkers, they knew someone who fit that bill.

"I got the call from Mike [Vellucci] after the first Spengler Cup game against Canada and sat down with my wife and discussed if we could make it work and what made sense. It was a no-brainer, especially with the way they play and where they are in the standings. And that's not by chance if you watch the way they're playing. I'm really excited to be back."

As for the Checkers, anytime you can add a player of Sanguinetti's experience and talent to an already clicking roster, that's a positive move.

"Bobby is a huge upgrade for us," said Vellucci. "He's offensively gifted and he's a good skater. He's a good guy, everyone here likes him, and he just wants to fit in and contribute."

Sanguinetti has been an offensive force on the blue line across his 10-year career, including posting the best scoring line by a defenseman in Checkers franchise history with a 50-point effort in 2011-12. He continued that scoring trend over the last two campaigns in Switzerland and now joins a deep defensive corps in Charlotte that already boasts a boatload of puck-moving skill.

"It's hard to sit there and say you're going to change your game, so I'm just going to try to add to it," said Sanguinetti. "At the same time it's about earning the trust from the coaches and doing the right things on the defensive side of the game. When there is that offensive opportunity to jump in, that's something I'll make sure I'm ready for. Helping the guys out when I can and being a good locker room guy."

As with any player moving from the European game to North America – Sanguinetti hasn't played a game on the smaller sheet of ice since 2015-16 – there will be some adjusting to do.

"I think back to when I came back from Russia, that was just one year overseas and it takes some time," said Sanguinetti. "It's quicker here. The pace isn't necessarily faster, over in Switzerland it's a fast league and the game is up and down the ice, it's more the quickness of the game. Guys are on top of you faster and it's a lot more little passes to tight areas. I think that's something I'm going to have to continue to work



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on and get some extra work on that as quick as I can. That's my focus, every day to get more comfortable and take the positives away from it."

"We'll work him in slowly as he gets back to the North American game," said Vellucci. "But he's going to be huge for us."

Whether it's this weekend or later down the line, when

Sanguinetti hits the ice at Bojangles' Coliseum it will be a big moment, not only for the team, but for the fans who continue to embrace him seven years later.

"The way we were treated when we were here was amazing," said Sanguinetti. "From the fans and the staff and everyone around the organization, it was amazing. That was the biggest selling point to coming back."

Watch This Weekend's Games For Free

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

For those unable to make it Bojangles' Coliseum this weekend, both of the Checkers' games against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins will be available to watch online for free.

Friday's 7 p.m. matchup is the AHL Game of the Week and will be broadcast for free on Facebook Watch here.

On Saturday, the league is making all 15 games free to watch on AHLTV, including Charlotte's 6 p.m. puck drop against the Penguins.

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1125240 Carolina Hurricanes

Tampa Bay's late rally ends Canes' five-game win streak

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

JANUARY 10, 2019 11:13 PM

To beat the best, you have to play your best.

For much of their game Thursday against the Tampa Bay Lightning, the NHL's best team this season, the Carolina Hurricanes did that. They played with an edge, gave up few good scoring chances, took the lead on Justin Williams' 300th career goal and got one of Petr Mrazek's best goaltending games of the season.

But it couldn't keep the Lightning from winning. Tampa Bay scored two power-play goals in the final eight minutes -- from Ondrej Palat and then Brayden Point -- to win 3-1 at Amalie Arena and end the Canes' five-game winning streak.

Rookie Andrei Svechnikov had the first Canes penalty in the third period and Greg McKegg the second with an undisciplined slash with 3:55 left in regulation. The Canes' penalty killing, which has been aggressive and become a strength, couldn't prevent the Lightning from scoring.

Point, denied a goal by a coach's challenge in the second period, picked up a late empty-netter for a second goal.

"I couldn't complain. The effort was phenomenal," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We worked hard. We always work hard. We're a hard-working team. Obviously we knew coming in we couldn't take penalties and we did. That's the killer."

The Lightning improved to 34-8-2, the NHL's best record. The Bolts, called the "perfect package" by Brind'Amour before the game, are 17-1-1 since Nov. 29 and have won nine straight at home at Amalie.

After a scoreless first in which the Lightning managed three shots, Williams' milestone goal at 4:24 of the second pushed the Canes (20-18-5) in front. Williams, crashing the net, followed up a shot by defenseman Dougie Hamilton to beat goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy for his 11th of the season.

The game took a more intense turn later in the second period after the Lightning was denied a tying goal by Point.

Point took a stretch pass, got behind defensemen Justin Faulk and Calvin de Haan and beat Mrazek, who denied Point's first shot only to have Point whack the puck out of the air and into the net.

Brind'Amour issued a coach's challenge, claiming offside. But not on Point. On Tyler Johnson.

Canes goaltending coach Mike Bales, sitting with general manager Don Waddell high above the Amalie ice, was said to have spotted Johnson

leaving the ice but not completely off the ice when Point entered the zone. The goal was negated and the Canes kept the 1-0 lead, much to the displeasure of the home fans.

The Canes kept the lead until Svechnikov was called for hooking at 11:15 of the third, his second penalty of the game. Palat's power-play score, off a fortunate bounce, tied it.

McKegg then was called for what was a retaliation move. After being elbowed by Alex Killorn, with no call, McKegg slashed Killorn on the back of the leg with 3:55 left in regulation.

"Tough call at the end," Brind'Amour said. "Good game going on and the guy embellishes a little tap on the back of the legs."

Point, open in the slot, ripped a shot past Mrazek and the Lightning had the lead. His empty-netter gave him 29 goals for the season.

The Canes returned to Raleigh after the game to complete a back-to-back against the Buffalo Sabres on Friday at PNC Arena. It will be the return game for winger Jeff Skinner, who was traded by the Canes in the offseason after eight years with Carolina, has put together a terrific first season with Buffalo and also has 29 goals.

"When you play a team like Tampa, where we were in a good position, and then to lose it that way, that's a tough way to lose," Brind'Amour said. "You almost rather lose 8-0. That's going to be tough but we have to pick the guys up tomorrow and be ready to go."

News Observer LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125241 Carolina Hurricanes

Former Canes general manager Ron Francis 'reinvents' himself with new business job

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

JANUARY 10, 2019 06:24 PM

It has taken a while, and understandably so, but Ron Francis is making a move away from hockey.

Not from Raleigh. He and his family are staying. But hockey.

Francis, the former executive vice president and general manager of the Carolina Hurricanes, has joined NAI Carolantic Realty, company chairman Steve Stroud announced Thursday. Francis will work with clients on commercial real estate investments, Stroud said.

"I've known Steve for a long time and stayed in touch over the years," Francis said in an interview. "When things changed for me he said, 'What



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are you going to do?' and he said I would be good at this. We talked about it, I hemmed and hawed, and made the decision to go back to school and take the class and learn about real estate in November and December, passed all the exams and got my brokerage license.

"I talked with Steve and said, 'Let's give it a try.' Here we are."

Francis, 55, used the word "reinvent" in describing his move into the business world. For nearly all of his life, it was all hockey.

He was a Canadian junior star, an NHL star, a two-time Stanley Cup winner and judged worthy of the Hockey Hall of Fame after he retired as a player. He had his number retired by the Hurricanes and was the first hockey player selected for the N.C. Sports Hall of Fame.

Moving to the Hurricanes front office, he was the director of player development, vice president of hockey operations and also associate head coach, then named general manager and executive vice president in April 2014.

Former Canes captain Ron Francis takes to the ice for the final time at the start of a ceremony held before an NHL game played between the Carolina Hurricanes and the Atlanta Thrashers at the RBC center in Raleigh Saturday night 1/28/06. His jersey was retired in honor of his career. staff/Chris Seward

Everything changed when Tom Dundon became majority owner of the Hurricanes a year ago. Dundon, citing personality differences, first reassigned Francis to president of hockey operations in March 2018, then fired him the next month.

Francis has remained an investor in the team as a member of Hurricanes Holdings LLC and said he will continue that financial relationship until November 2019. He said his contract with the team ends June 30, 2019, and said he preferred not to comment on the team or his departure from the Canes while still under contract.

Francis said he has not attended any Hurricanes games this season or seen the telecasts. He was once Rod Brind'Amour's teammate and later his boss as GM, but has watched from afar during Brind'Amour's first year as a head coach.

"This will be a dramatic change from what I have been doing in hockey, there's no question," Francis said of his new position "I do think a lot that you learn in hockey and learn in sports in general translate well to the business world in terms of communication, teamwork.

"It's a new challenge. But I certainly feel more comfortable that I'm doing it with NAI Carolantic Realty and Steve Stroud and the people he has here, who have an outstanding reputation and are known for their hard work and knowledge. I've got some learning to do but some good people to learn with."

In terms of hockey, Francis said he believes he could have "stayed in the game" and his name has been mentioned as a potential candidate for other GM jobs. But he said that could not have happened while maintaining his investment in the team, and likely would mean moving his family.

"At this point in our life, we thought this isn't exactly what we're looking to do," he said. "So this is a new venture. I'm sure not a lot of people at 55 reinvent themselves."

Francis did agree to serve as co-general manager, along with Sean Burke, of the Canadian team in the recent Spengler Cup in Davos, Switzerland. Another former teammate, Kevin Dineen, was the Canada coach although the Canadians did not win a fourth straight title.

It has been a busy time, Francis said. He said he and his wife, Mary Lou, celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary with a two-week trip to Italy. While there, he said, their daughter, Kaitlyn, was engaged and will be married in 2020.

Now, he has a new non-hockey job and said he was at his desk Thursday at the NAI Carolantic Realty office off Trinity Road, not far from PNC Arena.

"I've been in this area 20-plus years, been in this market and made a lot of good friends," Francis said. "I'm excited about this opportunity."

News Observer LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125242 Carolina Hurricanes

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

By John Vogl

Jan 10, 2019

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.



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"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."

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.

(Courtesy of Beth Campbell)

"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."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125333 NHL

Montreal Expos suitor Mitch Garber joins Seattle NHL franchise as minority investor

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

A prominent Canadian lawyer-turned-businessman trying to bring the Expos back to Montreal has signed on as a minority investor with an incoming Seattle NHL team.

A hockey source confirmed that Mitch Garber, 54, a chairman and a co-investor in the Montreal-based Cirque du Soleil entertainment company owned by the Seattle team's managing partner David Bonderman, will be a minority stakeholder in both the NHL franchise and KeyArena. Garber is one of the lead figures, along with Seagram Co. liquor empire heir Stephen Bronfman, trying to revive the Expos — a move that could impact the Pacific Northwest given Major League Baseball is expected to also consider putting a new franchise in Portland as a pairing with any Montreal club.

Members of the NHL Seattle group had no immediate comment.

Garber could not be reached for comment on his reasons for joining the Seattle franchise, though he and Bonderman have done a spate of business deals together the past decade. In 2009, Garber became CEO and the first private investor of Caesars Interactive Entertainment (CIE), a newly created digital gaming and entertainment business whose parent company was owned by Bonderman's TPG investment firm.

While at CIE, which owns the World Series of Poker and other entities, Garber also founded the Playtika social gaming company, which he later sold for \$4.4 billion to Chinese mogul Jack Ma. Garber, who earned a onetime \$210 million payout in stock options and bonuses when he left Caesar's in 2016, had become chairman of Cirque du Soleil in 2015 after the company was purchased by Bonderman's firm and other investors.

In his 1990s years as a prominent Montreal sports lawyer and radio host, Garber and his partner, Morden Lazarus, assisted entrepreneur Jim



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Speros in relocating a Canadian Football League franchise from Baltimore to Montreal and renaming it after an Alouettes team bearing that name that had folded nine years earlier.

His current partner in reviving the Expos, Bronfman, is the son of the MLB team's original billionaire owner. Bronfman attempted to purchase the Montreal Canadiens NHL franchise in 2009 before the team was sold for \$500 million to members of its prior Molson family owners.

Garber's expertise in online gaming could help Seattle's incoming hockey franchise and the league with ideas on how to best leverage future revenues from sports gambling. A lifelong, rabid baseball fan, Garber's new involvement with the NHL and some of its sports power brokers could also help with his separate quest to revive MLB in his hometown.

Seattle Times LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125235 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres' Jack Eichel gets in full practice, says 'I feel 100 percent'

Jason Wolf

Published Thu, Jan 10, 2019

Updated Fri, Jan 11, 2019

Jack Eichel was on the ice for the start of practice Thursday morning at HarborCenter and appears poised to return from a three-game injury absence to center the Buffalo Sabres' top line against the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday in Raleigh, N.C.

"I felt good today," Eichel said. "I feel 100 percent, so I'm just excited for the game (Friday)."

But Sabres coach Phil Housley, who said he liked what he saw from Eichel at practice, wouldn't commit to the captain's return to game action.

"I thought he did quite well," Housley said. "It was a pretty high-tempo, little bump-and-grind practice and it was good to see him out there. I thought he did a good job today.

"I wouldn't declare him in the lineup. Obviously, we wanted to see how he reacted to practice and we'll know more (Friday)."

Eichel, who has been sidelined by an "upper body" injury, skated alongside Jeff Skinner and Tage Thompson during his first full practice since late December.

Eichel said he was eager to play on the same line as Thompson, who Housley has moved to the top line in place of Sam Reinhart in an effort to create balance.

"He's been playing well," Eichel said of Thompson, "so we'll just try to build chemistry as quick as possible."

Reinhart skated on the second line Thursday, alongside center Vladimir Sobotka and left wing Conor Sheary.

"I just thought Tage has been playing very good hockey the last 10 games, particularly the last five," Housley said. "He's creating a lot of offense, he's using his speed, he's using his shot, he's been reliable defensively and just put him up there with Jack to just get some balance."

Eichel's injury surfaced when he took a maintenance day from practice on Dec. 30. He skated just four shifts in a home loss to the New York Islanders on New Year's Eve before leaving the game.

The Sabres have won two of the three games Eichel has missed, using Evan Rodrigues, Casey Mittelstadt and Sobotka to center the top line in his absence.

Eichel was a limited participant in the team's practice on Monday but didn't play in the Sabres' 5-1 victory against the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday night.

C.J. Smith, who scored his first NHL goal during the team's five-goal second period, remains a candidate to be sent to Rochester upon Eichel's return.

But Housley said Smith will accompany the team to Carolina.

Smith and Remi Elie skated as extras Thursday.

"Obviously, it's big for our group and the confidence," Eichel said about the Sabres' eruption in the second period, when five different players scored against the Devils. "There was a bit of maybe lack of scoring there going on for a while for a lot of us, so it's good to see it get spread around. I don't think anybody had more than one point. There were so many different guys contributing and it's good to see. I think we can build off that and take it into (Friday) night."

Buffalo News LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125236 Buffalo Sabres

Buffalo Sabres prospect Vasily Glotov is 'electrifying' all-star

Bill Hoppe

Published Thu, Jan 10, 2019

Updated Thu, Jan 10, 2019

Vasily Glotov calls the rink his second home. The Buffalo Sabres' prospect always arrives early – "I show up at 8:15, 8:20 at the latest," he said – and is so regimented he takes the same number of shots each day before practice.

"Two hundred pucks every morning," said Glotov, a rookie winger with the Cincinnati Cyclones, the Sabres' ECHL affiliate.

Spending the day at the rink is a special experience for Glotov, whose slick skills and fun-loving personality have caught the attention of the Sabres and their fans over the last three years.

Glotov, who will represent the Cyclones at the ECHL All-Star Game on Jan. 21, always seems to be smiling and having a blast.

"He's a guy that's all about the game," Cyclones coach Matt Thomas said. "Like, if you took hockey away from him, I couldn't see him functioning. That's how much he loves the game."

Thomas said "coming to the rink is the best day of the year" for the Russian.

"You can't help but recognize that and feed off of that," Thomas said. "He makes it exciting for everybody to come to the rink, because of how excited he is. He's certainly got that contagious personality and that zest for the game and for life that you always want to be around."

Glotov, 21, has beaten long odds to play pro hockey in North America.

The Sabres' old regime picked him in the seventh round, 190th overall. Two strong seasons in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League helped him earn a one-year American Hockey League contract.



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The 5-foot-11, 174-pound Glotov has acclimated to the ECHL quickly, compiling seven goals and 23 points in 32 contests this season. He also earned a one-game promotion to the Rochester Americans.

Glotov's array of talents, of course, have buoyed him.

"He probably has some of the most natural, raw, purest stick-handling skills I've seen," said Sabres winger C.J. Smith, who noted Glotov's "skill set is incredible."

But Glotov's desire to improve and evolve – "He's insanely coachable," Thomas said – has helped him thrive.

Thomas said Glotov has "the ability to take to coaching and not only take it, but put it into play.

"A lot of players will agree with it and understand it and they have a hard time implementing it in their game. The thirst for knowledge from him is incredible. But the ability to go out and actually positively change it to implement it into his game, I haven't seen any player that has that."

Glotov has done that while working to improve his English. He said he has done that by watching "a lot of Netflix." The British drama "Peaky Blinders" is his favorite show.

He spoke English well enough to conduct interviews after the Sabres drafted him in 2016. But a better grasp of the language has been critical to his success.

"You tell him, 'Hey, this is what we need you to do,' " Thomas said. "He knows it all. He can repeat every one of our systems word-for-word, and I think that's a special trait from not only a player that has a language barrier to begin with, but is known as an offensive player."

Thomas has put more on Glotov's plate, utilizing him as a shutdown forward against the opponent's top line and in a penalty-killing role.

"He's been tremendous with that," said Thomas, who will coach Glotov and the Western Conference All-Stars. "He was a guy I was worried that it was going to be a long process to understand that he just can't play one-on-one and be the dynamic offensive player that he is.

"But he's a guy, he's all in. ... Give him a role and he'll do the role."

"I really enjoy when a coach puts me in a situation (where) he trusts me," Glotov said.

Still, the speedy Glotov's main job is to create offense. While he ranks seventh in scoring on the Cyclones, who rank first in the conference, the ECHL likes to showcase its young talent in the three-on-three all-star format.

Glotov might zoom all over the ice and put on a show.

"The best thing to say about him is he's a tremendous one-on-one player that has an elite skill set that can really create offense," Thomas said. "I think ... those types of guys can really shine in those games. So for me, I think he's deserving because he's a pretty electrifying player when he has some time and space."

Buffalo News LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125306 Nashville Predators

Thursday's recap: Blue Jackets 4, Predators 3 (OT)

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean

Published 8:45 p.m. CT Jan. 10, 2019 | Updated 10:05 p.m. CT Jan. 10, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Pekka Rinne was supposed to be off work Thursday.

But Juuse Saros called in sick and Troy Grosenick was called up from Milwaukee as an emergency backup. That meant Rinne was called on to play in his 600th career game, which turned out to be a Predators' 4-3 overtime loss to the Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena.

For the 32nd time in his career, the 36-year-old Rinne started both games of back-to-backs, most of which came early during his career.

The reigning Vezina Trophy winner stopped 28 shots during a 4-3 overtime victory Wednesday against the Blackhawks in Chicago and made 30 saves Thursday.

"I used to play all the time in back-to-backs," Rinne said Thursday morning before the team fell to 5-0-2 in its last seven games. "Nothing really changes. It's been a policy the last I-don't-know how many years (to not do that). It's a good chance to take a rest and play the other guy.

"It's automatic we split those games. I'm excited. Physically it's a little bit different, but other than that nothing really."

Rinne — and four shots off the post — helped keep the Predators in the game until the third period, when Artemi Panarin and Boone Jenner scored nine seconds apart for a two-goal lead. Panarin returned to score the winner in overtime.

The Predators answered with two goals in 38 seconds — one from Viktor Arvidsson and one from Mattias Ekholm — to tie it 3-all with 4:15 left.

Jenner put the home team ahead 1-0 at 6:26 of the first. Nick Bonino tied it 1-all early in the third.

Big number: 28. Assists this season by Mattias Ekholm, a career high. He assisted on Bonino's game-tying goal in the third.

Big number II: 600. Career victories for Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella.

Bigname: Blue Jackets goalie Sergei Bobrovsky was a healthy scratch after he was asked to stay away from the team for failing to meet team values.

Quotable: "So far this road trip has been big for us." — Rinne on the team's season-long six-game trip.

Tennessean LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125307 Nashville Predators

Saros out sick; Predators recall goalie Troy Grosenick on emergency basis

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean

Published 4:36 p.m. CT Jan. 10, 2019 | Updated 5:31 p.m. CT Jan. 10, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Less than two hours before their game Thursday against the Blue Jackets, the Predators recalled goalie Troy Grosenick from Milwaukee on an emergency basis.



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Pekka Rinne, who played all of Wednesday night's 4-3 overtime victory against the Blackhawks, will start and Grosenick will back him up because regular backup Juuse Saros is sick.

Tennessean LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125308 Nashville Predators

Filip Forsberg makes it happen for Predators

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean

Published 2:52 p.m. CT Jan. 10, 2019 | Updated 3:02 p.m. CT Jan. 10, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Filip Forsberg channeled his inner Forrest Gump on Wednesday night in Chicago.

"(Expletive) happens," the Predators forward said after his mistake led to the tying goal late during the third period of what turned out to be a 4-3 overtime victory against the Blackhawks thanks to — who else? — Forsberg.

Forsberg turned over the puck deep in his own zone as Viktor Arvidsson skated away, allowing Blackhawks center Artem Anisimov to tie the score 3-all with 2:21 left in regulation.

Arvidsson slammed his stick on the crossbar in frustration, and the Predators were forced to watch Anisimov go down the high-five line.

"It's one of those things. They did a good job," Forsberg said. "Just scrambled (a) little bit, tried to whack it off the wall to keep it safe. Nobody was there. They connected on a nice play."

Forsberg redeemed himself by scoring his second goal of the night a minute into the extra period, though.

"I shouldn't say I owe these guys anything, but they do a lot of good things for me, so it's great I could do something back for them," said Forsberg, who was playing in his second game since missing 17 with an upper-body injury.

Band is back together

Forsberg the fourth-liner lasted all of two periods in his first game back Monday against the Maple Leafs. He played 13:54 during that 4-0 victory, a one-game tuneup before he rejoined his top linemates, Arvidsson and Ryan Johansen full-time for the first time in nearly two months.

Arvidsson missed 21 games with a broken thumb, leaving the wounded Predators with plenty of time to daydream about the good old days.

"We've been talking to each other a lot over the last couple months," Forsberg said. "We want (to) play together. We feel comfortable, and we're having fun together. I think you can see it on the ice."

The three have spent plenty of time there together in recent years.

They combined for 18 of the Predators' 37 shots on goal Wednesday, including seven each by Arvidsson and Forsberg.

"The line generated a lot of offense," Predators coach Peter Laviolette said. "Fil is a huge part of the team. He's been our top scorer the past two years. ... To get them all back together, yeah (they) were out for a long time, so they're probably going to shake off a little bit of rust. The more they play the better they're going to feel."

Expect the expected

Forsberg's 16 goals lead the Predators, despite the time he missed, showing just how much the Predators missed him.

His rebound from the mistake Wednesday further solidified that notion.

"We know Fil's compete level," said Johansen, who leads the Predators with 38 points. "That was a great example. He got the puck in overtime and (Jonathan) Toews was coming at him. He made a nice move to outbottle him and out-strength him and had an unbelievable finish to seal the deal."

Next on Forsberg's list is to finish his return to full health.

"There are some things (that are) obviously a little rusty, a couple passes that I missed," he said. "But it's getting better."

Tennessean LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125309 Nashville Predators

Breaking Down Saros: Why 'Little Bear' is the Next Big Thing

By Paul Campbell

Jan 10, 2019

It would be easy to get swallowed whole by the immense shadow cast by Pekka Rinne, but Juuse Saros has managed to shine. Though his career spans only 65 total games, his performance has been impressive.

The Stats

His .919 save percentage in all situations puts him tied for sixth in the league over the span of his career (for goalies with more than 3000 minutes played), while his delta save percentage (the difference between his expected and actual save percentage based on the difficulty of shots faced) is an impressive 1.08, good for fourth in the league: Pekka Rinne, to compare, is ranked 31st over that timespan (courtesy of Corsica Hockey). The sample size is admittedly small, but when he's been given the chance Saros has delivered.

Some of Rinne's biggest critics have — not entirely unfairly — credited a good deal of his success to the stellar defense he plays behind. It stands to reason in that case that Saros would be benefitting from the same great defense, causing his numbers to look a lot more impressive than they would on another team.

Interestingly, this simply isn't true. Saros has faced shots from more difficult locations throughout his career, compared both to Rinne, and to the league average. First, let's look at 2016-17, the year Saros began seeing a significant number of starts as the Predators' backup.

The "Without Saros" image corresponds almost exactly with Rinne's heat maps. Since when Saros wasn't playing, Rinne almost always was. The angry red area in front of the net in the "With Saros" image indicates significantly more shots faced from that dangerous area than the average goalie. The contrast with the calm blue pool in front of the goal in the "Without Saros" image (indicating far lower than league average shots from there) is striking.

The same theme continued into the 2017-18 season:

While the first image shows Rinne having a somewhat more challenging range of shots than before, Saros was up against the same kind of netfront shots that characterized the previous season. These images show five-on-five play only, but the pattern was the same over both seasons for penalty kill situations as well.



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Part of the disparity may be due to the kinds of games backups often start, on the road, the second half of back-to-backs behind a tired team. Part of it may be attributable to each goaltender, with Rinne perhaps stifling more rebounds and handling the puck better to eliminate dangerous chances. Whatever the reasons, Saros's success cannot simply be attributed to a career spent facing shots from easy locations.

So, why has he been successful? The answer is in his game. Let's break it down.

The Style

No goaltending pair is easier to distinguish from a quick glance than Nashville's: Rinne is a towering 6'5", while Saros is (generously) listed at 5'11", putting him in a tie for shortest goaltender in the league. Despite this massive apparent disadvantage, Saros is able to play with the very best because of his technical and positional excellence.

You might expect a smaller goaltender to take more depth, coming out further to challenge, closing off space that a larger goaltender's body would do by default. Saros aligns with this expectation:

The rush is very low risk as the puck enters the zone, with a defender keeping the puck carrier outside, and both passing options defended. Many goaltenders would remain in or near the blue paint in this situation, but Saros steps well outside it to meet the rush. This aggressive depth both covers more net in the case of a shot from outside, and potentially dissuades the puck carrier from taking the shot in the first place.

The downside of this approach, and the reason many goaltenders who once challenged rushes like this have since retreated, is that the farther you come out, the farther and faster you have to travel in the case of a lateral pass or carry. Saros is able to challenge like this thanks in part to his elite defense breaking up passes, but his own ability to judge and manage his depth gets most of the credit. The next clip illustrates my point perfectly. Watch his depth throughout.

Saros sets up to face the high-slot shot outside the crease, but as the shot threat evaporates, he fades back into the blue. When the pass comes across to the surprisingly open shooter, Saros is at perfect depth to turn and push his skate just in front of the post, making a very difficult save. Had he remained out in the white, there's no way he would have been able to lunge back and across in time.

Choosing your initial depth and when to recede is a matter of strategically reading the play. In the situation above, he has plenty of time to make his adjustments. In the next clip, he's afforded no such luxury, but still reads and executes exquisitely.

Facing a point shot from a defender moving laterally as a two-player screen passes in front of him, Saros remains back in the blue to defend against the myriad possibilities the play might set up. When the shot wrecks on the screen, however, Saros springs into action. Having gone down (wisely) into a blocking butterfly when he loses sight of the puck after release, he knows he is too deep to face down the shot he anticipates will come from the hash marks. Quickly, he gets both feet under him and bursts forward in an instant, reaching the top of his crease, stopping, and setting before the shot is taken. All of this is impressive.

Many goaltenders would have a hard time both gaining depth and stopping to set before this shot comes. The choice would be to remain deep and await the shot, or push out and meet the shot while still moving forward. The first option leaves too much net open. The second covers more net, but moving forward makes most save selections more difficult to execute, makes rebounds hard to control, and paralyzes a goaltender if the shooter carries or passes laterally. Saros's impressive power and footwork ensure he doesn't have to make that decision.

Saros is remarkably precise with his edge work, allowing him to remain on angle fronting the puck when on his knees, even during rapid changes in direction. Take this horrible mess of a play, for instance. Watch him adjust as the puck moves from side to side.

After the initial save, Saros isn't satisfied with just stretching out and hoping the puck hits him. He manages to plant his right foot and push his whole body in front of the puck as a unit, even getting his pads closed before the rebound would have come. When the shooter whiffs, he kills all the momentum of his initial push by planting the left skate, stopping him from drifting out of the play entirely. He uses that foot to push himself onto both feet, standing to gain leverage to resist the skaters threatening to push him bodily into the net, then drops and seals just in time to keep the puck out.

On a far cleaner but even more rapid play, watch Saros's quick lateral adjustments:

Each time the puck moves laterally, Saros moves as a unit to reposition himself appropriately. Most impressive is the adjustment he makes after the pass. He moves to his left, lining up with where the pass was received, then seeing the shooter's need to get the puck in front of him before shooting, Saros shifts quickly to his right and arrives before the shot is released. Small lateral movements like this (often called micro adjustments) are very difficult to master, but are absolutely essential to optimize coverage. When you don't have a massive frame to rely on, every degree closer to the angle line you can get matters that much more.

An unsurprising area of concern for Saros is his ability to see past screens, especially on the penalty kill, where traffic is constant and defenders can't do much to stop it. This is his typical approach:

Saros employs what's known as the "tall" stance when the puck moves up to the point on the penalty kill. This is common (Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy uses a similar strategy), but unlike taller goaltenders, Saros has to work much harder. He often can't see over shoulders, and so has to peek around bodies. Here, he does an admirable job of looking around the screen to the right, seeing the windup so he can guess when the shot is coming, then hurrying left to pick up the puck again. He sees it a moment too late, and can't react in time to make the save.

A significant disadvantage of the tall stance is that the feet are so close together, and the body so upright, many potential save selections aren't possible till the goalie gets down into a shot-ready stance. This creates a significant delay, a second step that often means the difference between a stop and a goal. Further, a goalie's coverage from the tall stance is minimal, meaning that if a shot comes through while you're up there, the odds of it just hitting you are low.

The Future

It's clear that at 23, Saros already has the skill to be an effective starting goaltender. His game is so different from Rinne's that it's hard to compare the relative quality of each, but if Rinne goes down with an injury, as he has already this season, the Nashville crease will be in good hands. Having a goaltender like Saros in the wings means the Predators can gradually ease back on the number of games Rinne starts, getting the most out of their better-rested number one while preparing their prodigy for the increased workload he'll eventually be facing.

So far, the coaching staff has handled their pair of talented Finns well. Their greatest danger will be waiting too long to hand over the keys to the kid, but so long as they time it right, Nashville is in a very enviable goaltending position.

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1125310 Nashville Predators

How a 43-second video from P.K. Subban inspired a teenage hockey player dealing with racism



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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By Adam Vingani

Jan 10, 2019

CHICAGO — The 43-second video circulated around the internet Monday, though that was never the plan.

In it, P.K. Subban, standing on the visiting bench inside Detroit's Little Caesars Arena last Friday, offered encouragement to a boy in need of a lift.

Hey Ty, it's P.K. Subban here with the Nashville Predators. I've heard a little bit about you and what you're going through. I can tell you this right now that as long as you're still breathing in this world, you've got to believe in yourself and let nobody tell you what you can and can't do, especially if it's because of the color of your skin. In this world, some things happen that we don't really understand. That's OK. We don't have to understand it. All we need to do is understand ourself, believe in ourself and keep trying and keep pushing forward. I just want to tell you that when you're playing hockey, you play because you love the game and you want to play. Let nobody take that away from you.

Ty is 13-year-old Ty Cornett, the only son of Matthew and Nicole Cornett and one of four children that they have adopted. The family lives in Dearborn, Mich., fewer than 10 miles west of where Subban recorded the video.

Ty idolizes Subban. He'll watch YouTube clips of Subban for hours on end and would probably never stop if his parents didn't make him. When he was 6, all he wanted for Christmas was a Subban jersey.

"I'm a diehard Red Wings fan," Matthew said. "My wife and I, one of our first dates was going to a Red Wings game. We love Detroit sports, and seeing my son ask for a Montreal jersey really killed me. But I also knew it was important to him. ... He really gravitated toward P.K. to the point to where the only poster we allowed him to have on his wall is P.K. in his Predators uniform. He still wears his Montreal jersey everywhere. I think he's got like three bobbleheads. He's got this Team Subban shirt that he got for Christmas last year. We've got about 100 P.K. Subban cards. He's got Predators sweatshirts. He actually had his hair cut like P.K. for years. He would actually take the picture to the barber and say, 'Cut it like this.'

"I have old videos from where he would score, and he was doing the P.K. celebration. He adores the guy."

More than anywhere else, Subban's influence on Ty is felt on the ice. Ty plays defense with flair and wears No. 76, seeking permission from his mother a few years ago to change from his previous No. 15, which she wore during her high school days.

"I think he's misunderstood because he's loud, and he's not apologetic about the way he plays," Matthew said. "That brings out a lot of negativity from other people."

Ty Cornett has idolized P.K. Subban since he was 6 years old. (Courtesy of Matthew Cornett)

As the only black kid on his team, Matthew and Nicole let Ty know that he might be the target of taunts, a reality he grasped. One of his first experiences with racism came when he was 10. A player on another team offered high-fives to members of Ty's team as he passed them in the hallway, but when Ty went for one, the boy pulled his hand away.

"Too slow, (N-word)," the boy said.

Things have worsened since then.

"This year's been the worst by far," Matthew said. "... They would beat their chests and start acting like gorillas every time he lined up in front of their bench. They followed him to the bench in front of his coaches and said, 'Hey monkey, stick to basketball.'

'Thank God the ice is frozen. Otherwise you'd be drowning right now,' was another one that he heard. Then he played in another tournament and a dad 10 seats from me said, 'Get the fuck up, monkey. This ain't football.'

"He played a team here and was called 'Dirty (N-word), 'I'm going to lynch you, (N-word),' 'My dad says the only good (N-word) is a dead (N-word),' 'Go pick me some cotton.' He got called 'boy.'

"And the things about these boys, they know what they're doing. The kids know what they're doing, and they know how to do it in front of the referees without causing an issue. But the referees came up to my son after one of the games and said, 'We're sorry for the way they treated you. We know they were coming after you. We apologize, and we're going to go talk to their coach.' They weren't sorry enough to call a penalty, but they were sorry enough to apologize to him.

"Ty was fine with it, which is sad. It's to the point now where he doesn't even tell me it happens anymore because it's just natural, I guess."

(George Atkinson, president of the Michigan Amateur Hockey Association, released this statement to The Athletic: "We have a zero tolerance policy for that type of behavior. The first we heard of this was (Tuesday). We are looking into the matter.")

Although Ty put on a brave face, the slurs ate at him and those close to him. Joshua Meier, the father of one of Ty's teammates with the Plymouth Stingrays, reached out to Denny Hughes, who works security for the NHL in Detroit.

Hughes then approached Brandon Walker, the Predators' manager of hockey operations, before Friday's game to see if there was anything the team could do to help. Meier was just hoping for an autograph from Subban, but the Predators had a better, more personal idea. Walker briefed Subban about Ty's situation, then shot the video in one take.

The text with Subban's message reached Ty's phone Friday evening, but he didn't see it until the next morning. (As a family rule, the Cornett children have to leave their phones in their parents' room overnight.)

"I hear him screaming," Matthew said. "I thought he was hurt. And he came running in and showed me, and I've never seen him that excited in my life. A close second probably would've been when he got his Subban jersey when he was 6. You could probably hear him halfway down the block how much he screamed. Then he shut his video game off, and my wife said he was sitting in a room by himself just watching the video over and over and over again."

It was a message that Matthew, who is white and whose wife is half white, half Cuban, couldn't deliver with the same effectiveness or perspective.

"He's giving Ty advice and giving Ty a lesson that, no matter how hard I try as a parent, I'm never going to be able to do, because no matter how much I want to put myself in Ty's shoes, I'm never going to be able to fully understand that," Matthew said. "And to have somebody like P.K., who went through it, not only him but his family, and to see what they've done with that is one of the best lessons that I can try to use to teach Ty.

"People want to argue and fight and blame so much nowadays, and watching somebody like P.K. who says, 'Don't worry about anybody else. Just worry about yourself,' I've said it 100 times or 1,000 times. But I don't think it clicked until he heard it (from Subban). That helped our family more than anything. ... Having him personally address Ty has done more than anything I could hope to do, at least in that part of his hockey life."

Matthew didn't intend to post the video to his Reddit account, appropriately named "hockey7676." But he wanted other kids facing similar problems to hear Subban's words.

Subban, for his part, said he doesn't want to be hailed as "a savior or a hero or anything like that." In his mind, it was just the right thing to do.



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"It's not just for black kids," Subban said. "I hope people aren't just taking it as (I'm) just trying to help out black kids that play hockey. It's all kids. It's all kids that are facing bullying or racism or whatever it is, because these issues are not just issues in sports or hockey. They're issues in life. A kid could be going to school and going through the same stuff. In this specific case, Ty's in a similar position that I've been in in my life, and I was able to send him a personal message.

"It's the truth, that anything in your life, if you don't want to do it, then that's fine. You can move on to something else. But you never should stop doing something because somebody doesn't think that you should 1125324 New York Rangers

Josh Bailey's late goal lifts Islanders over Rangers at the Garden

Staff Report

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS |

JAN 10, 2019 | 10:25 PM

Josh Bailey scored with 1:26 remaining to lift the Islanders over the Rangers 4-3 on Thursday night at Madison Square Garden.

Cal Clutterbuck found Bailey cutting to the back post, and he beat Henrik Lundqvist to help the Islanders improve to 13-2-0 in the last 15 meetings between the Big Apple rivals.

Matt Barzal had a goal and two assists, and Robin Lehner made 27 saves. Jordan Eberle and Anders Lee also scored for the Islanders, and Johnny Boychuk had two assists.

Ryan Strome, Kevin Shattenkirk and Jesper Fast scored for the Rangers, who dropped their fifth straight to open 2019. Lundqvist stopped 16 shots.

"I was really proud of the way we played. To come out in the third period and play with the pace and energy we played says an awful lot about our character," Rangers head coach David Quinn said. "But character is not getting us wins right now."

Fast tied it 3-3 midway through the third period by knocking the puck out of the air and past Lehner. That came after Lee put the Islanders ahead 3-2 by redirecting Nick Leddy's slap shot on the power play early in the second period.

Former Islander Strome opened the scoring 1:38 into the game with a power-play goal, but Barzal answered just 53 seconds later with a nifty deke past Lundqvist. The speedy forward has been terrific against the Rangers, recording 14 points in seven games. Barzal will represent the Islanders at All-Star weekend in San Jose.

Eberle made it 2-1 five minutes later after mishandling a puck but recovering to snap a wrist shot by Lundqvist.

"We played really well, we put ourselves in a really good spot to win the game, I don't know what to say," Lundqvist said. "You look at the goals and break it down, there's things that happened we just have to clean up to win games. One shot I didn't stop that in the third and that's the difference."

Shattenkirk tied it 2-2 when he scored his second of the season at 1:11 of the middle frame.

New York Daily News LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125325 New York Rangers

Barry Trotz went with his muscle, and it paid off

By Brett Cyrgalis

January 11, 2019 | 1:41am

Islanders coach Barry Trotz decided to scratch talented rookie Michael Dal Colle and dress the monstrous Ross Johnston for what would turn out to be his team's 4-3 win over the Rangers on Thursday night at the Garden.

Johnston had been the one who goaded a reluctant Cody McLeod, on the night before Thanksgiving, into a fight that ended with McLeod breaking his hand and missing more than a month. Rangers coach David Quinn then put McLeod in the starting lineup Thursday, and he tried to fight Matt Martin off the opening faceoff.

Martin, dealing with a left-elbow injury, declined. He seemed to be making it clear Johnston was on the bench to take the challenge.

Then, when Johnston came on for the next shift and tried to engage McLeod, the Rangers winger skated away. It even drew an unsportsmanlike-conduct penalty on Johnston, with the Rangers getting a power-play goal from Ryan Strome to go up, 1-0.

Eventually, Martin and McLeod fought at 7:41 of the first — really, more of an ice dance — but by then, it seemed like the tempers had cooled a bit.

"They have a couple more physical guys and I had a feeling they were up to something," Trotz said explaining his lineup move. "Right off the bat, they wanted to get involved with [Martin]. But they didn't want to seem to do much with Ross."

The Rangers were without Kevin Hayes (upper body) for the fourth straight game. Hayes did skate with the team in the morning, wearing a non-contact jersey.

"That was a step forward," Quinn said. "The fact he was out there today was a good sign."

Quinn brought lefty defenseman Freddy Claesson back into the lineup after he had been scratched for two straight and four of the past six, replacing righty Tony DeAngelo. Quinn said he was bringing Claesson in because he "plays an in-your-face style," and Claesson collected an assist in 19:55 of ice time paired with Kevin Shattenkirk.

Brendan Smith was the other defenseman scratched, his second straight game out and fifth time in street clothes in the past six games.

Rangers rookie Filip Chytil continued to play out of his natural center position on the wing, with Ryan Strome in the middle and Jesper Fast on the right. That bumped Mats Zuccarello to the top line, with Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad.

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1125326 New York Rangers

Rangers need to embrace what slide has made painfully obvious

By Larry Brooks

January 10, 2019 | 11:54PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 11, 2019

If you want to rate degree of demoralizing defeats, be my guest. If you believe that Thursday's 4-3 loss to the Islanders at the Garden in which the Nomads got the winner with 1:26 remaining in the third period on their only shot of the final 20 minutes — while the Rangers poured 17 on Robin Lehner — leaves more scars than the four defeats preceding it, in which the Blueshirts were outscored 22-5, well, OK.

But while this five-game skid is discouraging, it has also served a constructive purpose in exposing the Rangers' personnel once and for all as not fast enough, skilled enough or deep enough to compete on even footing with credible playoff contenders. For this high-speed crash six weeks after the slide began at Thanksgiving also should be liberating for the organization.

The pipe dream of making the postseason tournament has all but evaporated with the gap between the Rangers and the final wild-card spot held by the Islanders now at 11 points. But who, other than the few lonely voices in the team's room, even gave that long-shot possibility more than a passing thought entering the season?

Now, with the fewest non-shootout victories (12) in the NHL accurately representing the Rangers' spot on the league ladder, general manager Jeff Gorton and his staff are freed to retrain their focus exclusively on what was the season's original intent, anyway.

That, lest anyone forget, was development.

It is not about the standings. But it is also not only about the approach to the Feb. 25 trade deadline. Rather, painful as it might be for David Quinn and his coaching staff to admit, the 39-game final countdown is about ensuring the youngins on Broadway make enough progress so that they have a running start on the 2019-20 season.

So, for instance, if it might benefit Neal Pionk — whose botched coverage on Josh Bailey in front was co-conspiratorial in allowing the winner — to sit for a game or two, that should be the move even if his replacement (either Tony DeAngelo or Brendan Smith) might be struggling even more dramatically. Crafting an individualized program for Pionk, by far the most likely of the defensive trio to be here next year, is more important than getting a "W."

Beyond that, taking care of the future might mandate sending Filip Chytil, Brett Howden and Alex Georgiev to the AHL Wolf Pack to continue their apprenticeships rather than finishing the season in the NHL. It is about putting the kids in position to thrive, not merely survive.

Chytil, 19, has flashed high-end skills while Howden has established himself with a well-developed and responsible 200-by-85 game. But speed bumps have slowed down both as the season has grinded on and the Rangers have been increasingly exposed.

In his 20 contests since extending his goal-scoring streak to five games on Thanksgiving Eve, Chytil has scored once, and that into an empty net. Indeed, subtracting that five-game binge from Nov. 12 through Nov. 21, the teenager has a total of that one empty-net goal and eight assists in 37 games. A natural center, Chytil has been bumped to left wing again so Ryan Strome can skate at center on the second line in Kevin Hayes' continued absence.

Quinn's move is understandable. The Rangers were simply chewed up and spit out in Colorado and Arizona going with youngsters Chytil, Howden and Boo Nieves in the middle behind Mika Zibanejad.

But if Chytil — who had a strong final 10 minutes in this one following a brief benching — can't play the middle even with Hayes out and the team sinking, then sending No. 72 to the Wolf Pack, where he could get first-line minutes at center would seem the wise course of action. Plus, getting the teenager out of what portends to become a second straight post-partum depression period in New York so he can participate in a legit playoff race is of benefit alone.

Howden, 20, has been a staple as the club's third-line center since the season's second week. But he has gone without a point in his past 10

games and has not scored a goal in the last 25 matches. Numbers do not define Howden's game, but it might be better to put No. 21 in a position where he might dominate and feel better about himself entering the summer.

The NHL may be a results-oriented business, but this season's results were never of prime importance on Broadway. The 9-1-1 surge into Thanksgiving may have changed the tenor of the conversation for a bit, this plunge provides a welcome and liberating reminder that 2018-19 was always meant to be about 2019-20 and beyond.

Management and the coaching staff shouldn't be afraid to act that way.

New York Post LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125327 New York Rangers

Rangers' hard work ruined by 1 Islanders' shot in crushing loss

By Brett Cyrgalis

January 10, 2019 | 9:56pm | Updated

But the way his Rangers lost Thursday night, the game-winning goal in a 4-3 defeat to the Islanders at the Garden coming on the only shot allowed in all of the third period, well, that's a tough one to swallow. And considering Josh Bailey's tally with 1:26 left in regulation handed the Rangers their fifth loss in a row doesn't make it any easier.

"We played two really good games," Zuccarello said, referring to the 4-2 loss at Vegas on Tuesday that ended a pointless three-game western swing, "but at the end of the day, I'd rather play a sh—ty game and get two points. But right now, we can't seem to find a way to win. When you're in a tough stretch, that's how it goes. I wish I had the answer."

There is no real answer for these Rangers (17-19-7), who continue to work hard, but continue to make crucial, backbreaking mistakes. Their woeful penalty kill continues to be no help. The Islanders (24-14-4) scored two power-play goals on three chances to give them their seventh win in the past eight games, also their 10th victory in the last 12.

"We're peaking at the right time and playing our best hockey," Bailey said. "You're going to have those moments when you're not at your best, but in those moments, you find good teams around the league find a way to win."

This hardly felt like a big rivalry game as in years past, with tempers rather cool despite an early dustup from Matt Martin and Cody McLeod. It was more a back-and-forth affair — until the Rangers pinned the Islanders for all of the third period, outshooting them 17-1. But that lonely number on the right side of the ledger was the one that mattered, with Bailey able to finish a nice cross-ice feed from Cal Clutterbuck that goalie Henrik Lundqvist wasn't able to read in time.

"I just didn't pick it up," said Lundqvist, who returned from being pulled in each of his previous two starts to give up four goals on 20 shots. "Maybe I can read it better, come across with my body. But I felt like I was late coming across. I wish I could sit here and have the answers. It's too bad."

The first time the Garden crowd woke up was when Jesper Fast tied the score, 3-3, at 8:40 of the third, batting a flying puck out of the air and past goalie Robin Lehner.

The Blueshirts kept coming, too, but Lehner ended up putting aside 16 shots in the final 20 minutes and registering 27 saves total to earn his seventh straight win.



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He was also a big part of the Islanders' penalty kill, which negated the Rangers' 55-second five-on-three man-advantage and the following 65-second five-on-four early in the third period.

"To me, we won the game on special teams," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said.

The Rangers actually opened the game with a power-play goal from Ryan Strome at 1:38 of the first, but the lead was short-lived, as Mathew Barzal scored on a breakaway just 53 seconds later to make it 1-1.

Kevin Shattenkirk collected his second goal of the season in the second period, but it was sandwiched by power-play goals from Jordan Eberle and Anders Lee to give the Isles a 3-2 lead going into the third.

That's when the Rangers began to dominate — until they lost.

And that's the feeling they'll be taking into the second game of this home-and-home on Saturday afternoon at Barclays Center, where the Rangers have never won.

"We can't seem to find a way to win. We find a way to lose instead," Zuccarello said. "It's tough to swallow. I don't know what to say, it's not fun."

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1125328 New York Rangers

Islanders, Rangers taking different approaches this season

By Mark Herrmann

@markpherrmann

Updated January 11, 2019 1:49 AM

The Islanders know that any playoff-worthy team finds a way to make just the play they need at just the right time, in just the right place. With maybe a little emphasis on the latter.

As rewarding as it has been for them to be part of the revival of Nassau Coliseum, it also is sweet for them whenever they can win in another special place, which they did on Thursday night. An opportunistic win over the Rangers at Madison Square Garden can make two points seem larger than the standings will show.

"The history, the rivalry between us, between our fan bases. A lot certainly goes into it. We look forward to these ones," said Josh Bailey, who scored with 1:26 remaining — on the Islanders' only shot of the third period — to earn a 4-3 victory that had its share of entertaining moments.

It was not a perfect game by the Islanders. In fact, both sides would say that the Rangers played better in the final period. But the visitors did what they had to do when they had to do it (and where).

Winning goalie Robin Lehner said, "You can feel it out there. A good game, some emotions. It's always fun. It's a great building. You hear a bunch of our fans here, too. It's loud, it's fun. We're two close teams and we want to win."

Both sides invested a lot in this one despite their different circumstances. The Islanders are all-in on 2018-19 and are in the first wild-card spot. The Rangers are committed to their rebuild, which almost surely will mean trading at least one solid veteran rather than trying to get reinforcements for a postseason push.

Here's the contrast: The Rangers are fresh off a western trip in which they went 0-3, were outscored 15-3 but were encouraged by a 4-2 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights. Recently, the Islanders had a western trip in which they went 3-1, outscored the opposition 12-7 and were upset by a 4-2 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights.

You can't argue with either approach. The Islanders are seeking the credibility they've been lacking; the Rangers are seeking the fresh blood they've been lacking. On Thursday night, the Islanders were hungry for points in the playoff race and the Rangers were desperate for a confidence boost for their development process in front of their fans.

Email address

"It's a tough one," said Henrik Lundqvist, who has lost 11 of his past 12 decisions against the Islanders (1-9-2) in the past five seasons. "We played really well. We put ourselves in a really good spot to win the game. There were things that happened that we just have to clean up to win games. It's a tough one, but it is what it is."

It was good to see some zip and bite on the ice, much more so than in the rivals' first meeting of the season, which Islanders coach Barry Trotz had said was "pretty tame." This time there was jawing, a wrestling match between Matt Martin and Cody McLeod that officially was classified a fight, and scoring that went back and forth. Good show.

They will meet again Saturday afternoon at Barclays Center, where the Rangers never have won.

Cal Clutterbuck, whose pass led to Bailey's goal, said, "None of that really matters at this point. It's all about us getting back to what has made us successful the last month-and-a-half. We got two points today and we don't want to give them back on Saturday."

We'll take it. We'll take all we can get from the two teams that are vowing to get better in their own separate ways. We'll see what the future holds. The Islanders had the final hold on Thursday night, and on the Garden.

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1125329 New York Rangers

Rangers stunned at Garden, fall on late goal to Islanders for fifth straight loss

By Colin Stephenson

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Updated January 11, 2019 1:58 AM

Shock and pain were evident on the faces of all of the Rangers after this one.

They had just dominated the third period. Jesper Fast's goal had tied the score midway through the period, and the Rangers were throwing everything they had at Islanders goalie Robin Lehner, peppering him with rubber. The Isles couldn't even get a shot off against Henrik Lundqvist — not one.

A goal was bound to come. It had to.

And it did — for the Islanders.

Josh Bailey's redirection of Cal Clutterbuck's centering pass was the only shot on goal the Isles got in the third period, but it was enough to send the Rangers to their fifth straight loss, a 4-3 decision that left the Blueshirts broken inside Madison Square Garden on Thursday night.



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"We've had some heartbreaking losses, but that's right up there. It might be at the top of the list," a grim-faced coach David Quinn said. "To come out the way we did in the third period and play with the pace and the energy that we did, it says an awful lot about our character. But character's not getting us wins right now."

Before the game, Quinn had talked about how the period between the Christmas break and the All-Star break in late January "really makes or breaks your season in a lot of ways."

At 17-19-7 for 41 points — 11 points out of a playoff spot — the season looks more broken than made for the Rangers.

Trying to build off a strong showing in Tuesday's 4-2 loss to Vegas in the finale of their 0-3 road trip, the Rangers started the game with a clear sense of urgency. With the Islanders starting their fourth line of Clutterbuck, Casey Cizikas and Matt Martin, Quinn started his fourth line, and Cody McLeod and Martin did a little dance with one another in the neutral zone right after the opening faceoff.

Seventeen seconds into the game, Ross Johnston — against whom McLeod was fighting when he broke his hand the last time the teams played — dropped a glove and was sent off for unsportsmanlike conduct. That led to a power-play goal by Ryan Strome that put the Rangers ahead 1-0 at 1:38.

The lead lasted only 53 seconds, though, as Mathew Barzal (goal, two assists) went to the backhand to beat Lundqvist (16 saves) on a breakaway at 2:31. McLeod and Martin did fight, at 7:41 of the period, and 28 seconds later, Jimmy Vesey was sent off for tripping. The Islanders took the lead with a power-play goal by Jordan Eberle at 8:51.

Kevin Shattenkirk's goal tied it for the Rangers at 1:11 of the second period, but with Marc Staal off for holding, Anders Lee deflected Nick Leddy's shot past Lundqvist to make it 3-2 Isles.

But after Fast chipped in the rebound of Neal Pionk's shot that flipped high in the air and dropped right in front of Fast, the Rangers had to think they'd win for sure. Or at least get the game to overtime.

They were wrong, and that's why this loss hurt so much more than any of the previous four.

"Yeah, when you're losing like we are, it does," Staal said. ". . . We did enough things, I thought, to be able to win a game, and we just couldn't find a way to do it. A minute-and-a-half left, they get a chance, and that's the way it's going for us right now."

Notes & quotes: Kevin Hayes missed his fourth straight game with an upper-body injury, but he participated in the morning skate, wearing a red no-contact jersey . . . Tony DeAngelo, who played in Vegas after sitting out three games, was out of the lineup, replaced by Fredrik Claesson. Brendan Smith was the Rangers' other healthy scratch.

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1125330 New York Rangers

Josh Bailey's late goal gives Islanders win over Rangers at the Garden

By Andrew Gross

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Updated January 11, 2019 1:46 AM

Superb individual performances are not enough for the Islanders, who have struggled in their team game of late.

So as good as Mathew Barzal was on Thursday night, the Islanders nearly cost themselves with a somnolent third period against the Rangers at Madison Square Garden. But on the Islanders' only shot of the period (to the Rangers' 17), Josh Bailey scored at 18:34 to give the Isles a 4-3 victory.

"It was pretty ugly on our part," said Barzal, who had a goal and two assists and has four goals and 10 assists in seven career games against the Rangers. "We'll take it any way we can get it, honestly."

Robin Lehner made 27 saves and the Islanders (24-14-4) went 2-for-3 on the power play and killed off a 55-second five-on-three advantage for the Rangers (17-19-7) in the third period.

"We found a way," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "To me, we won the game on special teams."

The teams play again Saturday afternoon at Barclays Center. "It was a big win for us, but if we want to win the next game, we have a lot of things to fix," said Lehner, who has won a career-high eight straight.

The Islanders, who had a season-high six-game winning streak snapped in Tuesday night's 4-3 loss to the Hurricanes at NYCB Live's Nassau Coliseum, have won 10 of 12. They are 13-2-0 against the Rangers — who have lost five straight — since Dec. 2, 2015.

Barzal delivered a responsible performance after his bad turnover led to a late first-period goal by the Hurricanes.

"That's his job to produce and play good," right wing Leo Komarov said. "Everyone has bad games. But he's been playing really good all season."

Barzal drew a holding call on Marc Staal at 1:38 of the second period and helped set up Anders Lee's deflection of Nick Leddy's power-play shot for a 3-2 lead at 3:08. Kevin Shattenkirk had tied the score at 2 at 1:11 of the second period.

With the Islanders up 3-2, Komarov was called for delay of game at 4:13 of the third period for knocking the Isles' net off its moorings with defenseman Adam Pelech already in the penalty box for hooking. The Islanders held the Rangers without a shot on their five-on-three advantage, but Jesper Fast, swatting at a floating puck, tied the score at 3 at 8:40 of the period.

Trotz opted to put burly left wing Ross Johnston on Valtteri Filppula's third line with Komarov, and Johnston immediately went after Cody McLeod, who missed three weeks after breaking his hand in a fight with Johnston in the second period of the Islanders' 5-0 loss at the Garden on Nov. 21.

McLeod did not accept the invitation and Johnston wound up being called for unsportsmanlike conduct 17 seconds in when he flung off a glove. Former Islander Ryan Strome made it 1-0 with a power-play goal at 1:38.

But Barzal, skating past Brett Howden on the right wing, got to the crease for a backhand past Henrik Lundqvist (16 saves) to tie it at 1 at 2:31.

Jordan Eberle's power-play goal from the left circle, with Barzal getting the secondary assist, made it 2-1 at 8:51 of the first period.

Notes & quotes: Lehner is 3-2-2 against Lundqvist, a fellow Swede. The two first crossed paths in Gothenburg when Lundqvist, then 19, visited Lehner's father, Michael, a goaltending coach . . . Rookie Michael Dal Colle was a healthy scratch for the first time in six games since being recalled from Bridgeport.

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1125331 New York Rangers



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The Rangers incredibly out-shot the Islanders 17-1 in the third period, but that one shot still beat them

By Rick Carpiello

Jan 10, 2019

NEW YORK — You cannot make this stuff up. You can't.

The Rangers, careening down a slope with no brakes, seeing their season flash before their eyes with 40 games still left to play, somehow pulled it all together ... played one of their better games, despite running on fumes ... played their best period since 2018.

Did not allow the Islanders a single shot on goal in the third period of a 3-3 game ...

Until the Islanders got one single shot. With 1:26 left. And it went in. Because, of course, it did.

"That's the way it's going right now," said Mats Zuccarello. "We can't find a way to win. We find a way to lose instead. It's tough to swallow. It's not fun.

"It sucks right now. The boys are working hard. I think we deserved better today. But at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if you play a good game or whatever you play. It's the two points. I don't know what to say. It sucks.

"At the end of the day, I'd rather play a shitty game and get two points."

You could see the hurt in Zuccarello's strides as he raced as hard as he's skated all season to prevent an Islanders empty-net goal in the closing seconds. You can see the hurt in his eyes because, obviously, he knows the reality of what happens to veteran unrestricted free agents-to-be at the trade deadline, Feb. 25, which is less than six-and-a-half weeks away.

It's five losses in a row for the Rangers in 2019, all of them in regulation, so zero points gained, though, really not much ground lost to the rest of the crummy bottom half of the East and the league overall.

But it eats at the Rangers, who have to know the reality of their situation and their roster, which will get worse at the deadline. It eats at them because, at least in the last two games, the effort hasn't been up to question. It hurts because, even if they understand the unlikelihood of playing beyond Game 82, they still want to win every game. They wanted to win Game 43 on Thursday night. They'll want to win Game 44 just as much, the rematch in Brooklyn, where they've never won, on Saturday afternoon.

"We have a lot to compare, with heart-breaking losses, but that one's right up there at the top of the list," said Rangers coach David Quinn. "I was really proud of the way we played, just in the third period. I know we weren't great in the first two. We battled through some things, and to come out the way we did in the third and play with the pace and energy that we did, it says a lot about our character.

"But character's not getting us wins right now."

Quinn decided the team, which got in from Vegas at 6:30 a.m. Wednesday, needs a day off on Friday, even with the matinee on Saturday. Losses like these knock the heck out of you anytime, but much more when you're tired.

And much more when it's slipping away. The Rangers are 5-11-5 (which is 5-16 anywhere but the NHL) in their last 21 games. They left the building 11 points out of playoff spot in the mediocre East. They are also not doing themselves any draft-lottery favors being only ninth from the bottom of the NHL pile, though only four points ahead of the ground-level Ottawa Senators.

The NHL saying has always gone that you play a few bad games and might win a couple of them before you go into a losing streak, and you play a few good games you might lose before you come out of one. We don't yet know if the Rangers are on the verge of coming out of theirs, when, honestly, they stole the win before the five-game losing streak, and really only played a handful of acceptable periods during it.

"The last two games we certainly made strides," Quinn said. "As we've all alluded to, the season's past the halfway point and the gap's getting bigger and every game brings out a new level of significance just because of the situation we're in.

"It is hard (to take positives) because we want to win hockey games and we haven't won one in a while. Maybe if we had been winning some games and this happened we could move past it. We've got to work hard at the mental aspect and move past this tonight. We cannot let this get in the way of our performance on Saturday. We can't let them win two games tonight. We can't let them win two games tonight."

It will be some challenge to digest and erase a third period in which the Rangers tied the game, in which they out-shot the Isles 17-1.

But here came Cal Clutterbuck, a grinder, down the right-wing boards, throwing a prayer to the slot. And there was Josh Bailey, unchecked by Neal Pionk, who had an awful evening and has leveled off lately. Bailey slapped the puck into the top of the net, past Henrik Lundqvist, who had no chance. Sudden death in regulation time.

"I just didn't pick it up," Lundqvist said. "It's a quick play. If I could read it better, come across with my body ... but I felt like I was late coming across. I wish I could sit here and have the answers. It's too bad. We played really well, especially in the third ... that's a tough one."

Can't make it up.

Thoughts

1) If you can forget for a moment the Islanders' winning goal on their only shot of the third period, the Rangers also kind of lost this one with their crumbling penalty kill, and with a god-awful 5-on-3 power play. The Isles went 2-for-3 on the power play, and the Rangers have allowed 10 PPGs in their last seven games. The only team that didn't score on the power play in that span was pathetic St. Louis — and Lundqvist was sensational in that one.

2) I forgot to mention, this game pitted the No. 25 goalie in the league against No. 26, or at least that's how I read the rankings in one publication before the season.

3) Kevin Hayes sat out a fourth game in a row with that "upper body" injury, and people are starting to ask if this is one of those "bubble wrap" things with him, as it was with Ryan McDonagh and Rick Nash prior to last season's deadline. You know, they were both hurt, and both about to be traded. I don't think that's the case here. The deadline is still too far away. But there's not even a hint that Hayes and the Rangers have begun negotiations on a new contract.

4) There were plenty of scouts in the building for this one, but a lot of them were simply Islanders scouts in town for organizational meetings. The Rangers have been scouted a lot. And there has been speculation, if not outright rumor, of interest in Zuccarello from Calgary, which reputedly was interested in acquiring him at the last deadline.

5) This one had a fun start, if by fun you mean the potential for mayhem. The Islanders started their fourth line, which included Matt Martin. Quinn, who submitted his lineup second as the home coach, started his toughs, Cody McLeod and Adam McQuaid. There was nothing subtle about it, as McLeod switched to the right wing, moving Jesper Fast to the left, so he could line up against Martin for the opening faceoff. McLeod cross-checked Martin and challenged him. Martin declined, went to the bench, and Barry Trotz sent out big Ross Johnston instead.

6) McLeod was back to left wing for the next draw, and Johnston moved to the right to go face to face with McLeod. Remember, Johnston



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instigated and forced a fight with McLeod (he wasn't called for instigating, of course) in which McLeod broke his hand in Brooklyn in November.

7) So, McLeod cross-checked Johnston before the puck dropped. Then, Johnston chased him, grabbed him from behind, tried to get him to go, and McLeod skated away as Johnston dropped a glove. ... Johnston got a minor penalty.

8) Let's put it this way. It fell a little bit short of Rangers-Devils Synchronized Fighting the night Stu Bickel won the opening faceoff (career 100 percent on draws).

9) So out of all the silliness, the Rangers got a power play and Filip Chytil got it to Jimmy Vesey down below the icing line, and he sent it across the slot to ex-Islander Ryan Strome for a one-timer through goalie Robin Lehner. 1-0. It appeared the entire Rangers bench taunted Johnston on his way back to the Isles bench after the goal.

10) But that didn't last long at all, 53 seconds to be exact. Pionk turned it over in the neutral zone and went for a change. Johnny Boychuk sent Mathew Barzal in on a breakaway behind Brett Howden — neither of the oncoming defensemen were anywhere near him — and slipped it through Lundqvist's legs. 1-1. Barzal had a goal and two assists and is 4-10-14 in seven career games against the Rangers.

11) McLeod later ran Casey Cizikas into the turnbuckle at the end of the Rangers bench. Cizikas got up slowly and headed to his bench, as Martin ran after McLeod for the first actual fisticuffs of the night. No instigator, of course.

12) Vesey was called for tripping and the Rangers' wobbly penalty kill quickly gave up a goal, Jordan Eberle completely ignored by both Pionk and Vlad Namestnikov. Eberle mishandled the pass from Anders Lee but had enough time by his lonesome to corral it and wrist a shot that might have deflected off a sliding Pionk and past Lundqvist high on the stick side. 2-1. A pretty loud "Let's Go Islanders" chant followed.

13) A deflected puck by Clutterbuck drilled Rangers assistant coach Lindy Ruff in the forehead on the bench. He tuffed it out.

14) The Rangers didn't get much else on Lehner until late in the period, when he got a piece of a Pavel Buchnevich shot, then stopped Howden's whiffed shot at the doorstep.

15) Daily Zucc-O-Meter: Zuccarello was elevated to the first line with Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider and, for the second game in a row, had some jump (and still only one shot on goal). I love this idea that they need to trade him ASAP because it's not fair to him. That's not how it works. He did some chirping with Lee during the game. Zuccarello tried to set up Zibanejad at the left post late in the first but didn't connect, Zibanejad's redirection deflecting off his own skate and off Lehner's pads.

16) Early second, Lehner stopped a quick shot from Strome, who cut to the middle and fired, before Kevin Shattenkirk fired one from the right point, through traffic, and past Lehner. 2-2.

17) ... but Marc Staal went off for holding, and the leaky Rangers penalty kill, minus its No. 1 penalty-kill D-man, was faced with keeping it tied. Instead, it was a complete fire drill. Lee hit the post, then fanned on a one-timer. Finally, with Lee planted in Lundqvist's facemask, unchecked by Brady Skjei or McQuaid, he deflected Nick Leddy's shot through Lundqvist, just 1:57 after Shattenkirk's goal. 3-2.

18) Martin belted Buchnevich in open ice in the middle of the second, and Buchnevich tried a retaliatory hit on Martin moments later, but got the worst of that one, too.

19) Pionk hit a post with a chance to tie it, and a while later Namestnikov took a hooking penalty. Back to work went the penalty kill. Lee quickly fired one off Lundqvist's mask, but the Rangers made it difficult for the Islanders to enter the zone and survived it.

20) Early third, Strome drove to the net for a Chytil pass, and drew a penalty on Adam Pelech. During the power play, Lehner made a

scrambling save on a Zibanejad one-timer from The Ovechkin Office, and Zuccarello had a chance stopped next time down the ice. And when Leo Komarov knocked the net off its moorings for a delay-of-game call, the Rangers had :55 worth of 5-on-3. The Rangers chose Namestnikov (four goals in 39 games) to be on the group of five — and as well as he's played, you want your top skilled guys around the net there, no? Shattenkirk whiffed on one shot and had one blocked, and Zuccarello fired a bad-angle shot wide of the net and out of the zone. Just awful. The rest of the 5-on-4 was worse, the Rangers not once getting the puck into the zone with possession.

21) After the power play, Buchnevich ripped one that Lehner gloved. You might think a guy like Buchnevich or Chytil could have played the 5-on-3?

22) Speaking of skill ... a Pionk shot hit Scott Mayfield and deflected high in the air. Fast outbattled Devon Toews for position, waited for the pop-up to hit the ice, and bunted it past Lehner. 3-3.

23) Moments later, McLeod and Martin had another dust-up at the Rangers bench, and one of McLeod's lefts drilled one of the linesmen right in the jaw.

24) Fast nearly had another one, when he tried to wrap-around a Namestnikov rebound. Lehner walled him off, so Fast went to the back of the net, forcing Lehner to go post to post. But Fast slammed on the brakes, and came back to the original spot, only to be thwarted by Lehner, who dived across on his belly and reached back with his glove to keep the puck off the goal line. Yikes.

25) Uncontested Goal of the Night (still without a sponsor): Clutterbuck to Bailey happened. 4-3. Holy shish kebab.

26) Lundqvist played in his 837th career NHL game, tying Hall of Famer Jacques Plante for 12th on the all-time list.

27) Quinn Bin: Tony DeAngelo, coming off a game in which he took some risks and took some penalties, including a needless misconduct in Vegas, was placed right back into the Bin, alongside Brendan Smith.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125332 New York Rangers

Goldman: What we've learned from the Rangers' past seven games

By Shayna Goldman

Jan 10, 2019

There wasn't much of a question of whether 2018-19 was going to be a tough season for the Rangers. That's the nature of a rebuild. While there were glimmers of hope with wins and streaks, it was inevitable that it would come crashing down, especially when looking below the surface.

It's just a challenge to get through this. A time filled with lopsided games and a waiting period for player movement. It's bound to get worse before it's better, but through all of this, there still could be more encouraging signs. Those are just few and far between as of late.

After falling to the Golden Knights on Tuesday, the Rangers have a 17-18-7 record and 41 points as they passed the midpoint of their season with their 42nd game. The Rangers still have just 12 regulation or overtime wins, which is the worst in the league, and a disappointing road record of 6-13-2, which only worsened over this last stretch. Somehow, they're not the worst road team in the league, with the Senators and Devils posting even less impressive away records.



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The seven points they've received from their overtime losses has kept them hovering above the bottom of the standings. But that loser point may not keep them there for long if they continue to lose like they did in four of their last seven games. In 2019, they've accumulated a minus-17 goal differential after allowing 22 goals and scoring just five. Yikes.

Even after removing special teams and focusing just on 5-on-5, their goal differential is minus-11. Just four pucks have made it into their opponent's nets, while they've allowed 15.

According to the model of The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn, the Rangers have seen the biggest drop in expected win percentage of minus-26 this week and are projected to finish last in the Metropolitan Division with 77.9 points.

About their 5-on-5 play....

It's still bad.

The Rangers are second to last in the NHL with a shot share of 44.74 percent. Over the last seven games, their shot rate slightly decreased to 50.25 shots per 60 (last in the league), while their shot rate against is inching closer to 62 per 60 (second to last).

Chart by Sean Tierney

Over this last stretch, they took the majority of 5-on-5 shots once – in their 7-2 loss to the Penguins. Against the Golden Knights, after conceding almost 68 percent of the shots and 69 percent of the scoring chances in the first, they were able to pull even after the next 40 minutes. Taking the majority of the shots in just two of seven games means relying on goaltenders to keep the game within reach while sprinkling in shots and quality chances. It's not a sustainable strategy.

The forward lines still need more balance

Jesper Fast is a first-liner, Pavel Buchnevich has been buried in the bottom-six, Brett Howden and Mats Zuccarello are struggling and Lias Andersson was demoted.

Andersson was sent back to the Hartford Wolf Pack after 21 games. The first year of Andersson's contract was going to be burned at some point this season anyway, so it happening sooner rather than later really isn't that much of a concern. The concern was his actual play and his opportunity.

Players have to earn their minutes and there's an argument to be made that Andersson didn't. However most coaches put younger players in minimal minutes, which usually means a place in the bottom-six to get them acclimated to the NHL. The bottom-six usually means lower quality teammates that aren't going to help them take that step. Andersson was promoted and should have had more of an opportunity to sink or swim instead of keeping him in limited minutes without the highest quality linemates. That would have been more telling than the time he got, which is why a demotion makes the most sense. At least he'll be playing in Hartford.

The problem is that there isn't enough room down the middle, not with Mika Zibanejad, Hayes, Howden, Ryan Strome, Chytil, and now Boo Nieves. That's why Chytil's played on the wing, as have Nieves and Strome for a few games. But when Hayes was pulled from the lineup against Colorado, it opened up a spot – a spot that Chytil absorbed for the first two games before Strome took over Tuesday.

Moving back to center is going to be an adjustment for Chytil, but that time should be taken while that's spot open. To ease that transition it could help to have stronger wingers with him, like Chris Kreider or Zuccarello.

Speaking of centers, there's Howden, who earned a place down the middle over Andersson and has remained at his natural position, unlike Chytil. To start the season, Howden showed exactly why he earned that place in the lineup with three points in four games. But as the season's went on, he's slowed down quite a bit. It's been 24 games since Howden's last scored; he hasn't since November 12 against the

Vancouver Canucks. In those twenty four goal-less games, he has just four points.

While his scoring dip isn't that concerning – he hit the rookie wall, it's not that uncommon – a change in linemates may help him get back on track. Fast may be playing up on the first line to relieve Zibanejad of some of the defensive responsibilities of playing center, but he's shown that he can handle that without him.

Zuccarello, a two-way winger who has been struggling, could slot up to the first line in an effort to spark his game. He and Zibanejad connected for a power play goal Tuesday and have developed chemistry over the last few years.

Buchnevich could move up from the bottom-six too, so passes like this aren't wasted on players that aren't near the caliber that he should be playing with.

The Kreider-Zibanejad-Fast line may have combined for 10 points against the Predators in their first game back together, but Fast's defensive abilities would be better served alongside Howden. In the almost 127 5-on-5 minutes Howden skated with Fast, they combined for a 47.5 percent Corsi; without Fast, Howden's been on the ice for almost eight percent less of the shot share and more than 10 percent less of the scoring chance share.

The Rangers woes aren't because of their goaltending...

In all but two of these seven games, the Rangers goaltenders faced at least 35 shots a night, with the high coming against the Avalanche, who fired 47 pucks on Alexandar Georgiev's net. It hasn't been an easy season for Henrik Lundqvist behind the Rangers defense and it's somehow still getting worse. Georgiev is facing far too many shots against than he should have to in his second season of NHL action.

In Arizona, Lundqvist faced 32 shots in 36 minutes before Georgiev took over to finish the game, giving The Athletic's Cat Silverman a chance to watch both Rangers goaltenders in action. Her thoughts on the shots both netminders faced encapsulated not just the one game, but the season Lundqvist's had behind this team.

"To me, Lundqvist started off the game against Arizona looking about as strong as he ever does, but the shot volume he was facing – and the pre-shot movement, which could really only be described as utter chaos – almost left no chance for him to come out of that game alive. Through nearly the first 20 minutes of play, the Rangers were allowing a shot per minute, putting Lundqvist on pace for a 60-shot game in regulation," Silverman said.

"Add in that the Rangers took five shots of their own, the Coyotes were putting almost constant sustained pressure on the Rangers in their own zone and giving Lundqvist very little time to evaluate what was going on in front of him.

"The Rangers blue line couldn't be doing their goaltenders a bigger disservice right now. They looked like they have on almost every bad goal we've seen from Lundqvist in the last handful of years, hemming the Coyotes into the Rangers zone and creating chaos without allowing Arizona to cool off the pressure by pulling back to the perimeter and reevaluating their strategy. It left the Coyotes shooting at will and Lundqvist unable to predict where there would be gaps in the defensive coverage, only it looked like this over the entirety of Lundqvist's tenure in the game before getting yanked.

"Like Lundqvist, Georgiev looked fine at first, but the Coyotes eventually cooled off and avoided a massacre by taking half their shot volume in each of the first two periods during those final 20 minutes. Given that there were still some rebound control issues in Georgiev's game and his timing didn't look quite as impeccable as Lundqvist's, though, it's hard to imagine him surviving behind that kind of a system for long, either. There isn't a goaltender in the history of the game that would stay afloat behind whatever the Rangers defense is doing."

Their woes, once again, trace back to their defense



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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While the Rangers' offense isn't exactly dangerous and their goaltenders have had off games, the majority of the Rangers' struggles stem from their blue line. Yet somehow, the pairs of Marc Staal and Neal Pionk and Brady Skjei and Adam McQuaid were trotted out in all seven games after each disappointing loss.

Staal and Pionk are not only the most consistent pair to be deployed by the Rangers with their 518 5-on-5 minutes, that ice time ranked 12th in the league among defense pairs. Their 41.34 percent Corsi is 281st among all 306 pairs to play at least 50 minutes. But like last year, this pair has been leaned on no matter the results.

Pionk's skated just 231 5-on-5 minutes of his NHL career without Staal on his left, which doesn't give the coaches or management a way to evaluate him on his own without the influence of his partner. It also doesn't give them a chance to see if there's a more optimal pair for their struggling blue line.

Since returning from injury, McQuaid has skated on Skjei's right. The pair didn't have encouraging results before and haven't after, yet they've stayed together too. The Rangers allow about 60 percent of the shot share with them on the ice and are expected to allow 55 percent of the goals share. It's debatable whether McQuaid even belongs in the lineup, let alone on Skjei's right; the left handed defender's Corsi has decreased by almost six percent when he's on the ice with McQuaid.

When the Rangers aren't scoring, the coaches are fast to tweak the forward lines; every line has changed at least once in this stretch. The defense though, no matter how many shots, scoring chances, or goals against, barely changes. Through this stretch, there were only tweaks to the third pair with Kevin Shattenkirk returning from injury, and Brendan Smith, Tony DeAngelo, and Fredrik Claesson rotating in and out of the lineup.

While the players are at fault for underperforming, at a certain point, the attention turns to the coaches that set the defensive structure and form the pairs deployed.

The Rangers defense has been their greatest weakness over the last few years. Alain Vigneault's chaotic system didn't help and his assistants were often scapegoated. Three different assistants handled the defense in his five-year tenure. A new assistant coach was added to handle the defense and penalty kill last year in Lindy Ruff.

Under Vigneault and Ruff in 2017-18, pairs were relied on no matter the results or how stagnant they became and the defense's execution was horrible. Vigneault most likely had the final say over Ruff's choices, so the onus was still on him – especially after years of similar flaws. The Dallas Stars employed a similar system under Ruff, so if any coach knew how to operate under it, it should have been him. Then again, Ruff's teams over the years have had their defensive shortcomings.

While Ruff works alongside assistant Greg Brown on the defense, the personnel and tactical decisions are still problematic, as are the executions – even after some changes to personnel, almost all of the coaching staff, and the system. While the personnel isn't that inspiring, should it be this bad?

This doesn't fall solely on Ruff, but on head coach David Quinn and general manager Jeff Gorton. Not only did Gorton retain Ruff, but how he evaluates defensemen and assembles a blue line has been questionable over the last few years. Quinn has the final say on these decisions, which shifts the onus on him as well – but how much is Ruff blindly trusted?

What needs to happen for there to be a change on defense? The team was already out-shot 143 to 107 in their last four losses, out-chanced 119 to 87, and out-scored 22 to 5.

When will enough be enough?

The Athletic LOADED: 01.11.2019

do it because of the color of your skin or judging your character based on the color of your skin. I don't think that's fair, and I don't think it's right."

Ty wants to help, too. The Cornetts have called the family of Divyne Apollon II, also a 13-year-old hockey player who has endured racism in Maryland.

Through it all, Ty's love of hockey hasn't lessened. There was a time late last year when Matthew, distraught over the treatment of his son, thought Ty should consider taking a break.

"Why would I ever stop playing hockey?" Ty told him. "I love it. They're the ones with the problems, not me."

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The Athletic / By the numbers: How each team's performance is expected to change in the second half

By Dom Luszczyszyn Jan 10, 2019 36

"Why do you hate my favourite team?"

It's a common question that's asked anytime I post my season projections, generally when a team's projected point total is significantly different from a team's point pace. In that sense, it's a fair question to ask as it seems from an outside perspective that the model is seeing something very different from the on-ice results.

In a game as random as hockey though, the threat of regression is ever-looming and that's essentially what a model with eyes towards the future is saying: the farther a projection is from a team's pace, the more regression is expected.

That's all well and good, but it doesn't answer that first pivotal question, which is what I plan to do here – framed with point distributions.

The above chart is available on our daily projections page, but it generally gets glossed over as most fans focus on a team's average projection. It's a single number that best represents a team's likely future, but at this point, it still only represents around seven-to-eight percent of the total range after 50,000 simulations. Even at the halfway point of the season, there's still a very wide range of expected outcomes, roughly 25 points, meaning a team projected for 100 points likely lands anywhere between 88 and 112, with half of all simulations landing in a six-point range between 98 and 103 points.

The season is half over, but things can still change quickly.

With all that being said, let's take a dive into why some teams are projected to move away from their current pace, for better or worse.

Projections and data as of January 9, 2019

Keep rounding errors in mind if records don't "add up" perfectly

Status Quo

Zero-to-two point difference between pace and projection

Before Wednesday night's win against Chicago, the Predators were on pace for 102.5 points and projected for 102.4. It doesn't get closer than that. Nashville is a weird team in that regard because the status quo includes two stretches: one where the team is healthy and excellent, and the other where the team is injured and not so excellent. Expect something in the middle going forward as the team likely isn't as good as that first group, even when healthy, nor is it as bad as that second group, even when injured.



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Like Nashville, Pittsburgh went through two swings: an ugly first quarter where everyone wrote the Penguins off and a sterling second quarter where everyone remembered the Penguins were, and still are, Cup contenders. Again, the answer is somewhere in the middle: their current pace.

In Toronto it always feels like the sky is falling even when it's not. Toronto is tied for second in the league in points percentage with Washington and Winnipeg and are on pace for 109 points. Of those three teams, my model is more bullish on Toronto's talent level being actually 110-point calibre – a very high bar that only Tampa Bay comfortably clears. It hinges on what the team has looked like under-the-hood since Auston Matthews returned to health and William Nylander returned, results aside. With a league-high PDO, my model still expects the team to go under their current pace though.

After a brief injured-filled lull the Bruins are back to where they should be: third in the Atlantic. There's a chance the team can still catch the Leafs for home ice in the first round, but it's not a very strong one. Injuries derailed parts of the teams season, but they're back on track now, posting a record of 16-8-3 with Patrice Bergeron in the lineup.

This looked like the year Arizona could finally make its way out of the bottom five. With a slowish start and a season-ending injury to starting goalie Antti Raanta, that's become less and less likely by the day. A season-ending injury to Nick Schmaltz only furthers that doom and gloom. The Coyotes aren't currently in the bottom five, but my model expects their pace to maintain while other teams below them rise above them over the season's second half.

Everyone knew they would be bad, and they are in fact, nearly exactly as bad as predicted. Thank you, next.

Before the season started my model expected Columbus to be a 101-point team and it looks like the Blue Jackets will settle in right around that range this season. That was despite a bleak outlook for the future due to the team's pending free agents, Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, but the sky has not fallen as some foretold. Having said that, the team is expected to drop slightly and finish below 100 points, largely due to their slight decline at 5-on-5. Last year the team had a 51.7 percent shot share and 53.5 percent goal share. This year those numbers are 50.0 and 52.1 respectively.

Canucks fans are excited about their team for the first time in a long time and for good reason. Elias Pettersson's star-powered introduction to the league has reignited the team, paving the way to Vancouver's best record in four seasons. The Canucks are on pace for 80 points, but that includes an injury-filled lull in the middle – they could finish a little higher than that when all is said and done. Still, those hoping for the playoffs should keep expectations tempered as the team's chances of hitting over 90 points are under 10 percent.

The Stars are an average hockey team. Whether that's enough to get into the playoffs or not is anybody's guess at this point, but with John Klingberg back the team found its bearings, going 6-3-1. It seems as if Tyler Seguin has found his stride too and that should go a long way. What is concerning though is that the team still isn't carrying the play (even with Klingberg back), posting a 47.6 percent Corsi which is the seventh-worst mark in the league. I'm not sold on them, but in a weak West, they could still be a wildcard team.

There were many wondering if the Erik Karlsson led Sharks would live up to the hype. Well, they're starting to, turning into one of the league's hottest teams while maintaining their excellent shot rate. San Jose has a 68 percent chance of finishing with 100 points or more this season.

Minor Movement

Two-to-four point difference

The Rangers were expected to be one of the league's worst teams this season, and yet have found a way to stay outside of the bottom five for the majority of the season, currently ranking 23rd in points percentage. I'd expect that to change as teams below them improve and the Rangers

start selling. Only Ottawa has a worse possession rate at 5-on-5 this season.

After a red-hot start to the season where Colorado was 15-6-5 at the end of November, the team has gone off the rails quickly winning just five of their last 17 games, ahead of only Philadelphia, Detroit and Ottawa over that span (and that was before Wednesday's demoralizing loss to Calgary). The Avalanche have been an average 5-on-5 club during the time frame, but have been victimized by the league's worst shooting percentage at 5.6 percent, a stark contrast from the fourth-ranked 9.8 percent in the team's previous 26 games. Regression was expected based on the hot starts from the team's top line which collectively shot 12.7 percent up until December and have been at 7.2 percent since. Again, somewhere in the middle is what should be expected of them going forward. The team lacks depth outside that potent line, yes, but grade out as an above average team because of said line, one of the league's best. The team has also had some really bad luck in close games, going 4-14 in one-goal games which is the league's worst figure. They're 16-10 otherwise, tied for seventh in the league. Generally speaking, it's that second number that's more meaningful when all is said and done as one-goal games tend to be more subject to the whims of puck luck.

Since Nate Schmidt came back on Nov. 18, Vegas has been the league's second-best team with a 19-4-3 record; a 129-point pace. The team was regularly out-chancing other teams in the early going, but not getting the bounces. Those bounces have arrived and now the team is back up to a 103-point pace – close to where they were in their inaugural season. The Golden Knights are good, but I'm not convinced they're this good and should see a slow down after heating up over the last two months.

Since Shea Weber came back the Canadiens have been up there among the league's best outfits, but my model still isn't convinced, not with Carey Price not fully himself yet (though he is improving) and without a true difference-maker up front. This might be a case where the team is better than the sum of its parts (or they're simply overachieving) and the projections aren't being fair to a team that many saw as a bottom-10 team to start the season. In any case, whether you're high on the team or not, it feels like somewhere between 90-to-100 points is a safe bet for the Habs: it's where they land 57 percent of the time.

The Flames are projected to finish with the West's highest total at 105 points, but that's still a touch below the team's current pace. On average, the league usually has five teams above 105 points per year and while I have no doubt the story will be the same this season, it's still too early to call which teams will get there (aside from Tampa Bay). Add up every team's probability and you get 423 percent or 4.2 teams. Calgary has a 46 percent chance, which ranks third, as expected.

Tampa Bay: 99 percent

Toronto: 69 percent

Calgary: 46 percent

Winnipeg: 36 percent

Pittsburgh: 32 percent

Nashville: 29 percent

San Jose: 27 percent

Boston: 26 percent

Washington: 24 percent

Vegas: 18 percent

It's still possible Calgary maintains its pace and goes above and beyond, but there are reasons to suggest regression is possible due to the team's insane shorthanded scoring rate and its massive 16-4 goal-differential when either team's net is empty. Small qualms, really, but worth mentioning.



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The glory days spanning from October 2016 to May 2017 may be long gone in the rearview window, but I still suspect the Oilers are better than their current 82-point pace. Since losing Oscar Klefbom and Kris Russell to injury the defence has been in a state of disarray with the team's shot attempts against at 5-on-5 ballooning from 56 to 61 per 60 minutes and their Corsi percentage dropping from 50.3 to 42.4 percent, the second-worst mark in the league. The team has struggled to keep pucks out of the net as a result and have gone 4-8-1 in the process. Even with the injuries, the Oilers probably aren't that bad and with the two defenders likely returning soon it's likely the Oilers pick things up and finish somewhere between 80-to-90 points.

The Wild are on pace for 88 points and have struggled without Matt Dumba, but they're a stronger team than they've currently shown. Despite a middling Corsi rate, Minnesota remains a dominant team via expected goals at 54 percent, but don't have the actual goal rate to match at a shade under breakeven. I'd expect that to even out, but it largely depends on Devan Dubnyk regaining his past form. Dubnyk has been generally overrated since entering the Wild system, propped up by the team's staunch defence, but that hasn't been the case this season. Over the past two seasons, Dubnyk's save percentage has been 0.6 percent worse than what's expected of him. This year it's at 1.5 percent, his worst mark since the catastrophic 2013-14 season where he was exiled from Edmonton. Even at the pedestrian mark he was at the last two seasons, Dubnyk would grade out as a .925 goalie at 5-on-5, saving the Wild seven goals in the process. That would be enough to put the team closer to a 90-point pace and reason to expect a stronger second half from the team.

A recent five-game winning streak has changed things drastically for Carolina. It seemed like all playoff hopes were lost for the Hurricanes, but regression hit the team hard and now they're back up to an 88-point pace, just under four points away from where my model currently projects them. As much as people like to think analytics overrates the Canes, there are 13 teams expected to see a larger change over the league's second half than Carolina. If the Hurricanes move away from the goalie timeshare and rely more on Curtis McElhinney they could shift further as he's been surprisingly one of the league's strongest goalies over the last three seasons (in an admittedly small sample size). Really though, it all comes down to the team finding its scoring touch. They're still last at 5-on-5 shooting percentage, but have slowly crept up past the six percent barrier and I don't doubt that the team has even further to go in that regard given they were at seven percent last season.

Sizeable Shift

Four-to-six point difference

The playoffs are a pipe dream at this point, but the Panthers should at least be able to surge to a more respectable point total than their current pace. This one largely comes down to goaltending as the Panthers have an .886 on the season, the second-worst mark in the league. This could be a case where Roberto Luongo has simply fallen off a cliff after countless injuries at the age of 39, but even a cliff this steep seems a bit hard to believe. He was at .929 just last year and above .915 in every season with Florida, but is at .892 this season.

Two things the model is agnostic too when it comes to projecting future games, both of which heavily influence where the Senators will end up:

The trade deadline

Effort level after the trade deadline

Ottawa has two mammoth UFA decisions to monitor in Matt Duchene and Mark Stone, who equate to 5.6 combined wins of value – 41 percent of Ottawa's total value. Without either, this team could be one of the worst teams assembled in the salary cap era and might drop even farther than its current 67-point pace. Post-trade deadline, bad teams usually play worse too as there's little left to play for, exacerbating the issue further. My model thinks the team can bounce back above 70 points, especially now with an NHL goalie at backup, but it's difficult to give that much credence with the extraneous issues surrounding the team.

In St. Louis the problem might be as simple as this:

Vladimir Tarasenko – 5-on-5 Points-Per-60

2013-14 – 2.41

2014-15 – 2.79

2015-16 – 2.29

2016-17 – 2.21

2017-18 – 2.12

2018-19 – 1.18

When your superstar isn't playing like one, with a points-per-60 rate that ranks 289th in the league, you're asking for trouble. That's a fourth line rate. Of course, we know that's not exactly Tarasenko's fault as he's firing as many shots as ever, but only scoring on five percent rather than his usual 11. The NHL is a star-driven league and the Blues have sputtered without Tarasenko leading the way, but it goes beyond that. Brayden Schenn has regressed after looking like a promising top line centre in his first year as a Blue. Others have too. The team as a whole is a below average possession group. And Jake Allen, whose bar was painfully low to start the year, somehow has managed to be worse than expected. The Blues aren't as bad as their current standing (they're third worst in one-goal games, but have a .500 win percentage otherwise) and I think we'll see a team closer to what many expected in the second half – it'll just be too little, too late.

It's getting harder and harder to argue that a bottom five possession team deserves more than they're getting, especially after a loss to the league's worst team on Wednesday. After a sluggish start, it seems like the Ducks found their mojo in November and early December, but have spiralled back into old patterns since, dropping nine straight games to fall out of the playoffs. What should help more than anything is becoming fully healthy. Rickard Rakell and Cam Fowler both rejoined the team this week after lengthy absences and will be the keys to getting Anaheim back on track. Aside from Corey Perry, who won't be back until March, this will be the first time this season that the Ducks are fully healthy. With the league's best goalie, all they have to do is get back to the level they were at last season. Judging from how they looked this season, that might be easier said than done and I wouldn't blame you for viewing the Ducks as a model "blind-spot," a team it refuses to downgrade no matter how many games it loses or how often they get out-played in said games. Time will tell.

It takes a special kind of awful to be a true talent sub-70 point team (for reference, I have the worst team, Ottawa at 72) so any team on pace for anything below that will likely see a bump. That includes the awful Kings who should settle in around 70-to-75 points. This one is pretty easy to spot as the team's best players – aside from Dustin Brown who has maintained his 60-point pace from year-to-year – have been well below the pace they played last season.

Point pace vs. last season

Anze Kopitar: 55 vs. 92

Jeff Carter: 36 vs. 67

Tyler Toffoli: 30 vs. 47

Drew Doughty: 47 vs. 60

Jake Muzzin: 32 vs. 47

That's in a year when scoring was up across the board too. In fairness, it was clear that a lot of those totals from last year were poised to drop, just not to this degree and it wouldn't be a surprise to see players pick it up in the second half, if nothing more than to salvage their pride after a lost season. Even Jonathan Quick has dropped from .921 last season to .902 this season.



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This one might be a controversial one as the Jets are widely viewed as one of the league's best teams, and while my model doesn't doubt that, it's bearish on a team that will be missing Nikolaj Ehlers and Dustin Byfuglien for an extended period of time. That's about five wins of value out of the lineup. There's also a red-hot power play that might be just flying a touch too high right now. The team is fourth in shooting percentage this season – the same as last year – but at 18.7 percent rather than 15.5 percent. Last year, only one team was above 16 percent for the season. Of all the expected contenders, the Jets and Capitals are the only teams below 50 percent in expected goals at 5-on-5. The Jets are also second in the league in winning one-goal games and seventh otherwise.

Drastic Deviation

Six point difference or more

I'm guessing many Devils fans didn't expect to see me vouching that the team was better than it looked at any point this season, but such is life for a team that's failing to live up to expectations. My model sees them as a .500 team, well above their current pace at around 76 points. New Jersey does well in getting to the dangerous areas of the ice and even better at keeping other teams out, but it hasn't translated to the scoresheet yet. What really hurts is the realization of the fickleness that is a team's record in one-goal games. This season the Devils have a .250 win percentage in one-goal games and are at .462 otherwise. Last year they were at .595 and .475 respectively. If you want to know why a very similar team has drastically different results from year-to-year, there's your answer.

The Sabres surprisingly find themselves in a playoff spot at the halfway point, so it's only natural that there's some reserved skepticism about their success this season. While Carter Hutton is a decent goalie, it's still difficult to fathom that the league's third-best goaltending results this season would be from a tandem led by him. My model is high on the underrated duo that includes Linus Ullmark, but still figures that will regress slightly. The real problem with Buffalo is on offence where outside of the team's top line it's difficult to imagine where scoring is coming from. We're seeing that play out since the end of the team's 10-game winning streak

THE OTHER PROBLEM: SINCE THE END OF THE STREAK NO FORWARD ON THE TEAM OUTSIDE OF THE TOP LINE HAS MORE THAN THREE POINTS. IN 17 GAMES. THAT IS ... THAT IS SOMETHING YOU CAN NOT WIN WITH.

— ADAM GRETZ (@AGRETZ) JANUARY 8, 2019

Of the team's 14 regular forwards, eight (!!!) are scoring at a fourth line rate or lower and Kyle Okposo, the team's sixth most efficient scorer at evens, is close at 1.33 points-per-60. That is some weak depth and I'm not even sure how much room for regression there is there considering how devoid of talent that group of eight is. Perhaps more concerning is that the team's leading scorer, Jeff Skinner, looks likely to fall back down to earth too after scoring on nearly 1-in-5 shots at 5-on-5 in his first 43 games. His previous high was 15 percent back in his rookie season and he was closer to 10 percent in his previous three seasons. The Sabres are currently on pace for 99 points, but my model believes that they'll fall much closer to 90-to-95 points, entering a dog fight for one of the final wildcard spots.

Islanders fans are an ornery bunch when it comes to giving their team some respect. To their credit, I think they're truly better than many expected and very much deserve to be in the playoff hunt, but I don't see them hitting 100 points as their current pace suggests. Over the second half I suspect they'll be in a similar boat as Buffalo: falling back towards the playoff outline in a desperate fight to the finish for one of the final playoff spots. For the Islanders, it's about the percentages. The Barry Trotz effect may be real, but not to the point where the team is top five in both shooting and save percentage at 5-on-5 – the only team in the league to manage the feat. If it's not Tampa Bay or Toronto doing so, two teams with a lethal offence and a top-five goalie at its disposal, then why should we trust the Islanders? In net it's difficult to have faith in Robin

Lehner and Thomas Greiss to maintain those marks going forward despite what they've shown through the first half of the season. Lehner was underrated in Buffalo, but being at .927 is a bit rich. Up front, Cal Clutterbuck is the only Islander forward who isn't scoring on 10 percent or more of his shots at 5-on-5 this season. Even more damning is that five of the top six – all of whom are above 15 percent – are players in the Isles bottom six: Valtteri Filppula, Tom Kuhnhackl, Matt Martin, Casey Cizikas and Andrew Ladd. Collectively, they're scoring on 19.1 percent of their shots. Last year that number was 8.0 percent. If the depth scoring dries up don't be surprised and the Islanders should see a very different second half as a result.

Only three teams are expected to regress more than Washington, but it's becoming harder to ignore that the Capitals are a difficult team to measure using current public data. Having said that, I'm not so convinced the team can maintain its current 1032 PDO on the strength of a league-leading 10.7 shooting percentage and top-10 save percentage. It's the former number that's most alarming. The team's fourth liners are currently in way over their head with Travis Boyd (23.5 percent), Nic Dowd (19.1), Chandler Stephenson (18.2) and Devante Smith-Pelly (11.4) unlikely to keep up their current efficiency. And no disrespect to Alex Ovechkin, but it's similarly unlikely he'll continue to score on 18.4 percent of his shots when he's only been above 10 percent five other times, topping out at 12.8 percent last year. Maybe there's something in the water in Washington, but even if that's the case, it's difficult to believe this is something the team can keep up.

This is a tricky one. On the one hand the Blackhawks have the talent not to be this bad with guys like Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and Alex DeBrincat up front and have shown so recently with a slight return to form, going 7-3-4 in their last 14 games. On the other hand, the team has been demonstrably bad under new coach Jeremy Colliton with a 46.6 percent Corsi rate that's almost five percent worse than under Joel Quenneville and ranks in the league's bottom five, en route to a 66-point pace. Again, it takes a special kind of team combined with horrible luck to be sub-70 point bad. I suspect Chicago will regress from there but it's clear this team isn't the same under new coaching, something my model isn't readily apparent of.

The Lightning are on pace for 130 points, which would be the third highest single-season mark ever. That should be more than enough reason. They're the best team in the league, hands-down, but not to the degree that they continue winning over 75 percent of their games going forward.

A team many expected to be, at the very least, above average ranks dead last in the league with a 15-22-6 record, a 69-point pace. That's reason enough to expect a turnaround going forward with my model suggesting there's only a three percent chance it gets any worse. Under new coach Scott Gordon it sure feels like it has with the team going 3-7-2, scoring on just 5.6 percent of shots at 5-on-5 since. What would help is if one of the team's seven goalies figured it out. While Brian Elliott likely isn't the answer, it's hard to imagine the team would be this low in the standings if he wasn't limited to just 14 games this season – 14 games where he's played at an above average .911 rate. The other six goalies? They're at .865 collectively on almost 1,000 shots. That's not a typo. If they played at just .890 – a terrible rate that only Florida is worse than – the Flyers would've allowed 23 fewer goals (!!!), which equates to about four-to-five more wins in the standings. That would bump the Flyers pace up to 88 points. That's a team that would still have a chance in the playoff race, which is what many expected from them at the start of the year. Elliott's last game was Nov. 15 and it's no coincidence that the team is 6-13-5 since, the league's worst record. There's more. The Flyers, who had a league average power play at 20.7 percent last year sits 29th this season at 13.3 percent. The cause of that is a league-worst 7.9 percent shooting percentage, a full 1.7 percent worse than the next worst team and five percent worse than last season. It's also somehow equal to the Flyers rate at 5-on-5. With their best players on, and with a man advantage, the Flyers are scoring as often as they do as a team at 5-on-5. That's just plain ol' bad luck and it's arguable no team has been hit worse by it than the Flyers. Philadelphia is the team that's been furthest



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from expectations this season, but it seems very likely that their luck will change in the season's second half, especially when Elliott comes back. Really, it can't get any worse, right?

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

By Scott Burnside Jan 10, 2019

If we're imagining a much-anticipated return to the World Cup of Hockey in the fall of 2020, Sweden would arguably be able to field as deep and talented a lineup as any team in recent years.

They have never quite gotten it together since winning gold in 2006. They lost the gold medal game in Sochi after the International Olympic Committee forbid Nicklas Backstrom from playing against Canada because of an issue with his allergy medication. And a stacked Swedish team bowed out to Team Europe in overtime of the semifinals of the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. That means missing last year was especially difficult for the Swedes.

"Honestly, it sucks, really hard," defenseman John Klingberg told us just before the start of last year's Olympic tournament. But as time has passed so, too, has the look of this Swedish team, a definite changing of the proverbial guard afoot. No Sedin twins with the retirement of Hall of Fame-bound Daniel and Henrik. Henrik Zetterberg is gone too. No place for Niklas Kronwall. Instead, dynamic players like rookie of the year favorite Elias Pettersson, 2018 first-overall pick Rasmus Dahlin and the aforementioned Klingberg suggest that, while the names may be changing, the talent level certainly isn't.

"Yes, we're in the midst of a major generational shift in Swedish hockey. A new guard is definitely taking over after the Zetterberg-Sedin-Kronwall era," veteran Swedish journalist Per Bjurman said. "Hank Lundqvist and Nick Backstrom would be the grey eminence on that team. It's pretty exciting, it feels like we're going to have one hell of a team for the next World Cup, if there is one, and especially in Beijing 2022."

So, Here is our projected 23-player roster for Team Sweden 2020 and a brief explanation of how we arrived at our choices.

Forwards

Lots to like up front with the Swedes and they bear a striking resemblance to Canada in that the nation possesses a lot of high skill, hard working, natural centers. That means we're going to force some guys in to unnatural positions on the wings to get them in the lineup. Carl Soderberg, Rickard Rakell and William Karlsson are among those that might play out of position, but I don't think that's going to hurt this skilled, balanced lineup. And yes, we found a place for William Nylander as one of our two extra forwards understanding he would/could likely end up playing top-six minutes for this talented Swedish squad.

Defense

The Swedes are loaded on the back end, and we would argue boast as explosive a defensive group as anyone that will line up in a future World Cup of Hockey. And, oh yeah, they can defend, too, with defending Norris Trophy winner Victor Hedman and potential Norris candidate Hampus Lindholm patrolling the blueline. We have a preponderance of left-hand shots on the Swedish blueline and we wanted to include Dahlin, so that forced us to move Oliver Ekman-Larsson to the right side, although Lindholm could do that as well.

Goaltending

There really isn't an obvious heir apparent to the greatest Swedish goalie of all time and future Hall of Famer Lundqvist. And even if time is creeping up on the great Rangers netminder, he's still as good as it gets between the pipes for the Swedes. Love the work Jacob Markstrom has done in keeping Vancouver in the playoff hunt, and Robin Lehner is a great story, but the Swedes would be at a definite disadvantage in goal in terms of their depth considering some of the other nations looking to establish themselves as the best in the world.

And now, a couple roster projections from my colleagues at The Athletic:

The Athletic LOADED: 01.11.2019

1125418 Websites

The Athletic / The pros and cons of teams putting their No. 1 goalie on a pitch count

By Pierre LeBrun Jan 10, 2019

Should goalies be on a pitch count?

As we head into a new era of science and data, and perhaps a whole new way of managing the most important position in the sport, this question is being asked more and more.

Is there a magic number starting goalies should be kept under as far as games started in a season in order to maximize their performance?

The last three Stanley Cup champions, Pittsburgh back-to-back in 2016 and '17 and Washington last season, saw their winning netminder hardly overused during the regular season.

Is there a correlation or is this just a coincidence?

Braden Holtby's 54 starts last season was his lowest usage in four years, Philipp Grubauer not only pushing for the job but in fact starting the playoff opener. The result ended up being a fresher Holtby having the postseason of his life.

"Braden historically wanted more games, liked more games, and has always felt that he was playing better when he was constantly playing," Caps GM Brian MacLellan told The Athletic on Tuesday. "Last year, I don't know that it was a conscious thing, it just kind of worked out that way because Grubauer played really well throughout the year, so it evolved into what happened. That translated into a good performance by Holtby at the end of the year."

Did it ever.

Matt Murray and Marc-Andre Fleury both figured in the Pittsburgh net in their back-to-back championship years, therefore limiting their usage. A nice luxury to have, of course, a veteran No. 1 with an emerging No. 1.

But the salary cap world doesn't really allow for two No. 1's, so the challenge is to find a competent backup which allows the starter not to be overextended.

That is, of course, if you're a team that believes in this emerging theory of limiting the innings of your starting goaltender.

"I definitely do, and I have for a long time," said one NHL team executive this week who requested anonymity because he wants to keep that philosophy to himself for competitive reasons.

"I think there's no question it's a fact your starting goalie has to be managed so that he's as his best, come playoff time."



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But what's the perfect number? Sixty games?

The game is faster than ever, putting goalies under more physical duress during games and I would argue more mental pressure, too.

I put all this to the reigning Vezina Trophy winner.

"Personally, every year I feel like I've played less and less games and at the same time I feel like my game has gotten better," Nashville Predators star Pekka Rinne said on Monday. "It's hard to say if it's a direct reason from that. But I feel like it's only beneficial. And if you want to be one of the top teams in the league, you have to have two goalies that the team is going to play the same way when either one of them is in net and have the same confidence in each goalie. I feel like we have that. Juuse is playing awesome and he's a super talented young goalie."

In Juuse Saros, 23, the Preds not only have an emerging goalie they trust but one that Rinne, 36, is enjoying mentoring. It's a healthy situation which is important for it to work.

Rinne started 59 games last season, his lowest total in a full, healthy season since his sophomore year in 2009-10, when he started 54 games.

Not that Rinne has talked about a specific number with the Preds' coaching staff.

"We haven't really talked about that, but it's a good question, it's a valid question," Rinne said. "Maybe there's something there. You want to be feeling fresh when you're going into the playoffs. If you're playing 70 games you're probably playing with fire. Because as you said, it's more demanding than ever before, the tempo is up, the game is so fast. It's very demanding for goalies."

And believe me, that wasn't the answer Rinne would have given you five years ago. Nor Holby for that matter or most elite starters. But perhaps they are seeing the light now.

Cam Talbot led all NHL goalies with 67 starts last season in a non-playoff season for his Oilers. Frederik Andersen was next with 66 starts and while everyone including himself will deny he was tired come playoff time, that's up for debate.

Sergei Bobrovsky, always a workhorse year in and year out, was third last season with 65 starts.

"Bobrovsky is a great goalie, but he plays too much in my opinion, he gets to the playoffs and gives up the kind of goals he wouldn't normally," said one Eastern Conference scout.

Andrei Vasilevskiy had a career-high 64 starts last season and openly said during an early March interview with our Joe Smith that he was feeling tired.

"Tiredness is something that I probably never faced before," Vasilevskiy said at the time. "I mean, 50-plus games. When you play in 20-plus games, it's like you think, 'Oh, I'm good, I can play 60-plus.' But now when I'm on 50-plus, I'm like, 'That's tough.' So that's why sometimes I'm probably not as sharp, like (I was) probably the first half of the season. That's why I have to adjust and be on the top of my game."

To be fair, last season was the 24-year-old's first as a full-time starter. It takes time to adjust to that role. But his one-month injury this past November has a silver lining, it will keep his totals down for the year and in theory, fresher for the postseason. And my understanding is that the NHL-leading Lightning are very much cognizant and are monitoring his workload.

I asked Maple Leafs head coach Mike Babcock on Monday whether Andersen's absence (who is currently out with a groin injury) could ultimately be a blessing in disguise as far as his energy levels later in the season, pointing to the Washington and Pittsburgh netminder examples of the last three years.

"It's outstanding, it's great if you can do it, you got to make the playoffs though," Babcock said. "In a fantasy world, when you're in control of

everything, that's wonderful. But most of us are crawling to get into the playoffs. I don't know if you look at the standings, every time you don't win a game you go 'Oh my God.' They're catching you. Everyone is jammed together."

Added Babcock about the Andersen break: "It might be a great thing, let's get him healthy, let's get him back to playing good. Then we can say at the end of the year he played the perfect amount of games. (But) I don't believe anyone is tired at playoff time."

Predators head coach Peter Laviolette echoed Babcock's statement that first and foremost, making the playoffs precedes any plan as far as managing the goalie rotation.

"The point is, you got to there too, right? You got to get there. You can't just say this is the plan," Laviolette said.

But, yes, the veteran coach is very much aware of not overplaying Rinne.

"We're obviously talking about his rest. Last year might have been one of his lower years for games played," Laviolette said. "He wasn't in that high 60 range. We've obviously got to develop Juuse as well. So it's a fine line. We're really fortunate we've got a guy who just won a Vezina Trophy and have a young guy that we believe in. We are trying to watch it.

"We're really in a good situation with Peks being one of the top goalies in the league and we really trust Juuse," added Laviolette. "If we can find some games for him that maybe normally Peks might have, that would just reduce that number and maybe pull it down. There's no question I do believe it helps him in a long season."

Marc-Andre Fleury currently leads all goalies with 39 starts on the season, putting him on pace for 70 this season. Only eight goalies since 2010 have topped 70 games a season. That's something the Vegas Golden Knights are going to have to consider moving forward. Of course, the Knights struggled out of the gates in October and needed Fleury to drag them back into the fight.

However, I don't think the Knights are overly concerned about Fleury's workload. They had a very busy first half, already having played 45 games, and the second half is set up better for rest days and spacing between games for Fleury. Now that the red-hot Knights are back to looking like a contender, it should also afford them the chance to be more selective for his starting assignments down the stretch.

The contending Bruins, I'm told, absolutely buy into the idea of managing the games played for their top goalie. Tuukka Rask appeared in a career-high 70 games (67 starts) in 2014-15 — the Bruins missed the playoffs — and that number went down to 62 starts in 2015-16, 64 starts in 2016-17 and last season 53 starts. Anton Khudobin gave the Bruins 20 solid games last season and this year Jaroslav Halak is playing a prominent role, basically splitting the starts. The Bruins very much believe in finding the balance and having two guys that can take the net. Rask will emerge as the guy as the season goes on but the B's are limiting his totals with the playoffs in mind.

Goalie guru Lyle Mast, for one, is on board with all of this.

"The very thing that comes to my mind, and I know this is a conversation amongst NHL goalie coaches, is that in today's game the goalie can't get away with anything less than his 'A' game," Mast said on Monday. "If you're not playing 'A' hockey every night, you're getting exposed."

Mast also points out if the starter is playing a ton of games that it probably means less practice time due to the need to conserve energy for the games. That's perhaps less time to address issues that can creep into a goalie's game over time.

"So, his game is probably now operating somewhere at 80 percent. Maybe 85 percent, when he needs to be probably 100 percent every night," said Mast.

There are a number of things to consider moving forward. One member of an NHL coaching staff wondered this as far as thinking outside the box: when playing in back-to-back nights, why not fly tomorrow's starter



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to the next city ahead of time like pitchers in a playoff series do sometimes? Why is he sitting on the bench the night before and flying in a 2 a.m. with the rest of his team and not sleeping properly?

One reason is because managing a third goalie is about the hardest thing to do in today's NHL. The CBA rules pretty much make it that most third goalies in the NHL require waivers for normal call-ups. Which is something to look at for the next CBA because the role of the No. 3 goalie may have to expand in a number of ways if teams are going to continue to find ways to better manage their starter.

Such as the idea that the third goalie should be up with the big team helping in practice to give the starter the odd day off.

One NHL GM observed the following to me earlier this season: given that a goalie faces an average of 300 pucks in a normal, off-day practice, why is he on the ice the day after a game? Does that make any sense?

The science continues to develop. Teams are going to find that number they believe works best for their starting goalie to deliver his maximum performance, particularly when it matters most.

All of which will put greater and greater emphasis on trusting the No. 2 man.

Which is why it was paramount that Pheonix Copley, for example, is able to be a reliable No. 2 behind Holby for the defending Cup champs. So far, so good. Copley not only has fared well in 13 starts with a .915 save percentage, but his usage has Holby on pace for 56 starts, which is a reasonable number.

"I mean it's not a plan set in stone but it's evolving into something similar to last year," MacLellan said. "The coaches are pretty optimistic about it. Our goalie coach, Scott Murray, has done a great job with Copley, just like he did with Grubauer.

"All of this is evolving around the league. It's hard to get that No. 2 that can handle that workload. Especially with the salary cap. It's a hard thing to do every year."

But at least from a Caps' perspective, they know it's the right path for success.

Hard to argue against it.

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Sportsnet.ca / Leafs' Tavares building case for best ever season by free-agent signing

Chris Johnston | January 10, 2019, 9:57 PM

NEWARK, N.J. — The last time the Toronto Maple Leafs had a player scoring like this it was the high-flying early '90s and everything seemed possible for Doug Gilmour, Wendel Clark and Co.

That it's John Tavares helping make believers out of Leafs Nation again is a major coup for an organization which set aside big bucks and significant cap space to bring him home over the summer.

Tavares had already proven himself as one of the better goal-scorers of his generation during nine seasons in Long Island. But after half a year in Toronto, where he's scored 29 times in 43 games, he's building a case to have this considered one of the best seasons by a free-agent signing in NHL history.

"He's done nothing but impress me," defenceman Travis Dermott said after Thursday's 4-2 win over New Jersey.

The impact Tavares has on the organization runs much deeper than goals, but the Leafs aren't paying him \$11 million per season for intangibles. That's why his production has been so important during a 28-13-2 start — the NHL's second-best record by percentage of points earned.

Against the Devils, Tavares scored two more times and now trails only Washington's Alex Ovechkin in that department league-wide. He'd never potted more than 38 in nine seasons as a member of the Islanders and is now on pace for 55.

What stands out is that he's producing more shots on goal than ever before, averaging 3.79 per game after putting six more on Devils goalie Keith Kinkaid.

"I just try to go out there and be as best prepared, be as consistent as I can be," said Tavares. "You know, try to be just hard to defend. Find different ways to produce, not just in certain situations, whether it's around the net, off the cycle, on the rush, on the power play.

"I'm obviously playing with some pretty good players throughout the lineup, so I'm just trying to be ready for those opportunities and capitalize and just try to play my game. I just want to keep it going."

He and linemate Mitch Marner found instant offensive chemistry this season, and they've benefitted from the grind-it-out style of left-winger Zach Hyman. He returned Thursday after an eight-game absence with an ankle injury and was on the ice for all four goals scored by the Leafs.

"It just goes to show you need people to win the puck back and he was able to do that for us," said Leafs coach Mike Babcock.

Tavares scored both his goals from an area close to the net, collecting a Jake Gardiner rebound and backhanding it home at 7:21 before finishing off a lovely passing sequence from Morgan Rielly and Marner at 19:53.

They were Nos. 300 and 301 on his career, making the No. 1 overall pick from 2009 the first in his draft class to reach that milestone.

By a wide margin.

He's now at five more goals than his previous best mark through 43 games of a season and the only Leafs player in the last 31 years with this many since Dave Andreychuk had 31 in 1994. Heady stuff.

Even if you were to go back to the giddy afternoon of July 1, when Tavares chose to sign with the Leafs over five other finalists, you probably wouldn't have pencilled him in for this kind of roaring start.

"I wouldn't [have] put a guess on it," said defenceman Ron Hainsey. "When it happened I was just excited that we had him on the team. How many goals he would or wouldn't score [didn't matter], I knew we were getting a centreman whose a great player.

"Obviously he's had a heck of a start here through 43."

When you couple it with his steady demeanour off the ice — teammates have described him as the most consummate professional they've ever shared a dressing room with — you start to understand why Toronto has been able to withstand an Auston Matthews shoulder injury, the William Nylander contract standoff and subsequent dry spell, and more recently, the groin issue that's sidelined No. 1 goaltender Frederik Andersen.

Steady like a metronome, Tavares has been there to keep things beating in rhythm.

"He's a guy that everyone wants to play better when you're on the ice with him," said Dermott. "He'll get you the puck if you're open. He'll battle for you and for the whole team down low. He's a guy that makes you definitely want to work harder for your teammates."

And he's had a huge hand in adding numbers to the win column.

Perhaps most encouraging is the fact his production doesn't seem to be unattainably high — he's on pace for a career-best 95 points — and he's



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remained remarkably even-keeled despite all of the early achievement in Toronto.

Tavares is only the seventh player drafted after 2005 to hit 300 goals, following Sidney Crosby, Steven Stamkos, Phil Kessel, Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and Anze Kopitar. He's keeping pretty good company.

"It's always that much more satisfying when it contributes in a big win, especially bouncing back after [a 4-0 loss to Nashville] the other night," said Tavares. "I think a credit to a lot of guys I've played with over my career, obviously a big part of helping me be successful.

"I don't want to stop there."

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Sportsnet.ca / Exhausted Oilers put resilience on display in gritty comeback win

Mark Spector | January 11, 2019, 1:20 AM

EDMONTON — There are nights when you're not clicking on all cylinders. Then, there are nights when the car's up on blocks, the engine is taken apart and parts are strewn across the garage.

When you're having one of the latter nights, and then watch a puck rattle off both of your defencemen and into your net for the apparent game-winner, well, then you've got no chance, right?

There's absolutely no rescuing any point on one of those nights, correct?

"We had nothin'" said head coach Ken Hitchcock, who played the hell out of his best players, got a goal with eight seconds left in regulation and watched his Edmonton Oilers beat Florida 4-3 in a shootout Thursday.

"These games can really help you going forward as a team," Hitchcock said, "because it's damned impressive, what they did."

The win opened up a crucial homestand leading into the All-Star break for Edmonton, with the scuffling Oilers hovering just below the wild-card spot. Either they make hay in this next stretch of six home games sandwiched around a game in Vancouver, or you can take them behind the barn and put the 2018-19 season to rest.

"That was a huge win for us," said Cam Talbot, who watched his counterpart James Reimer face just 18 shots on net during regulation. "It was definitely not the prettiest, but any time you can grind out a win like that in the way we were able to do it, we persevered after their third goal where we had another unfortunate bounce against us.

"We could have folded, but we went down and battled back and found a way in the shootout."

And the coach? Don't worry about him.

No one can squeeze more juice out of a lemon like this one than Hitchcock, who gave the media a dose of Friday morning's dressing room speech on the post-game podium.

"We were exhausted," he began, his team fresh off a four-game roadie in California. "Everybody knew, halfway through the first period, we had nothing. They just helped each other through. They stayed vocal on the bench. Any good thing that happened, guys were cheerleading each other, trying to help.

"It's a hell of a sign for having absolutely zero in the tank. To come up with two points is, for me, really, really impressive."

Connor McDavid carried his team once again, notching his fifth two-goal game this season, adding an assist and scoring the definitive goal in the shootout. To be honest, we've seen him more dominant, but we used to say the same of Wayne Gretzky when he'd have a mortal night yet walk away with three points.

Leon Draisaitl (two assists) helped forge the game-tying goal with eight seconds to play, after the Panthers broke open a 2-2 game with a shot that caromed off of both Oilers defencemen and past Talbot at 14:02 of the third period.

Darnell Nurse added a goal and an assist, playing an astonishing 31:49.

"We're leanin' on guys heavy," admitted Hitchcock, who does so because he simply has too many passengers these days. "Leon played (28:34), Connor played (27:34). We're leanin' on guys hard. We've got to make sure they get rest and days off — the practices 'til the break are irrelevant. We're leanin' heavy on our top guys.

"We could use a few more participants," he admitted, "but we've got a lot of guys who worked real hard tonight with nothing in their (tanks)."

This is a critical time for Edmonton, which entered the game having won just two of the past 10 games. They can't afford to let the wild-card spot get any further away, and with a homestand that includes Florida, Arizona, Carolina and Detroit — with a road game in Vancouver — the opportunity to get on a roll has arrived.

Not that the Oilers can look down their noses at any other teams, but either you beat the Detroit and Florida, or you miss the playoffs alongside them. Take your choice.

"Things haven't been going great for us, so this is a big game," said Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who opened the shootout with a goal. "It was the first game in a homestand and to be able to come back late in the game after a tough bounce against, we could have sagged and rolled over and died. But we kept pushing and fighting and there was no let-up in our game."

Sometimes you play great and lose. Sometimes you play, er, less than great and you win. When that happens there's only one thing to do — walk away with a smile, and rest up for the next one.

"You can take the positives," McDavid said. "We found a way to win a game where maybe we didn't deserve it. But we stuck with it.

"It was gritty."

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1125421 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens Takeaways: Power play requires radical changes

Eric Engels January 11, 2019, 12:12 AM

The Montreal Canadiens took a hard loss in St. Louis on Thursday night and it had very little to do with their effort.

Not to say their effort couldn't have been better, but their execution was abysmal. In just about every category.

The Canadiens couldn't string a pass together to save their lives but were somehow only credited with seven giveaways. They also couldn't win a faceoff before the third period started (they actually won seven of 31 through two periods while Blues centre Ryan O'Reilly drew back 17 of his first 19). And Montreal's power-play, which has been the worst in the NHL for a fair portion of the season, somehow managed one of the



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ugliest goals you'll ever see and still ended up being the worst it's been in any of their 45 games to date.

More on that below.

Before we get there, it's worth mentioning that if it wasn't for goaltender Carey Price, who stopped several odd-man rushes and was only beat on three breakaways and a third rebound opportunity on an early Blues power play, the score would have been out of hand.

Instead, the game ended 4-1 Blues, knocking the Canadiens out of a playoff spot because the New York Islanders beat the New York Rangers 4-3 at Madison Square Garden.

The Canadiens have suffered losses to learn from this season. This wasn't one of them. This is a game tape to burn if there ever was one.

We'll give you the skinny on where things went wrong for them in our takeaways. If you're a Montreal fan who missed the game, don't bother watching the one-hour rerun...

Max Domi and Jonathan Drouin in matchup hell

Domi and Drouin drew the short straw of having to play against O'Reilly for most of the night, and they were stuck chasing the puck around as a result.

Bad night for it to happen—with Domi having come into the game with zero goals in his last 14 contests and Drouin with three over that stretch.

Montreal's leading scorers were challenged by Canadiens coach Claude Julien on Wednesday to do more, and the threat of them being separated was floated if they didn't abide.

"I think Jonathan's had a good season," said Julien to reporters. "The last little while has been tough for him. I see the same thing everybody else does. We know he has the talent. His compete level and how much he wants to get involved is what really makes the big difference in his game.

"Trust me: We work hard with all players and I think a good portion of it has to come from the player."

When asked about Domi, Julien said, "It's just a line (with Joel Armia) that's going through a rough patch here and we've got to get them going.

"When you're leading your team in scoring, those two guys, it's not because they've had a bad year," Julien added. "They're going through a bad stretch right now. And we need them to be better. I agree with that part."

The effort was there for both players, but the execution wasn't. As was the case for their teammates.

Domi and Drouin were separated in the final five minutes of the loss, with Drouin moving to the left of Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Joel Armia and Domi centering Paul Byron and Artturi Lehkonen.

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

The power(less) play

It gave up one goal and scored one.

On the goal given up, a 2-on-1 beautifully executed by O'Reilly and eventually finished by Oskar Sundqvist, the play started with a faceoff in the Blues' end. Domi lost it cleanly to O'Reilly, Drouin pinched in from the point and whiffed while the play went by him, and the rest was history.

It was Domi's third lost draw on that one power play.

On that front, the Canadiens took five faceoffs on the power play in the first period alone and lost all of them.

Establishing possession is a pretty important part of running an efficient power play, and the Canadiens failed to do that in the first frame. When they did finally get the puck, they gave it away.

The Canadiens finally won a faceoff in the offensive zone with the man advantage in the second period. It led to sustained pressure and two scoring chances before the second unit came on and created the lone goal of the night.

The goal ended up being Brendan Gallagher's 17th of the season. A shot from a terrible angle off the cycle that banked off Blues defenceman Alex Pietrangolo and found the back of the net with just over half a game to play.

It was Montreal's fifth power-play goal in its last 55 attempts. It made the score 3-1 St. Louis. It even generated some momentum for the team, which was something remarkable considering how much the power play stole away from them in the first period.

And then in the third period, down 4-1, Drouin took an end-to-end rush on the power play and got slashed by Joel Edmundson to give the Canadiens a 5-on-3 advantage for 1:12.

They had just over six minutes remaining to make it a close hockey game. Shea Weber practically dented the post on the only shot attempt the Canadiens managed over that 1:12. They didn't record a single shot on net with that opportunity.

On the whole, Montreal's power play hit a new low in this game. It was just hideous—and that's saying something considering how bad it's been all year.

When it struggled mightily out of the gate, Julien said the following on Oct. 12:

"Well, you hope it doesn't take too long [to figure out]. If it's going to take a while, I think, at the end of the day, it's for us to work on to get the right people in the right places and make it successful.

"There's still some tweaking that we do along the way as we watch games and we see what's going on, and we're trying to obviously make it better," added Julien.

And yet, 45 games in, very little has changed about the (failing) strategy they've employed. The personnel hasn't been mixed to any significant degree.

You really have to wonder how much longer the Canadiens can go on without making radical changes.

Take nothing away from Jordan Binnington

The 25-year-old St. Louis goaltender, who was a third-round draft pick of the team in 2011, made 25 saves to shut out the Philadelphia Flyers in his first ever start on Monday.

On Thursday, in his second start (and first at home), he robbed Gallagher on the first shift and settled in to make several other key saves throughout the night.

Binnington got a piece of a disrupted first-period breakaway for Nicolas Deslauriers and got the whole puck on Phillip Danault's halfway through the frame.

His best save came on Victor Mete early in the third period, when he sprawled out to stop a one-timed shot that would've narrowed St. Louis' lead to 3-2.

The Richmond Hill, Ont., native robbed Deslauriers moments later, stopped Drouin's end-to-end rush with the right pad, and made one more quality stop on Gallagher before the game ended.

Binnington finished the game with 28 saves and now has 1.59 goals-against average and a .937 save percentage in four appearances this year.

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing Carey Price's save percentage: Can he become elite again?

Andrew Berkshire January 10, 2019

After a pretty horrendous start to the season if you go by save percentage, Carey Price has looked closer to his regular self since the calendar turned to December. He's posted a .925 save percentage since Dec. 1, the second-best mark of the 24 goaltenders who have played 10 games or more over that time.

Even with a little more than a month of inspired play, though, his overall numbers this season have not been impressive on the surface. After last season where Price never really looked right and posted the worst save percentage of his career, it makes sense that there are questions about what's going on with him.

After a multitude of knee injuries that appeared to become chronic after Chris Kreider ran Price over in the 2014 Eastern Conference Final, a lot of analysts believe the Canadiens netminder is damaged goods who is unable to recapture his peak form.

Since Price's peak was among the best individual seasons for a goaltender since Dominik Hasek, and considering Price is in his 30's, that's a safe bet to make.

However the question shouldn't necessarily be whether Price can tower over the rest of the NHL once again and assert himself as one of the best goaltenders in history. Rather, it should be whether or not he can get back to being among the best goaltenders in the league today?

Expecting a save percentage near .933 like Price produced in his Hart Trophy year is unrealistic, not just because he's older and has dealt with injuries, but because the average NHL save percentage has dropped from .915 to .909 over that time.

Price's current save percentage is also .909, which would mean he's about an average goaltender in the NHL, but there's a lot of noise in save percentage as a whole. For example, not every goalie faces the same amount of high quality chances — while overall shots against between two goalies could be similar, their expected save percentages could be wildly different due to where those shots are taken from.

So to drill a little deeper into Price's season, let's break down his save percentage by location.

Earlier in the year Price was really struggling on shots from the high slot, but he seems to be working his way towards average numbers there at 5-vs-5 and in all situations, while he's a hair below average on perimeter shots. This means he's giving up a few more weak goals than usual and so far this season the gap would account for about one more goal than league average.

From the high danger area, where half of all goals in the NHL are scored from, Price has actually been quite good. He ranks ninth in inner slot save percentage, which is way higher than his overall save percentage ranking.

Usually a goalie's overall save percentage tends to regress along the same trend as their high danger save percentage, but there's more to Price's story than just where shots are coming from. The frequency matters as well.

It's clear Price was bad last season and that you have to go back to 2016-17 to see a version of him that played at an expected normal level.

Using that season as a standard, let's look at the types of shots Price was facing relative to the average NHL goaltender, then compare it to this season.

As I've written about before, perimeter shots are dropping around the league, so it's not a surprise that the percentage of shots from the slot Price faces has risen over time. However the rate at which he's facing scoring chances has risen far faster than league average.

What I find interesting about that is the Canadiens were among the worst teams at suppressing high danger chances in the 2016-17 season before Michel Therrien was let go, and Claude Julien turned them into one of the league's best defensive teams down the stretch. The top pairing of Shea Weber and Andrei Markov allowed pretty much no chances against at all.

To me, that takes the blame for the defensive problems away from the coaches a little bit, and puts it more on the roster. Outside of Weber and Jeff Petry, Montreal is sorely lacking on the defensive end.

Getting into more detail, we can see the Canadiens are actually better than league average at defending off the rush, so the issue isn't likely to be a lack of mobility. The biggest outlier compared to league average is in the number of cycle chances the Canadiens allow, which are scoring chances immediately preceded by a pass.

It isn't new to see Montreal struggling to stop passes in their own zone, but this season they've been especially poor. While that hurts at even strength, the problems can compound on special teams.

Looking at Price's shots against in all situations, the same trends hold. But the gaps widen in per cent of shots from the slot and shots preceded by a pass between what Price faces and the league average.

One thing that can't be put on the shoulders of his teammates are the number of rebound chances Price lets out. Recovering rebounds is something defencemen can help out with, but the change in play that has produced more rebounds has been Price's own; he's giving up rebounds on 63 per cent of the shots he's faced this year, as opposed to just under 58 per cent two years ago.

More dangerous shots against do produce more rebounds, but Price is also giving up more rebounds on perimeter shots — 56.1 of those chances are followed by a rebound, up from 52.2 per cent in 2016-17. That's an area he needs to improve in, as he's typically been one of the best rebound controlling goaltenders in the league.

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.

Looking at all this data, it's relatively clear Price has had a tough job this season, but it all needs to be put into context as well. I'm not going to say he's been brilliant, especially by his own standards.

Based on the shot location alone that Price has faced this season, you would expect an average goaltender to save 90.4 per cent of them. Without adjusting for the excessive amount of passes that Price has to deal with, his current save percentage is actually significantly better than expectations and so far this season would put him in the range of 4.32 goals saved above average.

That doesn't place Price as a top-five NHL goalie, but he's climbing the list despite having to face the third-highest percentage of shots as scoring chances in the league. The only goalies who face tougher shots on average are Cam Ward and Carter Hutton.

Whether Price can ever recapture his status as the best goaltender in the league is up for debate, but those who think he's done are making decisions too quickly, and often base those conclusions on poor information.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 11, 2019

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks sunk by defensive woes, controversial goal in lacklustre effort

Iain MacIntyre | January 11, 2019, 2:09 AM

VANCOUVER — A kick in the crease was followed by a kick in the teeth as the Vancouver Canucks, finally positioned to really dig into the playoff race, opened a six-game homestand with a 4-3 overtime loss to the Arizona Coyotes.

Having completed three six-game road trips by the middle of the National Hockey League season, and playing more games and road games than everyone except the Vegas Golden Knights, the Canucks are starting a span of six games in 27 days.

All are at Rogers Arena. Five of the games are against teams below the playoff cutoff. And with the exception of super-rookie Elias Pettersson, out day-to-day with a knee injury, the Canucks are healthy. They're rested, they're getting quality practice time.

They have no excuses.

And yet they opened Thursday's game by going 15 1/2 minutes before registering a shot against the Coyotes, who were 5-10-1 the last five weeks.

The Canucks played catch-up all night, rallying three times to tie before losing in OT when Richard Panik, given too much space to speed down right wing, blew an unscreened shot from the top of the faceoff circle past goalie Jacob Markstrom's stick side.

But the goal that stung more was Coyote Nick Cousins' go-ahead marker at 10:05 of the second period, when the forward kicked a rebound past Markstrom to cap a counter-attack that began when Canuck Nikolay Goldobin appeared to be tripped on a partial breakaway by Oliver Ekman-Larsson.

To anyone who understands soccer and knows that a kicking motion can be something less than Charlie Brown swinging wildly at a football, there was little doubt Cousins booted it in. The Coyotes forward stared at the referee for the first three strides of his celebration, perhaps in disbelief that neither Dean Morton nor Francis Charron saw anything wrong with his goal. The goal then withstood a review by the NHL war room in Toronto.

"It was a kick," Markstrom said. "They still don't have any soccer fans in Toronto, so I don't know how they can not call that back. It's happened before and it will happen again. We need to get some soccer fans in (the war room).

"It's very frustrating. The game goes to overtime and it's a huge game for us. If that doesn't go in, nobody knows how the game would have played out. But it's 3-3 on the board after 60 minutes and one of their goals was kicked in. It's very frustrating."

Of course, the war room wasn't responsible for checking the Canucks into submission in the first period when Vancouver, coming off consecutive shutout losses and with two rest days and two practice days to prepare for the Coyotes, should have come out flying.

And it wasn't the referees who made Canucks defenceman Chris Tanev misplay the puck into his slot on one Arizona goal, and defenceman Erik Gudbranson fail to block a pass and instead settle the puck for Conor Garland on another.

It wasn't NHL officials who were briefly confused in overtime when, after Canucks Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser were stopped by Coyotes goalie Darcy Kuemper on excellent scoring chances, Vancouver was slow to get its defensive shape on the winning goal.

"They usually come with two guys with speed, one on each side," Canucks defenceman Alex Edler, who couldn't get across the ice in time

to take away Panik's space, explained. "I gapped up on the other side and then I saw that I needed to get over to his side. He got maybe a little too much room.

"When you lose in overtime it's never fun. But I think we played pretty good tonight. We talked about it being a pretty tight game and not a lot of room. I think we played hard, but there were a couple of breakdowns that they scored on and those are usually things that decide games."

Except for the costly defensive breakdowns, the Canucks did play well for the final 44 minutes when they outshot the Coyotes 31-15. But they surrendered four goals on home ice to the third-lowest-scoring team in the NHL and lost for the fourth time in five games (1-3-1) since playing themselves back into the playoff race in the Western Conference.

The most positive aspect of Thursday's game was that winger Sven Baertschi, who missed two months with a concussion, had two goals and six shots on net in his sixth game back from injury. He looked terrific on a reunited line with Horvat and Boeser.

"There's always doubt, I think," he said when asked if he was worried he might never play again. "There's that uncomfortable feeling that you have and the worry that you have.

"It was a long, hard, weird, interesting process. I learned a lot throughout that two months (to) understand what was happening to me. I just had to deal with it and understand it and be patient with it."

Rookie Adam Gaudette, back from a three-game stint in the American Hockey League, had the other Canucks goal.

Pettersson missed his second game with a sprained knee, but the Canucks hope their leading scorer might be ready to play Sunday against the Florida Panthers.

It was Panthers defenceman Mike Matheson who body-slammed Pettersson to the ice in Florida in October, causing a concussion that kept the Canuck out of six games and sparked a raging debate on Vancouver's team toughness. Vancouver is now 3-5-0 without Pettersson, and have scored only 14 goals in those eight games.

Even if Pettersson doesn't play Sunday, the Canucks are not expected to let Matheson's visit to Vancouver pass uneventfully. The team could have used a little more emotion at the start of Thursday's game.

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Sportsnet.ca / 6 things we learned in the first half of the 2018-19 NHL season

Rory Boylen | January 10, 2019, 5:26 PM

With a little more than half of the games played, we look back at the start of this NHL season to see if we learned anything new about the league and where it's headed.

What did we come away with? Goal trends, struggling stars, the importance of a quality backup goalie, plus lovable dogs and mascots.

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.

DON'T FREAK OUT OVER STARS STRUGGLING EARLY

Every October and November we're on the lookout for those early storylines that will unfold through the year and help define that NHL season. Maybe it's goals on the rise, or a specific team or two that are



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taking a step up or down. But the first half of this season served as another reminder to take a deeper look before drawing any grand conclusions about player performances specifically.

From Erik Karlsson to Patrik Laine and Sergei Bobrovsky, a collection of star players we've come to expect big numbers from didn't get off to the best starts this season. Sometimes these slow starts are followed by calls to trade the player, questions of whether they're declining and past their prime, or just wonder at what the heck has gone wrong — is it the way they're being used, or are they doing anything differently?

In almost every one of these cases the underlying numbers indicated a course correction was coming — and looking at some of these players now, it's clear there wasn't anything to get overly concerned about.

Take Karlsson for example. After being traded to San Jose in September, he had to get used to a new team and system and had a variety of different defence partners off the hop. Through 18 games he had zero goals and just eight points, far from the near point-a-game numbers he'd built a career on.

But it was clear that most of this had to do with unlucky percentages — he was the fifth-best defenceman in the NHL in shot-attempt differential as of Nov. 2, but the Sharks were scoring on less than five per cent of their shots with Karlsson on the ice. He was generating a pile of high-danger chances for himself and his teammates, but the bounces just weren't going his way.

Today Karlsson is tied for fourth in scoring at his position and is currently on a 14-game point streak, which is the longest by a blueliner in the salary cap era. He has 25 points over that stretch and at this pace he'll be in the Norris Trophy discussion by the end of the year.

Laine, too, reminded us that even the best snipers are inherently streaky. He had just three goals in October with a 6.8 shooting percentage, then scored 18 times in November. Since that month closed, Laine has three goals in 18 games, so while this won't go down as his best season overall, it would also seem to indicate another strong stretch is on the horizon.

Bobrovsky, too, started with a woeful .882 save percentage in the first month, then followed it up with a .932 November in which he lost only two games. He's still one of the better goalies in the league and though this won't be a Vezina-worthy season for him, there may be something else going on between the pending UFA and his team.

If there's one star who hasn't course-corrected yet, look no further than Vladimir Tarasenko. One of the top goal scorers over the previous four years, Tarasenko has just 12 at the midway mark. His shooting percentage is just 8.1, though, which is the lowest of his career, and the quality of his shots are actually better than ever. If any team can buy low on him this trade season, the 27-year-old is a good bet to recover just fine.

The conclusion: if a star player is still somewhere in their prime and have been putting up consistently strong numbers for years, don't read too much into low totals in October and November. If the underlying numbers are still showing well, the turnaround will come.

BACKUP GOALIES NEEDED

It's becoming clear that having a rested No. 1 is as important as ever to succeeding in the Stanley Cup playoffs. Consider that none of the past five championship netminders played more than 57 games in the season they won it all, and of the 40 teams that advanced past Round 1 over the past five years, just 16 had a goalie who played 60 or more times in a season. And more often than not, those goalies were eliminated in Round 2.

It's not that you can't win the Cup or go on a post-season run with a goalie leaned on this much — it's about giving your team the best odds to do it.

Having a backup goalie to do more than just spell a starter for one side of a back-to-back seems to be a key factor for start-to-finish team success

these days. Not only will a good backup help make sure your starter goes into the post-season fresh, but they can also help sustain a team through a bad stretch by the starter. For instance, Jaroslav Halak has been stellar for Boston this season when Tuukka Rask was having a rough patch and without that the Bruins might not be in a playoff spot right now.

Aaron Dell has been huge for the Sharks, Laurent Brossoit for the Jets, and Casey DeSmith was better than Matt Murray and kept the Penguins alive when the latter went down to injury. Meantime, Edmonton's Mikko Koskinen and Calgary's David Rittich have all but taken over the top job.

Now we're looking at teams such as Toronto, Columbus and even Calgary — as long as Mike Smith struggles to reach a .900 save percentage — and recognize they need credible backups to either give the No. 1s a break or maintain a certain level in case of injury. The trouble is there are very few options on the trade market outside of, possibly, Jimmy Howard — and Red Wings GM Ken Holland wants a first-round pick for him.

What does this mean for the second half? The top four goalies in games played are Marc-Andre Fleury (39), John Gibson (37), Jake Allen (34) and Devan Dubnyk (34). Of those, Fleury and the Golden Knights would be the only one in the "Stanley Cup contender" category.

In Fleury's career he's played 64 or more games in a season six times. Of those years he got out of the first round just twice and has a cumulative .894 post-season save percentage. Vegas may want to find some more starts for Malcolm Subban in the second half.

GRITTY IS GREAT

When the Philadelphia Flyers unveiled their new mascot in September, who would have guessed the googly-eyed cousin of Youppi! would so instantly become a beloved member of the NHL community?

Love him like most do, or hate him, Gritty is the best story out of the Flyers organization this season. In what's been a majorly disappointing first half for the hockey club, the mascot has effectively been the face of the franchise.

ALL DOGS GO TO... THE NHL

Speaking of distractions, everyone seems to be getting a dog this year.

In a trend started by, we think, Bark-Andre Furry, who is the unofficial pup for the Golden Knights, some teams around the league have officially adopted dogs into their organizations.

There's no chance anything tops this video today...

Barclay is on the ice at #Blues practice! pic.twitter.com/PYqmlqcERD

— Tim and Sid (@timandsid) December 13, 2018

TOP SCORERS SKEWING YOUNGER

If you take a look at the top scorers in the NHL right now, you'll notice a pile of young players leading the way.

Eleven of the top 20 scorers right now are under the age of 25 — that includes six of the top 10 and two of the top three (Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen).

The NHL has been skewing younger for a few years now as the league gets faster and older players have a harder time keeping up with the pace. The first time this started to change in a major way was following the 2004-05 lockout — four of the top 10 scorers at the end of the 2005-06 season were under 25 years of age. That's compared to just two in 2003-04 and 2002-03 and one in 2001-02.

Just two of the top 20 scorers right now are over 30 years old, and Blake Wheeler is the only forward. Compare that to seven of the top 20 being over 30 in 2003-04.

This just hammers home the point even further about how important it is to draft well and go all-in on a winning window before your players hit UFA age. It also shows that it's worth it to pay through the nose to keep



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your high-end young stars, even if it means shelling out \$10 million on their first post-ELC contract.

These are the best, most productive players in the NHL today. So when this summer's big RFA crop starts signing for monster dollars, you'll see why it makes perfect sense.

GOAL TRENDS

Everyone knows goals are up again this season. With an average of 6.10 goals per game, this is the most offence we've seen since 2005-06 when power plays were handed out at the highest rate on record.

But while goal totals are up over last season (5.94), power-play opportunities and success rates have stayed relatively flat, while shot totals have actually declined a little from 63.6 shots per game to 62.4. Meantime, the average save percentage has fallen from .912 last season to .909 this season.

Part of that could be due to the smaller, streamlined goalie equipment, with under-arm shots having a better chance of going in than before. But more than that, while teams are shooting a little less overall, they're actually creating more scoring chances. Perimeter shots are in decline, so it seems teams are passing up those opportunities to try and get in a little closer to the goalie.

SEASON	GOALS/G	PPO/G	PP%	SV%	SA/G
2018-19	6.1	6.14	20.14	0.909	62.4
2017-18	5.94	6.08	20.18	0.912	63.6
2016-17	5.54	5.98	19.1	0.913	60.2
2015-16	5.42	6.22	18.66	0.915	59.2
2014-15	5.46	6.12	18.66	0.915	59.6
2013-14	5.48	6.52	17.89	0.914	60

*per Hockey-Reference

This year's average save percentage is the lowest in a decade, but 10 years ago teams were averaging a combined two extra power plays per game than they're getting right now. Power plays are far more successful now — this year and last are the first two times the average PP was over 20 per cent since the end of the 1980s.

Offences are getting more efficient, which could be due to game planning, more skill throughout the lineup, smaller goalie gear, or all of the above.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL agent Walsh: Escrow is players' primary issue with CBA

Mike Johnston | January 10, 2019, 8:54 PM

The NHL and the NHL Players' Association don't always see eye to eye. The two sides did come to an agreement on multi-year exclusive trading card licenses Thursday with The Upper Deck Company. That's positive. Collective bargaining agreement negotiations on the other hand? They might not go quite as smoothly.

Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos reported this past weekend that the NHL and NHLPA were slated to meet in Las Vegas at some point this week for some CBA talks. Both the league and NHLPA have the option to opt out of the current CBA in September, and famed NHL player agent Allan

Walsh was a guest on Prime Time Sports Thursday to discuss what he perceives to be potentially the biggest stumbling block.

"I think the primary issue for players is escrow and finding a way to ease the burden," Walsh told Bob McCown and John Shannon. "Players right now are seeing 13.5 per cent of their paycheques withheld, and that's off the top. And then players who are also playing in Canadian markets are in the 50 per cent-plus in some places tax bracket, so imagine 63.5 per cent to 68 per cent of your paycheque gone. That's the biggest issue. ...

"I'm not going to get into the weeds on what the players could give up or should give up, but clearly any new deal going forward has to in some way address the escrow burden on players."

Prime Time Sports

Jan. 10: NHL's CBA talks on the horizon

January 10 2019

Audio Player

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Participation in the 2022 Olympics could be another point of contention in negotiations, but Walsh focused on the topic of escrow during the interview.

Walsh continued: "You'd be pretty angry if in addition to the taxes that you pay, they took another 13.5 per cent off the top. So, a player's contract will say a million dollars but it's not really a million dollars. And that is something that the players have been paying into escrow and they've had their paycheques withheld since 2005 and it's something that needs to be addressed.

"There are formulas out there with some degree of flexibility that can, I think, fairly easily alleviate the escrow burden. If players are paying five to six per cent a year in escrow I don't think they're gonna be happy about it but that's a number I think they can live with. When you start talking about 13.5 per cent — and under this CBA it's been as high as 20 per cent — that's something that doesn't work."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman told reporters in Seattle Wednesday that he isn't in favour of having a difficult negotiation and is hopeful the two sides can "extend and renew with minimal fanfare."

Bettman added: "We'll see

1125426 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs set tone early, outlast pesky Devils

Kristen Shilton

The Maple Leafs battled their way back into the win column on Thursday, outlasting the New Jersey Devils for a 4-2 victory. John Tavares lead the way with two goals, while Michael Hutchinson turned aside 27 shots in net to help preserve the win. Toronto moves to 27-13-2 on the season.

TAKEAWAYS

Start hot, and hold on

The Maple Leafs had sputtered their way out of 2018 and into 2019, losing three of four (and being shut out twice) heading into Thursday's game against New Jersey. Toronto set the tone there with a scorching first period, controlling play for most of the frame and jumping out to a 3-0 lead after 20 minutes off goals by Ron Hainsey and a pair from Tavares.



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In the second, Devils netminder Keith Kinkaid made a series of big stops on Nazem Kadri and Tavares, breathing life into New Jersey they used to hit back with goals from Blake Coleman and Brian Boyle just 26 seconds apart. The first goal came via a collective breakdown by the Leafs in their own end, while the second was precipitated by Jake Gardiner's fanned pass at the Devils' blueline, sending play the other way.

Toronto clung to a 3-2 lead heading into the third, momentum firmly in the Devils' clutches. The Leafs did their best to pull it back, outshooting the Devils 5-1 early in the period and generating a couple of quality chances in the bunch. They controlled possession for most of the final 20 minutes at 72 per cent but didn't find the back of the net again until Mitch Marner's empty-netter with 22 seconds left capped off the Leafs' dominant frame.

Mr. 300

Since early November, Tavares hasn't gone more than two games at a time without a goal, emerging as the Leafs' most consistent scoring threat. All that production paid off for Tavares with the 300th goal of his career, scored in the first period of Thursday's win. It was Tavares' 28th marker of the season, his ninth in Toronto's last 11 games, and his third in as many games this season against the Devils.

In reaching the benchmark, Tavares became the first player from the 2009 NHL draft class (of which he was selected first) to score 300 goals, and joins Alex Ovechkin (420) and Steven Stamkos (348) as the only players to perform the feat since the 2009-10 season.

Tavares would score again late in the first, taking a cross-crease pass from Morgan Rielly to bury the puck behind Kinkaid.

Since he entered the league, Tavares has tallied more goals than assists only once, back in the lockout-shortened 2012-13 campaign (28 goals, 19 assists). In this debut season with the Leafs, Tavares is out-pacing himself in goals compared to helpers (29 goals to 21 assists).

Blue collar battle

Zach Hyman was like a caged tiger waiting to get back in the Leafs' lineup after an eight-game absence nursing an ankle injury (incidentally suffered during Toronto's last trip to New Jersey on Dec. 18). So when the winger was cleared to return on Thursday, he didn't waste any time making an impact.

Early in the first period, Tavares and Ben Lovejoy were in the box for roughing and it was Hyman getting in on the cycle and fishing a puck out from behind Kinkaid's net to tee up Hainsey's slapshot from the point that put Toronto up 1-0.

Then Hyman was at work again on the forecheck, winning the puck back for Toronto before Tavares buried the 300th score of his career. Like any returning player, Hyman had his hiccups along the way in the form of errant passes and his legs began to fade in the third. But it's Hyman's skill set – highlighted by tenacity and offensive heaviness – that is unmatched by any teammate, and the Leafs clearly missed having him available. He finished a team-leading plus-four with three shots on goal in 16:44 ice time.

Hangin' on Hutch

Michael Hutchinson made his fourth straight start in net for Toronto on Thursday, as the team waits for Frederik Andersen (groin) and Garret Sparks (concussion) to come back from injury, and it may have been his best performance of the bunch so far. Starting in the first, Hutchinson made a handful of notable saves to keep New Jersey off the board, and continued to calmly handle the Devils' pressure early in the second.

It wasn't until that wayward middle frame and the 26-second span of scoring within it that Hutchinson, like the Leafs, faltered. Giving up those two quick scores that easily could have rattled a player with limited NHL experience in the last two seasons. That wasn't the case with Hutchinson, who gathered himself and remained effective and in control the rest of the way to hold Toronto ahead.

The victory was a good confidence-booster for Hutchinson, who could be called up again for the Leafs on Saturday, in a massive divisional matchup against the Boston Bruins at home. He finished the game with 27 saves and .931 save percentage.

Searching for a spark

Much was made about the Leafs altering their power play units in Wednesday's practice, where Auston Matthews was moved to the second group and Kasperii Kapanen joined the top unit. It was the slightest of adjustments, but Toronto seemingly had to do something to combat its recent 5-for-43 run through 15 games with the extra man.

The alterations did nothing to help production though, not that the Leafs stuck with them for long. On Toronto's lone power play attempt in New Jersey, each group saw about 40 seconds of time, before Toronto went back to its original top unit (Matthews back in place) for the final 30 seconds, and actually managed two shots on goal.

It was a small sample, but that burst at the end may have been enough to convince Toronto it needs to remedy the power play woes with personnel that's worked in the past, as opposed to tinkering for unknown future gains.

Fast fact

The Leafs have completed a season sweep of the Devils, outscoring them 17-5.

Blue and White Trending

Tracking Leafs' trends all season long

The Leafs are 22-2-1 when scoring first this season.

Next game

Toronto will come home to meet the Bruins on Saturday.

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TSN.CA / Agent: Linking CBA talks to World Cup deadline a 'travesty'

Frank Seravalli

The clock is ticking on a World Cup of Hockey in 2020.

The stipulation is simple: No labour peace, no World Cup. Neither the NHL nor the NHL Players' Association wants a repeat of 2004, to hold a World Cup amid an impending work stoppage.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said the deadline to sign off on an agreement for 2020 is the upcoming All-Star weekend in San Jose, Calif., later this month.

With that deadline in mind, TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie reported that the NHL and NHLPA met on Thursday in Las Vegas under the guise of the Consumer Electronics Show trade convention to conduct preliminary labour discussions.

There was enough positive momentum to schedule more talks next week.

Bettman previously linked NHL player participation in the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics to a multi-year extension of the current Collective Bargaining Agreement.



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But one longtime NHL player agent said Thursday that the NHLPA engaging in any sort of CBA extension negotiation linked to a fast-approaching World Cup of Hockey deadline is a massive tactical error.

"It's a travesty," said Anton Thun, who has represented NHL players since 1985. "For an international hockey calendar or a World Cup of Hockey in 2020 to have any impact at all or be the reason for hastening CBA talks does not make any sense.

"The World Cup of Hockey in 2016 did not advance hockey to the world. It generated relative peanuts. It was not international hockey, it did not develop international hockey, it was NHL players wearing their country's – or an artificial entity's – jerseys and it brought in local money from Toronto. That's it."

The 2016 World Cup of Hockey, played at then-called Air Canada Centre in Toronto, was expected to turn a \$65 million profit according to reports. It netted a return of \$44 million, which was evenly split between the NHL and NHLPA.

NHL players who participated in the two-week tournament received \$86,000 (U.S. dollars) pre-tax, while the other 500 union members who did not participate received a cheque for \$10,000 (U.S.) before taxes.

"The top 200 or so players in the world played at an extremely high level for two weeks for pennies on the dollar of what they earn in the NHL, and they shouldered all the risk," Thun said. "NHL teams faced none of the risk at all and split the same amount of profits."

The NHLPA declined comment when presented with Thun's positions on Thursday evening.

Thun, 60, is the co-managing director of Quartexx Management based in Toronto. He is advocating that the NHLPA hold off on negotiation until after this summer's signing period, using up as much of the runway as possible before the NHLPA must decide whether or not to exercise its re-opener clause on Sept. 15, which would take effect on Sept. 15, 2020.

His reason for delaying as long as possible is that young stars like Auston Matthews, Mikko Rantanen, Mitch Marner, Brayden Point, Patrik Laine and Sebastian Aho – to name a few – are about to change the contract landscape as they exit their entry-level deals.

Young players are making an impact like never before on the game. They are also about to earn money on their second contracts that was previously reserved only for generational talents like Sidney Crosby, Alex Ovechkin and Connor McDavid.

"I don't think the NHLPA should be negotiating a CBA at all until the implications of star young players signing is fully understood," Thun said. "There is going to be a seismic shift in the economic structure of the game over the next 12 months. Until the players, as a group, understand that impact, they shouldn't be extending."

Thun also questioned whether or not NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr has received a mandate from the union to conduct preliminary CBA negotiations.

"I do not know, one way or the other, that Don Fehr has received any sort of mandate from the players to even be engaging in CBA extension talks," Thun said. "Until the players themselves have defined specific goals, and each player has insight as to what those goals are, I do not think there should be any CBA negotiations taking place. To the best of my knowledge, and I'd know with the players I currently represent, I don't know that the NHLPA has had those discussions with the entire membership."

Mandate or not, it appears the NHLPA and NHL are already well down the track on preliminary labour discussions.

Bettman alluded to that fact when asked about the CBA on Wednesday during a scheduled stop in Seattle. Under Bettman's watch, the NHL was locked out the NHLPA in 1994, 2004 and 2012, resulting in the cancellation of 2,574 games, including the entire 2004-05 season.

"I'm not in favour of having a difficult negotiation," Bettman told reporters. "I'm hoping we can extend or renew [the CBA] with minimum fanfare, and I'm not a fan of work stoppages, although we do have a system that works and keeps the game healthy and vibrant and entertaining as it is now. We'll see what happens, but I'm not looking for a fight."

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TSN.CA / Rielly all-star campaign reaches final hours

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The team held a limited media availability on Thursday afternoon at the Prudential Center. The New Jersey Devils held a full morning skate ahead of tonight's game.

The voting in the new "Last Men In" initiative to determine the final NHL All-Star Game participants wraps up Thursday night and the candidacy of Morgan Rielly received a big boost over the last 24 hours in the form of several high-profile endorsement videos from teammates, including Nazem Kadri, Auston Matthews, Patrick Marleau and Mitch Marner that were posted on social media.

The initiative was spearheaded by de facto campaign manager Jake Gardiner.

"He's probably one of the most deserving in the league," said Gardiner, "just based off his numbers. So, we filmed some guys last night and had fun with it. Mitch kind of followed me around and we had some good ideas and just kind of built it from there."

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) January 10, 2019

The videos feature heartfelt pleas to the public to elect the 24-year-old to his first all-star game. Rielly leads all NHL defencemen in goals (13) and is second behind San Jose Sharks veteran Brent Burns in points with 45.

"The way he's played this year, it's a shame he hasn't made it or been named yet," said Marleau, who admitted he needed two takes to nail his video. "You guys have seen what he's done on the ice. It's pretty remarkable."

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) January 10, 2019

Rielly is competing with Boston's Patrice Bergeron, Buffalo's Jeff Skinner, Detroit's Dylan Larkin, Florida's Aleksander Barkov, Montreal's Shea Weber, Ottawa's Mark Stone and Tampa Bay's Brayden Point for the final spot out of the Atlantic Division.

The results are expected to be announced on Friday.

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) January 10, 2019

Leafs make hard push to get Rielly into All-Star game

With the NHL All-Star last man in voting closing Thursday night, the Maple Leafs made a hard push on social media to get fans to vote for Morgan Rielly.

Devils defenceman Damon Severson will be well aware of Zach Hyman when the gritty left winger is on the ice tonight. Hyman is returning to Toronto's lineup for the first time since sustaining an ankle injury in a game in New Jersey on Dec. 18.



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"He's a good forechecker so that puts pressure on us," Severson said. "He makes us make decisions a lot quicker than maybe other guys and he finishes us when we go back. He doesn't let us beat him up the ice. As a defenceman, I try and jump in the play as fast as I can, but he'll finish his check and make sure he doesn't get beat up the ice so he's effective in that way, for sure."

'It's good to be back': Hyman returns after eight games

After missing eight games, Zach Hyman will return to the Maple Leafs' lineup Thursday against the Devils. Hyman talks about his excitement level to get back in the lineup and John Tavares explains why he is looking forward to his return because of how much space he creates for him and Mitch Marner.

Out with a lower-body injury since Dec. 23, Devils left winger Taylor Hall will sit out an eighth straight game on Thursday.

"He's definitely moving in the right direction and progressing well," said coach John Hynes. "It's a situation where we had to make sure we knew what was going on with him before you can start to rehab and get him going. There's a chance, for sure, he's back before the all-star break, but I think, right now, we just have to evaluate him every day and see where he's at. It's a situation where once he gets back skating it's not going to be too long before he plays."

Injured goalie Mackenzie Blackwood (lower body) and winger Marcus Johansson (upper body) both skated on Thursday morning, but won't play against the Leafs. Cory Schneider also skated and, per Hynes, took shots for the first time since getting hurt.

Devils' Hall "progressing well" and could return before all-star break

Taylor Hall will miss an eighth straight game on Thursday when New Jersey hosts the Maple Leafs. The reigning Hart Trophy winner has been out since Dec. 23 with a lower-body injury and still hasn't started skating again. But head coach John Hynes remains optimistic the left winger could play before the all-star break. And his return can't come soon enough for the Devils, who have lost three of four to fall 12 points out of a playoff spot.

Despite their struggles this season, the Devils have been very effective in shorthanded situations, killing off 85.3 per cent of power plays to rank second in the NHL in that department. Hynes credits assistant coach Alain Nasreddine, who has worked with the group the last few seasons and added a new tweak this year.

"We've had a little bit more freedom this year just to pressure when we feel the need be," Severson revealed. "We have some guys who can skate on the penalty kill and we've been creating a little bit of offence through the penalty kill, which is key, because when you just dump the puck every time it's easy and power play is able to conserve energy ... when we force them to back check and tire themselves out and they have to go for a change it makes it more difficult."

The Devils have killed 38 of 40 power plays over their last 12 games

Toronto, meanwhile, is struggling to produce much on the power play, going just 1-for-15 over the last seven games. Leafs head coach Mike Babcock shuffled his groups at Wednesday's practice, moving Matthews to the second unit where he's reunited with William Nylander while giving Kasperii Kapanen a chance with the first unit quarterbacked by Marner.

Despite outscoring New Jersey 13-3 in two games this season, Toronto is 0-for-7 on the man advantage against the Devils.

Leafs Ice Chips: Babcock shakes up the power play

The Maple Leafs' power play has gone 5-for-43 in their last 15 games prompting Mike Babcock to shake up the lines. Kristen Shilton has more on the shakeup and why Toronto's head coach believes a little competition never hurt anyone.

Michael Hutchinson makes his fourth straight start for the Leafs while Keith Kinkaid is back in for the Devils after allowing five goals on 33 shots against the Sabres on Tuesday in Buffalo.

"He's got to be a little quieter in the net and that's something we've talked to him about," Hynes said of Kinkaid. "He's a highly athletic goalie, highly competitive so just understand that less is more at times. You have to have that athleticism and the competitiveness in a focused, structured way. The thing we'd like him to do is eliminate the pucks that have gone through him. Some of the goals that have gone in haven't been his fault, but we'd like him to eliminate the leaky goals."

Kinkaid has allowed 11 goals on 53 shots (.792 save percentage) in a pair of losses to the Leafs this season.

Since the start of December, Kinkaid is 4-6-2 with an .875 save percentage.

Projected Leafs lineup for Thursday's game:

Forwards

Hyman-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen

Marleau-Kadri-Nylander

Lindholm-Gauthier-Brown

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Ozhiganov

Goaltenders

Hutchinson

Kaskisuo

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TSN.CA / Canucks face Coyotes in first home game since December

Jeff Paterson

VANCOUVER -- After a four day break, the Vancouver Canucks (20-21-4) return to action Thursday night when they host the visiting Arizona Coyotes (18-21-3).

With Rogers Arena playing host to the World Juniors late last month and into early January, the Canucks have not played a home game since Dec. 22. Tonight's contest is the opener of a six-game homestand that will take the Canucks to the NHL All-Star break.

The Canucks will be without leading scorer Elias Pettersson (knee) for a second straight game after he was injured against the Canadiens in Montreal a week ago. Josh Leivo (back spasms) is also out and will miss a third consecutive contest. The team has been shut out in its past two games and has gone 120 minutes without scoring since Pettersson capped his first NHL hat trick in overtime against the Senators in Ottawa on Jan. 2.



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Since then, the Canucks were unable to score against Carey Price in Montreal last Thursday and Michael Hutchinson in Toronto last Saturday. The Canucks have been held off the scoresheet in three of their last four games and four of the past seven. Sven Baertschi will be the only Canucks player in uniform tonight to score so far in 2019.

Without Pettersson this season, the Canucks are 3-4 and have scored 11 goals in those seven games, and just nine in regulation.

In Toronto, the Canucks trailed 2-0 after two periods before the Maple Leafs scored three third period goals in a 5-0 win. Jacob Markstrom made 29 saves and surrendered more than three goals in a game for the first time since Nov. 29. Markstrom is 9-3 in his past 12 games and will get the start again tonight.

On Tuesday, the Canucks recalled centre Adam Gaudette from Utica of the AHL. He had two goals and an assist in three games in the minors since being re-assigned on Dec. 29. In 31 NHL games this season, he has scored two goals and added four assists. Gaudette will centre a line with Baertschi and Jake Virtanen tonight.

Bo Horvat has gone seven games without a goal, his longest dry spell of the season. Horvat, Virtanen, and Loui Eriksson have all gone seven games without scoring.

The Coyotes are here after a 5-0 home ice win over the New York Rangers on Sunday. Rookie Conor Garland scored twice and Darcy Kuemper made 23 saves for his first shutout of the season. The win snapped a three-game losing skid and was just the Coyotes' second regulation victory in the team's past 16 games (5-10-1).

Clayton Keller scored on Sunday and leads the Coyotes with nine goals and 21 assists for 30 points while captain Oliver Ekman-Larsson is second in scoring with five goals and 18 assists. Former Canuck Brad Richardson leads the Coyotes with 11 goals followed by Christian Fischer with 10. Garland has scored in three goals in his past two games and now has five goals in his first 15 NHL games.

The Coyotes are 29th in the NHL in offence with 106 goals this season and have scored 49 of their goals in 20 road games. Only the two Southern California teams have scored fewer goals than Arizona this season.

While putting pucks in the net has been an issue, keeping them out has not been. Only three teams in the league have surrendered fewer than the 117 goals the Coyotes have allowed this season. They are the league's best penalty-killing team (88.4 percentage) and a serious threat to score while shorthanded. Their 11 goals while down a man are second only to the Calgary Flames' 14. For context, Arizona has allowed 15 power play goals and scored 11 times while shorthanded. And for comparison, the Canucks have given up 33 power play goals so far this season.

Michael Grabner, who is tied for the league-lead with four shorthanded goals, is out of the lineup indefinitely with an eye injury. Recently acquired Nick Schmaltz is done for the season with a lower-body injury after playing just 17 games for Arizona after being dealt from the Chicago Blackhawks. He had five goals and nine assists for the Coyotes with four of his goals coming on the power play. Defenceman Jason Demers suffered a season-ending lower-body injury in November and goalie Antti Raanta's season is over as well due to a lower-body injury.

The Coyotes beat the Canucks 4-1 in Glendale on Oct. 25 with Darren Archibald scoring the lone Vancouver goal. These teams will finish their four-game regular season series with a pair of games in the final week of February.

Possible Canucks lineup

Goldobin-Horvat-Boeser

Baertschi-Gaudette-Virtanen

Roussel-Sutter-Granlund

Eriksson-Beagle-Motte

Edler-Tanev

Hutton-Gudbranson

Pouliot-Stecher

Markstrom

Possible Coyotes lineup

Keller-Stepan-Fischer

Panik-Richardson-Hinostrroza

Galchenyuk-Cousins-Garland

Crouse-Kempe-Dauphin

Ekman-Larsson-Hjalmarsson

Chychrun-Lyubushkin

Oesterle-Goligoski

Kuemper

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TSN.CA / Proposed class-action concussion lawsuit filed against WHL, CHL, Hockey Canada

Rick Westhead

A former Western Hockey League player has filed a proposed class-action lawsuit against the WHL, Canadian Hockey League and Hockey Canada, alleging that he was often not given medical attention after his 72 fights in the WHL and that he now is showing symptoms of the brain-withering disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE.

James Johnathon McEwan made his allegations in a 24-page notice of claim filed on Wednesday in B.C. Superior Court. His allegations haven't been proven and the defendants haven't filed their responses to the claim.

McEwan has brought forward the proposed class-action on behalf of any and all former CHL players who didn't advance to play in the National Hockey League and suffered injury as a result of concussive and subconcussive impacts.

McEwan, 31, is seeking damages for personal and physical injury, psychological injuries, special damages for out-of-pocket medical expenses and loss of past and future income. The Ottawa Citizen first reported on the lawsuit.

WHL spokesman Taylor Rocca, Hockey Canada spokesman Mark Halliday and CHL president David Branch didn't respond to an email seeking comment.

McEwan, a left wing, played for four seasons in the WHL from 2004 to 2008.

He joined the Seattle Thunderbirds in 2004 at the age of 17 and was involved in 18 fights throughout the season, fights that, according to his claim, were "not just condoned and tolerated by the coaches and managers of the teams he had played for, but... encouraged, praised and rewarded."



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The fights led to "swelling, black eyes, loss of consciousness and temporary confusion. After each fight, Mr. McEwan would continue to play. He was not given medical attention."

The following season, McEwan was involved in 19 fights as a member of the Thunderbirds. He then served as an assistant captain for the Kelowna Rockets during the 2006-07 season.

"Mr. McEwan was involved in 25 fights throughout the season and was 'glorified' on numerous social media outlets as holding the best fight with the most punches landed, and was voted the third most entertaining player," his claim says. "The side effect of his continuous head trauma began to have a noticeable impact in his day-to-day life. He was beginning to experience severe anxiety, mood swings, personality changes and angry outbursts. Mr. McEwan began to consume copious amounts of alcohol in an effort to cope with the physical pain and mental distress he was regularly experiencing."

As a 20-year-old, McEwan was Kelowna's captain in the 2007-08 season, when he had 11 fights. His claim says the bouts in his final WHL season led to swelling and pressure in his head and a documented concussion, which resulted in a two-week medical leave from the team.

"Mr. McEwan began experiencing severe depression, anxiety, mood swings, memory loss, confusion, angry outbursts, and suicidal thoughts," his claim says. The WHL, CHL and Hockey Canada "should have known, or ought to have known, that multiple sub concussive and concussive blows to the head would lead to long term injury including but not limited to memory loss, dementia, depression, and CTE and its related symptoms."

McEwan played parts of five seasons in the ECHL after his junior career. His final season was 2014-15, when he appeared in 21 games with the Duluth, Ga.-based Gwinnett Gladiators.

In the statement of claim, McEwan's lawyer, Robyn Wishart, wrote that scientific evidence for decades has linked brain trauma to long-term neurological problems and that during practices and games, a CHL player can sustain close to 1,000 or more hits to the head in one season without any documented concussions.

"Such repeated blows result in permanently impaired brain function," the claim says, adding that neuropathologist Dr. Ann McKee, a researcher with Boston University, has diagnosed CTE in the brains of four former junior hockey players who never advanced to the NHL. All four of those players committed suicide before the age of 30.

McEwan's claim comes months after the NHL settled major concussion-related litigation of its own.

In August, a U.S. judge ruled that a proposed lawsuit against the NHL filed in Minnesota would not proceed as a class action largely because medical monitoring laws were too different between various U.S. states and Canadian provinces for players to form a common class of plaintiffs.

After that ruling, the NHL offered a settlement to some 300 former players. They face a Jan. 20 deadline to accept the settlement or pursue their own individual lawsuits against the NHL.

The CHL is also fighting class-action lawsuits in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec related to working conditions for players. In each of those cases, former players have alleged that for-profit teams should be paying players at least minimum wage.

The leagues have countered that if they have to pay players, some teams will go out of business. They also contend that most players who don't go on to play pro hockey are well looked after with education scholarships.

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TSN.CA / Pirri continues to prove he can produce offensively

Travis Yost

Fun with small samples: Brandon Pirri is currently leading the NHL in goals per 60 minutes played at 3.8, nearly a full goal ahead of Toronto's Auston Matthews. Pirri is also the league leader in points per 60 minutes played at 5.4, just a hair above Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov.

Of course, Pirri has only played eight games this season. But his story is a remarkable one. In those eight games, he has seven goals and three assists, and is seemingly in on every dangerous Vegas scoring chance. Even a brief return to AHL Chicago – merely a paper transaction to protect the rest of the Vegas roster – didn't slow him down as his return to NHL action ended with yet another goal against the New York Rangers.

Pirri has never had trouble scoring goals. His NHL career, now spanning 236 games with five different teams, has seen him average 23 goals and 40 points per 82 games. Those seem like reasonably impressive numbers – certainly the type of production that can see a player carve out a comfortable middle-six role for years.

But Pirri has always been mired in a fight for a roster spot. An ugly 2016-17 season with the Rangers probably didn't help. It was the primary driver of him spending nearly two seasons with Vegas' AHL affiliate. But it wasn't just Vegas who may have underestimated his value. Every one of his contracts has effectively been signed at the league minimum, despite consistent offensive production.

Every team in the league had a shot at him in 2014-15 (he would sign a two-year deal at the league minimum with the Florida Panthers), and again in 2016-17 (he would sign a one-year deal with the Rangers at close to league minimum), and again in 2017-18 (again, a one-year deal with the Golden Knights at close to league minimum). Vegas didn't win Pirri via the expansion draft, but rather routine free agency!

I think most franchises recognize Pirri as an offensive threat. The production has been there for some time and we know scoring rates tend to drive player values and contracts. But the common refrain with Pirri – stop me if you have heard this one before – is that his "compete level" and "commitment to defensive play" aren't always up to par. At least said one NHL scout.

I'm not here to defend Pirri as a defensive specialist, but I do think it's worth fact-checking this type of claim. After all, if Pirri was a defensive liability, we should expect to see his shot and goal rates stand as underwhelming relative to his individual offensive production.

But that doesn't hold up well to test. Consider Pirri's five 'regular' NHL seasons, really since the beginning of the 2013-14 calendar year, by three key performance measures (via NST):

So Pirri's teams are roughly equal from a scoring chance perspective with Pirri on the ice versus off of the ice, marginally better from a shot advantage, and definitively better from a goal advantage.

I find the goal measure to be particularly compelling. His teams get about 54 per cent of the goals with him on the ice, which suggests one of two things: we are still understating his offensive impact or we are definitively overstating the negative impact he purportedly carries on the defensive side of the game. Perhaps both are true.

Regardless, the overarching point here is that Pirri's teams have always been competitive with him on the ice. They certainly look better when he's scoring – Vegas is something of a buzz saw right now any time he's taking a shift. When he's not scoring, performance drops. But that wouldn't make Pirri any different from any other forward playing in the NHL right now.



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At the end of the day, Pirri is adding goals and wins to his team. Some may not like the way he creates those goals and wins, but that's a debate for another day.

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TSN.CA / Avs' frustrations boil over with MacKinnon and Bednar blow-up

Frank Seravalli

The cauldron in Colorado finally bubbled over after a month of pent-up frustration.

Cameras captured Avalanche star Nathan MacKinnon and coach Jared Bednar in a heated exchange on the bench on Wednesday night in Calgary in the dying seconds of Colorado's sixth regulation loss (1-6-2) in their last nine games.

MacKinnon threw a Gatorade bottle in disgust and after trading words with Bednar, he was so fired up that a calming arm from captain Gabriel Landeskog caused him to fall backwards on the bench.

Neither Bednar nor MacKinnon was asked about the exchange by reporters postgame.

The reigning Hart Trophy runner-up seemed to mouth something to Bednar the effect of: "Do your job." Bednar appeared to keep his calm.

Regardless of what was said, Wednesday night's blow-up was the first public glimpse into just how ugly it's been for the Avalanche, who have sunk like a stone in the standings in recent weeks.

The Avs began the season by bolting to the top of the standings. They held the top spot in the Western Conference (17-7-5) into Dec. 7.

The wheels have somehow fallen off since.

Colorado is just 3-9-3 over the last calendar month. The team with the third-most goals in the West has been outscored by 14 in this stretch. They now hold just a two-point edge on the final playoff spot - and they'd be in much worse shape had Anaheim not concurrently lost nine straight.

It's easy to understand MacKinnon's frustration. It's hard to blame 'Mac' or Mikko, the NHL's best one-two punch this season.

MacKinnon and Rantanen have continued to carry the Avalanche, scoring at the same ridiculous pace that they started the season. With 68 points, Rantanen is three off Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov for the league lead. MacKinnon is right behind him, tied for third with Calgary's Hart Trophy candidate Johnny Gaudreau with 66 points.

They were utterly dominant on Wednesday at the Saddledome. MacKinnon was on the ice for all three goals the Avalanche scored against Calgary. Rantanen netted a goal and assist, MacKinnon scored the Avs' first goal.

They've been dominant all season. There have been just three games in the 44 played that the Landeskog-MacKinnon-Rantanen line has not tallied at least one goal - and only one of those games has been during this 15-game slide.

No, the culprit has been Colorado's goaltending, not even the obvious lack of depth.

The Avalanche outshot the division-leading Jets (41-21) and Flames (35-16) on back-to-back nights on the road and lost by a combined five goals.

Semyon Varlamov has dropped the ball and Philipp Grubauer has been equally bad in net. The Avalanche have just an .865 save percentage over the last calendar month. Varlamov started the season with a .930 save percentage in his first 18 appearances; he has an .849 mark since then. Grubauer hasn't been much better at .876.

Up front, MacKinnon's line is light years ahead of the rest of the team. Only two other Avalanche forwards have cracked the 20-point plateau this season in Carl Soderberg and Alex Kerfoot.

As the third-youngest coach managing the NHL's youngest roster, Bednar has seemingly made peace with the fact that the Avs are a one-line show.

Bednar stressed in late October that he treated MacKinnon's line differently than the rest, trying to engage them in the process. He said he facilitates regular "complete line meetings with them instead of the full team."

"Those guys have a lot of input," Bednar said on Oct. 23. "We get them sitting down as a line and communicating things that they might not have on their own. We want to try and spur that conversation as much as possible, because they're playing 21 to 22 minutes a night - a third of the game - and we want to make sure they're communicating before, during and after the game."

Wednesday may have been a blip on the radar, a momentary outburst in a long season, a scene that would not have gone noticed if it occurred in the privacy of the dressing room. It's out there now. The bell can't be unring. The question will be in how the Avalanche respond.

One month ago, the conversation surrounding Colorado was whether GM Joe Sakic could find the complementary pieces to strengthen the team around that star-studded line. The thought was maybe one or two key additions might be enough to turn the Avalanche into a true Stanley Cup contender.

One month later, the Avalanche have leveled out in a way that's made them appear completely average, a team that's suddenly just clinging to their playoff lives.

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USA TODAY / Blue Jackets take goalie Sergei Bobrovsky off roster for failure to meet 'expectations and values'

Kevin Allen, Jan. 10, 2019

The Columbus Blue Jackets announced goalie Sergei Bobrovsky will not be on the roster for tonight's game against the Nashville Predators.

General manager Jarmo Kekalainen did not call it a suspension, but the decision clearly is punitive.

"There are certain expectations and values that we have established for our players that define our culture," Kekalainen said. "An incident occurred in which Sergei failed to meet those expectations and values, so we made the decision that he would not be with the team for tonight's game. This is an internal matter and we will have no further comment at this time."

With a 2.87 goals-against average and .906 save percentage, Blue Jackets goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky isn't having his best season.

Bobrovsky is in the last season of his contract with the Blue Jackets, and the two sides are not close to negotiating an extension.



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With the Feb. 25 trade deadline approaching, the Blue Jackets, in a scrap to hang onto their playoff spot, are faced with the decision of whether to trade Bobrovsky for future assets or keep him for the playoff run. They have a similar decision with dynamic scorer Artemi Panarin.

Can they afford to get nothing in return if those players leave the team this summer? Or, is it more important for the franchise to make a playoff run?

With a 2.87 goals-against average and .906 save percentage, Bobrovsky isn't having his best season, but his numbers are better than back-up goalie Joonas Korpisalo's statistics (3.29, .889).

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