



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • January 16, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes' lose 16th straight game to Rangers at Madison Square Garden

By Chip Alexander

New York Rangers right wing Pavel Buchnevich, left, scores a goal past Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Curtis McElhinney (35) during the second period of an NHL hockey game Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2019, at Madison Square Garden in New York. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer) Mary Altaffer AP

The Carolina Hurricanes will win again one day at Madison Square Garden, but that day was not Tuesday.

The Canes, who were winless against the New York Rangers in their last 15 games at the Garden, made it 16 straight with 6-2 loss.

Generally lifeless much of the game, the Canes got two goals from rookie forward Saku Maenalanen and some energized play from his line, which had Victor Rask at center and winger Warren Foegele. That's the Canes' fourth line. The top three lines had little or no impact.

"I don't think we had enough guys emotionally invested," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It was a little flat. We needed more from some guys and just didn't have it tonight. We got off to a bad start and never got going, it felt like."

The Rangers (19-20-7) again had goalie Henrik Lundqvist in net. And Lundqvist did what he so often does: beat the Canes, winning for the 20th time in his last 23 games against Carolina.

The Canes' top line, with center Sebastian Aho and wingers Teuvo Teravainen and Micheal Ferland, had been on a point-producing tear the past two games in wins over Buffalo and Nashville. But the Rangers' top line, centered by Mika Zibanejad, was dominant this night and Aho's line quiet.

Zibanejad had two goals and two assists, and Tony DeAngelo and Pavel Buchnevich each scored twice as the Rangers rebounded from a miserable 7-5 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets that had New York coach David Quinn challenging his team.

The Rangers torched the Canes' penalty killers, scoring on all three power plays. That made for a long night for goalie

Curtis McElhinney, who also had his struggles and had his personal four-game win streak end.

"Special teams killed us," Brind'Amour said.

On a first-period power play, the Canes briefly had a 5-on-2 advantage heading up the ice after two Rangers collided and fell in the Carolina zone. But Lucas Wallmark's pass ended up in the skates of Andrei Svechnikov and the Rangers soon cleared the puck.

So it went for the Canes (22-19-5), who had won seven of their past eight games to make a move in the Eastern Conference standings. Carolina has not beaten the Rangers at the Garden since October 2010.]

"We just weren't very sharp or mentally engaged," defenseman Justin Faulk said.

After playing three games in four days, beating the Predators 6-3 on Sunday, the Canes had a practice Monday in Raleigh before the team flight to New York and skipped the morning skate Tuesday in New York.

Sluggish from the opening faceoff the Canes allowed a goal 1:16 into the game as DeAngelo zipped one through traffic. That set the tone.

Maenalanen tied the score with his first goal, swiping the puck in the New York zone and quickly whipping a shot past Lundqvist, but Zibanejad scored two in the period -- the first on a power play -- as the Rangers led 3-1.

Buchnevich's two goals, both on power plays, pushed the lead to 5-1 in the third before Maenalanen scored again, redirecting a Rask shot. It was Maenalanen's fourth goal, all in the past five games.

Canes captain Justin Williams, who had goals in five straight games and points in seven straight, had both streaks end.

"A few guys had good games," Brind'Amour said.

"Unfortunately it was a wasted effort because we didn't have enough guys going. We just didn't have it. It's frustrating this time of year when you need the points, but it's a long year and we have to regroup."



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THE ATHLETIC

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

By Craig Custance

There are a few things you could historically count on from a Team Finland entry in a major international hockey tournament. One, they'd advance further than you expected. Almost always. Two, they'd be as defensively sound a group as any team in the tournament. Three, their goaltending group would be equally as great.

But firepower? That was usually reserved for other countries.

Now, as we finish up our projections of the 2020 World Cup of Hockey (a tournament that is surprisingly still very much an option, according to optimistic CBA negotiation reports from colleague Pierre LeBrun), we see just how much Finland has evolved.

There isn't just firepower. There's firepower to spare. Two lines worth. The Finland teams that have won multiple golds in world junior championships are maturing into a world power.

"This 2020 World Cup is going to be a lot of fun for us," said Helsinki native and former NHL forward Sean Bergenheim, who assisted in doing some Finland roster assessment for The Athletic. "The success we've had in the World Junior Championships the last years, I think that's going to be the first big tournament when you see these young players now being the stars of our men's national team."

You've got the game-changing goal scorer in Patrik Laine. The 200-foot center in Aleksander Barkov. The straw that stirs the drink in Sebastian Aho. And the No. 1 defenseman in Miro Heiskanen that the country really hasn't had in the past. The lineup is deep, diverse and certainly capable of winning it all.

"For Finland to have success, I would still say the team and the identity is what has made Finland strong always – teamwork," Bergenheim said. "I don't think they're going to change the system to a fully offensive system. I think the way the national team has played hockey, combined with those players and that firepower is going to be a pretty good chance for success."

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

Forwards

Finland has had offensive stars in the past but nothing quite like the depth of this forward group.

"Right now, it looks like we're going to have the best offensive lineup we've ever had," Bergenheim said. "You see what (Mikko) Rantanen has done – it's not just one line, with a superstar, it's two lines that can compete with any – with Canada – or any country's top two lines. We haven't had that before."

I preferred to keep Carolina teammates Aho and Teuvo Teravainen together and put Mikael Granlund in the top six because of his experience, leaving Kasper Kapanen's offense spread out to the third line.

Bergenheim signed off on the top six but said he might build out the fourth line a little differently.

"I would maybe add somebody like Valter Filppula or Leo Komarov," Bergenheim said. "They would be more useful there than Kotkaniemi or Lehtonen. It's hard to say. I would still have a few of the older guys there too. The team is quite young, those (veteran) guys could have a shutdown role for Finland."

There's a debate to be had as to whether or not to include Kaapo Kakko. He's a projected top two pick in June's draft and has impressed Bergenheim with his play in the Finnish league.

"He's really good," Bergenheim said. "Two years from now, I think it's possible he's in there. In a way, I hope he's going to be on that team and taking those steps and getting the experience."

Defensemen

By the time this tournament rolls around, Miro Heiskanen will have cemented himself as a bonafide No. 1 defenseman. This country has had high-end veterans like Teppo Numminen and Kimmo Timonen but this kid has the chance to be something really special for Finland.

"He's awesome," Bergenheim said. "It's good for Finland. We haven't really had a stud D-man in many years. He's the one."

After that, it gets a little thin compared to other powers. That's not to say the defense is a weakness for Finland, these are all NHL defensemen listed above, but when you compare it to, say, Sweden, there's a definite advantage for the Swedes.

There will be a lot on Heiskanen's shoulders in this tournament, although he appears capable of handling it.

"If he can take steps, he'll be a superstar," Bergenheim said.

Goalies

Pekka Rinne is coming off a Vezina trophy season and should be locked in as the No. 1 option at this point for Finland but he's also 36 years old right now and by the time this tournament rolls around will be pushed for playing time in Nashville even more by fellow Finn Juuse Saros.

But out of respect for Rinne, he's the No. 1.

"I think he is right now," agreed Bergenheim. "I would definitely put him there."

Tuukka Rask is the bigger name but Bergenheim also likes Antti Raanta as another option in goal for Finland. Raanta



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has had trouble staying healthy but has a career .920 save percentage.

“Raanta has played pretty good too and he’s younger,” Bergenheim said. “He can be there in two years, it’s right to have him in there.”

And now, a couple more Team Finland projections from my colleagues at The Athletic:



Gold: The beat (and beating) goes on at MSG

By Adam Gold radio host 99.9 the Fan

Make that 16 in a row.

That the Carolina Hurricanes were beaten, 6-2, by the New York Rangers Tuesday night should not be a surprise to anyone. After all, the game was at Madison Square Garden where the Canes have not won in 3,000 days. What’s more, it seems that Carolina could play the Rangers anywhere in New York, or Raleigh, or Bangkok, or on the dark side of the moon and the result would likely be the same.

Overall, since the last Hurricanes win in midtown Manhattan, the Rangers are 20-6-7 against Carolina which includes the utter domination of 13-0-3 at the World’s Most Famous Arena. What’s worse, though, about this 8-year run of incompetence in Gotham is that so many of the games have been virtually non-competitive.

Tuesday night’s one-sided affair was just the latest in a long line of curb stompings at the hands of Henrik Lundqvist and the Rangers. It was the 7th game of the 16 in which Carolina was beaten by at least three goals. And, it brings the aggregate score over this agonizingly long losing streak to 60-22.

22 goals in 16 games? Seriously?

Certainly, Henrik Lundqvist is part of that miserable equation. After all, the future Hall of Fame goaltender IS 28-11-1 with a .930 SV% in his career against Carolina — wait, make that 29-11-1 after his latest stroll down Broadway against the Canes. But, part of it is the responsibility of the Hurricanes and that was never more evident than Tuesday.

Carolina played the game as though winning 7 of 8 games entitles you to take a night off. As alternate captain Justin

Faulk said after the game, “we weren’t as emotionally invested as we needed to be.”

Excuse me?

Here’s the skinny; do you know what winning 7 of 8 got Carolina?

Nothing. Not a dadgum thing. Sure, it brought Carolina closer to relevance. It certainly raised the spirits of fans, even made the hockey media feel like their incredulous, analytical adoration for the Canes was justified. Even as of Tuesday morning, in spite of being the equivalent of 2 1/2 games OUT of playoff position, The Athletic’s projections gave Carolina a 57% chance of finishing inside the top eight.

Huh?

14 points in their last 16 games is adorable, but when you start that stretch UNDER .500, in such a massive hole, you have to do a lot of digging just to see the sun. The Canes haven’t accomplished a thing. They’re still a losing team since their 4-0-1 start to the season. And, they still can’t beat the Rangers in New York.

Oh, and the teams the Hurricanes are chasing for playoff spots, well, they both won on Tuesday night. So....

The Canes are now eight points behind Montreal and 7 behind the Islanders. In other words, not a whole lot closer to the Wild Card line than they were prior to this 7-2-0 stretch. It will probably take another 7 wins in 8 games stretch to gain any significant ground, which is why what happened in New York is so disappointing. “We don’t have the luxury of having those games”, said captain Justin Williams.

And yet, the Canes did, again, at Madison Square Garden.



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Recap: Canes Fall to Rangers

Maenalanen scores two goals in 6-2 loss

by Michael Smith

NEW YORK - Saku Maenalanen scored two goals in the first multi-goal game of his young career, but the Carolina Hurricanes fell, 6-2, to the New York Rangers.

Mika Zibanejad, Pavel Buchnevich and Tony DeAngelo each netted a pair of goals for the Rangers.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game at The World's Most Famous Arena.

One

It sure feels as though the curse is real at Madison Square Garden.

The Hurricanes are now winless in 16 straight games (0-13-3) at the Garden. Their last victory came on Oct. 29, 2010, and they've been outscored 60-22 since.

It's a strange, quirky streak because so many iterations of these two teams have faced each other since that last W in New York. In fact, no one who dressed in that 4-3 victory more than eight years ago is even still on the team today.

But, irrelevant to each next game as it may be, the streak lives on. The Hurricanes' next chance to snap it will be in less than a month on Friday, Feb. 8.

Streak aside, let's take a step back from the immediacy of the result of this game and look at it through the lens of this recent stretch.

The Canes have still won seven of their last nine games, and this clunker of a 60-minute segment followed large chunks of solid, 60-minute segments.

"We weren't ready. We weren't the better team," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's something that's frustrating this time of year when we need the points, but it's a long year. We've got to regroup and put it behind us."

Two

This one seemed ill-fated from the start.

Just 76 seconds into the game, Tony DeAngelo scored on a point shot that beat Curtis McElhinney through traffic.

"We just got off to a bad start," Brind'Amour said. "We never got going, it felt like."

Prior to the game, Brind'Amour cautioned against a fast start from the Rangers, who took a verbal lashing from their head coach following a 7-5 loss in Columbus on Sunday.

"I thought it was more that we were not as emotionally invested as we needed to be," Brind'Amour said. "We need 20 guys. We've been saying that all year. If we don't have everybody dialed in, it's going to look like that. We just didn't have everyone going."

"Opportunities are there for us every night," Justin Williams said. "To not come through with the two points that we wanted and came here to get is disappointing and stings. We don't have the luxury of having those games, certainly with where we're at."

Three

There was a moment, though, that it seemed the Canes might overcome the Rangers' early lead.

Maenalanen evened the score at one at the 9:24 mark of the first. Rangers defenseman Brett Howden couldn't handle a pass and coughed it up right in the slot, where Maenalanen hopped on the loose puck and buried his shot for his second goal in as many games.

"He's been solid since he's been called up," Brind'Amour said. "He's one of those guys you notice every shift he's out there he's making things happen."

That optimism for the Canes, though, was short-lived. Mika Zibanejad scored twice in a span of 1:41 to give the Rangers a 3-1 lead that they carried into the first intermission.

"Little breakdowns ended up in our net. We weren't as sharp as we needed to be early. Just a little bit off," Williams said. "We got down early and couldn't close the gap quick enough."

"We weren't as emotionally invested as we needed to be," Justin Faulk said. "They capitalized on a few of our mistakes and got a couple bounces, but we just didn't have the jam needed for two points tonight."

Four

Maenalanen netted his second goal of the night in the third period, as he tipped in a shot from high in the zone from Victor Rask.

"He's big, he's strong, he makes smart plays with the puck, he's got good hands. He's got a lot of tools," Williams said. "He's been great for us. He's really given a spark to that line, creating opportunities and creating goals."

Faulk recorded the secondary assist on that goal, the 240th point of his career, which ties Dave Babych for the most points by a defenseman in franchise history.

Five



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The Hurricanes' penalty kill had a night to forget, as it surrendered three goals on three power-play opportunities for the Rangers.

"I think we were pretty sloppy," Faulk said. "We just weren't very sharp, and that goes with being mentally engaged and aware of what's happening out there. They took advantage."

"I don't think we had enough guys emotionally invested. It was a little flat. The special teams just killed us," Brind'Amour

said. "Once we got behind the eight ball, it was tough to get rolling. We needed a little more from some guys who just didn't have it tonight."

Up Next

The Hurricanes host the Ottawa Senators on Friday night before departing for a three-game trek through Western Canada prior to All-Star Weekend.



Zibanejad scores four points in Rangers win against Hurricanes

New York defeats Carolina for 16th straight time at Madison Square Garden

by Dan Rosen

NEW YORK -- Mika Zibanejad had two goals and two assists, and the New York Rangers extended their home winning streak against the Carolina Hurricanes to 16 games with a 6-2 victory at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday.

New York has won every home game against Carolina since Jan. 5, 2011. It's the longest home winning streak for the Rangers against any opponent.

Henrik Lundqvist made 34 saves for his first win in four games this month for the Rangers (19-20-7), who went 3-for-3 on the power play and 3-for-3 on the penalty kill.

The Rangers lost six of their previous seven games, including 7-5 at the Columbus Blue Jackets on Sunday, when coach David Quinn was critical of their effort and battle level.

"We had played three good games before the debacle in Columbus and I think we built off that," Quinn said. "We moved past what happened in Columbus. The guys took ownership of it and righted a wrong."

Saku Maenalanen had his first two-goal game in the NHL, and Curtis McElhinney made 22 saves for Carolina (22-19-5), which won its previous two games and seven of eight since Dec. 31.

"I don't think we had enough guys emotionally invested," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It was a little flat and the special teams just killed us. Once we got behind the eight ball it was tough to get rolling. We need a little more from some guys and we just didn't have it tonight."

Pavel Buchnevich and Tony DeAngelo each scored two goals, Mats Zuccarello had three assists and Chris Kreider and Boo Nieves each had two assists for New York.

DeAngelo gave the Rangers a 1-0 lead 76 seconds into the first period when he scored on a wrist shot through traffic. Maenalanen tied it 1-1 at 9:24, capitalizing on a Rangers defensive zone turnover for an unassisted goal.

The Rangers had a 3-1 lead less than five minutes later on back-to-back goals from Zibanejad, who had his third four-point game of the season

He made it 2-1 with a power-play goal on a one-timer from the slot off a pass from Kreider at 12:41, and 3-1 1:41 later off another one-timer from the slot, this time at even-strength off a pass from Zuccarello.

Buchnevich extended the lead to 4-1 with a power-play goal at 3:41 of the second period and Lundqvist kept it that way with a difficult right-pad save while dropping his stick on Warren Foegele with 2:45 remaining in the period.

"It felt good to keep it 4-1 going into the third, not giving them any confidence or energy," Lundqvist said.

Buchnevich extended the lead to 5-1 with another power-play goal at 4:19 of the third.

Maenalanen, playing his ninth NHL game, cut it to 5-2 at 11:51 but DeAngelo scored 1:04 later to make it 6-2.

"Opportunities are there for us every night and to not come through with the two points that we wanted, that we came here to get, yeah, it's disappointing, it stinks," Carolina captain Justin Williams said. "We don't have the luxury of having those games certainly with where we're at."

They said it

"We've been saying it all year, if we don't have everybody dialed in it's going to look like that. We just didn't have



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everyone going. It's unfortunate this time of year but you're going to have those here and there. It's a long year and we just gotta regroup now and put this one behind us." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

"If you have to point at one thing tonight that really helped, special teams. Unbelievable. Power play obviously, but also the penalty kill. I can't tell you how much that helps the team, how much confidence that gives the group when you're able to cash in on their penalties and also make sure you don't give up a goal on the PK." -- Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist

Need to know

The Rangers had three players score at least two goals in a game for the first time since Dec. 22, 1996, when Mark Messier, Alexei Kovalev and Niklas Sundstrom did it against the Florida Panthers. ... Rangers defenseman Ryan Lindgren played 15:22 and had one shot on goal, three hits

and three blocked shots in his NHL debut. The 20-year-old was recalled from Hartford of the American Hockey League on Monday. ... Lundqvist appeared in his 838th NHL game, passing Hall of Famer Jacques Plante for 12th place on the League's all-time games played list among goalies. ... Zibanejad had two goals and two assists in a 5-2 win against the Florida Panthers on Oct. 23, and four assists in a 4-3 win at the Nashville Predators on Dec. 29. ... DeAngelo played his 100th NHL game. ... Williams had his five-game goal streak and seven-game point streak end. ... Justin Faulk tied Dave Babych for the most points by a defenseman in Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers history with 240. ... Carolina forward Victor Rask had his 100th NHL assist. ... Carolina is 0-13-3 in its losing streak at New York.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Ottawa Senators on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET; FS-CR, RDS2, TSN5, NHL.TV)

Rangers: Host the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, MSG, NBCSCH, NHL.TV)



Zibanejad, Lundqvist lead Rangers to 6-2 win over Hurricanes

By SCOTT CHARLES

NEW YORK (AP) — With players up and down the lineup producing multiple points, the New York Rangers broke through for a confidence-building victory they desperately needed.

Mika Zibanejad had two goals and two assists to help the Rangers beat the Carolina Hurricanes 6-2 on Tuesday night.

Pavel Buchnevich and Tony DeAngelo also scored twice for New York. Mats Zuccarello had three assists and Chris Kreider added two as the Rangers won for only the second time in eight games.

Henrik Lundqvist made 34 saves for his 444th win, one behind Terry Sawchuk for sixth place on the NHL's career list.

"I think we played faster, played simpler," Zibanejad said after tying his career high with four points. "We scored on the power play, took advantage of the chances we had. It was a good response from the guys."

Saku Maenalanen had two goals and Curtis McElhinney stopped 22 shots but the Hurricanes lost for just the second time since the new year.

Zibanejad scored his first goal after McElhinney misread a long carom off the end boards. Rangers defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk sent the puck deep from just inside the red line and Kreider controlled it a few feet in front of the goalie. McElhinney misjudged the bounce and came out too far, allowing Zibanejad an easy tap-in opportunity at 12:41 of the first period.

"I don't think we had enough guys emotionally invested," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Special teams killed us. We needed a little more from some guys. Just didn't have it tonight."

Zibanejad scored again when Zuccarello delivered a backhand pass from below the goal line at 14:22 to give New York a 3-1 lead. Kreider got his second assist of the game on the play.

Zuccarello has six points in the past three games.

"You just see a little bit more of a bounce in his step. His personality is back. He is playing with a lot of passion and enthusiasm," Rangers coach David Quinn said. "Best hockey he's played since the season started, for sure."

DeAngelo, skating in his 100th NHL game, opened the scoring when a fluttering wrist shot sailed past McElhinney at 1:16 of the first. Jimmy Vesey and Boo Nieves assisted.

"The big thing when you have a good start and cash in a couple of goals is not to have a letdown," Lundqvist said. "We continued to push hard and keep our focus. It's a step for us in becoming a better team."

Carolina knotted the score at 9:24 when Maenalanen benefited from Brett Howden's turnover. The rookie center struggled to control a pass in his own end and Maenalanen took advantage, scoring his third career goal. Howden skated on the fourth line for the second consecutive game after spending a majority of the season on one of New York's top three offensive trios.



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Maenalanen also redirected Victor Rask's wrist shot at 11:51 of the third period. Justin Faulk assisted on the play.

Buchnevich scored the first of two power-play goals at 3:41 of the second when Zibanejad found the Russian all alone at the top of the crease. Zuccarello also had an assist.

Buchnevich added his second of the game and ninth this season early in the third period. Zibanejad and Zuccarello assisted on the goal.

DeAngelo scored his fourth of the season at 12:55 of the third to extend New York's lead to 6-2. Nieves and Vladislav Namestnikov helped set up the goal.

"We have to keep building off this," Rangers defenseman Brady Skjei said. "One game is not going to change the season."

NOTES: Rangers defenseman Ryan Lindgren made his NHL debut. The 20-year-old Minnesota native was acquired at the trade deadline last season from the Boston Bruins as part of a package for recently retired Rick Nash. ... Zuccarello passed Anders Hedberg for the most assists by a Rangers player born and trained outside North America. ... Kevin Hayes missed his seventh straight game with an upper-body injury but skated in a non-contact jersey at the most recent practice. ... Rangers defenseman Neal Pionk missed the game due to a lingering lower-body injury. ... New York scratched defenseman Brendan Smith. Carolina scratched forward Clark Bishop.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host the Ottawa Senators on Friday.

Rangers: Host the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday.



NHL Power Rankings: What Does the Coach Say? Edition

Luke Fox

He is your wise teacher, your greatest supporter, and your harshest critic.

He is your boss, and his words serve as a job review — daily, often publicly.

He is your head coach, for now.

Yes, with GMs (usually) speaking calmly and with less frequency, and with players embracing the safety of the cliché, there are few better ways to gauge the internal temperature of a hockey team.

Without further ado, we present our NHL Power Rankings: What Does the Coach Say? Edition.

As always, the clubs are listed in order of which ones we believe are the most dangerous today.

For the write-ups, we've handpicked a recent quote from all 31 bench bosses (thank you, beat reporters everywhere!) that speaks to each team's current mood.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning

"The Stamkoses, Callahans, the McDonaghs, the Girardis and Stralmans... you want to put them in positions to have success in those roles, but they have to take pride in that. That's what the team is doing, taking pride in that." —Jon Cooper on the depth of Lightning leadership.

2. Calgary Flames

"I think it'll be good to get the time off for Gio." —Bill Peters on Norris candidate Mark Giordano's all-star game snub.

3. San Jose Sharks

"He's just comfortable. It was a big transition off the ice personally and coming into a new dressing room, getting used to teammates, getting used to how we play and how his game fits inside our structure. There were just 10-15 games

of transition in those areas. And since then, he has been excellent." —Peter DeBoer on Erik Karlsson's return to awesome.

4. Winnipeg Jets

"Against the teams that aren't right now in the playoff picture, our record is spectacular. So we haven't taken anybody lightly. The challenges for us [against Vegas and Nashville this week] aren't that. It would be playing well against good teams when you're in the middle of a pretty good grinder missing some guys. Not excuses." —Paul Maurice.

5. Vegas Golden Knights

"Just a consistent guy that plays the game the right way, face-offs, kills penalties, plays power play, does everything for us. We missed him for two and a half months. But lately he's been real, real good... and he's a part of our turnaround after the first 25 games." —Gerard Gallant on the value of a healthy Paul Stastny.

6. Washington Capitals

"He's just an elite, elite scorer that we're so fortunate to have on our team and, jeez, the league is even fortunate just to have this type of a player that's a generational talent." —Todd Reirden on Alex Ovechkin, who leads everyone with 33 goals.

7. Columbus Blue Jackets

"I don't think of it as something special. It's a number. But I'm honoured and privileged to have the opportunity to be in the game as long as I have. That's what that number is." —John Tortorella on his 600th victory as head coach.

8. Pittsburgh Penguins

"It's just carelessness. It's a lack of diligence in the important parts of the rink. Even though we're on the power play, we have to have some conscience defensively." —Mike Sullivan,



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fuming that his Penguins lead the NHL with 10 shorthanded goals allowed.

9. Nashville Predators

"As long as the focus stays at the rink, that's what we worry about." —Peter Laviolette on P.K. Subban's side projects.

10. Boston Bruins

"The standard we expect out of him I don't think has been there enough lately, period. He's been told that. We want him to play his way out of it." —Bruce Cassidy, lighting a fire under Jake DeBrusk this week.

11. Toronto Maple Leafs

"It's not mentally sharp enough, physically engaged enough either. We've only got ourselves to blame. Obviously, myself as the head coach, I'm responsible. We didn't play well enough, we didn't play hard enough and the players are the same way. We weren't good enough." —Mike Babcock on the Maple Leafs' 2019 mediocrity.

12. New York Islanders

"They're a great illustration of what you can be when the strength is in the group, not necessarily in any individual." — Barry Trotz on the revival of the Islanders' excellent fourth line (Casey Cizikas, Cal Clutterbuck, Matt Martin).

13. Montreal Canadiens

"It's the kind of thing we don't see much anymore, but I think the players and the coaches appreciated what he did." — Claude Julien on how Nicolas Deslauriers' fight with Boston's Kevan Miller helped boost the Habs to Monday's big win.

14. Carolina Hurricanes

"It's him and the rest. What I saw him do here I'll never forget, and I try to do a lot of the things he taught us." —Rod Brind'Amour on whom he believes to be the NHL's best coach, Peter Laviolette.

15. Buffalo Sabres

"At home we get the last change, so we can get the matchups that we want. But on the road, he's going to be forced to play against players that maybe we didn't want him playing against, but that's a great learning lesson in his development." —Phil Housley on rookie centre Casey Mittelstadt's struggles away from KeyBank Center.

16. Colorado Avalanche

"It's time now to put up or shut up here." —Jared Bednar.

17. Dallas Stars

"It's everybody. Unfortunately, I'm very frustrated that I have not been able to gain consistency in our performance and I have not been able to change the culture of mediocrity." — Jim Montgomery, droppin' bombs.

18. Minnesota Wild

"That was the worst game we've played since I've been here as coach.... If your best players aren't your best players, you're not going to win a game. It's as simple as that. When I look down and [Joel Eriksson] Ek's line is the best line that

we have out there, then we're in trouble." —Bruce Boudreau on the Wild's 5-2 loss Saturday to rebuilding Detroit.

19. St. Louis Blues

"I hate to use the word desperate times, but we've got to win games." —Craig Berube.

20. Vancouver Canucks

"We're going to do right by him, but we want him back as fast as he can. He's a competitive kid; he wants to play. He's not happy not playing." —Travis Green on the much anticipated return of Elias Pettersson.

21. Edmonton Oilers

"I've only been here 25 games or so. I just know we're trying to get more and more from people and sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. I just know what it takes to get in and if this is the level we're going to play at it's not good enough." —Ken Hitchcock, squeezing water from a stone.

22. Arizona Coyotes

"If you don't have your A game, professionalism comes into play: good angles, being smart, living for another shift. Some guys have to learn that sometimes you're not going to have your A game and you're going to have to be a little more smart." —Rick Tocchet, after the Coyotes were roasted 7-1 in Calgary Sunday.

23. New Jersey Devils

"He's a great example for a lot of young kids on our team and people in the organization. He spent some time in the American Hockey League, he had an opportunity in the NHL and really understood what his role was and what his identity is. This year, he hasn't veered from it." —John Hynes on late-bloomer Blake Coleman's breakthrough season at age 27.

24. Anaheim Ducks

"Dumb question." —Randy Carlyle, to a reporter who inquired about his job security amidst a now 12-game losing rut.

25. Florida Panthers

"We had some guys, especially some of our big guys, who had very average or below-average games." —Bob Boughner, calling out his stars after five-game losing skid and an 0-fer trip to Western Canada.

26. Detroit Red Wings

"When you've lost as many as we have, the reality is that you get to points where you are fragile. We can pretend that's not true.... Now, we have control over that. We have control of believing in ourselves and carrying ourselves with confidence. We've been here before, let's go find a way to dig ourselves out." —Jeff Blashill.

27. New York Rangers

"You're going to lose hockey games. But you better want to battle somebody. It's just ridiculous. Three games where we feel good about our effort and our compete, and then we come out here and do that? It's a freaking joke.



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"We failed miserably tonight. Miserably. Our lack of determination in our one-on-one battles, fishing for pucks — you do that in this league, that's what happens. You get your asses handed to you." —David Quinn, lit following Sunday's 7-5 loss in Columbus.

28. Chicago Blackhawks

"I think that that will bring out the best in everyone." — Jeremy Colliton.

29. Los Angeles Kings

"When you're in an offensive role, you have to produce offensively. He hasn't done that consistently enough." —

Willie Desjardins, desperate for scoring and calling out Brendan Leipsic.

30. Philadelphia Flyers

"I just worry about what's in front of me. I'm not a high-stress guy." —Scott Gordon.

31. Ottawa Senators

"Right now, he has to battle through what all college guys have to battle through, that grind of so many games in so little time and all the travelling." —Guy Boucher, explaining why Brady Tkachuk is starting to let my fantasy team down.



Hurricanes the team to watch as trade deadline approaches

By Adam Gretz

The Carolina Hurricanes are a team worth watching right now for a lot of reasons.

By winning eight of their past 11 games they have inched their way back into the playoff discussion in the Eastern Conference. At least enough to be considered on the bubble. Yes, five points back in mid-January is still a pretty big hill to climb, but they're making a run at it.

They also have the Storm Surge celebrations after wins on home ice as they add a little excitement to the league. Great stuff.

One of the other reasons you should be keeping an eye on them is they are one of the most intriguing teams in the league when it comes to the upcoming Feb. 25 trade deadline because of the contract situations, the makeup of their roster, and their position in the standings.

The contract and roster situations include...

Almost all of their long-term commitments being on the blue line. All of their regular NHL defenders are signed through at least the end of next season, while four of them run through at least 2021 (and two of them go beyond 2024).

Their only goalie under contract beyond this season is Scott Darling ... who is currently buried in the American Hockey League. Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney are both unrestricted free agents after this season.

Almost all of their forwards are some kind of a free agent after this season. The only forwards under contract beyond this season are Jordan Staal, Victor Rask, Andrei Svechnikov, Warren Foegele, and Lucas Wallmark. The latter three are still on their entry-level deals. They have four potential unrestricted free agents (including captain Justin Williams) and five restricted free agents, including two of

their top offensive players in Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen.

Then there is the place in the standings. Like a lot of the teams in the Western Conference wild card race, the Hurricanes have to figure out exactly what they are this season — a team that has a legitimate shot to make the playoffs and might want to add something, or at least stay the course as currently constructed? Or are they a team that is too far back and needs to go into "sell" mode, especially with its current crop of free agents?

One thing is certain, the Hurricanes have a lot of intriguing players when it comes to potential trade chips.

For one, they still have a ton of depth along the blue line and could still flip one of their defenders for help elsewhere around the roster. Justin Faulk's name was all over the rumor mill during the offseason (especially after the addition of Dougie Hamilton) but remained with the team. There was also a rumbling in recent weeks that they might — might — be willing to listen to offers on Hamilton, but that seems like a real long-shot given that they are barely a half of a season into it and they would probably be dealing him at his lowest possible value. The best bet there is to hold on to him and trust that he regains the form and production he has shown throughout his career.

The forwards are where the real intrigue comes in because, again, so many of them are on expiring contracts.

It is probably pretty safe to say that Aho and Teravainen are not going anywhere. Not only are the team's two best forwards, they are both young and just now entering their primes. Even if you assume the Hurricanes are not going to be a team that spends to the salary cap they still have all the flexibility in the world to get them signed.

The most likely player to get moved would seem to be forward Micheal Ferland (the other part of the Hamilton



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trade) who is set to become an unrestricted free agent after this season and is probably in line for a fairly substantial raise from his current \$1.75 million salary. He would also probably be able to get that on the open market because he's the type of player that appeals to pretty much everyone in the league. He has size, is physical, is probably going to be a 20-goal, 40-point player for the second year in a row and once again has strong underlying numbers. He's a good player that a lot of teams would want — especially around playoff time.

The other variable in all of this is just where the Hurricanes sit in the standings as we get closer to the deadline.

They have been a patient team that has always kept the long-term goal in mind, and even with the recent surge they really haven't picked up that much ground in the standings when it comes to wild card positioning. It's still asking a lot for them to get in or to expect them to try and actually add to this roster this season by giving up younger, future assets.

But it is also a team that hasn't made the playoffs since 2008-09, and if they can stack a few more wins together and keep staying afloat in the race it might change how much they are willing to trade or sell off in the short-term.

There are a lot of different directions this can go in the coming weeks, and a lot of it will probably depend on how long they can keep up this recent strong play.

YAHOO! SPORTS

Power Rankings: Pacific trio taking flight

Ryan Lambert

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

31. Philadelphia Flyers (Last week: 30)

30. New York Rangers (LW: 29)

David Quinn was real pissed about how the Rangers played on Sunday night and even though they're tanking (and should be), that's the right attitude for a coach to take. You want guys to play to the absolute height of their abilities regardless of how bad your GM wants you to be in the standings, so as a coach you gotta peel the paint sometimes even if you know your team sucks.

And don't get me wrong, this team sucks and it's only going to get worse when the sell-off comes, but that's how you're supposed to tank. Players shouldn't take shifts off, they should just be surrounded by so little talent that everyone trying 110 percent still only gives you like 60 points at the end of the season.

29. Los Angeles Kings (LW: 28)

These guys purportedly don't want to trade Doughty, Kopitar, or Quick, and while it may be easy to go, "Well sure, those guys are expensive, old, and signed long-term," why wouldn't they at least WANT to trade them? Sure, other teams might not be interested, but Kopitar and Doughty are impact players who, perhaps in the summer, get you a pretty nice price from a team that thinks it's a Doughty or Kopitar away from competing.

When you're as bad as this team is, everything should be on the table.

28. Chicago (LW: 27)

27. Anaheim Ducks (LW: 26)

Not gonna fire the coach (which is nuts), so they make a trade instead. And it's like, okay, they offloaded the Cogliano deal and Cogliano wasn't doing anything. That's good.

So is getting a better, younger version of Cogliano (albeit one who doesn't move the needle possession-wise). But if this is the start of a "retool" then I don't know how much you can expect results to improve any time soon.

26. Detroit Red Wings (LW: 25)

25. Ottawa Senators (LW: 31)

Big move up for the Senators this week, mainly because every team behind them either went .333 or .250 in points percentage. They moved up by default, but when you're one of the worst teams in the league, you take the Ws where you can get 'em.

24. New Jersey Devils (LW: 23)

23. Florida Panthers (LW: 18)

At some point there has to be a change. They can't keep playing like this.

22. Arizona Coyotes (LW: 21)

21. St. Louis Blues (LW: 22)

20. Vancouver Canucks (LW: 24)

Games in hand and all that, but the fact that these guys are even remotely in the playoff conversation in mid-January is honestly shocking. Plus, they just won their first regulation game without Elias Pettersson in the lineup, and it only took 10 tries and a terrible Florida team to make it happen.

19. Dallas Stars (LW: 16)

18. Edmonton Oilers (LW: 19)

Imagine going to an Oilers skills competition event and they tell you day-of, "Ah by the way, no McDavid at this one." Why do you even stick around?

17. Colorado Avalanche (LW: 15)



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Nathan MacKinnon took the L in the “yelling at the coach so hard I fell off the bench” incident about as well as he could, but his larger point that the Avs aren’t doing anything when MacKinnon and Rantanen are on the bench should be well taken.

16. Montreal Canadiens (LW: 20)

As with the Senators above, these guys really only moved up because everyone that moved below them really had a bad week. These guys had a just-fine week and hey as long as you’re holding onto playoff contention, I guess that’s fine.

15. New York Islanders (LW: 17)

14. Minnesota Wild (LW: 14)

13. Buffalo Sabres (LW: 12)

Jeff Skinner has 30 goals. Not news.

Jack Eichel has 15. Sam Reinhart and Jason Pominville have 10 each. After that, no one else on the team has more than seven goals.

Or, how about this one: Those four guys are the only forwards on the team with more than 20 points. They’ve played 45 games.

Truly amazing, but at this point it’s no surprise they’re not holding down a playoff spot anymore.

12. Carolina Hurricanes (LW: 13)

The ‘Canes are 7-1-0 in their last eight, but weirdly they’re getting outshot pretty hard (big reversal from earlier this season) and getting .900-plus goaltending (even bigger reversal).

If they can start outshooting teams to the tune of 55 percent again — which strikes me as very possible — while still getting even only-a-little-below-league-average goaltending, they’re gonna make a big run at the playoffs.

11. Winnipeg Jets (LW: 10)

10. Pittsburgh Penguins (LW: 9)

9. Columbus Blue Jackets (LW: 11)

Kind of amazing how fast we forgot that this team suspended its All-World goalie for a game in the same season that’s expected to be his last in Columbus. You wonder if the full story will get out any time soon, but I really really really want to know what happened there.

8. Boston Bruins (LW: 8)

Worth noting that the Bruins lineup is finally at its full power for the first time since about this point last season, and all of a sudden Tuukka Rask is playing out of his mind. Pretty interesting occurrence, to me, a person who has no long-term stated interest in trying to run Rask out of town.

7. Toronto Maple Leafs (LW: 4)

6. Washington Capitals (LW: 7)

Okay they’re back to winning. That was a scary week.

5. Nashville Predators (LW: 6)

It’s a tough bounce that going 2-1-1 in a week and generally being a really good team doesn’t get you in the top four but you’ll see why in a second.

4. Vegas Golden Knights (LW: 3)

3. San Jose Sharks (LW: 5)

2. Calgary Flames (LW: 2)

In this week’s 31 Takes, I noted that all three of the teams atop the Pacific are playing lights-out over the last quarter of the season, but it’s really wild, so let’s restate and clarify:

The Golden Knights are 14-3-3 in the last 20. The Sharks 15-3-2. The Flames are 14-4-2.

But the thing is, one of those Sharks losses was to Calgary. And one of Vegas’s losses was to San Jose. So, even better then.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (LW: 1)

Anyway, Tampa only has nine regulation losses the entire season so far. Two of them were in the last week and a half, but I don’t think that’s a particularly big deal.

They’re still the best team in the sport and probably of the cap era by a mile. Have a good one.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes fall flat, get blown out by Rangers at Madison Square Garden

Canes end busy stretch with a blowout loss in New York.

By Brett Finger

Tuesday night’s matchup against the New York Rangers was one doozy of a trap game for the Carolina Hurricanes.

At the end of a 8-game, 13-day stretch, the Canes strolled into Madison Square Garden, a place where they haven’t won since October of Jeff Skinner’s rookie season, and got dealt with by a bottom-dwelling Rangers team that got called out by their head coach David Quinn after their most recent game against the Columbus Blue Jackets.



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From the opening puck drop, the Hurricanes were a step or seven behind the Rangers and, all of 75 seconds into the first period, New York scored the opening goal in the form of a long-range floater off the stick of Anthony DeAngelo.

The Hurricanes managed to just barely survive a flurry of chances from the blue shirts, and they were able to take advantage of a pretty unfortunate mistake to get on the board.

Brett Howden lost his balance, turned the puck over to Saku Maenalanen, and the rookie Finn beat Henrik Lundqvist to even the score at one goal apiece.

It was... all down hill from there for the Canes.

The final 50 minutes of the game were dominated by the Rangers, who came out with an intensity that the Hurricanes never came close to matching. Every puck battle was won by a player in a blue jersey and every 50/50 play went the home team's way.

Mika Zibanejad found the back of the net twice before the first period came to a merciful end, the second goal coming off of a slick pass from Mats Zuccarello. The Swede gave New York a 3-1 lead through 20 minutes, and they built on it in the second period.

In the early stages of the middle frame, a defensive breakdown from Carolina's penalty kill led to Pavel Buchnevich being left wide open in the slot, and he made no mistake as he fired home Zibanejad's centering pass to make it 4-1.

Buchnevich struck again on the man advantage less than five minutes into the third period to put an end to any comeback hopes that the Hurricanes may have had.

Rod Brind'Amour seemingly glued every forward not named "Saku Maenalanen", "Victor Rask", or "Warren Foegele" to the bench. The Rask-centered line was, far and away, the team's best on Tuesday. They were the only trio that seemed willing to put forth real effort.

Those efforts were rewarded again in the third period, when Rask's perimeter shot got deflected by Maenalanen in front and got behind Henrik Lundqvist. The goal marked by Maenalanen's first multi-goal in the NHL and his third goal in two games.

Any positive vibes that the Canes got from that goal were squashed just a minute later. DeAngelo potted his second goal of the evening to bump the score to 6-2, which is how the game would eventually end.

There's no two ways about it, the Hurricanes were bad on Tuesday night. They looked exhausted both physically and mentally. They were playing their eighth game in 13 days and, boy, they looked the part.

You never want to just say "this game doesn't matter", but there's not much to do about this loss. The Canes were flat and disengaged from start to finish, and they got whooped because of it. The Rangers had a point to prove after getting publicly scorned, and they accomplished their mission.

The Hurricanes get to go home, have an off day, get back to practice on Thursday, and then look to bounce back against the Ottawa Senators. The response after Tuesday's blowout loss will need to be loud and clear at PNC Arena on Friday night.

Checkers Recap: Charlotte Squeezes Out 1-0 Win over Bridgeport

Alex Nedeljkovic was perfect in Tuesday night's game against Bridgeport.

By Justin Lape

CHARLOTTE — The Charlotte Checkers have strung back-to-back wins together with a 1-0 win Tuesday over the Bridgeport Sound Tigers on 1950s Night. Alex Nedeljkovic lead the way with a 19-save shutout. The shutout is Nedeljkovic's second of the season.

Early in the first period, the game was primarily played in the neutral zone and cycling the puck in each team's offensive zone without generating much offense. Dennis Robertson was sent to the box just a few minute in but the Checkers were able to kill it. Bridgeport exchanged a power play shortly after when a Checkers forward was taken down on a breakaway. Charlotte was able to get a few shots on goalie Chris Gibson but was not able to capitalize with the man advantage.

Around the ten minute mark of the first, Aleks Saarela fired a floating backhand shot past Gibson to give Charlotte the early lead. Martin Necas earned the lone assist on the goal. The Checkers came alive after the Saarela goal and fired a few more chances off Gibson. They were awarded a power

play opportunity later in the period but could not capitalize again.

In the second, Charlotte was granted an early power play opportunity but could not find the back of the net. The Checkers power play has struggled through the early part of the six-game home-stand. Checkers goalie Alex Nedeljkovic had to stay sharp through the second period with Bridgeport pushing hard for the tying goal. His pads stayed quick and were able to keep the equalizer out. He received some help from right winger Nick Schilkey when the forward spotted the puck hanging out in front of Nedeljkovic and flipped it out of the zone after a scramble in front of the Charlotte net.

Neither Charlotte nor Bridgeport scored to change the first period results, so the game remained 1-0 after two periods.

A power play late in the second carried over into the third for the Checkers but they were unable to score. Just seconds after the play went to even strength, the Checkers committed a penalty themselves that they were able to kill off. Patrick Brown and Cliff Pu sprung out of the defensive zone for a 2-on-1 shorthanded chance but Gibson made a huge sliding save to keep Bridgeport within one.



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The Sound Tigers pushed hard through most of the third but were not able to generate many shots on Nedeljkovic. The Sound Tigers pulled Gibson with a little over two minutes to play. Around the 1:30 mark, Bridgeport fired a flurry of shots on net but defenseman Roland McKeown dove in front of the crease to keep the game at 1-0.

After a few defensive zone faceoffs, Charlotte was able to wind the clock down and hold on for the win.

The Checkers and Sound Tigers will play again on Wednesday at 7 p.m. Charlotte will wrap up their homestand with a pair of games against the Toronto Marlies on Saturday and Sunday.

Charlotte Checkers Corner: Doing A Split

The Checkers made like a banana dessert and split their weekend series with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

By Justin Lape

The Charlotte Checkers split a pair of games to start their six-game homestand, taking a loss to the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins on Friday but following it up with a win against the Penguins on Saturday.

I've been able to cover multiple wins live this year but I've also been at two of the worst games of the season: a 5-1 loss to the Binghamton Senators on Nov. 20 and Friday's 5-1 loss to the Penguins. Both had something similar other than the score.

Each of those two losses had one of the better crowds of the season. As is the case with the Hurricanes, crowds tend to flock more to Bojangles Coliseum on the weekend. In both losses, head coach Mike Vellucci was not happy for one reason: how the Checkers played in front of their home crowd.

Vellucci had passionate responses in both efforts and seems to understand the selling point of hockey in the state. Win and they will come. Show a poor effort and the casual fan's likelihood of returning likely decreases.

Tuesday's game will be the Checkers first sold crowd of the season as they are hosting their annual 1950s Night featuring drastically reduced ticket prices and \$1 hot dogs, 50 cent sodas and 50 cent popcorns. It's a safe bet to say Vellucci will have his team ready to play in front of a great crowd.

Weekend Recap

Canes Country had coverage of Friday's 5-1 loss to the Penguins:

Checkers Rocked By Penguins 5-1

Game Notes

The Nashville Predators and Philadelphia Flyers both had scouts at Tuesday's game.

The Flyers scout spoke highly about Martin Necas and said he was impressed with his World Junior Championships performance this season. He also expressed his concern with Nedeljkovic's size which may not translate well at the NHL level with the way the league is headed.

The Checkers said they sold over 6000 hot dogs at last year's 50s Night. It remains to be seen how many they sold at Tuesday night's game. #HotDogWatch

The Checkers followed the loss with a 5-3 win over the Penguins on Saturday. Alex Nedeljkovic lead the way with 32 saves on 35 shots and Nicolas Roy had a three-point night with two goals and an assist. Charlotte burst out to a three goal lead in the first period before the Penguins cut the gap to 3-2 until Roy added cushion late in the second period with a goal. The Penguins' Jeff Taylor responded to close the one goal gap again but Roy delivered the dagger with an empty net goal late in the third.

Player of the Week

Nicolas Roy is this week's player of the week. His three-point performance propelled the Checkers to their lone win of the weekend. While the Greg McKeeg and Clark Bishop experiments have been fun, it would be interesting to see Roy get a larger chance in the NHL. The six-games was a small chance but Roy's size as a center or wing would fit well into the Hurricanes' system. He's been productive at the AHL level this season with 26 points in 33 games.

Thought of the Week

Callum Booth was fantastic in his back-up role for the Checkers before being forced to the ECHL to make way for Scott Darling and his contract. In seven games at the AHL, Booth posted a 1.89 goals against average and a .924 save percentage. Now at the ECHL, Booth's numbers have suffered with a 2.76 goals against average and a .903 save percentage in 12 games. Scott Darling has a 3.31 goals against with a .882 save percentage in ten games this season. In a previous column, I suggested Booth's development could hurt as result of making way for Darling. It's starting to show short-term effects.

Looking Ahead

The Checkers have a busy week with a pair of games on Tuesday and Wednesday against the Bridgeport Sound Tigers. Charlotte takes on Toronto on Saturday and Sunday to wrap up their homestand.



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Alex Nedeljkovic, Checkers Shut Out Bridgeport

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The top two teams in the AHL locked in a tight contest in front of a sold-out crowd Tuesday night and it was the Checkers who emerged victorious with a hard-fought 1-0 win.

Alex Nedeljkovic continued his hot streak with a commanding performance, turning aside all 20 shots that he faced. The netminder helped shut down all four of the Sound Tigers' man advantages on the night and stood tall during a 10-shot third period to earn his franchise-record eighth shutout in a Checkers sweater.

Bridgeport was similarly strong on defense but Aleksis Saarela was able to solve Christopher Gibson midway through the first, throwing a backhander through traffic for his seventh point in his last seven games and what would stand as the game's only tally.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the game
I thought we played really well for most of the game. We didn't score many goals. On the power play we got a lot of chances and didn't bury it, but you've got to make sure that you stay focused defensively. I thought our guys worked extremely hard and made some big blocks and big saves there at the end.

Vellucci on goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic
He was unbelievable. He wasn't really tested a ton early on, but when he was he made the big save. That's what winners do. He's a winner and he wins games. That save you saw there at the end where he batted it with his stick – the guy had the empty net and he battled right to the end. He could have just given up but he didn't, and then (Roland McKeown) makes a great play to bat it out of the air. A lot of great things.

Vellucci on playing with two defensemen out of the lineup due to illness
Fortunately we have a lot of D right now. There was a time we didn't have any. Two guys stick at the last minute, Bobby (Sanguinetti) today and Trevor (Carrick) yesterday. (Josiah) Didier in his first game back got the star of the game by the boys at the end there – he was a warrior all game.

Vellucci on playing in front of a sellout crowd
It was nice to give them a win. I would have liked to give them a few more goals and not make it so exciting there at

the end, but it's always fun to play in front of a packed house. We've had some really good crowds here in the last three and hopefully that continues.

Nedeljkovic on a playoff-style game against Bridgeport
We're a tight-knit team but they're a really good team too. They play fast, they play hard, they're physical and they have a lot of speed. That's the way we have to play the rest of the way here if we really want to make a statement and take this thing to the next level.

Nedeljkovic on killing penalties down the stretch
We got a couple of calls our way in the second there and we knew we were maybe going to get a couple go against us going into the third. It was just trying to weather the storm. We kept our feet moving as best we could. The kill was awesome all night, they didn't get a lot of shots on us and we were getting pucks out when we had a chance to clear it.

Nedeljkovic on the crowd
It's amazing. That's what you play for. You want to play in front of a big crowd, and at the next level it's always tens of thousands of people watching you and then however many more people watching on TV. That's what you want. It's a lot of fun when the crowd's into it and they were into it tonight.

NOTES

The Checkers improved to an AHL-best 29-9-3 on the season and now have 11 more points than second-placed Bridgeport ... Nedeljkovic recorded his second shutout of January and now has eight for his career, giving him sole possession of the Checkers' all-time lead. His league-leading wins total is now 19 ... Saarela's goal gave him seven points (3g, 4a) in his last seven games ... This was the Checkers' second 1-0 victory of the season. They are now 6-115-12 all time when scoring one or fewer goals ... The teams were a combined 0-for-10 on the power play ... Charlotte improved to 2-2-0 against Bridgeport this season. Previously, Bridgeport was the only AHL team they had a losing record against ... Josiah Didier returned to the lineup after missing 24 games due to injury. His previous game was on Nov. 16 ... Defensemen Trevor Carrick and Bobby Sanguinetti missed the game due to illness ... Forward Steven Lorentz was a healthy extra.

UP NEXT

The Checkers host a rematch against Bridgeport on Wednesday at Bojangles' Coliseum.



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Checkers to Help Train Puppy from Project2Heal

We're getting a puppy! The Checkers are working with Project2Heal to help train a service dog for someone in need this season.

Throughout the season, Checkers players, coaches, front office members and fans will all play a part in the puppy's training, as he will make appearances at select practices and games at Bojangles' Coliseum throughout the season, including our game on Sunday, Jan. 20, at 1 p.m. Fans will be encouraged to meet and interact with the puppy in order to help him build the confidence he will need to eventually provide service in public settings on a daily basis.

When the puppy's training is complete following the season, Project2Heal will place the puppy with a local veteran or child with a special need.

Checkers fans currently have the opportunity to name the puppy via a vote on the team's Facebook page from the available choices of Charlie, Checker, Calder (after the Calder Cup) and Kelly (after Checkers legend Pat Kelly).

Project2Heal is a local nonprofit that breeds, nurtures and trains Labrador Retrievers to provide healing for those with physical and emotional challenges.

TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1126147 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' lose 16th straight game to Rangers at Madison Square Garden

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

The Carolina Hurricanes will win again one day at Madison Square Garden, but that day was not Tuesday.

The Canes, who were winless against the New York Rangers in their last 15 games at the Garden, made it 16 straight with 6-2 loss.

Generally lifeless much of the game, the Canes got two goals from rookie forward Saku Maenalanen and some energized play from his line, which had Victor Rask at center and winger Warren Foegele. That's the Canes' fourth line. The top three lines had little or no impact.

"I don't think we had enough guys emotionally invested," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It was a little flat. We needed more from some guys and just didn't have it tonight. We got off to a bad start and never got going, it felt like."

The Rangers (19-20-7) again had goalie Henrik Lundqvist in net. And Lundqvist did what he so often does: beat the Canes, winning for the 20th time in his last 23 games against Carolina.

The Canes' top line, with center Sebastian Aho and wingers Teuvo Teravainen and Micheal Ferland, had been on a point-producing tear the past two games in wins over Buffalo and Nashville. But the Rangers' top line, centered by Mika Zibanejad, was dominant this night and Aho's line quiet.

Zibanejad had two goals and two assists, and Tony DeAngelo and Pavel Buchnevich each scored twice as the Rangers rebounded from a miserable 7-5 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets that had New York coach David Quinn challenging his team.

The Rangers torched the Canes' penalty killers, scoring on all three power plays. That made for a long night for goalie Curtis McElhinney, who also had his struggles and had his personal four-game win streak end.

"Special teams killed us," Brind'Amour said.

On a first-period power play, the Canes briefly had a 5-on-2 advantage heading up the ice after two Rangers collided and fell in the Carolina zone. But Lucas Wallmark's pass ended up in the skates of Andrei Svechnikov and the Rangers soon cleared the puck.

So it went for the Canes (22-19-5), who had won seven of their past eight games to make a move in the Eastern Conference standings. Carolina has not beaten the Rangers at the Garden since October 2010.

After playing three games in four days, beating the Predators 6-3 on Sunday, the Canes had a practice Monday in Raleigh before the team flight to New York and skipped the morning skate Tuesday in New York.

Sluggish from the opening faceoff the Canes allowed a goal 1:16 into the game as DeAngelo zipped one through traffic. That set the tone.

Carolina Hurricanes right wing Saku Maenalanen (8) celebrates after scoring a goal against the New York Rangers during the first period of an NHL hockey game Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2019, at Madison Square Garden in New York.

Maenalanen tied the score with his first goal, swiping the puck in the New York zone and quickly whipping a shot past Lundqvist, but Zibanejad scored two in the period -- the first on a power play -- as the Rangers led 3-1.

Buchnevich's two goals, both on power plays, pushed the lead to 5-1 in the third before Maenalanen scored again, redirecting a Rask shot. It was Maenalanen's fourth goal, all in the past five games.

Canes captain Justin Williams, who had goals in five straight games and points in seven straight, had both streaks end.

"A few guys had good games," Brind'Amour said. "Unfortunately it was a wasted effort because we didn't have enough guys going. We just didn't have it. It's frustrating this time of year when you need the points, but it's a long year and we have to regroup."

News Observer LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126148 Carolina Hurricanes

State of the Canes: The curse of the bounces and the team that keeps trying

By Sara Civian Jan 14, 2019

Cliches are a given in most NHL interviews, but it's not because hockey players are dumb. They're just too polite to tell you to screw off when you ask them something dumb, so responding with something equally dumb is the next best thing.

It happens so often that the league compiled a video in which stars like Marc-Andre Fleury and Jack Eichel revealed their favorite cliches. Somehow, the one thrown around the Hurricanes locker room every single night didn't make the cut.

Bounces, folks. We're always talking bounces.

Bad bounces are the default culprit after Canes losses when they outperform their opponent (which, if you're keeping track, is most of them). But then the talk of bounces doesn't go away when the Canes win.

"So you guys aren't just saying this?" I asked a couple Canes throughout their most recent win streak, some away from the cameras. "You really do believe in the bounces and the bad luck stuff?"

It turns out some of them really, really do.

And there's comfort in the fact that at some point they made a group decision to stay the course. If they could just keep outperforming teams, if they could just keep shooting the puck despite the worst NHL shooting



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percentage in a decade, then regression to the mean had to be inevitable.

The bounces would come. Then the goals would come, then the wins would come, then the ...

Wait, what?

Don't look now but the Canes have won seven of their past eight games, they're getting the puck in the net with ease and they're three points back of Buffalo and four back of Montreal with a game in hand in the playoff race.

WIN OVER NASHVILLE MAKES CAROLINA MORE LIKELY TO MAKE THE PLAYOFFS THAN NOT.

— MICAH BLAKE MCCURDY (@INEFFECTIVEMATH) JANUARY 13, 2019

Best part is, there's no grand explanation except these vague bounces they've been going on about. Maybe this team and its sometimes-cursed-sometimes-beloved bounces have no place on that cliché video because it's the same story when the cameras are on and when they're off.

"(We're) just sticking to the game plan," Micheal Ferland said with his daughter in his arms after tallying two assists and one KO against Nashville. "We haven't changed the way we played. We're still shooting the puck. Roddy told us to change nothing, just keep playing the way we're playing.

He paused. ...

"And we're finally getting bounces."

If you ask Brind'Amour about the bounces, he'll give you the same knowing chuckle he gave about how Justin Williams is proving people wrong with his career-high five-game goal streak.

THIS IS THE BEST "I WAS RIGHT Y'ALL WERE WRONG" IN A MINUTE PIC.TWITTER.COM/O8EMOEI6O2

— SARA CIV (@SARACIVIAN) JANUARY 12, 2019

So, how about Williams?

CHANGING THE CULTURE PIC.TWITTER.COM/40XVEFG2JR

— TOM DUNDON (@TDCANES) JANUARY 13, 2019

"Yeah. I mean what else can you say about him? I've said it all along," Brind'Amour smirked after Carolina's win over Buffalo. "I haven't wavered a bit. I knew what we were getting out of him. He's going to have some stinker games, just like all of us, but he keeps playing every shift. He's consistent and that's why he's a pro, he has been his whole career and he's leading this team that way. Every day he comes to the rink and does it the same way — no excuses good or bad, he gives you everything he has. That's all we ask from all of our guys."

Brind'Amour has maintained this confidence in his team win or lose, so long as they stick to the game plan. They're gonna do them whether you like it or not. Brock McGinn is going to hit 25 goal posts, give the acting performance it seems he's been waiting for his whole life as Thor in the Storm Surge, then he'll finally score the next game.

Luck, Thor voodoo, Finnish coffee, black jerseys (7-0-2), Greg McKegg? Whatever turns the tides of the mysterious bounces, the Canes "haven't wavered a bit" in the hard work that creates them in the first place, give or take a handful of games.

Even if these bounces are ultimately puppets of the Hockey Gods, you have to create them from the right spots to nudge them in a good direction. The Canes have been doing that all season — it's what they mean when they say nothing's changed.

They're first in the NHL in both shot quantity and quality, despite a league-worst shooting percentage. They also boast a league-leading 510 high-danger chances (per Natural Stat Trick). While some of us have

been knee deep in conspiracy theories in an attempt to explain how this is happening, the team generally surrendered to the bounces.

Now the Hurricanes have been regressing to the mean, scoring at least three goals in each of their past seven wins.

"It's the same players, it's the same system," Sebastian Aho reiterated after the Canes' 6-3 win over Nashville. "Maybe we're doing the little details better now, but we're doing it right all the time."

As for his second-career hat trick, achieved in a matinee? He turned to coffee, something he and his countrymen often do.

"(I had) a lot," he laughed. "It was an early game. Had a few extra cups to wake up."

How many times have the 2018-19 Carolina Hurricanes attempted and failed on breakaways? So what, they'd tell you, the process doesn't change. Aho's still out there breaking away, and apparently he got there just in time for a "good bounce."

One good bounce on the power play, one at even strength, and one on the penalty kill.

The People's 21-year-old All-Star has 14 goals and 25 points in his past 18 games — two on the power play, three shorthanded, nine even strength.

If Brind'Amour is going around praising someone's conditioning like he does Aho's, you know it must be all-strengths legit.

When asked about his penalty kill prowess, Aho contested that actually he and the team could be better.

It's fun to watch him grow into stardom.

• Try and tell me Ferland isn't secretly launching a full-blown presidential campaign.

A quick rundown of his accomplishments since returning to Aho's wing Friday night: First career three-point night against Buffalo, two more assists against Nashville including a delicious backhand feed, one bounce short of a Gordie Howe hat trick, an old school uppercut to the jaw that knocked a villain out and made PNC Arena the loudest it's been this season.

Then the man who just took Austin Watson down in three punches came out for the postgame presser with his adorable daughter.

"YOU DON'T LIKE IT WHEN DADDY FIGHTS, DO YOU?"
PIC.TWITTER.COM/HT7TZVGBRK

— SARA CIV (@SARACIVIAN) JANUARY 13, 2019

He's either running for office or getting paid. If the Hurricanes end up trading him closer to the deadline, which seems likely, at least he's putting on one hell of a farewell tour.

• Andrei Svechnikov has hit his rookie wall, and that's fine. Almost every rookie has to deal with that at some point. Brind'Amour said he remembers almost crying when he hit his. It's important someone like Svechnikov realizes the team is capable of winning without the weight of the world on his shoulders, so good for the team for not losing right now. It's only a matter of time until we're looking back laughing at the fact that this kid really managed to get a penalty while still in the penalty box. It's obviously not great that he's leading the league in stick penalties right now, but part of it is Brind'Amour has started trusting him to unleash the Svech factor — he's gotta make some mistakes if he's gonna learn how to alter his game to fit this league full-time. Referees are also extra hard on rookies. It'll be OK.

Just promise me some of you will remember how hard you criticized Brind'Amour for not putting him on the first line early on. I have a feeling we'll be using his "I've said it all along" soundbite often through the course of his head coaching career.

BEST BUDS □ PIC.TWITTER.COM/TBLYCYOMOS



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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— CAROLINA HURRICANES (@NHLCANES) JANUARY 13, 2019

• The Hurricanes staff went on a two-game coaches challenge win streak last week, which is kind of insane. Two important goals were overturned. Tripp Tracy said on the broadcast that they're a tight-knit crew. Chris Huffine and L.J. Scarpace are the video coaches, and goalie coach Mike Bales (who is doing a great job with goaltending decisions) was a factor in one of the offside challenges. I told Brind'Amour there had never been such an appreciation for video coaches in my comments.

"Every team has those guys, they're behind the scenes working like dogs," he said. "They're putting in so much time and energy, and obviously on those calls it's imperative they get it right — especially on the offside ones (or suffer a penalty). There's a lot of pressure behind there, believe it or not, but they've done a nice job obviously."

• The Hurricanes head to Madison Square Garden on Tuesday, where they've lost 15 consecutive games. Those were darker times, though. Greg McKeeg was just a twinkle in Ron Francis' eye.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126149 Carolina Hurricanes

Micheal Ferland is looking for a 'significant' raise. Will the Hurricanes pay the price?

By Sara Civian Jan 13, 2019

Manitoba-born Micheal Ferland stood in front of multiple cameras in Winnipeg back in October. He had just scored the lone goal in the Hurricanes' losing effort — a net-front tap in that showcased his finishing touch, the one this team was missing.

A Jets reporter asked him about the trade that sent him, Dougie Hamilton and prospect Adam Fox to the Hurricanes over the summer.

He thought about it for a while, then he said something completely unprompted.

"I would love to stay in Carolina."

This is the kind of statement you hear all the time and barely bat an eyelash at. It's no rarity for an NHL player to dish out a feel-good answer to a feel-good question regardless of the truth. Raleigh is also a great city to live in.

But no one even asked, and his delivery made you sure that he meant what he said.

He's also a power forward about to hit the free agency market in what will be the best opportunity of his career for a big payday.

He probably does love Carolina. He would probably love to get paid in his prime, too. Who can blame him?

The 26-year-old heavy left winger has found success at Sebastian Aho's side this season, providing physicality and killer instinct to complement high-end talent as he did in Calgary with Johnny Gaudreau.

"It's never enough for those guys," Ferland said of Gaudreau and Aho after Carolina's win Friday. "You'll get some scoring chances, then the next shift Fishy is yelling down your throat 'Get the puck in, let's go, let's keep it going.' It's what makes them special."

His 13 goals, 10 assists and grit have been special in their own right for the Hurricanes through 37 games played. He did have a goal-scoring drought from the end of November through December, but he'd been struggling with the pace of the game after spending a significant amount of time sidelined with a concussion — and he'd been floating around on

the second and third lines. He told me he was finally starting to feel 100 percent again after the game in Washington on Dec. 27, then he scored his first goal in more than a month four games later in the Hurricanes' all-important win over the Blue Jackets.

He looked more like 1,000 percent against the Sabres on Friday. As rumors about his pending free agency continued swirling, he got his spot next to Aho back and responded with his first career three-point game (1 goal, 2 assists). Of course, it was great, but add it to the list of things this fan base has to hold its breath about with cautious enjoyment — on the night of Jeff Skinner's return, no less.

Will Ferland go the same "can't lose him for nothing" direction as Skinner?

The Hurricanes obviously love what he has brought to the table at \$1.75 million AAV. They're also aware he's due for a bigger paycheck, one they'd be willing to give to a certain extent. I'm told he's asking for a "significant" raise that sounds like it's at least in the ballpark of Tom Wilson's \$5.17 million AAV, though the term — which could be the biggest issue — is unclear.

I've also heard that the two camps haven't communicated "for some time," and last time they did they were not on the same page about Ferland's deal. A player like Ferland could potentially get paid what he wants elsewhere, so it makes sense that he and his camp keep pushing and want to explore the possibilities. It's not like the Canes and their well-documented playoff drought are in a position where they can ask him to take one for the team.

Things are rarely set in stone until the last second in this business — Ferland's camp and the Canes could always still get together and reach an agreement. As it stands right now, though, my sense is moving Ferland is much more of a "when" than "if" situation, one that will unfold before the Feb. 25 trade deadline.

There are plenty of valid complaints surrounding trading Ferland, but personally I'd hold off on them until we see all of this play out. As frustrating as the idea of trading an actual goal-scorer must be for any fan of this team, as desperately as you want the Hurricanes to just pay someone, anyone, who provides an X factor, there's more to it.

The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun reported the initial ask for Ferland sounds like a first and a prospect, and with the way he's been playing that isn't totally out of the question. You know there are some ... interesting ... general managers out there as well. A first round pick for a player who could walk is an offer a non-Stanley Cup contending team probably can't refuse, right?

We also can't ignore The Athletic's Jeremy Rutherford's reports that the Blues have had "significant talks" with Carolina and Vladimir Tarasenko's name has been involved. He said Dougie Hamilton "makes sense" but he's also heard the Blues have interest in Justin Faulk.

If the Canes can pull off a trade for Tarasenko, trading Ferland stings much less — especially with the looming possibility that he could walk in the offseason. Of course, it'll sting regardless, as he's been a fan favorite since Day One, and there's gotta be a German word for how you feel watching former Hurricanes tear it up elsewhere.

But for the Hurricanes, it might be coming down to what owner Tom Dundon told me last week while we were discussing something completely unrelated.

"Whatever the perception is, my job is to make sure we're not over- or under-valuing emotions," he said. "(I'm here to) provide resources, ask questions, and hopefully, as an organization, everyone feels empowered to have an opinion. ... We have to be very careful not to let short-term results affect our long-term plans."

The short-term suggests Ferland has been an awesome addition to the first line, emotions suggest he's a fun player everyone loves watching with an inspiring backstory. Long-term plans include the need to sign



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Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen and some yet-to-be-determined goalie.

It seems both the Canes and Ferland are right at the intersection of the short- and the long-term on their respective paths. The Canes are back on the fringe of the playoff bubble with six wins in seven games. Meanwhile, Ferland loves playing for them by all accounts, but also is thinking about his family and his future.

This is where the hardest decisions happen all around. There's a chance their plans could still include each other, but as of today it's more likely they don't.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126238 Ottawa Senators

Senators' Matt Duchene getting used to facing former Avalanche teammates

Bruce Garrioch

January 15, 2019 7:11 PM EST

Fourteen months after being dealt to the Ottawa Senators as part of a blockbuster three-way deal with the Colorado Avalanche and Nashville Predators, Duchene isn't quite used to suiting up against his former teammates.

Wednesday night will mark the fourth time Duchene, who was drafted No. 3 overall by the Avalanche in 2009, will face his former teammates the trade in November 2017, but it's still a little odd.

"It's starting to become more of just another team," Duchene said Tuesday, the eve of the National Hockey League matchup at Canadian Tire Centre. "Playing in Denver (in November) was more of a chapter-closer to me because, for any guy who goes back and plays in their old building, there's a lot of emotions there.

"Right now, I'm really just focused on the fact I haven't played a game in 10 days and I'm looking forward to getting back with the guys."

The Senators' top centre missing last week's three-game trip through California so he could remain in Ottawa with his wife, Ashley, for the Jan. 9 birth of their first child, Beau.

The last time Duchene saw the Avalanche, he scored two goals in 6-3 loss in Denver on Oct. 26.

"That was special," said Duchene, who will celebrate his 28th birthday Wednesday. "A win would have been the most coveted thing for me."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126239 Ottawa Senators

Senators step up efforts to re-sign Mark Stone and Matt Duchene

Bruce Garrioch

January 15, 2019 7:11 PM EST

Senators general manager Pierre Dorion was spotted boarding a Tuesday afternoon flight at Ottawa International Airport, and the indications were that Dorion was headed to Los Angeles to meet face-to-face with Duchene's agent, Pat Brisson of CAA Hockey.

It's also believed Dorion held discussions with Stone's agents after wrapping up weekend scouting meetings in Florida. He told reporters on Jan. 1 that he expected talks to take place in the first couple of weeks of the month.

None of this should be surprising. If the Senators are going to get deals done with Stone and Duchene, both of them eligible for unrestricted free agency come July 1, it makes sense that talks would pick up now.

With the National Hockey League trade deadline set for Feb. 25, the Senators have made it clear their priority is to get them both signed to long-term extensions so they can play a major role in the organization's rebuild.

Under rules of the collective agreement between the NHL and the players' association, the Senators had to wait until after Jan. 1 to hold formal talks with Stone. As for Duchene, another meeting would be the third for Dorion and Brisson.

Naturally, the Senators want to keep both players, but they need to know if Stone and Duchene are willing to re-sign before Feb. 25. If not, then both will likely be dealt for assets that can help down the road.

In their roles as alternate captains, Stone and Duchene have led by example this season, more than willing to help young Senators.

If the Senators are going to keep both, they're likely looking at eight-year deals and raises.

Making \$7.35 million on a one-year deal he signed in August, Stone will be looking for a deal north of \$8 million per season. Duchene is making \$6 million in the final year of his current contract.

At least part of the negotiations will involve spelling out for both players the team's direction. They've had those talks in the past, but, a year into this rebuild, both players will want to have a good idea of what's next.

Owner Eugene Melnyk and Dorion decided just over a year ago that the Senators would do this rebuild. The team has given young players such as Colin White, Thomas Chabot, Brady Tkachuk and Maxime Lajoie an opportunity to play big roles here in 2018-19.

The Senators don't have a first-round pick in the NHL draft in June, having sent that to the Colorado Avalanche in the deal for Duchene in November 2017, but they do have prospects such as Drake Batherson and Alex Formenton poised to push for spots next season, so there's no question more young players are going to be added to the roster.

Stone and Duchene have stated publicly they want to stay in Ottawa if new contracts can be worked out.

A big part of getting deals done with Stone and Duchene will involve how the contracts are structured. It's believed Stone was close on a deal with the Senators in August, when they settled on the one-year pact to avoid a salary arbitration hearing.

The Senators also have to decide what to do with winger Ryan Dzingel, who can also become an unrestricted free agent on July 1. For now Stone and Duchene are the priorities, but it would make sense if at least part of the discussions surrounded Dzingel's future. He has been an effective player with this season with 18 goals and 15 assists in 44 games.

The clock is ticking, but the fact that talks are picking up can be seen as a positive. Dorion and Senators scouts no doubt spent last week in Florida preparing for every scenario.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 01.16.2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1126240 Ottawa Senators

Snapshots: Anders Nilsson will start in Sens' net against Avalanche

Bruce Garrioch

January 15, 2019 7:10 PM EST

Those who keep an eye on these sorts of things raised their alert level to high on Tuesday as Ottawa Senators goaltender Anders Nilsson left practice early at Canadian Tire Centre.

Nobody had noticed the club's newly-acquired netminder experiencing any issues before he had a chat with goalie coach Pierre Groulx and headed to the dressing room one day before the Senators would face the Colorado Avalanche.

It turned out Nilsson just wasn't feeling well, but he is expected to make the start in net against the Avalanche.

"We knew before (the skate) he's got a little stomach bug, but we just (pulled) him out to keep his energy for (Wednesday)," Senators head coach Guy Boucher said later.

The Senators still had Craig Anderson and Marcus Hogberg to finish Tuesday's skate, but Nilsson, who has provided the kind of goaltending the club needs, will make his fourth straight start on Wednesday.

While Anderson skated with the team for the first time since he being sidelined by a concussion in a game against the New Jersey Devils on Dec. 21, he still hasn't received medical clearance to play again and won't even dress as backup against Colorado.

Hogberg would have started if Nilsson hadn't been able to play. Since being acquired from the Vancouver Canucks in a deal that sent Tom Pyatt and Mike McKenna the other way on Jan. 2, the 28-year-old Nilsson has helped the Senators get back on track.

He has a 2-3-0 record, .920 save-percentage and 2.43 goals-against average in five games with Ottawa, which won two of three games on its California road trip after losing eight in a row.

"To win games in the NHL you need NHL goaltending, whether it's your No. 1, and your backup has to give you NHL backup minutes or you can't win really. That's what it is," Boucher said. "Or you win once in every blue moon.

"When you get a guy like Nilsson, his first game he was nervous and you could see it. The pucks were bobbling and that was normal, but since then he's been solid. He's been playing really good games. It's not just the saves and the goals against, it's the rebounds and the rebound control. He deflects it to corners or outside.

"It's like a quarterback or a pitcher. If you don't have that, then you don't have anything. It starts with that and ends with that. He's done a really good job and he got unlucky in San Jose because he played well enough for us to win. That's for sure."

ANDERSON INCHING CLOSER

The Senators never expected to be without their top goalie as long as they have. When Anderson's concussion was first reported, the team hoped he'd be able to play right after the Christmas break.

There have been times during the past month where he's been close to a return, but has suffered setbacks. That's why the Senators are being cautious about promising a date when Anderson will be available.

"There's some really nasty injuries where guys are out for a full year and those are bad you because you know it's long," Boucher said. "You knew with the (Jean-Gabriel) Pageau injury, it was bad.

"But (head) injuries, they can last just a few days and they can last way longer than you expect. That's what's tough. You can't plan. With (defenceman Thomas) Chabot, it was clear, it was going to be about three weeks and so you kind of plan around that. It would take a lot of bad luck for it to linger on more than that.

"When you get concussions, it can take a lot longer or sometimes it's just the opposite. They're tough to understand, they're tough to predict and that's why it's tough to deal with."

Boucher confirmed that Anderson had experienced some setbacks.

"Sometimes a player feels great, gets on the ice and then all of a sudden at 8 p.m. starts to feel symptoms. It's very difficult to monitor those," Boucher said.

"Any day that it reverts back, you go back three days in the (concussion) protocol. That's where you've got to wait and see. That's his first real practice. If it doesn't work out and go the way it needs to then we're back three days."

That's why Boucher is being cautious.

"I'm waiting to see how it developed and today how (Anderson) felt," Boucher said. "With those injuries, you've got to wait almost until later in the day and until the next day to find out how it went.

"Hopefully, it continues to go well and maybe he's available this weekend."

Fortunately, Nilsson will be available Wednesday night.

THE LAST WORDS

The Senators will have defenceman Thomas Chabot back in action against the Avalanche.

He was on the ice Tuesday and declared to he'd be ready to play after recovering from a shoulder injury.

That will leave Boucher with decisions to make because the Senators could have seven or eight healthy defencemen, depending on the status of Ben Harpur.

Boucher said he expected to dress 11 forwards and seven defencemen for Wednesday's contest.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126241 Ottawa Senators

Game Day: Colorado Avalanche at Ottawa Senators

Bruce Garrioch

January 15, 2019 6:56 PM EST

The Senators' top centre, Duchene returns to the lineup after being away from the team to be with his wife, Ashley, for the birth of their son, Beau. Duchene says he stills finds it a little strange to face his former Avalanche teammates, but he did have two assists in an Oct. 26 matchup in Denver. With 26 goals in 46 games, MacKinnon has been a force for the Avalanche and he must be shut down if the Senators are to have any chance of success.



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FIVE KEYS TO THE GAME

1. Shut down the big line

The Senators have had issues stopping the National Hockey League's big lines this season and that's going to be a huge challenge in this one. Colorado's Gabriel Landeskog, Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen are having a great season, combining for 75 goals and 112 assists. Senators head coach Guy Boucher has to determine his best matchup here.

2. Get the stops

Give goaltender Anders Nilsson credit. He did a good job on the Senators western road swing, stopping 93 of 98 shots in Anaheim, Los Angeles and San Jose. Boucher said the club got NHL-calibre goaltending on that trip, and that has to continue with Nilsson making his fourth consecutive start in goal.

3 The return from the long road trip

NHL teams always seem to struggle after coming off lengthy road trips and that will be an issue for the Senators. They went 2-1-0 in California and need to build on that success. The Senators are 11-9-4 at home.

4. Welcome back, Thomas

The Senators will get all-star defenceman Thomas Chabot back from a shoulder injury, but he can't do it all by himself. He was a point-a-game player before he was hurt against the Islanders on Dec. 28, but the Senators need to ease him back into the mix.

5. Stay strong on penalty killing

The Senators haven't allowed a power-play goal in their past three games, a big reason why they went 2-1-0 in California. They did allow two power-play scores in a 5-4 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes in the last home game on Jan. 6.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126178 Edmonton Oilers

Lovin' Looch: Goals or not, Milan Lucic remains an Edmonton Oilers fan favourite

Robert Tychkowski

In a market not above eating its young (ask Tom Poti or Justin Schultz what it's like to struggle here), Milan Lucic never once felt the wrath of Edmonton during his 82-game slump.

At least not inside Rogers Place.

He got savaged on Twitter, ripped in the blogs, roasted in the papers and on the radio, but the people who buy the tickets love the guy.

He scores two goals in a calendar year for \$6 million and they chant his name whenever he does anything even remotely chant-worthy.

"It's kind of cool," said linemate Ryan Nugent-Hopkins. "Every time he goes in on the forecheck you hear at least a few people start it, 'Loooooch.'"

"The fans got behind him and I'm sure they were happy to see him get a couple."

Happy is one way of putting it. When he scored his first goal in 42 games last week in San Jose, a travelling Oilers fan threw a hat on the ice.

When he scored (twice!) at home on Monday against Buffalo, it sounded like he just buried an overtime playoff winner to eliminate Anaheim and Calgary at the same time.

"You definitely hear it, you always hear it," said Lucic, adding fans here respect when a player is working hard, even if the goals aren't coming.

"Even though stuff wasn't going in, I think my effort was there. I've learned in my career that you have to control what you can control and that's your work ethic and effort. That's maybe what kept me popular in their eyes."

It was. Play hard, turn pucks over on the forecheck, intimidate opponents looking to make trouble in a scrum, punch the odd Flame, look after Connor McDavid and fans gave him all the time he needed to figure out the scoring part.

"They enjoy the physical play," said Lucic. "All fans enjoy it. That's what's made me a popular player in the three organizations I've played with. It hasn't really been the goals and assists, it's been the competitive level and the physicality."

His teammates shared in the relief when Lucic scored in San Jose and celebrated louder than he did after the deuce against Buffalo. They know what he brings to the team and the room and even though the goals weren't there, they more than anyone knew he wasn't coming to the games empty handed.

"The biggest thing is that he was staying really positive, he knew that he could contribute in other aspects of the game and that's what he was doing," said Nugent-Hopkins. "Using his body, getting in on forechecks and creating a lot of loose pucks for other guys. He has a lot of good aspects to his game so he doesn't need to just be scoring."

But scoring is still part of the reason the Oilers brought him here, so that 82-game dry spell weighed on him a lot. They all felt it.

"I don't think people understand how hard that is, when you're supposed to score and do all these things and you're not, and you're struggling with it," said Leon Draisaitl.

"We can all agree 2018 didn't go his way, but he never got down on himself and always came to the rink with a smile on his face. It's nice to see him get rewarded for being patient and staying with it, it was awesome to see."

And if he starts scoring again, it will be a significant addition at this point in the season

"He just has to stay confident," said Nugent-Hopkins. "He's done it in the past and he can do it again. It would be a huge plus for us if he does start scoring again. He just has to keep working hard and playing his way."

CHEMISTRY SET

Lucic scored his three goals on a line with Nugent-Hopkins, a spot he's grown accustomed to in his time here. And what's not to like about lining up next to a smart, two-way player with first-overall offensive instincts.

"I've had a chance to play a lot with him over the last two and a half years," said Lucic. "And as we've gone on we've found a way to create more chemistry. When I first got here he paid a lot more attention to improving his defensive game and it took a little bit away from his offence. Last year and this year he's been able to combine both. He's going well, he's a big part of this team."

YAMAMOTO A GO

Kailer Yamamoto, who's been out eight games with an upper body injury, practised Tuesday and will likely play in Vancouver Wednesday.

"I feel really good," he said. "Hopefully I'll get in the lineup. It's been a good process. It's tough, you want to be out there every game fighting for the guys."



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"But I feel like I can jump right in. They have a lot of confidence in me so I'm hoping to get things going."

WAIVER PICKUP

The Oilers claimed centre Colby Cave off waivers from Boston and will play him in Vancouver.

The six-foot-one, 200-pounder has a goal and four assists in 20 games this year.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126179 Edmonton Oilers

JONES: Oilers taking Edmonton on a mind-bending journey through season

Terry Jones

At least the head coach can identify with it and relate to it.

Ken Hitchcock is a born and bred Edmontonian, and he said: "Yeah, I get that."

Your agent had just made a statement that in my 51 years writing sports here, I couldn't recall a time that quite matches what Edmonton is experiencing right now when it comes to the day-in, day-out ups-and-downs and ins-and-outs of mental depression directly related to the performance of the Oilers.

Hitchcock said some degree of that condition always exists here.

"I've gone through this feeling before and I know what it feels like. We live, eat and sleep Oilers here. Everything is Oilers here."

But this is above and beyond.

Obviously this is a city that knows highs and lows.

This is a city that has celebrated 14 Grey Cups, five Stanley Cups and a long list of other championships and titles by other teams and individuals in a variety of sports.

And Edmonton is a city that saw the greatest player in the history of hockey, Wayne Gretzky, sold — a community that, one by one, watched Mark Messier, Jari Kurri, Paul Coffey, Grant Fuhr, Glenn Anderson, Kevin Lowe and others leave in the prime of their careers.

This is a town that watched Lowe and Craig MacTavish take a team to Game 7 of another Stanley Cup final with Chris Pronger and other acquisitions, only to lose and have Pronger leave and the entire team come unraveled over night.

This isn't the first time an Oiler team has been trying to catch the final playoff spot and fans have been forced to ride the roller-coaster. The Oilers did that a lot in the years between Stanley Cup appearances, finishing eighth annually and ending up in all those incredible playoff series against Hitchcock's Dallas Stars back then.

But this is different.

This is a town that has watched the Oilers miss the playoffs 11 of the last 12 years.

And this is a team with the current generational player in Connor McDavid, and the clock ticking on his Stanley Cup window.

Then there's the Peter Chiarelli factor.

While the general manager acquired Hitchcock, Alex Chiasson and Mikko Koskinen, his record of bad deals has resulted in a fear factor entering the picture.

Every day, fans live in fear Chiarelli might trade away another Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle, etc. for a lesser talent. Every day, Edmonton fears he might trade away a developing talent or high draft picks, as was the case involving Griffin Reinhart.

Combine the fear factor with 11 of 12 years out of the playoffs, the McDavid factor and the recent run of six straight losses, followed by the current up-and-down-like-a-toilet-seat, win-one-lose-one run and it has all conspired to build the situation that includes a mental-health problem fans take to work with them.

All that stuff, spoken or unspoken, I'm sure Hitchcock gets. And he realizes it's his job to keep his eye on the puck and to get the team to find the same sort of focus.

"To me, the Oilers are the city of Edmonton and I really have to temper how I handle that because if you don't handle it well, it could be overwhelming. The players feel the responsibility. They feel the pressure."

It doesn't help that every second game, the Oilers have to come up from out of a playoff position for a gulp of air and that every time they do, they see the Calgary Flames in first place.

"I was once part of a group that once felt like that. I don't think there was even a person I liked one per cent of who lived in Calgary. I hated everything about Calgary, including the road," said Hitchcock.

Forgetting the Decade of Darkness and the current Chiarelli chapter, the picture Hitchcock is dealing with here is strictly the mad scramble where four teams went into games Tuesday tied for the final playoff position.

"There are five or six of us," said the coach. "When you are this close in the standings and this close in your play, it requires so much energy to win a hockey game that when your energy is down you look like you can't do a thing. Then when you get some rest, it looks like nobody is going to beat you."

"Quite frankly, I think we're going to have to deal with this for the rest of the year because, in my opinion, the players have to exert so much energy into just winning the hockey game that I think it's going to be a lot on us on how we manage their time."

"We had a little sickness go through us in the Arizona game when the flu bug hit us. You don't want to talk about that. But it hit us pretty square and it looked like we had about five good players stuck in mud," he added.

Hitchcock suggests it might be a good idea for locals to invest in those jackets with the wrap-around sleeves.

"I just know that this is going to be a ride we're going to be on that I don't see it changing. I think there are going to be six of us stuck together playing for three spots for quite while."

Are there psychologists who offer group rates?

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126180 Edmonton Oilers

EDMONTON OILERS TAKE 3: From the strange to the spooky

Robert Tychkowski



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It sent a pretty decent murmur through the city when word leaked out Edmonton Oilers management and scouts are fanning out across North America in a talent search worthy of American Idol. You know, if the American Idol judges had traded away Taylor Swift and Jordin Sparks.

The Oilers need a forward. Badly. So they are launching a manhunt.

Leave no Mark Stone unturned.

This is a good idea when eight of your 12 forwards look like they got their stats mixed up with Ken Daneyko.

Quick question, though:

Ignoring the obvious irony of how a team that drafted Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle, and spent two more top-four picks on wingers, is suddenly strapped for wingers? The Oilers are just realizing now they need more skill in their top nine?

That's like realizing halfway through a bowl of soup that you might need a spoon.

To many observers, this should have been forking obvious last summer. It was too great a risk, too long a shot, to expect Kailer Yamamoto and Jesse Puljujarvi to carry top-six NHL positions for the first time in their lives. If a couple of 20-year-olds make the team out of camp and score 12 or 15 goals each, it's a bonus, not something an organization should ever be counting on.

In fairness, they did add Alex Chiasson, but they got lucky on that one. He came in on a professional tryout, got healthy-scratched the first five games and is on pace to almost triple his career high in goals.

It's unlikely they will be as fortunate in their current search and return with anything close. On a team as thin and cap-restricted as Edmonton, it will not be a simple task. But it's one that should have been taken care of long before now.

CURSES, INDEED

What if Milan Lucic starts scoring?

That's not something people have been asking recently, because when somebody has all the hands of a snake, you don't spend much time wondering when he might start juggling.

With three goals in his last four games, it's still not a question Oilers fans dare ask out loud, but silently you know they're thinking it.

Could he? Is he?

Maybe.

One thing is for certain, that whole 2018 curse thing is looking kind of spooky.

He scores nine goals in 39 games prior to New Year's Eve last season, and is on pace for 20. Everything is great.

Then 2018 hits and he scores twice in the entire calendar year: Once in the final 43 games last season and once in the 39 games prior to New Year's Eve this season.

Then 2019 hits and he's got three in four games.

That's messed up. But if this mojo thing is real and the spell has been lifted, it will have a major impact on Edmonton's playoff hunt. It could change everything.

Yes, we're getting ahead of ourselves. When a guy goes 82 games with two goals, it takes more than one or two nights before anyone believes he's back.

And the way pucks were going in against Buffalo on Monday, the minor hockey kid that stood on the blue line for the anthem might have got one, but if 2018 really was a curse that's behind him now, this could be huge.

UP AND DOWN

The Edmonton Oilers' seven games in January so far:

Clutch win in Arizona.

Horrible loss in L.A.

Clutch win in Anaheim.

Horrible loss in San Jose.

Clutch win over Florida.

Horrible loss to Arizona

Clutch win over Buffalo.

This is nuts.

But it might not be a bad idea to put \$20 on the Canucks Wednesday night. According to their season-long tribute to uncertainty, the Oilers are going to stink the rink out in Vancouver before upsetting the Flames at home.

That's how they roll.

Their endless game of Are We Great or Do We Suck has fans at a complete loss (and win, and loss, and win) over what to make of these mood swings. And it's created a terrible quandary on social media, where the typically angry masses need black and white answers immediately in order to begin the necessary name calling and blame assignment.

And what about those plans for mid-April? Book a holiday? Or wait for playoff tickets?

The whole system is stuck in a holding pattern while the Oilers plane flies circles around the outskirts of mediocrity waiting for the fog to clear. Only, the fog might actually be exhaust from their plane, so they might be up there for a while.

Were they overachieving when they won those four games by a combined score of 18-6, or underachieving when they lost those three games by a combined score of 14-4?

You'd think that at some point, the Oilers would pick a lane and either make a hard push for the post-season or quietly clinch their traditional playoff spot in Cabo San Lucas.

Then again, they might not. It might be about 36 more games of this.

What they hell. We've all seen worse.

Enjoy the ride.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126181 Edmonton Oilers

In Lucic and Kassian, the Oilers finally get some secondary scoring

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal

First star Zack Kassian, second star Milan Lucic...

Whoa, no Connor McDavid, no Leon Draisaitl, no Ryan Nugent-Hopkins throwing Edmonton Oiler caps to the crowd as one of the game stars in a 7-2 pasting of the Buffalo Sabres, who might have five or six of their own except Mikko Koskinen gave up a goal on the first shot but stopped 41 of the next 42.

By any yardstick, The Three Metres of Koskinen was very good, so good he was third-star in a rout that could easily have been 7-5 but for some of his terrific stops in a very sloppy first 20 minutes by the Oilers



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But this was more about the Oilers not needing their big guns (throw in Alex Chiasson) who have 84 goals for one of the rare nights. Kassian had his third and fourth goals and was plus-4. Lucic had his third and fourth goals, scoring with two nice shots (his only two shots). He's got three goals in his last four games after two in the preceding 91, going back to last year, and Kassian doubled his seasonal output in 4 1/2 minutes in the first period.

Secondary scoring, finally...

"They're playing for Milan and I've noticed that since the day I came here," said Oilers coach Ken Hitchcock. "They want him to do well and they love him as a player and a person. He's paying them back in spades right now. This is the guy now that everybody expected when they signed him here, the guy they saw in Boston."

'ABOUT EFFING TIME'

To his credit, Lucic never whined or moaned through his unbelievable run of no goals night after night after night.

When he finally got one in San Jose Jan. 8, he said "about effing time", OK that's the polite version as the cameras panned in on him. But it was tough to celebrate after a 7-2 drubbing.

He could smile after this one, though.

"You are not even thinking, you are just shooting it hard and it finds a way in," said Lucic. "Even on the 2-on-1 with Nuge, the D drew Nuge away so I wanted to make a high percentage shot and it ends up finding the back of the net."

Chiasson has 17 goals in only 56 shots, an out-of-body season for him. He's scoring at a 30.4 percent clip, but he knows all about droughts. He's had lots in his 418 NHL games. He can certainly empathize with what Lucic's suffered through.

"I've been in this position before. I know what he's feeling," said Chiasson, who also knows that when the goals start going in, it's like a Zamboni's been carted off your shoulders.

"One thing I've learned is, you have to grab it. When you're on, you have to stick with it, because you can cold real fast. You never know," he said.

'HE'S GOT SPEED, TEMPO'

Hitchcock has seen this coming for awhile now with Lucic, who doubles as coach and soothsayer.

"For me this is five games in a row where Looch has been like this. He looks like the player for me who was around two or three years ago," he said.

"He's got speed, tempo to his game, both ends of the rink. He's able to pressure and control the boards, make good decisions off the boards, his back-checking...he's breaking up play after play."

"I think scoring is the end by-product of how well he's playing."

Same with Kassian, who had an excellent game, the goals aside. He was around the puck all night long and had 55 minutes to get his first NHL hat-trick, but Hutton robbed him with a glove early in the second as he worked his way free.

He says he wasn't thinking of that but every player would love to see the hats flying over the glass from the crowd for a hat-trick, especially a role player.

"It is nice to chip in with two goals. I don't think I have ever had a stretch where I had gone 40-plus games and had only two goals before. It is nice to score goals, it's the National Hockey League. Hopefully the floodgates open now," said Kassian of his third career NHL two-goal game.

"First one (goal) was a lucky bounce, plain and simple, the second a good play by Toby."

Hitchcock knows Kassian's got more offence in him.

"When he plays physical at the puck he's very effective, and he's starting to understand foot-speed to create turnovers. He did a good job again tonight and both these guys (Lucic) used their legs, getting on top of people, both big-body guys."

TIED FOR WILDCARD SPOT

And, so the Oilers are now tied with Anaheim, Vancouver and Dallas for the second wildcard in the West as they head to Vancouver Wednesday. And, they won a game when they didn't need McDavid or Draisaitl, with the foot soldiers doing rolling up their sleeves to help out.

"Down the stretch here, we're all aware of how close the standings are," Chiasson said. "You know, I was on a championship team last year (in Washington). Our best players were our best players, but our depth guys won us everything. It's a big part of winning."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 01.16.2019

1126182 Edmonton Oilers

Willis: Why the Oilers should make a decision on Peter Chiarelli this week

By Jonathan Willis Jan 15, 2019

After firing Todd McLellan as Edmonton's coach, GM Peter Chiarelli held a media conference call. He was asked about the roster he had assembled, and while he talked about parity and room for improvement and injury he repeated the same point several times: "It's good enough."

There's really only one question the people above Chiarelli in the Oilers' organizational hierarchy need to answer: is the GM right?

For the good of the team, it's a question that should be resolved by the end of next week. The timing is important because Edmonton plays its last game before a 10-day break on January 22. That break is a chance to evaluate everything, as well as set trade deadline strategy.

If Chiarelli is not going to be the Oilers general manager past this summer, he shouldn't be the one heading up hockey operations through this period.

The risk with running a lame-duck GM through the deadline period is obvious. In midseason trades just this year, Chiarelli has already committed the Oilers to Ryan Spooner and Brandon Manning and their combined \$5.45-million cap hit through next season.

A caretaker GM can handle necessary immediate business with less likelihood of committing his successor to pricey long-term bets.

Additionally, making a decision prior to the deadline would give the Oilers time to form a search committee, do research and turn a long list of plausible GM candidates into a short list of interviewees. The organization has never engaged in a thorough public search for a GM and that is perhaps reflected in its league-worst record since Kevin Lowe vacated the office.

If the Oilers are going to keep Chiarelli in his post, the timing is even more important. A GM with security past the summer is more likely to engage in the long-term planning the position demands. He is less likely to engage in short-term panic moves aimed at saving his job.

Regardless of what the decision is, the Oilers are better off making it this week than they are kicking the can to the end of the year.

It won't necessarily be easy for the team to make a decision by that point. Large organizations are rarely known for their agility, although it's rarely noted that this in many ways is a good thing. When making decisions that



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are going to have massive long-term repercussions, it doesn't pay to be hasty.

One need only look at the level of change which came sweeping through the organization the last time it hired a new manager, in the summer of 2015.

It hasn't even been four full years yet, but all but three regulars from the 2014-15 team have since been jettisoned by the organization – and this from a team that had 12 players aged 25-or-younger play 20-plus games. That means that with the exception of Leon Draisaitl, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Oscar Klefbom the NHL team Chiarelli inherited has been wiped away.

That group has of course been augmented by prospects left over (Darnell Nurse, Jujhar Khaira) and a gimme draft choice (Connor McDavid), but the GM has tremendous power to remake a roster in his own image. Often when a new GM arrives he throws out the old playbook to make room for his own.

The financial decisions being made are large. As of now and including totals from the start of the season, Edmonton has \$309,306,499 in total salary commitments through the year 2025. All save the \$18-million on Ryan Nugent-Hopkins' contract are from deals signed during Chiarelli's tenure.

This exaggerates matters somewhat, in that it goes back to September and ignores the many deals of the obvious variety. The amount paid to Jesse Puljujarvi is the same that all fourth overall picks get. The amount paid to Connor McDavid is whatever he wants. Nevertheless, there are many big financial decisions involved in the gig.

This also ignores off-ice costs. The scouting staff has been almost completely overhauled since Chiarelli's arrival. The coaching staff in the NHL and the AHL has also been remade.

When a team hires a new president/general manager it is picking the person who will determine organizational philosophy on and off the ice, hire the personnel to implement that philosophy and both manage the players and allot the money to execute it. It's a massive job, and not the kind of position where hiring or firing on a whim is a good idea.

A big organization filling that position looks at different things than a pundit or a fan would.

For example, even after Edmonton's largely successful 2016-17 season, a pundit might have had reservations about endorsing Chiarelli's moves. From the Griffin Reinhart trade to the Milan Lucic signing to the Taylor Hall deal, an argument could (and in some corners was) made that the Oilers' short-term success carried some long-term baggage.

Those criticisms made sense from a pundit's perspective, but not that of a CEO or owner. A pundit should make arguments on a process based from independent thought; yes-men and weathercocks don't add much value.

For a CEO or owner, it's different. They aren't supposed to be subject matter experts; sports is filled with stories of micromanaging owners and the damage they can inflict. That's why they hire general managers who are, and why they are supposed to look at results while the GM safeguards the process.

Yet even from a results standpoint, caution is warranted. It doesn't do for the higher-ups to delve too deeply into minutiae.

Almost a year ago now I examined Chiarelli's record in depth, aiming for a 'just the facts' presentation of what he had done. The idea was to get away from philosophical differences and look solely at the record. My conclusion then was that despite some good decisions on balance his biggest moves had been failures which had set the organization back.

Nevertheless, that conclusion was arguable. Hall had won MVP, but some still made the case that the Oilers had to bring in Adam Larsson because their defensive deficiency was so acute and finding right-shot defenders so difficult. Jordan Eberle had outscored Ryan Strome, but

there were positional considerations. Lucic was in a tailspin, but coming off a 50-point season the year before and he was not yet 30.

The 2017-18 season was a disaster, but there were injuries to consider and a year earlier the team had gone deep into the second round of the playoffs. In the summer of 2018, as Edmonton's higher-ups considered the general manager, it had to be sorely tempting to look at those failures as being at least partially the result of circumstance.

That isn't possible in 2018-19. Now in the fourth year of Chiarelli's administration, the Oilers are clearly his team, built by his process. With the backdrop of 2017-18 providing immediate context, there's also no reason to be overly charitable in interpreting the results.

The results speak for themselves. If we give Chiarelli his first year as a transitional period, since the start of 2016-17 the Oilers have played 210 games. They have won 105 of them and lost 105 of them. They are roughly in line with those numbers this year, too, with 22 wins and 24 losses. They are a bubble team that sometimes gets hot and sometimes gets cold.

Edmonton's even-strength scoring reflects that, too. Since the start of 2016-17, the Oilers have scored 468 even-strength goals and allowed 468 even-strength goals.

The question is whether those results over the last 2-½ seasons are good enough, and in answering that question it's important to look at the NHL's top scorers over that span:

Connor McDavid: 277 points

Nikita Kucherov: 260 points

Sidney Crosby: 233 points

Crosby, the generational talent who has been the centrepiece of two Stanley Cup wins by Pittsburgh since Chiarelli took over the Oilers, is a phenomenal building block. McDavid is 44 points better than him over the league's last 200-odd games.

Kucherov, meanwhile, is the top offensive weapon on Tampa Bay, the team currently running away with first place in the NHL. The gap between Kucherov and McDavid is smaller, but at 17 points still significant.

We can see the size of that influence on the team's even-strength scoring. When McDavid is on the ice at even-strength since the start of 2016-17, the Oilers are plus-53. That's basically identical to Kucherov's totals in Tampa Bay (plus-51) and Crosby's totals in Pittsburgh (plus-54), despite the fact that both of those players have far better supporting casts.

The difference between Edmonton and the Lightning or Penguins at even-strength comes down to what happens when the superstar steps off the ice. Pittsburgh is plus-13. Tampa Bay is plus-24. Edmonton is minus-53.

Pittsburgh has a great superstar and a team around him good enough to make modest gains when he's off the ice. Tampa Bay has a great superstar and a team around him good enough to post solid numbers when he's off the ice. Edmonton has a great superstar and a team around him so bad that it literally gives back every single goal he helps create.

This then is what the Oilers are: a wildcard team, hovering around .500, torn between the greatness of their best player and the weakness of his supporting cast. These positive and negative charges cancel each other out, leaving Edmonton almost purely neutral.

Chiarelli cannot take credit for McDavid, or for Leon Draisaitl, his most regular linemate. Nobody but Chiarelli can take credit for the disaster that is the team's supporting cast.

The current Oilers' greatest weakness is also the greatest reason for optimism about their future. The McDavid-led core will last under a different GM. The supporting cast will not.



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We can look at Pittsburgh, twice, for examples of how this works.

In the summer of 2014, after eight straight playoff appearances and five seasons without a Cup, the Penguins fired GM Ray Shero and hired Jim Rutherford. Of the (pretty good) team Rutherford inherited, just five regulars would be mainstays on the playoff lineup that would win the Stanley Cup two years later.

The Mario Lemieux-led Penguins came from farther back. Again, though, between missing the playoffs in the spring of 1988 and winning the Cup in the summer of 1991 all but five regulars were turned over.

A general manager can make sweeping changes, but as a rule there isn't much he can do about the core he inherits. It gets lost sometimes, but this is why teams rebuild: not really to replace the supporting cast, but because it's almost impossible to land a real difference-maker outside the draft unless some rival GM is looking to offload Tyler Seguin or Taylor Hall.

Chiarelli's inherited core was Draisaitl, Nugent-Hopkins, Hall, Klefbom and the first overall that was certain to become McDavid. A GM taking the lead today would have all of that save Hall, and as we've seen even in the absence of Hall the top end of the Oilers compares nicely to Pittsburgh or Tampa Bay.

At this juncture, three and a half years into Chiarelli's tenure, the state of the Oilers seems obvious: they have a great core undermined by a bad supporting cast.

The fix for this seems equally obvious: keep the core and jettison the man responsible for building that bad supporting cast.

As we've seen, the ideal timing for such a change is next week. The break in the games means this is the right moment to bring in a caretaker GM and institute a plan for the trade deadline which will support the Oilers long-term organizational goals and the efforts of the next head of hockey operations.

It seems unlikely to happen. The people at the top of the organizational pyramid have been conservative in evaluating Chiarelli. In many ways it's hard to blame them. It's a big move and as a rule it's a good idea for owners and CEOs to leave process to the GM hired to govern it and focus primarily on the results.

In this case, the conservative and purely results-oriented play is to wait until April and to treat making the playoffs as a pass/fail mark. It would be the wrong play in that it sacrifices the trade deadline and also could endanger the kind of proper and wide-ranging GM search the team has never really taken time to do.

It's also the wrong play in that the big picture isn't going to change whether the Oilers are five points above or five points below the playoff cut line this year. Whichever way it breaks, the real story is the tension between the good that happens with McDavid and the bad that happens without him, and the knowledge of that tension is all that's truly necessary to make a decision on Chiarelli's performance.

Chiarelli says the roster is good enough. The results show it isn't. It is that simple and the time is now.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.16.2019

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Mangiapane looks past first NHL point, wants to be an everyday NHLer

Kristen Anderson, Postmedia

Playing it cool, trying to pretend that he'd been there before, Andrew Mangiapane downplayed the attention he garnered from scoring his first National Hockey League point on Sunday.

A few text messages from friends and family. The in-house man-of-the-match Calgary Police Service cowboy hat. The puck that touched his stick, then Derek Ryan's, then Mark Giordano's, then past Arizona Coyotes netminder Adin Hill for the Calgary Flames' first goal of an eventual 7-1 win. Social media love.

But his intentions and long-term goals in the NHL, hopefully, will not stop there.

"It's definitely nice to get the first one out of the way and hopefully there's many more to come and all that," Mangiapane was saying on Tuesday as the Flames returned to the ice after enjoying a day off Monday. "It was just a checkmark off the list and now I can just keep moving forward with my game as a pro and grow as a player.

"It's a day-to-day business."

That day-to-day business can be fickle, especially for a call-up like Mangiapane, who has taken advantage of his situation he is in.

The diminutive left-winger was recalled in early December and skated in seven games before being sent back to the American Hockey League's Stockton Heat. But suffering an undisclosed injury at the NHL level brought him back to Calgary to see their training staff and skate at the Scotiabank Saddledome. The Flames re-activated him off the injured reserve on Jan. 7 and kept him around.

"I was a little down, there, but the training staff and management helped me get over the injury I had," said the Toronto native. "Feeling good now, so I have to thank them. But I was a little down when it all happened but I'm still happy I'm here and got my first point.

"It's definitely been an up-and-down rollercoaster."

Riding the ups and downs, however, Mangiapane drew into the Flames' lineup Jan. 11 against Florida — the first time since his injury and his first NHL game action since Dec. 15 — and logged only four minutes of ice time, finishing the game a minus-one. But, on Sunday, he earned 13:34 of ice time versus the Coyotes.

"He did a good job coming back in," said Flames head coach Bill Peters. "I thought that line was real good. He did a good job on the forecheck, he got in and was quick on the forecheck. They recovered pucks and it was good for him to get his first NHL point. He had a good look in the first period when it was 0-0.

"That's a real positive for us if he can come in and play at that level (after injury)."

He's not sure how long it's going to last, how many chances he'll get at another NHL point or, even, at scoring his first NHL goal.

But at this point with only 19 NHL games on his resume, Mangiapane, Calgary's sixth-round (166th overall) selection from the 2015 NHL draft, is trying to prove he belongs.

He's not basking in the glow of his first NHL point.

He's not hungry for his first NHL goal.

He's simply operating with a mindset of "happy-to-be-here, happy to contribute, happy to improve every day and learn from the coaching staff," while living out of a suitcase at the team hotel along with Flames blueliner Oliver Kylington, who has been with the team since Juuso Valimaki suffered a high ankle sprain against the Vegas Golden Knights on Nov. 23 and Michael Stone's blood clot was discovered.

"You're checking (milestones) off the checklist which is nice but my goal is to be here every day and be a full-time NHLer, right?" said Mangiapane, who spent Sunday's game on the fourth line with Derek Ryan and Garnett Hathaway and looks like he'll be in against the Buffalo



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Sabres on Wednesday. "That's my goal coming in. You just have to work hard every day and keep pushing the pace."

His first NHL point was well-deserved but according to Peters, a greater body of work is needed before evaluating how long Mangiapane stays or if he is sent back to Stockton.

"When you first come up, you're running on adrenalin," Peters said. "And then when you come back in the lineup, you're running on adrenalin and fear of going down (to the AHL). So, let's see it over time. Let's see it over 10 games from now, what's your game like now that the adrenalin has worn off. It's a process."

"But I think he's been passing the test."

SOLID SEASON FOR GIO

There is a silver lining to the fact Mark Giordano was left off the NHL All-Star roster.

"He can't get hurt," quipped Flames head coach Bill Peters.

Named the NHL's first star of the week, the first defenceman to have been recognized this season with eight points in four games, the questions continue to roll in regarding the 35-year-old's monster 2018-19 NHL season. Heading into Tuesday's NHL action, Giordano's nine goals and 38 assists in 45 games were tied with Toronto's Morgan Rielly for second in league scoring among defencemen. Although he won't be attending the 2019 NHL All-Star festivities in San Jose, he's a strong candidate for this year's Norris Trophy, while his plus-36 is tops among all players in the NHL.

On Tuesday, Peters was asked where the Flames' captain ranks in his own personal books of top-end players.

"He's right there," he said. "He probably flew under the radar a little bit over the years. But he's had lots of good years. The year he tore his biceps, he was having a fantastic year. He's having a fantastic year, again, right now. As impressive as he was the other night (Sunday's 7-1 win over the Arizona Coyotes), the one thing I took out of it was he was a plus-five. That's hard to do. You know you're putting yourself in good situations offensively and defensively when you do that."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 01.16.2019

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

By Craig Custance Jan 15, 2019

There are a few things you could historically count on from a Team Finland entry in a major international hockey tournament. One, they'd advance further than you expected. Almost always. Two, they'd be as defensively sound a group as any team in the tournament. Three, their goaltending group would be equally as great.

But firepower? That was usually reserved for other countries.

Now, as we finish up our projections of the 2020 World Cup of Hockey (a tournament that is surprisingly still very much an option, according to optimistic CBA negotiation reports from colleague Pierre LeBrun), we see just how much Finland has evolved.

There isn't just firepower. There's firepower to spare. Two lines worth. The Finland teams that have won multiple golds in world junior championships are maturing into a world power.

"This 2020 World Cup is going to be a lot of fun for us," said Helsinki native and former NHL forward Sean Bergenheim, who assisted in doing some Finland roster assessment for The Athletic. "The success we've had in the World Junior Championships the last years, I think that's going to be the first big tournament when you see these young players now being the stars of our men's national team."

You've got the game-changing goal scorer in Patrik Laine. The 200-foot center in Aleksander Barkov. The straw that stirs the drink in Sebastian Aho. And the No. 1 defenseman in Miro Heiskanen that the country really hasn't had in the past. The lineup is deep, diverse and certainly capable of winning it all.

"For Finland to have success, I would still say the team and the identity is what has made Finland strong always – teamwork," Bergenheim said. "I don't think they're going to change the system to a fully offensive system. I think the way the national team has played hockey, combined with those players and that firepower is going to be a pretty good chance for success."

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

Forwards

Finland has had offensive stars in the past but nothing quite like the depth of this forward group.

"Right now, it looks like we're going to have the best offensive lineup we've ever had," Bergenheim said. "You see what (Mikko) Rantanen has done – it's not just one line, with a superstar, it's two lines that can compete with any – with Canada – or any country's top two lines. We haven't had that before."

I preferred to keep Carolina teammates Aho and Teuvo Teravainen together and put Mikael Granlund in the top six because of his experience, leaving Kasperii Kapanen's offense spread out to the third line.

Bergenheim signed off on the top six but said he might build out the fourth line a little differently.

"I would maybe add somebody like Valteri Filppula or Leo Komarov," Bergenheim said. "They would be more useful there than Kotkaniemi or Lehtonen. It's hard to say. I would still have a few of the older guys there too. The team is quite young, those (veteran) guys could have a shutdown role for Finland."

There's a debate to be had as to whether or not to include Kaapo Kakko. He's a projected top two pick in June's draft and has impressed Bergenheim with his play in the Finnish league.

"He's really good," Bergenheim said. "Two years from now, I think it's possible he's in there. In a way, I hope he's going to be on that team and taking those steps and getting the experience."

Defensemen

By the time this tournament rolls around, Miro Heiskanen will have cemented himself as a bonafide No. 1 defenseman. This country has had high-end veterans like Teppo Numminen and Kimmo Timonen but this kid has the chance to be something really special for Finland.

"He's awesome," Bergenheim said. "It's good for Finland. We haven't really had a stud D-man in many years. He's the one."

After that, it gets a little thin compared to other powers. That's not to say the defense is a weakness for Finland, these are all NHL defensemen listed above, but when you compare it to, say, Sweden, there's a definite advantage for the Swedes.

There will be a lot on Heiskanen's shoulders in this tournament, although he appears capable of handling it.

"If he can take steps, he'll be a superstar," Bergenheim said.



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Goalies

Pekka Rinne is coming off a Vezina trophy season and should be locked in as the No. 1 option at this point for Finland but he's also 36 years old right now and by the time this tournament rolls around will be pushed for playing time in Nashville even more by fellow Finn Juuse Saros.

But out of respect for Rinne, he's the No. 1.

"I think he is right now," agreed Bergenheim. "I would definitely put him there."

Tuukka Rask is the bigger name but Bergenheim also likes Antti Raanta as another option in goal for Finland. Raanta has had trouble staying healthy but has a career .920 save percentage.

"Raanta has played pretty good too and he's younger," Bergenheim said. "He can be there in two years, it's right to have him in there."

The Athletic LOADED: 01.16.2019

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The Athletic / LeBrun: For real, NHL and NHLPA both appear to want long-term labour peace, not another lockout

By Pierre LeBrun Jan 15, 2019

TORONTO — Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, well, you know the rest.

Especially when it comes to the NHL and collective bargaining.

And so I write this column very much knowing how ridiculous it could read months down the road.

You're looking at a guy who still wears the scars of covering a few NHL lockouts in his day.

But I must say, what I'm hearing from both sides these days on the NHL labour front is almost unheard of for this sport.

You're talking about a league that's had three lockouts in 25 years.

But at this hour, for what it's worth in the here and now, we seem to have two sides genuinely hoping to avoid missing games this time around.

Under the auspices of meeting a few times this season to salvage the 2020 World Cup of Hockey, including a positive get-together last week in Las Vegas, there's been spill-over CBA chatter which well, has actually been positive.

Gulp. For real.

"Talking in a substantive and meaningful way this far in advance of contract expiration can only be a good thing," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Athletic on Monday. "It's not something we were able to do last time around for a variety of reasons. Hopefully, the result will be different this time as well."

Said NHL Players' Association Don Fehr on Monday:

"We continue to regularly discuss a variety of matters with the league in advance of the re-opener option in September. After meeting last week, we expect to meet this week and have more meetings going forward."

Yes, both sides meet again Wednesday here in Toronto and again the World Cup is the front-burner item because they're running out of time to still stage it in September 2020 unless they don't have a deal in very short order.

But beyond whether or not there's a World Cup, what's become much more paramount is the idea that both sides have the bigger picture of the CBA in mind, too, with a decision needed by September on the CBA re-opener for 2020.

And the reason you can't talk World Cup without talking CBA is that the league won't agree to stage the tournament in 2020 without the guarantee of the players not opting out of the CBA at the same time.

But this isn't just about avoiding the re-opener in 2020. The real challenge here, and mutual desire, is long-term labour peace.

I keep hearing from people around the industry these days saying that while there are tweaks that are needed, particularly from a players' perspective, there certainly isn't that sense of dread that either side wants an all-out war.

"I think the way the league is going right now, two new teams, I'd be surprised if we (got) locked out," veteran Avalanche blueliner Erik Johnson said Monday. "But I don't think it means it won't drag out until the final hour. I think we'll get something done but I don't think it will be as soon as probably people would like to see. But I think it'll get done without a lockout. At least I'm optimistic about it."

Avs player rep Ian Cole, which means he's on the NHLPA's executive board, senses the same positive vibes but is careful not to get carried away with that, either. So much can happen between now and September.

"I don't want to surmise what's going to happen six months from now but there's wishful thinking for sure," said Cole.

As far as avoiding games missed?

"Well I think a lot of that depends on what happens in the discussions," said Cole. "I think it seems to me at least, and I could be off base or I could be spot on, but it seems that the players are pretty galvanized in the sense that everyone wants to continue to play hockey but also doesn't want to get taken to the cleaners for the lack of a better saying. I think there's some cautious optimism there, but like I said, emphasis on the word cautious."

The bottom line is this: I don't presently see one major issue that is so paramount that either side wants to go to war over.

Having said that, especially because the people negotiating in the room are holdovers from past battles, it wouldn't take much for it to go sideways in a hurry.

Both sides I think could use some tweaks to the system but I'd say the players feel a little more strongly they're the ones who gave away more the last two CBAs in accepting a hard salary cap and then dropping their revenue share to 50-50 from 57 per cent. They feel they've already made billions in concessions over the past two negotiations.

For the league to convince the players to extend the CBA, I think the owners must offer some concessions. For example:

— Could definitions for Hockey Related Revenue be extended toward the players' side to include revenue streams the NHLPA currently doesn't tap into? It doesn't have to be major, major money here, but something. More revenue streams means lower escrow for players, at least in theory. I also think players are tired of seeing HRR affected by have-not franchises.

"No one likes to see 13 per cent of their paycheques go out to support organizations that are — not my words, the media's words — that are run poorly or whatnot. Or in unfortunate situations," said Cole of the escrow payments players make.

"The owners want to extend the CBA because it's very lucrative for them right now, which you know, they take all the risk and everything," added Johnson. "But for us, we're giving up a fair chunk of our salaries to off-set some of the owners' losses in some of the smaller markets. Which is fair



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for them in a sense, but we'd like to get a little bigger piece of the pie if we can."

— Could the NHLPA get the owners to pay more to ensure better long-term medical care for both current and former players? For retired players living in the U.S., this is a big deal as far as medical coverage is concerned.

— And of course, Olympic participation. A must for players.

But that's no great giveback. I've said all along Beijing 2022 is a red herring. The league should want to be there as much as the players in terms of what's right for the sport itself. I don't believe the players should have to give back anything in CBA talks in return for that.

The bottom line is that there are ways to entice the players without having what we normally have before a new CBA is negotiated: scorched earth.

"There are obviously certain things that you know are up for discussion and there's always give and take. You need to emphasize and pick out things you think you can make a deal with. We trust our leadership," said Cole.

Imagine a world in which we wake up in August to a joint announcement that the CBA has been extended by several years. Crazy, right?

I'm not ready to lay money on it, I just can't after the lockouts covered in the past, it's in my bones to doubt all this positive stuff we're hearing now.

But it sure is amazing to think it's even a possibility.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.16.2019

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The Athletic / Pronman: 2018-19 midseason NHL prospects ranking

By Corey Pronman Jan 15, 2019

Welcome to my midseason rankings of the best prospects in NHL organizations.

The midpoint of the season is a point to reflect in the prospect community. NHL teams regularly have meetings with their scouting staffs at this time of year. A lot transpires in the first half of the season. I've traveled a lot and watched a lot of hockey, and with the World Junior Championship recently completed, this is always a great time to compress all the information and see where everyone stands.

These rankings are based on thousands of hours of research, spanning many trips to rinks across the hockey world, watching a lot of video, analyzing player's production, and discussing players with scouts, coaches and executives. While I seek input from many sources, these are solely my opinions and will deviate from NHL sources, even significantly in some instances.

My preference is for highly skilled players with upside. I look for prospects with speed, skill and intelligence. Skating is a little more important to me in forwards than defenders, and physicality is more important to me in defenders than forwards. I prefer forwards to defensemen, and centers to wingers.

To help illustrate players' strengths and weaknesses, each profile shows the grading scale I use for players' attributes. I am a fan of the 20-80 scale, borrowed from baseball. The 20-80 range represents three standard deviations from the mean, a grade of 50. A grade of 50 means the skill projects as NHL average in that category, 55 is above average,

60 is top 33 percent, 70 is top 10 percent, 80 is one of the best. A 45 is below average, 40 is fringe NHL level. A 20 is beer league level. Given how a normal distribution usually looks, most grades are within the 40-60 range. I only make note of a shot grade when a player stands out in that regard.

I split players up into tiers that will be seen throughout this feature. The difference between the very bottom of one tier and the very top of the next one is not significant. Here is how you should interpret them:

Elite prospect: Projects to be top 10-15 percent of the league at their position.

High-end prospect: Projects as a legit top-line forward who can play on your PP1/top pairing defenseman.

Very good prospect: Projects as a top-six forward/top-four defenseman/starting goaltender.

Prospects are not eligible if they've played more than 25 career NHL games in a season, 50 career games, 27 years of age or older, or were currently in the league as of Jan. 12.

From our previous rankings at the start of the season, 25 players have "graduated" out of eligibility, so keep that in mind as you look at a player's preseason ranking. While a player may have moved up in the ranking, they might not have improved as much as their peers .

Any questions? Join me Wednesday at noon ET to discuss these rankings and more.

Elite NHL Prospect

Quinn Hughes, D, Vancouver

Age: 19 | Drafted: Seventh overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 7

Skating: 70

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 65

Quinn Hughes is a special talent. The way he skates is unique and separates him from the pack. He's a truly elite skater but it's not just speed, his edges are ridiculously good. He spins off pressure and gets up to top speed incredibly well. He's also very skilled and makes elite plays seems routine. He has a fluidity to his game that I've never seen before. Every pass is crisp and on the mark, every rush seems easy. He's a small defenseman and he'll never be known for his penalty killing ability, but I think he defends OK. The biggest thing I've seen with Hughes is he needs to improve is cutting down the turnovers, especially the high-risk ones. But you take some bad with a truckload of the good. He projects to be a star defenseman in the NHL.

Read more: Hughes finally arrives in Vancouver

The skills that allow Quinn Hughes to thrive on the power play

Martin Necas, C, Carolina

Age: 20 | Drafted: 12th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 10

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 60

Necas didn't have the best world juniors, but he's been great everywhere else in the past year and a half. I've watched him in the AHL where he's



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looked very good and other scouts have said the same. His skating, skill and vision are all plus tools. He can push the pace with his speed and make skilled plays at an NHL pace. Necas has the potential to be a No. 1 center who drives a line. He'll need to get a lot stronger and a little more consistent in terms of how he physically competes, but I expect he'll be in the NHL in the near future.

Owen Tippett, RW, Florida

Age: 19 | Drafted: 10th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 30

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 65

Shot Grade: 60

Tippett has really impressed me this season between the OHL and Canada's U20 team. I see a player whose game has started to mature and has a talent level that's off the charts. Tippett's skill level is elite, he makes plays many wouldn't even think of trying. He has the individual skill to dance around defenders, but what's really impressed me is his playmaking. He makes the tough passes consistently, hitting pucks through seams on the power play and showing a lot of creativity as a playmaker. He still has his great shot, and that combination of tools makes him lethal. He's never going to be a great defender and will have the occasional night off, but when he's on there aren't many players who can match his talent level.

High-End NHL Prospect

Filip Zadina, RW, Detroit

Age: 19 | Drafted: Sixth overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 6

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 60

Shot Grade: 60

Zadina had a very disappointing world juniors, and while he's been quite good in the AHL, he hasn't been blowing doors down. There's some reason for pessimism, he hasn't been dancing around guys like he did last season and his compete level has worried me at times. But there's still plenty of reason for optimism. He has a ton of talent, his skills are fantastic, he skates well, he's got that cannon of a shot and, from what I've seen this season, his playmaking/vision is better than I thought last season. I still think he's going to be a great NHL player but it may take more time than I initially thought.

Read more: [Where Filip Zadina goes next](#)

[Behind the scenes with Zadina at the draft](#)

Barrett Hayton, C, Arizona

Age: 18 | Drafted: Fifth overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 41

Skating: 45

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 65

I've written a lot this season about Hayton, but he's looked fantastic every time I've watched him. His skill level and playmaking ability are among the best in junior hockey and at the world juniors he showed people how creative he can be. While his skill drives his value, he's also a very competitive two-way forward who projects to be a reliable defensive center in the NHL. He's improved his skating and can play at a quick pace when he wants to, but too often I find he slows the play down more than I'd like. With his talent and progression, it's hard to be too down on him, and I think he could be a top-line center one day for the Coyotes.

Read more: [Barrett Hayton is checking all the boxes](#)

Jordan Kyrrou, RW, St. Louis

Age: 20 | Drafted: 35th overall in 2016

Previous ranking: 16

Skating: 65

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 60

Kyrrou hasn't had much success at the NHL level this season, but he's been fantastic in the AHL as a 20-year-old, named an AHL All-Star and consistently a threat. The offensive tools Kyrrou has make you optimistic about his NHL projection. He's an elite skater with a lot of offensive creativity. He can play in a straight line with his speed, as well as having the skill to pull up and make a play. He's got to get stronger, a little tougher and learn to play inside the dots, but the talent will make him a power play guy if he rounds out his game a little bit.

Read more: [The grandson of Greek immigrants, Jordan Kyrrou's NHL career seems 'meant to be'](#)

Grigori Denisenko, LW, Florida

Age: 18 | Drafted: 15th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 35

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 65

Denisenko was the best player at the recent world juniors and has impressed me this season. He's got nearly every tool you want despite not being the biggest guy. He's quick and elusiveness with great edge work, he's got high-end hands and vision, and he plays hard. If anything, the criticism of him is he plays too hard at times and goes over the line. The production hasn't been there for him in the KHL, but it's the second best hockey league and he's very physically underdeveloped. Once he bulks up, I think he'll be a no doubt top-six forward.

Rasmus Kupari, C, Los Angeles

Age: 18 | Drafted: 20th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 18

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 55

There are times when I'm watching Kupari and I think he's not only going to be good, but he could be a cornerstone player. The raw tools are off the charts. He's a pro-sized center with high-end speed and puck skills



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who makes filthy moves seem routine, and he can do so at top speed. He'll have rushes where he goes through several guys and you wonder just how high the ceiling is for him. I like his hockey sense, but I don't think he sees the game at the same level as his other attributes and that's the main thing holding him back from hitting the highest echelon for me. His production concerns from his draft season have all but subsided, and he looks on the fast track to the NHL.

Read more: Kupari a 'man among boys' at WJC

Cody Glass, C, Vegas

Age: 19 | Drafted: Sixth overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 12

Skating: 45

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 55

Hockey sense: 65

Glass has torn up the WHL for the past two-and-a-half years and was quite good as Canada's No. 1 center at the world juniors. He's a top-end playmaker. He's the prototypical guy you want on the half-wall on the power play due to his vision and skill level. He knows how to wait out options, sees options develop and has the soft touch to thread passes through any lane. He's worked on rounding out his game and I think he'll be a decent two-way guy as a pro. He'll never be confused for a physical guy, but his smarts will carry him a lot in that respect. Glass skates fine but I find he plays a bit slow at times. When he wants to turn on the jets, he has an extra gear.

Cale Makar, D, Colorado

Age: 20 | Drafted: Fourth overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 20

Skating: 65

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 60

Makar returned for his sophomore season at UMass, where he's been the best player on one of the better teams in the nation. He's one of the best puck rushers you'll see, as his great speed combined with his skill level can make him a nightmare to handle for defensemen when he's coming up the ice. He's at his best on the rush, but he's also a very smart player who can make the tough passes. Makar will never be the best defender as a pro due to his size, but at the collegiate level, he's defended more than fine. The 2017 fourth-overall pick by the Avs will likely sign and suit up for them this spring.

Read more: The hockey world at his feet, Cale Makar continues to tread lightly

Vitali Kravtsov, RW, New York Rangers

Age: 19 | Drafted: Ninth overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 17

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 60

Kravtsov has been very impressive over the past 12 months in the KHL and international play. Kravtsov's point totals haven't been amazing this season in the KHL, but Chelyabinsk has a weak team. His game is

defined by his skill. When Kravtsov has the puck, he's looking to make something happen. He makes the flashy skill plays seem routine. His playmaking has also consistently impressed me this season. I wasn't 100 percent on that aspect of his game going into the draft, but I think his vision is high-end now. His pace at times could be better, but he can skate fine when he gets going. The main thing with Kravtsov is improving his compete level. He can get lost on the perimeter and taken out of games physically.

Dominik Bokk, RW, St. Louis

Age: 18 | Drafted: 25th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 21

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 60

Bokk hasn't dominated the SHL this season but I still think his development is on track for a guy who one-and-a-half seasons ago was in German junior hockey. He was the top scorer at the U20 B pool and, in the past month, his play in the SHL has gotten a lot better, with him being a regular on Vaxjo's top power play unit on the half-wall. His skill level is great. I saw him fighting the puck a bit more than I'd have liked early on this season, but I was also more impressed with his vision and pace than what I saw last season. He may take longer than a typical top prospect and needs a lot of work off the puck, but I think when it clicks, with his skill level, he's going to start rolling over teams.

Troy Terry, RW, Anaheim

Age: 21 | Drafted: 148th overall in 2015

Previous ranking: 51

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 60

Terry is the best player I've seen in the AHL this season. The 21-year-old has at times shown the ability to dominate that level with his offensive ability. Terry has a ton of skill and playmaking ability. He's always looking to make a play, he does so many good things in small spaces and makes creative decisions without much room to work with. Terry has also played with pace, using his speed to push defenders back and then making a skilled play at full speed. Despite being an older player he still has room to fill out physically and can get pushed off pucks, but he does compete well.

Read more: His name is Troy Terry. This is his evolution.

Nick Suzuki, C, Montreal

Age: 19 | Drafted: 13th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 34

Skating: 45

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 70

I was unsure on Suzuki last season, I watched him a fair bit and he never blew me away like in his draft year. This season I'm back on the bandwagon. Between his OHL and World Junior Championship play, I'm back toward my original assessment. He's an elite playmaker who sees the ice like few others. He combines that with a high skill level and makes



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difficult plays seem easy. Suzuki can score goals and has a good shot but has a pass-first mentality. Despite being small and lacking physicality, his exceptional hockey IQ allows him to be a good defensive forward. His main issue has and continues to be his skating as he really lacks any kind of dangerous gear. Once he's in the offensive zone he's lights out, but he could struggle to be the main zone entry guy on an NHL line.

Read more: Suzuki continues to show why he was the key piece of the Max Pacioretty trade

How Suzuki became one of junior hockey's most dynamic threats

Ryan Merkley, D, San Jose

Age: 18 | Drafted: 21st overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 28

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 65

Merkley is a player that you can write a lot about. He's an elite playmaker whose vision is off the charts. When he's on, he's making cross-ice passes with frequency, dancing around the blueline and making defenses look silly. But he's had some off nights where he's making bad decisions defensively, letting his emotions get the best of him and is a major negative. He's been traded this season and is off to a fresh start in Peterborough.

Adam Boqvist, D, Chicago

Age: 18 | Drafted: Eighth overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 25

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 70

Boqvist has been good this season in the OHL, his first season in North America. Some games he hasn't been as impactful and some games his playmaking stands out in a major way. His skill and particularly his offensive instincts are great, he sees the ice so well, and he is very creative in how he jumps into attacks and creates chances. I don't think he's shown a ton of pace on the smaller ice. He's a good skater but some games he plays a bit too slow. He's also not the biggest or meanest defenseman, so he might need time before he heads to the league.

Read more: How Adam Boqvist uses tempo, speed and a big shot in a small package to dictate

Very Good NHL Prospect

Kirill Kaprizov

Kirill Kaprizov, RW, Minnesota

Age: 21 | Drafted: 135th overall in 2015

Previous ranking: 24

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 60

Shot Grade: 60

I sense a fatigue in the industry, from scouts to fans, when discussing Kaprizov. He's been a regular on prospect lists for years. Even though his production is a bit down this season in the KHL, I haven't moved much on him as a player. He can make highly skilled plays, he can score, he has pace to his game and, despite being a smaller guy, he competes well versus men. The tools are there to succeed, but as one NHL scout put it, "I'm tired of hearing how good an NHL prospect he is. Let's see him do it already." Kaprizov is signed in the KHL through the 2019-20 season and has said he plans to see that contract through.

Noah Dobson, D, New York Islanders

Age: 19 | Drafted: 12th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 36

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 60

Hockey sense: 55

Dobson's counting numbers will not impress anyone at first glance, but he played the first half on an awful Bathurst team. He's a great player who has continued to win me over through the course of the season. He'll never be a first power play guy in the NHL, but I see a tough minutes defenseman who can play every situation. He's very mobile, especially for 6-foot-3, smart defensively, moves the puck well and has better hands than I thought last season. I expect him to have a monster second half since being traded in the QMJHL.

Erik Brannstrom, D, Vegas

Age: 19 | Drafted: 15th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 42

Skating: 65

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 65

Brannstrom is one of the better defensemen in the AHL as a teenager and was also great at the world juniors. He's a dynamic skater who can lead a rush and activate off the blueline very well. He's also a creative puck-mover who can thread passes on the power play and out of his own zone. I had mild concerns going into the season about his pure offensive skill level, but he's eased those concerns. Brannstrom might not be the biggest guy, but he defends well because of his feet and hockey sense.

Read more: Brannstrom's talent is evident, but it won't be what gets him to Vegas

Drake Batherson, RW, Ottawa

Age: 20 | Drafted: 121st overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 70

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 60

Batherson looks excellent in the AHL as a rookie pro, continuing his dramatic upward trend as a prospect. He even earned a brief NHL call-up and was decent at the top level. Batherson is very skilled and smart, with the ability to run a power play and make a lot of plays. His skating will never be his strong point, but he's improved enough to where he can gain the zone and create some space for his skill. He'll need some time



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to continue to improve his strength and pace, but he looks like he will be an important part of the Senators soon.

Read more: Batherson forces Senators to accelerate their plan

Bode Wilde, D, New York Islanders

Age: 18 | Drafted: 41st overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 57

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 55

Wilde sparks much debate in scouting circles due to his tremendous natural ability, combined with a draft season that had significant ups and downs, and questions about his decision-making. The latter hasn't struck me as an issue this season. He certainly has a gambler mentality to his play and lives on the edge with the puck, but he's made an impact with his skating and skill. He can take over a shift and that's hard to find.

Sam Steel, C, Anaheim

Age: 20 | Drafted: 30th overall in 2016

Previous ranking: 29

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 65

Steel looks quite good as a rookie pro in the AHL. He probably wasn't ready for the NHL to start the season, but he will get back to that level soon. Steel is a very skilled playmaking center who can play at both ends of the rink. That's a valuable player. He can be the guy on an NHL power play who sets things up. He has dynamic skill, but the thing holding him back from showing true top-end potential is a lack of breakaway speed. He looks quicker this season but his first step could still be better. He has room to get stronger, but I like his compete level and he can kill penalties.

Eeli Tolvanen, LW, Nashville

Age: 19 | Drafted: 30th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 19

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 60

Shot Grade: 70

Tolvanen's 2017-18 was everything you could hope for. He tore up the KHL, was great at the world juniors and Olympics, and appeared to be on the fast track to the league. This season has been a bit different. He's been good. His shot is still a cannon, he's very skilled and can create offense, but I have some mild concerns. He's not the quickest guy for his size and struggles in 1-on-1 battles, leading to a transition to North America where both aspects of a player's game are important. I still think he's going to be a good player, but it may take longer than I thought last season.

Read more: Tolvanen sees a path to the Predators through Milwaukee

Evan Bouchard, D, Edmonton

Age: 19 | Drafted: 10th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 45

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 55

Hockey sense: 60

Bouchard hasn't put up giant numbers in the OHL like last season, but he's played very well, logging a ton of minutes and anchoring Canada's power play at the world juniors. He's got great vision and a big shot, which makes him deadly on the man advantage. Bouchard improved his defensive play enough that he should be able to check fine at the pro level. With Bouchard the question is, outside his vision, how much can he create with his feet or skill? Neither are weaknesses, but I wouldn't call either massive strengths.

Read more: How the eye test fails to properly evaluate Evan Bouchard

Bouchard enlists former figure skater to help improve a weakness in his game

Philippe Myers, D, Philadelphia

Age: 21 | Drafted: Undrafted

Previous ranking: 33

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 70

Hockey sense: 50

Myers' second pro season got off to a bit of a rocky start. He turned pucks over a lot but scouts report he's been better lately. There are few defensemen out there with Myers' combination of size, mobility and touch, and that athletic skill set has a ton of value. I don't think his hockey sense will ever be the selling point of his game, but he's smart enough to get enough out of his toolkit and create chances. He could be a reliable every situation guy who plays on a second pairing.

Read more: Philippe Myers is one of the NHL's top — and once overlooked — prospects

Kristian Vesalainen, LW, Winnipeg

Age: 19 | Drafted: 24th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 48

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 55

Hockey sense: 55

Shot Grade: 60

Vesalainen is having a tumultuous season, bouncing between the NHL and AHL before heading off to play for Jokerit in the KHL, where he's played well. He declined an invite to the Finnish U20 team, which was an interesting moment but understandable given his travels. Vesalainen on the ice has a lot of the tools you want. He's big, quick, skilled and can score. That tends to be a good combination. What I've liked this season is I've seen Kristian look to make a play more often. He distributes the puck at an above-average level even versus KHLers. He does need to compete harder at times as he's not the most physically intense player.

Read more: Jets prospect Kristian Vesalainen has the skill set to be more than a prototypical power forward



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Oliver Wahlstrom, RW, New York Islanders

Age: 18 | Drafted: 11th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 13

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 55

Shot Grade: 70

Wahlstrom's season is the subject of much debate. With every scout I've talked to this season, his name comes up at least once. Last season Wahlstrom seemed to score at will, putting up monster numbers at the USNTDP. He still has his big shot and his great hands, but his freshman season at Boston College has been a bit rocky. His compete level and pace hasn't always been the best, per scouts who've been to B.C. games. That said, he still gets his chances, makes some plays and had a good world juniors. I'm not ready to get off the Wahlstrom bandwagon, but it would be nice to see a four-point weekend from him soon.

Read more: Oliver Wahlstrom and the danger of diversity

Denis Gurianov, RW, Dallas

Age: 21 | Drafted: 12th overall in 2015

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 55

Hockey sense: 55

I had come down on Gurianov in the past year or two. I thought his play in the AHL leading up this season looked indifferent and questioned whether he saw the game well enough. I've always seen the great feet, the size, the skill and could envision a player, but he never really delivered. This season he's looked like a whole new Gurianov. He's making plays with pace versus men, driving the Texas Stars' offense and hitting tough passes, which I've never seen him do before consistently. Player development is not always linear. Sometimes it has peaks and valleys.

Read more: Struggles behind him, Denis Gurianov showing he's NHL ready

Morgan Frost, C, Philadelphia

Age: 19 | Drafted: 27th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 50

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 60

Frost has been one of the top players in the CHL the past one-and-a-half seasons. His skill level is fantastic. He makes plays others have no business trying and consistently looks like a top-end playmaker. I've had concerns over the years over his pace, but I'm seeing mild improvements in that area. At the world juniors, he showed he could skate at a quicker pace, but he's not great there, and at times, as a smaller guy, he can get pushed off pucks too easily. Due to that, it might take him some time to adjust to the pro game, but once he does he's so skilled that he's going to be a great NHLer.

Read more: Why Flyers prospect Morgan Frost needs to find different ways to use his skating

Ruslan Iskhakov, LW, New York Islanders

Age: 18 | Drafted: 43rd overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 53

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 70

Physical Game: 20

Hockey sense: 65

There are few prospects I've thought more about this season than Iskhakov. He's a 5-foot-8 winger, around a half point per game playing for UConn as a freshman, which typically doesn't suggest great NHL prospect. However, his pure skill level is "oh my" good. He makes plays nobody else at that level can make. He's a fantastic playmaker who has added more pace to his game since last season and has truly elite hands. Iskhakov can be a victim of trying to do too much at times and needs a lot of work physically. His upside is through the roof if he ever puts it together and I think he will. He's had games where he does a lot of good things but the points don't come, and I think he'll have a big second half.

Nikita Gusev, LW, Vegas

Age: 26 | Drafted: 202nd overall in 2012

Previous ranking: 31

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 65

Physical Game: 25

Hockey sense: 65

Gusev has dominated the KHL for the past two-and-a-half seasons. Now a 26-year-old winger (and the last season I'll consider him a prospect due to him losing Calder eligibility), it feels like I've talked about him forever. Gusev has a ton of skill and his vision is very good. He makes plays and can help an NHL power play. He's not the biggest, most physical or quickest guy, but he knows what to do with the puck. His contract is up at the end of the season and it feels like if he'll ever come to the NHL it's now or never.

Alexander Nylander, RW, Buffalo

Age: 20 | Drafted: Eighth overall in 2016

Previous ranking: 49

Skating: 45

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 65

Nylander's performance is better this season than 2017-18, and he had a good NHL camp. He's shown his skill and vision at the AHL level a little more consistently and is an important part of a strong Rochester club. He looks a little quicker this season, but I wish he played quicker, in that he'd attack with speed and make plays at a fast pace. He has the playmaking ability to be a top player at the AHL level (and eventually a good NHL player) if he did these things and competed a bit harder.

Ty Smith, D, New Jersey

Age: 18 | Drafted: 17th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 39



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Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 65

Smith was one of the best defensemen in the WHL last season and has continued that level in 2018-19. His puck-moving ability and IQ are fantastic. He processes the game so well and seems to have ice in his veins with the puck, leading to a lot of clean breakouts and entries. Smith isn't the biggest guy but he's a decent defender because of his IQ and very good skating ability. Despite having great edge work and good speed, he doesn't always push the pace like I'd like to see and can get pressured into turnovers when he plays too slow.

Lucas Elvenes, RW, Vegas

Age: 19 | Drafted: 127th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 22

Skating: 45

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 65

Elvenes' season has been a bit up and down. He's had good flashes in the SHL but also had stretches where he hasn't been as good. He had a good world juniors, though, and I'm a believer in the skill set. His hands are very good and his vision is better. Elvenes makes high-end plays consistently. He's not a perfect player by any means though. He lacks a real breakaway gear and isn't all that good off the puck due to a lack of strength and, at times, a low compete level. That said, if he gets it going he has the skill to run a power play and drive a line offensively.

Josh Norris, C, Ottawa

Age: 19 | Drafted: 19th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 60

I was skeptical that Norris had top-six potential last season (as well as during the Erik Karlsson trade). The 2017 first-round pick by San Jose has had an impressive season, though, between the NCAA and U20 levels. He's never going to dominate a game, but he's a well-rounded player who teases you with flashes of high-end skill. He skates well, he competes well, he makes plays and he can be used in any situation. If you're expecting a gamebreaker, you'll be disappointed; if you want a center who can log 15-16 reliable minutes a game, he could be that.

Serron Noel, RW, Florida

Age: 18 | Drafted: 34th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 70

Hockey sense: 50

I was skeptical about Noel's NHL projection last season, but I'm impressed by his play this season. He's always been one of the toolsiest players in the OHL, but his production is more consistent in Oshawa this

season. He's 6-foot-5, skates and handles the pucks well, and this season he's making more plays. His vision will never be great, but if he can just make the right plays and not force things, he has the talent level to take over a shift and be a good pro.

Joseph Veleno, C, Detroit

Age: 19 | Drafted: 30th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 43

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 55

Veleno is one of the best players in the QMJHL this season and recently is scorching hot scoring-wise. He's a very good skater who can push the pace and make a play with speed. He competes hard and could be a solid two-way center as a pro. Veleno is putting up points, but more importantly scoring goals – and not just tap-ins, a criticism of his game last season. He's a divisive prospect. Some scouts love him, some scouts say he screams fourth-liner. I lean to the former camp. Though his counting stats this season might get Detroit fans ahead of themselves, I think Veleno has enough skill to score in the NHL.

Read more: Joe Veleno and the pressures of being exceptional

Ryan Poehling, C, Montreal

Age: 20 | Drafted: 25th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 44

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 60

Poehling has had a solid third season at St. Cloud and had a great world juniors, where he was named the tournament MVP. His best assets are his hockey sense and vision. He sees the ice very well and can be a setup guy on the flank on a power play as a pro. The rest of his toolkit won't amaze you, but he's got skill. Poehling combines a good offensive skill set with a competitive two-way game down the middle and the ability to kill penalties. He projects as a solid all situations second-line center.

Read more: Poehling leads Canadiens prospects at the World Juniors

Joel Farabee, LW, Philadelphia

Age: 18 | Drafted: 14th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 82

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 65

I was a mild skeptic of Farabee going into his draft year, but since being picked by the Flyers (14th overall) I've steadily been won over by his game (I know, crazy right!). I always knew he was a smart player, but he's so smart. His natural skill level isn't high-end, but he's very creative and sees the game very well. Farabee combines that with a high compete level and fine but not amazing speed. He might never frequent highlight reels, but he will be a guy who will log a lot of minutes in all situations.

Klim Kostin, LW, St. Louis



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Age: 19 | Drafted: 31st overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 40

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 65

Hockey sense: 55

Kostin is a hard player for me to figure out. He's got a lot of tools that intrigue me. He's big, skilled, skates well and has a real mean streak to his game. At the amateur level, he's consistently impressed me and he's added an extra step to his skating this season. Versus men in the AHL, though, he's been good but nothing spectacular, and the production is so-so. It makes me wonder if he's just so physically ahead of other juniors that he looks better than he is. I believe too much in his skill set though so I am willing to let him figure it out.

Isac Lundestrom, C, Anaheim

Age: X19 | Drafted: 23rd overall in 2018

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 60

Lundestrom had a great NHL camp, which led to him initially making the Ducks' injury-plagued roster before being sent down to the AHL. I still question how dynamic his offensive ability is from watching him in the SHL and international level, but based on his great NHL camp and talking to scouts who spoke highly of his play in the AHL, I'm willing to bump him up. He's got a well-rounded skill set. Lundestrom is fast, skilled and a very smart two-way center. He will finish the second half of the season back in Sweden.

Kirill Marchenko, RW, Columbus

Age: 18 | Drafted: 49th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 55

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 55

Hockey sense: 55

Marchenko is somewhat tough to track this season, if only because he's bounced around between the MHL, VHL, KHL and Russia's U20 team. He has a fantastic toolkit. He's a big body winger with good speed and high-end skills. He can wow you on any given shift and looks like a better playmaker than he showed last season. With Marchenko's big frame he can have a good power game, and when he drives wide with speed he's tough to stop. But he's been inconsistent and sometimes doesn't always play that way.

Nicolas Hague, D, Vegas

Age: 20 | Drafted: 34th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 45

Puck Skills: 50

Physical Game: 80

Hockey sense: 50

Shot Grade: 60

I was a bit of a skeptic of Hague in the OHL, but he's been quite good in his first full pro season. He plays a lot of minutes in all situations for the Chicago Wolves and is among the leaders in shots on goal for defensemen in the AHL. His skating and skill aren't standout attributes, but he's got enough skill that, given his giant wingspan and booming shot, he can make the most of his skill set. Hague is showing good power play ability in the AHL, particularly as a trigger man. Not only is he a big guy but he also has an edge to his game, making him a real physical presence once he adjusts to the pro pace.

Adam Fox, D, Carolina

Age: 20 | Drafted: 66th overall in 2016

Previous ranking: 64

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 65

Fox has had a tremendous junior season at Harvard, where he's been among the best per game scorers in college among all players, never mind defensemen. Fox is an incredibly smart player – one may even say Fox is clever. He has a ton of poise and patience with the puck to see options develop, and has a high level of skill to execute plays. Fox is an agile skater, but for a defenseman his size, he lacks breakaway speed, leading some scouts to believe he won't be a top-four defenseman. I can see the argument, but he's got so much talent that I do think he can make it.

Read more: Things to know about Adam Fox: He gets points at a crazy rate and wants in the NHL ASAP

Gabriel Vilardi, C, Los Angeles

Age: 19 | Drafted: 11th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 11

Skating: 45

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 65

On talent, Vilardi is in the top 15. He's got great skill and vision, is a big center, and is tough to dislodge from the puck. The tools point to a legit top level prospect. However, Vilardi's prospect stock has diverted away from hockey and into the medical realm. He's often hurt and barely played this season before reinjuring his back. He's never been the best skater, either, and with all his ailments, there are concerns about how his pace will be when he returns.

This ranking is optimistic compared to a survey of NHL scouts who agreed on talent he's a great prospect but would be hesitant to move one of their top prospects in a one-for-one for Vilardi with his current health status. I'm not a doctor, I know hockey (or at least pretend to), so this one is a tough one.

Read more: From 'special' to injured, is 2018-19 already a lost season for Vilardi?

Gabe Vilardi and the art of being effective without getting noticed

Janne Kuokkanen, C, Carolina

Age: 20 | Drafted: 43rd overall in 2016

Previous ranking: 63

Skating: 50



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Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 50

Hockey sense: 60

Kuokkanen isn't a guy who is going to pop up on highlight reels, but he's got a lot of the tools you want. He's been great in the AHL, posting around a point per game and eating a lot of minutes for Charlotte. His best attribute is his hockey sense. He has good vision but understands his position well and is reliable at both ends of the rink. Kuokkanen skates fine and has skill too, but he makes a lot of plays from his smarts.

K'Andre Miller, D, New York Rangers

Age: 18 | Drafted: 22nd overall in 2018

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 50

Physical Game: 60

Hockey sense: 55

Miller has had a great freshman season. His world juniors didn't go well as he got sick. At Wisconsin, though, he leads his team in scoring and is one of the better freshmen in the country. He's a fantastic skater for a big man and competes hard at both ends. He's shown more offense this season than I saw from him previously. I'm not fully convinced he's a natural puck-mover/playmaker, but he can rush with the best of them and has solid skills.

Tyler Madden, C, Vancouver

Age: 19 | Drafted: 68th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 60

Madden has had a great freshman season and was great at the world juniors for Team USA. He's quicker than last season and his skill level is fantastic, with his offensive touch improved from when I watched him last season. He can dangle defenders with consistency but also has great two-way sense with the ability to play any situation. Madden isn't the biggest guy and has a lot of bulking up to do, but his improved skating shows optimism for where he can get to when he fills out.

Read more: Tyler Madden lands a solid first impression with Vancouver

Alex Formenton, LW, Ottawa

Age: 19 | Drafted: 47th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 62

Skating: 65

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 55

Hockey sense: 50

Formenton is a tough player to get a read on. I like what I've seen. His speed is big-time, he's got touch and I've seen flashes of good playmaking. However, the numbers have never been great in junior, and scouts question whether he sees the game well enough to be a legit top-six forward in the NHL. I don't think he'll ever be confused for a premier playmaker, but I think he's got enough sense and touch to make a dent in the NHL with his speed, size and compete level.

Jesse Ylonen, RW, Montreal

Age: 19 | Drafted: 35th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: 38

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 55

Ylonen looks fine in Liiga this season but nothing amazing. He had a good world juniors, though, and I'm still confident his skill set will translate to pro success once he bulks up a lot. He's a very elusive skater who can jet through the neutral zone and has a lot of skill. Physically he's not imposing in terms of his style or body, but in open ice he can make a lot of plays. He'll need time but I could see at some point soon, be it in the second half or next season, that it clicks for him.

Dylan Sikura, RW, Chicago

Age: 23 | Drafted: 178th overall in 2014

Previous ranking: 69

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 55

Sikura looks very good in the AHL this season, creating a lot of chances and buzzing, but he struggled mightily in his NHL call-up. Those struggles don't write off his potential, but he's 23 years old so there is a part of me that hoped he did more. With that said, I still believe so much in his talent level. His speed and skill are high-end, and he has the potential in the NHL to score. Sikura is not the biggest guy, though, and his physicality isn't the best, not an ideal combination.

Mathias Emilio Pettersen, LW, Calgary

Age: 18 | Drafted: 167th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 35

Hockey sense: 65

Pettersen has had a great freshman season. He's one of the leading freshmen scorers and leads all U19 players in college in scoring. He's dynamic around the puck. Pettersen has a high skill level and makes a lot of high-level plays. He's a big part of Denver's power play off the half-wall and is a big reason why they are one of the top ranked teams in the country. He's looked a tad quicker from last season, with elusive edge work, and is competing harder than when I saw in the USHL.

Read more: Can't stop. Won't stop. The life and times of Mathias Emilio Pettersen

Alexandre Texier, C, Columbus

Age: 19 | Drafted: 45th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 73

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 50



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Hockey sense: 60

Texier's counting stats don't look amazing in Liiga for a 19-year-old, but from watching KalPa's games this season, I've liked his game a lot. He's gotten a lot of opportunities and generated chances but pucks haven't gone in. Texier is very skilled, showing the ability to make high-end plays in tight spaces and make defenders miss. He moves the puck very well, too. What's made me give him a slight bump as a prospect this season has been that I've noticed more speed/pace in his game. He still needs to get a lot stronger, as he can get pushed off pucks too easily.

Alexander Chmelevski, C, San Jose

Age: 19 | Drafted: 185th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 90

Skating: 50

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 60

Chmelevski has grown on me in the past few seasons and he had a great world juniors to affirm the growth I've seen in his game. He's always been a very skilled forward who can dangle guys and make high-end passes. The growth in his game is away from the puck. Chmelevski evolved into a more reliable center who can kill penalties and compete for pucks. I don't think he's a great skater, but he moves fine and plays quick.

Jesper Boqvist, LW, New Jersey

Age: 20 | Drafted: 36th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: 54

Skating: 60

Puck Skills: 60

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 55

Boqvist has had a good 20-year-old season for Brynas, as one of the leading scorers in the SHL. He has a lot of tools, between his great speed and puck skills, to be difficult to handle off the rush. I don't think his playmaking is high-end, but he can see the ice and make good decisions with the puck. Boqvist will never be a difficult player to win pucks from and his defensive play leaves you wanting, but if he gets a little better there, the pace of his game will translate to the NHL.

Read more: For the Boqvists, two successful NHL draft trips in two years 'was like a dream'

Rasmus Sandin, D, Toronto

Age: 18 | Drafted: 29th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 55

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 40

Hockey sense: 65

Sandin looks great in the AHL this season and had a good world juniors. He's a very good passer and calm with the puck. For an 18-year-old defenseman in the AHL, the poise he's shown versus men with the ability to make plays off the blueline or to hit the tough distributions from his D-zone is very impressive. He's not the biggest or quickest defender but is still reliable defensively because of his IQ and compete level. I've struggled to grade his skating. I always thought it was average, but I've

seen enough improvement there. He may never blow by guys, but he has some speed and good elusiveness.

Read more: Rasmus Sandin's Leafs debut illustrative of why he's exactly what they covet

Liam Foudy, C, Columbus

Age: 18 | Drafted: 18th overall in 2018

Previous ranking: NR

Skating: 65

Puck Skills: 55

Physical Game: 45

Hockey sense: 55

Foudy is a tough player for me to evaluate. There are reasons I'd hedge against him ever being a legit top-six forward. His skill level doesn't overly impress and his production in the OHL was never great. That said, he's a fantastic skater and his hockey sense is quite good. Numerous times this season I've seen him make a top-end pass at speed or off the wall that made me more intrigued by his offensive potential. Maybe he's just an up and down two-way center that lines up in your bottom six, but I can see enough there for him to be a second-line winger.

Read more: In an age of specialization, Liam Foudy is a fast-paced outlier

Top Goalies

I don't currently see a standout top goalie prospect at the moment. The top six goalies are all very close for me, and I could see reasonable arguments for any of them to be the No. 1 goalie prospect.

Igor Shesterkin, New York Rangers

Age: 23 | Drafted: 118th overall in 2014

Previous ranking: 4

Shesterkin is a very fun goalie to watch. He's incredibly quick, makes unique saves and has a lot of energy in his game. He's become more controlled over the years, improving his positioning and staying square to pucks even while moving quickly. His size is my only concern, but his athletic tools of production are otherwise fantastic.

Ilya Samsonov, Washington

Age: 21 | Drafted: 22nd overall in 2015

Previous ranking: 1

Samsonov had a tough start to his North American pro career. The tools are all there for him to succeed as he's a big goalie who moves incredibly well and has the sense to succeed versus pros. He gets caught being overly aggressive a bit too much and needs to improve some reads. I don't like overreacting too much to a 20 game sample for goalies, so despite his brutal numbers, I still believe in Samsonov.

Read more: Samsonov learning life in North America on and off the ice

Ilya Sorokin, New York Islanders

Age: 23 | Drafted: 78th overall in 2014

Previous ranking: 3

Sorokin is having yet another great season in the KHL. He's a well-rounded goaltender. He's big, moves well but does so economically, squares up a lot of pucks and is a calming presence in the net. The big question on Sorokin is when is he coming over; with his contract expiring in 2020, Islanders fans will have to reserve a little more patience.

Michael DiPietro, Vancouver

Age: 19 | Drafted: 64th overall in 2017



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Previous ranking: 8

There are few goalie prospects I've enjoyed watching over the years more than DiPietro. His save percentage may not suggest it, but he's stolen many games. He's a dynamic athlete who makes tough saves consistently and moves as well as any goalie outside the NHL. His sense/structure isn't at the same level as his quickness, but both are good. DiPietro's main issue is his size, and every time I see a puck go over his shoulder I wonder how much an issue it will be versus pros.

Daniil Tarasov, Columbus

Age: 19 | Drafted: 86th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: NR

Tarasov has bounced back well after missing an entire season with a knee injury to become one of the best goalie prospects. He's been great this season versus men in Russia's second-tier league. He's a very big goalie at 6-foot-5 but moves like a 5-foot-11 guy. He can make the high-end saves moving across his crease, but he's a smart read/react goalie. I've rarely seen him play poorly and often he's keeping his team in games.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Buffalo

Age: 19 | Drafted: 54th overall in 2017

Previous ranking: NR

Luukkonen has had a great season, at times carrying a mediocre Sudbury team, and he was the best goaltender at the world juniors. I've always appreciated the size and the quickness, but lately I've been very impressed by his great hockey sense and positioning. There's no extra movement in his game, which I saw in previous years, and he uses his size very well to take away angles.

Read more: Luukkonen shows gold medal mettle at World Juniors

Joseph Woll, Toronto

Samuel Ersson, Philadelphia

Lukas Dostal, Anaheim

Josef Korenar, San Jose

Cayden Primeau, Montreal

Jake Oettinger, Dallas

Connor Ingram, Tampa Bay

Cal Petersen, Los Angeles

Elvis Merzlikins, Columbus

Ville Husso, St. Louis

Kyle Keyser, Boston

Filip Gustavsson, Ottawa

Jakub Skarek, New York Islanders

Olof Lindbom, New York Rangers

Ian Scott, Toronto

Out of the running

The following is a list of players who are prospects but are not eligible for this list due to being in the NHL. This doesn't 100 percent mean they would have made the list, but they would have been in the running, at the very least. I will evaluate the players who just missed this list later this week.

Mason Appleton, RW, Winnipeg

Mackenzie Blackwood, G, New Jersey

Henrik Borgstrom, C, Florida

Michael Dal Colle, LW, New York Islanders

Thatcher Demko, G, Vancouver

Carter Hart, G, Philadelphia

Roope Hintz, C, Dallas

Filip Hronek, D, Detroit

Luke Kunin, C, Minnesota and;

Lawrence Pilut, D, Buffalo

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: What's the worst possible salary cap situation you could create from today's contracts?

By Sean McIndoe Jan 15, 2019

Last week we tried to assemble a roster made up of some of the NHL's best contracts. To add to the challenge and avoid simply stocking up on entry-level deals, we decided to skip ahead to 2021-22 and put together the best team that would still fit under a reasonable salary cap. It turned out to be a lot of fun and at least a little bit thought-provoking, many of you weighed in with your own picks and a good time was had by all.

But more than a few readers had a suggestion: OK, now do it for the worst contracts.

My first reaction was that that sounded like fun. A cap-compliant team made up of the worst contracts in the league? That's right up my alley.

My second reaction was that it would be easy. That was part of the appeal. Putting together the good contract roster had me looking like this guy by the end. But bad contracts? There are a ton of those! Every team has at least a few. This would be a breeze. I was in.

I got started. And then I began to actually think things through. And I realized what I had gotten myself into.

Here's the thing: Anyone can do a simple list of the worst contracts in the NHL and lots of people have. But we're talking about a roster of terrible NHL contracts that still fits under the salary cap, meaning we'll have a hard time squeezing some of the worst deals in without having to fill out the roster with "bad" deals that somehow also don't cost much.

That doesn't just add several layers of difficulty, it barely even makes sense. It's like putting together the best offensive team that won't score more than 300 goals. What are we even doing here?

Luckily, "barely even makes sense" has never stopped me before. Let's do this. Let's build the worst possible NHL team that fits under the current cap. Or more specifically, let's build the worst salary cap situation that would be possible in today's NHL.

A few quick ground rules:

This is a roster for this season, using this season's cap and this season's contracts. Unlike last week's piece, there's no reason to jump ahead to 2021-22 here. This is all for 2018-19, using the current cap of \$79.5 million. And as with last week, all we care about here is cap hit; actual dollars paid out don't matter to us.

We're not using any contracts that are dead money because of players that are on LTIR or whose careers are likely over. No David Clarksons, or



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Nathan Hortons or Marian Hossa on this team. Other than that, assume all active players are healthy – we're not penalizing players for being injured here.

We can't save cap space by burying deals in the AHL, a rule that will apply to any deals that actually are buried in the AHL. We also don't benefit from any retained salary from previous trades. We're paying full sticker price on everything.

We're trying to build the worst cap situation possible, so term matters. Long deals are worse than short ones. Which means that for the purpose of our team, they're better. Because they're worse. You get what I'm saying.

This idea is so dumb. I love it. Let's get to work.

(All salary info comes from CapFriendly.com. Stats for this season do not include last night's games.)

But first, a word about "bad" contracts

It always feels a little weird to write about good and bad contracts and to realize that we always default to seeing those deals from the team's perspective. A guy who makes too much money is considered "bad," while a guy who makes less than he deserves goes in the "good" column.

On a certain level that makes sense. We're fans, and ultimately the point of being a fan is to root for teams collectively, not individual players. This is a hard cap league now, meaning salaries matter. But it still feels strange to look at an underpaid player as always being a good thing, even when the difference might just be going straight into some billionaire owner's yacht fund. And it's especially strange to think that someone wanting to make as much money as they can has made a mistake when all of us feel the same way about our own jobs.

Let's be clear: Every one of the guys we're going to list in today's piece earned his contract. They're among the best few hundred hockey players in the world, playing in a league that generates billions in revenue based on people wanting to watch them play. Not one of them held anybody hostage, and each of them ultimately ended up signing an offer that their team put in front of them. If those turned out to be bad contracts, it's only because their teams screwed up.

We are also going to screw up, although in our case we can at least claim to be doing it on purpose. Let's do this. Who wants to make some capologists cry?

Goaltenders

Part of what makes this whole exercise so ridiculous is that we won't be able to fit any of the league's monster contracts onto the roster because they'd eat up too much space. In theory, there could be deals that are so bad that they can't fit on our all-bad roster because they don't leave room for anyone else.

For example, let's look at Carey Price. His \$10.5-million extension runs for another seven years after this one, even as he works through a second straight disappointing season. That one is tempting, and I tried to figure out a way to work it in. But I can't. You just can't build a truly terrible cap team when you're spending that much on your starting goalie. (What that might say about building an actual Cup contender around a \$10.5-million goaltender is an exercise left to the reader.)

But once you get past Price on the goaltender's list, you find something a little surprising: There aren't all that many goaltender deals that seem awful. There are certainly some questionable ones, but compared to the abject disasters we're going to see at the other positions, NHL GMs seem to be showing getting smarter when it comes to choosing the men inside the crease.

A few deals do jump out as contenders for our team. Mike Smith (\$5.67 million) and Semyon Varlamov (\$5.9 million) are making more than you'd like, but both of those deals expire this year. Craig Anderson has another year left at \$4.75 million, and that deal doesn't look great, but you could live with it if he's healthy and playing like he did earlier this year. Henrik

Lundqvist at \$8.5 million through 2021 has the potential to get ugly, but isn't quite there yet.

Two familiar names almost make the cut. Roberto Luongo still has three more years at \$5.33 million, and yes that deal still "sucks" even though he was really good last year. And then there's Luongo's old pal Cory Schneider, who's got the Devils on the hook for three more years at \$6 million. That one looks awful, which makes it awfully tempting for our roster.

But in the end, I'm going to save a little cap space while still grabbing a starter with one of the league's more regrettable deals: Carolina's Scott Darling at \$4.15 million through 2021. Schneider has at least been a top goaltender in the NHL, even if it feels like a long time ago. Darling had never been a full-time starter when the Hurricanes gambled on him, and while it may have been worth rolling the dice at the time, it didn't work. He's been a great story, and is working to get his career back on track in the AHL right now. It's still possible that we see him succeed in the NHL someday, but it seems unlikely to be in Carolina.

We'll back him up with another goalie who's currently in the AHL: Ottawa's Mike Condon at \$2.4 million. He's signed through next year and is currently battling a hip injury in the minors. That leaves us with over \$6 million in cap space spent on multi-year deals to goaltenders that aren't actually in the NHL right now, which is way too much while also leaving plenty of room that we're definitely going to need. Not a bad start.

Cap space spent so far: \$6.55 million on two players, an average of \$3.28 million each. That leaves us with \$72.95 million to fill out 16 more roster spots, at an average of \$4.05 million per player.

Defensemen

The very top of the cap list for defensemen doesn't seem all that bad; the top nine are all good players, even if some of the cap hits are a little high and the term left for guys like Ryan Suter and Brent Burns will eventually make those deals tough to swallow.

If "top nine" struck you as a weird cutoff point, well, it is. As you might imagine, we went with that because the tenth player on the list ends up being the first member of our blueline: L.A.'s Dion Phaneuf at \$7 million. That deal has already been traded twice, and the Kings are only paying a more reasonable \$5.25 million of it thanks to the Senators' retaining a chunk. Our team isn't so lucky and gets the full amount, so Phaneuf's ongoing struggles mean he slots in on our top pair.

He'll be joined by another contract you probably knew was coming: Chicago's Brent Seabrook at \$6.875 million. His contract runs through 2024 and he's already been a healthy scratch at times, so it's not surprising that his deal shows up on just about every list of the worst contracts in the league. He's a veteran with three Cup rings, so he still brings some value. But he's also a cautionary example of the potential price of championship teams trying to be loyal.

We'll head to a pair of Canadian rivals to find our second pair. Montreal's Karl Alzner at \$4.625 million was a deal that didn't look good when it was signed and looked far worse after he'd been waived and sent to the AHL. We'll pair him with Toronto's Nikita Zaitsev at \$4.5 million. He's having a strange year and it remains a mystery as to why the Leafs ever felt the need to lock him up on a seven-year deal.

After our top four, things get tricky, because we've still got plenty of candidates to work through and our budget is getting tight. For example, we won't be able to find room for Jack Johnson's \$3.25 million through 2023 or Dmitry Kulikov's \$4.133 million through 2021.

And then there's the single player I'm most surprised to see left off the roster: Philadelphia's Andrew MacDonald, whose \$5-million cap hit has been consistently savaged pretty much from the moment it was signed. But that was back in 2014, meaning the deal only has one more season to go after this one. It's still bad, and if we had more room to work with we'd find a spot for it. But we don't, so MacDonald is our team's heart-breaking final cut. This is like Mark Messier not making the 1998 Olympic team. Sometimes this sport can be so cruel.



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Instead, we'll build our third pairing around two deals that manage the rare feat of being cheap but still bad: Edmonton's Brandon Manning at \$2.25 million and the Islanders' Luca Sbisa at \$1.5 million. Manning was recently acquired by the Oilers in a deal that nobody seemed to understand, and they're on the hook for another season after this one. Sbisa's deal is actually defensible, since he's a veteran depth guy and it expires next year. But considering he's basically spending the season sitting in the press box as a healthy scratch, it gives us a chance to spend some money without getting anything at all in return. We'll take that.

Cap space spent so far: \$33.3 million on eight roster spots, for an average of \$4.1625 per player. That leaves us with \$46.2 million to spend on 12 forwards, an average of just \$3.85 million each. This is going to get tight.

Forwards

Now we're into the good stuff. Well, the bad stuff. You get the picture.

As with the other positions, the very top of the forward's list is plenty pricey, but not many of them strike you as truly awful. A few could probably be described as regrettable, sure – you'd probably rather not be paying Jonathan Toews \$10.5 million through 2023, and big-ticket contracts like Jamie Benn and Corey Perry aren't necessarily ones you'd sign today. But are any of those really disasters? Maybe Perry, but he's hurt right now and the others aren't there quite yet. Meanwhile, guys like Connor McDavid, John Tavares, Jack Eichel, Alexander Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby have been worth every penny and in some cases are even criminally undervalued.

But once you get down to the next tier, there are a ton of guys with regrettable deals. Just the specific sub-category of "aging wingers who were signed as UFAs for a \$6-million cap hit" could fill out a big chunk of our roster. David Backes, Loui Eriksson, Kyle Okposo ... that's a decent starting point. Mix in guys like Andrew Ladd (\$5.5 million), Dustin Brown (\$5.875 million), Ryan Callahan (\$5.8 million) and Brandon Dubinsky (\$5.85 million). And don't forget Bobby Ryan, who has to be a lock for the roster at \$7.25 million. It is, quite literally, an embarrassment of riches.

Here's the problem: We're running out of cap room.

That probably wasn't a hard scenario to see coming, seeing as we're trying to put together the worst cap team possible. If we were in great shape, it would mean we'd done something wrong along the way. But with just over \$45 million left to spend, we're going to run out of money if we focus exclusively on the guys in the \$5 to \$7 million range. Believe it or not, none of the guys in that paragraph made the team.

But we can afford a few pricey deals, so let's build a first line before we start squeezing the pennies. We'll start at center with Ryan Kesler at \$6.875 million. That's a big chunk of our remaining space, but for a 34-year-old with almost as many years left on his deal (four) as he has points on the season (six), we can't resist. We'll surround him a couple of fellow Pacific Division forwards: Edmonton's Milan Lucic at \$6 million, and James Neal at \$5.75 million, both through 2023. Add it all up, and we've got an \$18.625 million first line that's produced a grand total of 10 goals this year. Suggested nickname for this line: the Pacific Disaster Center.

For our second line, let's start with Vancouver's Sam Gagner at \$3.15 million through 2020; not only did the Canucks send him down to the minors, but they're also letting him play for another organization's team while he's there. He'll be joined by Columbus's Riley Nash at \$2.75 million through 2021, a deal that's been called the worst acquisition of the offseason. And we'll round out the line with Detroit's Justin Abdelkader at \$4.25 million through 2023. He'll be this line's big scoring threat, with five goals.

We'll start our third line with Luke Glendening at \$1.8 million. I hear you; this one actually isn't all that bad of a deal for a versatile player, even as it runs through 2021 for a bottom-six guy who'll be well into his 30s. But we need to go cheap on at least a few of these, and I'm still having

flashbacks to the 2018 trade deadline when he was about to be traded to Toronto and Leaf fans had a collective panic attack, so he's in. And his relatively meager cap hits gives us enough room to surround him with Rangers' AHLer Matt Beleskey at \$3.8 million and Edmonton's Ryan Spooner at \$4 million. That saddles Glendening with one linemate who's spent most of his season toiling away for a minor league organization. And also Matt Beleskey.

All of that leaves us with just over \$8 million to spend on our fourth unit. We'll start with Vancouver's Jay Beagle at \$3 million, and fill out the line with Philadelphia's Dale Weise at \$2.35 million and Dallas's Blake Comeau at \$2.4 million. My first draft had Matt Martin's \$2.5 million penciled into that last winger spot, but I've always liked him and Comeau actually has fewer goals and assists this season while playing on a deal that's a year longer.

Cap space spent so far: We've filled out a 20-man roster for a total of \$79.425 million, sliding in under the cap with a cool \$75,000 to spare. Don't worry, we'll find something to spend that leftover money on. I'm guessing it won't be printing playoff tickets.

How'd we do?

Good lord, this is a terrible roster. Which, of course, was the whole point. Still... wow.

Our leading scorer is Glendening, who has six goals and 15 points and wouldn't even be on the team if we hadn't needed to scrounge for a cheap option up front. The majority of our forwards have single-digit points on the year, including two-thirds of our \$18-million top line. Our entire blueline has combined for four goals and they all come from the same guy (Seabrook). Both of our goalies are currently in the minor leagues.

Our youngest player is Spooner, who's 26. Sixty percent of the lineup is 30 or older, including five who are at least 33. We do have a solid leadership core – in case you're wondering, Phaneuf is captain, with Kesler and Seabrook as the alternates. We also have no depth in case of injuries, which is actually fine because if one of these guys had to come out of the lineup how would you even tell?

But there's good news: Things get brighter in the future. As bad as this team's cap crunch is right now, it will get better if we can hold on through next year. Once this season ends, our roster will free up a grand total of ... uh ... \$1.5 million.

That's it. Luca Sbisa comes off the cap this summer. Everyone else is locked in through at least 2020, when six more names shake free. But even then, the biggest ticket we get out from under is Spooner's \$4 million. We're still stuck with Phaneuf and Darling, among others, until 2021. And even on opening night of the 2022-23 season, a full four seasons into the future, we'll still have over \$27 million tied up in Lucic, Neal, Abdelkader, Seabrook and Zaitsev. (And those last two guys even have another year left after that.)

Lord help us.

What's the over-under on players from this roster who get bought out at some point before the end of their deals? It has to be over 10, right? Even factoring in the ultra-depressing thought that some of these deals were specifically designed to be buyout-proof, you have to think that at least a few teams bite the bullet; remember that eight of these deals will still be around for the 2021 post-lockout compliance buyouts. But for now, this is what we've got. If there's a worse cap-compliant roster out there, I'm not sure I want to see it.

The next time you're looking at your favorite team's cap situation and muttering about how it couldn't possibly get any worse, remember – sure it could. You just have to really work at making it happen.

The Athletic LOADED: 01.16.2019



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Sportsnet.ca / Niemi's improbable redemption with Canadiens hits peak in win over Panthers

Eric Engels January 16, 2019, 12:38 AM

MONTREAL — It was a scene that was unimaginable on the day Antti Niemi was claimed off of waivers by the Montreal Canadiens: The fans rising to their feet at the Bell Centre, chanting his name as he was on his way to setting a career high in saves (52) in a 5-1 win over the Florida Panthers on Tuesday.

"I've never had that before," he said afterwards.

"NI-E-MI," they roared after the 35-year-old Finn made his 47th save of the night, freezing a Mike Hoffman one-timer to pull within one stop of his previous career high.

It was a special moment. A massive one for him in a career that has seen him go through so many peaks and valleys you'd think he was a professional skier.

The 60 minutes Niemi offered the Canadiens on this night were also monumental for their season. They had come back to Montreal in the early hours of the morning after a playoff-style win over their most bitter rivals in Boston. They were left with little time to prepare for a motivated and rested Panthers team that had suffered six straight losses and held a players-only meeting at the Bell Centre to buck that trend. And it was obvious they were in trouble as soon as the puck dropped, putting the progress they had made in the standings a night prior in jeopardy.

The shots read 7-0 Florida after seven minutes of play, forcing Niemi to contort himself in every direction to keep the score at 0-0.

Seven minutes and 11 seconds later, Hoffman scored the only goal that beat him — a cheeky forehand-one-hand backhand finish a la Peter Forsberg that was virtually unstoppable.

But Niemi came up with 15 saves in that first frame, 16 in the second period, and then 21 over the final 20 minutes to get the job done and push the Canadiens into a tie with Boston in points and pull them within one point of the Toronto Maple Leafs in the Atlantic Division standings.

The win also kept them ahead of the New York Islanders and Buffalo Sabres and in the first wild-card position in the Eastern Conference.

That it was Niemi who delivered it — never mind the fashion in which he did — was somewhat of a surprise.

It was the topic of the day on sports-talk radio across Montreal, in both of Canada's official languages: Should Price start after making 41 saves against the Bruins? Actually, the tone from most callers was, "Shouldn't he start?"

A lot of that had to do with the fact that Price had come on in early December and caught fire over the six weeks since, but some of it surely had to do with Niemi entering Tuesday's action with an .886 save percentage and a 3.85 goals-against average on the season.

It was Niemi's most recent performances — coupled with the fact that Price had recently missed time when an irritation he had played through for seven weeks flared up in practice — that gave Canadiens coach Claude Julien the confidence to tune out the noise and start his backup.

Niemi had made 47 saves in a 3-2 overtime win over the Dallas Stars on New Year's Eve, and he made 32 in a 3-2 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Jan. 8.

They were the type of performances no one saw coming back in November of 2017, when he arrived in Montreal after a horror-show start to the 2017-18 season. He had allowed 21 goals and stopped just 97 of

118 shots in five games split between the Panthers and Pittsburgh Penguins, and he had all but killed his career in the process.

Whether Niemi would actually get the opportunity to resurrect it in Montreal was completely up in the air upon his arrival. The general consensus was that he was only here to serve as an insurance policy for 24-year-old Charlie Lindgren, who might be in over his head with Price sidelined by a lower-body injury and backup Al Montoya forced to the injured reserve list with a concussion at the time.

But that's when Niemi put his head down and got to work.

The end result was a 7-5-4 record for a Canadiens team that finished in 28th place. He deserved better given his .929 save percentage and 2.46 goals-against average in 19 appearances, but at least it earned him a \$950,000 contract for this season.

On Tuesday night, Niemi improved to 8-4-1 in this year's campaign. He did so in the most remarkable way possible, and his teammates were elated for him.

"He's an outstanding professional," said Price. "He's won a Stanley Cup before (with the Chicago Blackhawks in 2010). It's nice to have that experience in this room, and he and I have a very strong connection with the way we both think about the game in a very similar way.

"He was outstanding tonight. His performance was immense, and it was great to see the fans give him that (recognition)."

They were on their feet for Shea Weber, who scored on the power play to make it 1-1 in the first minute of the second period. They rose for Phillip Danault, who made it 2-1 a little over 10 minutes later.

Max Domi got a heck of an ovation after he broke an 18-game goal drought to put the Canadiens up 3-1. Jesperi Kotkaniemi got them out of their seats when he stormed past Mike Matheson and made an exceptional move on Panthers goaltender James Reimer for his sixth goal of the season. And Brendan Gallagher got them up once more when he scored his 19th goal of the season into an empty net with 1:36 to play.

But the fans stuck around and reserved their highest praise for Niemi, who skated back onto the ice as the game's first star. It was surreal.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Treliving on pending RFA Tkachuk: 'We'll get him signed'

Emily Sadler | January 15, 2019, 9:49 PM

There's a lot of hockey left to be played this season, but we already know one thing for sure as far as the Calgary Flames are concerned: Matthew Tkachuk has a massive payday coming his way.

The 21-year-old winger is having the best season of his young career, having already blown away last year's point total with 23 goals and 54 points through 47 games so far, and is a major reason why the club sits atop the Western Conference.

Matthew Tkachuk became the fourth @NHLFlames player to reach 20 goals, marking the second time in franchise history four players have scored as many goals through 45 GP.

The other: Mike Bullard (27), Hakan Loob (25), Joe Nieuwendyk (32) and Joe Mullen (20) in 1987-88. #NHLStats pic.twitter.com/rJJ2ETSj1j

— NHL Public Relations (@PR_NHL) January 10, 2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Tkachuk is one of several big-name pending RFAs making their respective GMs nervous (Maple Leafs Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner, Winnipeg's Patrik Laine, and Vancouver's Brock Boeser are also among them). All eyes were on Toronto this past fall during the months-long stalemate between forward William Nylander and the club, which set another standard in terms of what this next group of RFAs will earn — and how long they may take before they sign on the dotted line.

During an appearance on Prime Time Sports on Tuesday, Flames GM Brad Treliving kept it short and sweet when talking about upcoming negotiations with Tkachuk:

"He's a real good player, he's having a good year. We'll get him signed. I don't know when that's going to be," he said.

When you look at Calgary's current list of cap hits, Treliving has done an impressive job of signing his young stars to affordable deals. Leading scorer Johnny Gaudreau and captain Mark Giordano have the highest cap hits at \$6.75 million, with Sean Monahan (\$6.375 million) not far behind. Based on the current market and what his RFA peers have hauled in — \$6.96 million annually for Nylander, for starters — Tkachuk looks poised to be the highest-paid player in Calgary.

"The focus for all of us right now is the season and the 30-some odd games we have left," Treliving continued. "But we'll work away at that quietly and I can tell you we'll let you know as soon as it's done, whenever that is."

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Sportsnet.ca / Five reasons Maple Leafs should be concerned following loss to Avalanche

Luke Fox | January 15, 2019, 9:03 AM

TORONTO – Some themes are developing, and they aren't pretty.

As the Toronto Maple Leafs are left, on their day off, to stew in Monday's 6-3 demolishing by the ice-cold Colorado Avalanche, that hard stare in the mirror should make them realize that things cannot continue this way.

"We've only got ourselves to blame," coach Mike Babcock said. "Myself as the head coach, I'm responsible. We didn't play well enough, we didn't play hard enough, and the players are the same way. We weren't good enough."

Bingo. But why?

Not having a healthy No. 1 goalie for three weeks is the obvious obstacle, and we'll save you another rant about finding a stud defenceman to patrol the right side, but the fissures run deeper.

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

The Leafs aren't built for big-boy hockey

Diligent solo efforts by a couple of sturdy Colorado power forwards, Mikko Rantanen and Carl Soderberg, allowed them to strip pucks off Leafs (Nazem Kadri and Jake Gardiner, respectively) in their own zone and score back-breaking goals.

"We have to bear down more, be harder to play against," Morgan Rielly said. "It's important that we realize that."

The Leafs were outthit by Colorado 25-13 Monday, and we're certain that stat would be even more lopsided if the Avs didn't have the puck all night.

Can Toronto flip a switch and play the heavy brand of hockey believed necessary to survive the post-season?

"I think we can play heavy. Heavy is a mindset. I don't think you necessarily have to have massive guys. You can still play heavy. We have a lot of guys who can. I think everybody can do that — play on the cycle and do things you need to do to win," argues Zach Hyman, arguably the best example the Leafs own for heavy hockey.

"You just have to have the mindset that you're not going to be pushed off the puck. Be strong on it. Brace yourself. Spin off guys. Just be tenacious. It's a tenacious mindset. I dunno. It's a nature-versus-nurture type of thing. I just grew up that way. My parents told me to go give 100 per cent when I was out there. For me, that's going into the corners. A mindset."

The Leafs have been lousy at home lately

Not since they purposely tanked to get as many balls as possible for the Auston Matthews lottery have the Maple Leafs endured a home stretch this dismal.

During their run to a franchise-best 29 home wins in 2017-18, Babcock delivered a great little speech about the importance of ruling your own barn and how he wanted visiting clubs to be worrying about how difficult it would be to scrape two points as they ate dinner the night prior to a date in Toronto.

That's not happening.

The Leafs have now lost five of six at Scotiabank Arena by a combined score of 21-13. In two of those five losses, they got shut out. In the other three, they had the lead and fumbled it.

Their lone home win this month came against an exhausted Canucks team wrapping its third six-game road trip of the season without its best player in the lineup (Elias Pettersson).

The Maple Leafs haven't defeated any team currently in a playoff position at home since November.

Such sloppiness — mental gaffes that lead to goals, questionable efforts, declining special teams — is especially confounding in games Toronto should gear up for.

They were booed off the ice when Mathew Barzal's Islanders rolled through and shut them out in John Tavares's first game against his former team. And Gardiner bore the brunt of fans' frustration Monday, fielding flurries of boos both online and in real life, when Toronto should've been emboldened with the return of Frederik Andersen.

"That hasn't happened before, that's for sure," an emotional Gardiner said. "Not something you want to hear, but plays happen in the game. Fans are passionate and they want to win."

The natives are restless.

I have been a Leafs fan my whole life. I often hear, "we have the best fans in the world". Not a chance. First of all, we have the quietest rink in the league. Now we are booing our players. "Best fans in the world" are loud at home games. And they don't boo players on a whim.

— Gerry Dee (@gerrydee) January 15, 2019

Is complacency becoming an issue?

It's reasonable to peek at the NHL standings and wonder if a sense of complacency may be seeping into the room. The Maple Leafs hold a three-point lead (plus two games in hand) over Montreal for a spot in the Atlantic Division's 2-3 matchup, but trail the force of nature that is the Tampa Bay Lightning by a nearly insurmountable 14 points for the top seeding.



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Crazier things have happened, but another first-round showdown versus the Boston Bruins feels almost inevitable, to the point where it's already being discussed openly 37 games out.

Why not battle to ensure the second seed and home ice? That's certainly something worth battling for — Game 7s at TD Garden have not exactly brought out Toronto's good side — except these Leafs have been a decidedly better, looser and more determined group on the road this season (15-5-1) than at home (13-10-1).

The Leafs have drawn opponents more desperate for points than them, and it has showed.

"It's time now to put up or shut up," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar proclaimed prior to Monday's tilt. His players had dropped nine of 10 and yet was firmly in the playoff mix, thanks to the Central Division's mushy middle.

Rielly has copped to the Leafs letting their foot off the pedal for costly stretches. Truth is, as the third-best team in the East, the Leafs can put up now, or coast for a bit and then put up.

"We didn't come ready to work. They did," Mitch Marner admitted post-game. "They were on a little bit of a slide down, and they came ready to play us. We didn't do the same."

So many slumping forwards

The frustration of scoring but one goal and two assists in 16 games is eating at William Nylander, and it shows. Following another near-miss Monday — and during another minus outing — Nylander whacked his stick on the glass in anger.

Yes, there's more jump in his legs than a month ago, but the invisible monkey he threw off his back on Jan. 3 may have hid a baby in his hood.

Patrick Marleau has now gone nine games without a goal. It's been 10 since he's finished on the plus side of the ledger.

Nazem Kadri has scored once in his past 18 and, after back-to-back 32-goal campaigns, is tracking for only 17.

Auston Matthews is contributing assists, but even he is stuck in his worst goal dip of the season, finding the net once in 10 games.

"When you go down and things don't go right, you've got to dig in and you've got to find a way out of it in a hurry," Babcock said.

"That's a sense of urgency. That's also being loose and driving and playing right."

Toronto is still searching for its go-to matchup line

John Tavares's line with Marner and Zach Hyman is the coach's most trusted, so Babcock hard-matched them against Boston and Colorado.

But Nathan MacKinnon's all-star trio absolutely caved in the Leafs, dominating zone time and scoring opportunities in the best-on-best.

Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy has said he actually wants his best line, Marchand-Bergeron-Pastnak, to go head-to-head with Tavares.

On other nights, Auston Matthews' group has been given that shutdown role.

And Kadri relished the challenge over the past two seasons, memorably getting under the skin of superstars like Joe Thornton and Connor McDavid; he looks significantly less engaged facing his fellow 3Cs with a constantly rotating cast of wingmen.

"What I'd like to do is I'd like to be able to give all three of those groups matchups as time goes on," Babcock says. But? "We've got to be playing good enough."

As Toronto exhales Tuesday and looks ahead to its next challenge, Thursday's doozy in Tampa, there is a silver lining: They can be better than this. Much better.

"We can compete way harder than we are right now. For whatever reason, since Christmas we haven't found that level. I don't know why that is," Babcock said.

"The league is going by, and everyone is getting better, and we've hit a lull. We've got to get turned."

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames' home success helping club stay atop tough Pacific Division

Eric Francis | January 15, 2019, 10:18 AM

CALGARY — It was widely accepted last spring the Calgary Flames missed the playoffs due to their home record.

A 17-20-4 mark in front of your fans generally doesn't cut it.

With almost three months remaining in the regular season the Flames are already just two wins away from tying last season's home victory total, which says plenty about how they've come to land second in the NHL standings.

Sunday's 7-1 spanking of Arizona at the Dome gives the Flames a 15-4-4 home record that is considered relatively standard for a team challenging for the division.

For further proof of that, consider the two teams nipping at the Flames' heels in the Pacific also have just four regulation losses at home.

"The Pacific gets beat up a little bit sometimes," said coach Bill Peters. "I think the Pacific is a real good division and it's reflected in those home records."

Taking advantage of the optional portion of an optional skate on Sunday, Peters dug into the stats that have people around the league talking about the Pacific.

The three-headed monster battling for the top of the division has San Jose, Vegas and his Flames in an intense dog-fight. Widely considered the weakest division heading into the season, the Pacific now sports three of the hottest, most potent clubs in the loop.

Occupying three of the top five spots in the league standings, every member in the trio has gone 8-1-1 of late.

"When you look at home records there are five or six teams that are elite home records and three are in the Pacific," said Peters. "Combined I think we've lost 12 games — four each. So, all you're doing there is keeping up — we're not creating separation there."

A five-game winning streak has the Flames three points up on the Sharks and four on the Golden Knights.

Their respective home records are 15-4-4, 16-4-4 and 15-4-3.

"In previous years you're in spots where you're not in a comfortable spot and you're trying to play catch-up and that's not the case this year," said Sean Monahan, whose club has won five in a row, including three straight at the Dome.

"This year is different — we're focused on our group and in the guys in this room and we're playing for each other and you can see that. And that's why we're in the position we are."

Despite a solid start last year, the Flames were only 12-11 at home this time a year ago.



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"There's a lot of things that go into it — our power play wasn't good last year and if you don't win special teams, you're not likely to win games," added Monahan, whose squad was the quickest Flames bunch to win 30 games since the Stanley Cup-winning club of 1988-89. "I think this year it's just a whole different group and a different mindset.

"You've got to expect to win games. That's been our mindset here.

"We're relentless. The last couple games haven't been our greatest and those are the turning points of the year where you learn stuff. It's been a good year in that sense for us and a lot of guys have stepped up for us."

That explains the league-best seven third-period comeback wins.

When Peters arrived in Calgary this summer he was well aware the Flames hadn't taken advantage of home ice, but he insists he hasn't seen a noticeable difference in the team's approach based on locale.

"I think we're good everywhere to be honest with you," said Peters, whose club has the NHL's third-best road record at 15-9-0. "I think our game is very consistent — I think we have a game that can travel.

"I don't know what it was (last year at home), but I know the road record was very good. So, if you can win on the road you can win at home.

"Winning on the road is much harder. We're one of the few sports where you have the distinct advantage of controlling matchups on whistles. There's no other sport that has that.

"To me that's the advantage of being at home and coaches and players can take advantage of putting people in good situations to be successful. I think that's why you see so many strong home records."

The Flames' five-game homestand continues Wednesday against Buffalo before Detroit comes calling Friday.

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TSN.CA / Russian wingers top TSN's ranking of NHL-affiliated prospects

Craig Button

New York Rangers prospect Vitali Kravtsov barely edges out fellow Russian winger Grigori Denisenko of the Florida Panthers to lead the way in the 2019 edition of TSN Hockey's annual list of the Top 50 NHL-affiliated prospects.

Only players considered to have not achieved full-time NHL status are included in the rankings.

Kravtsov, 19, is a highly skilled winger who is an offensive threat with his combination of speed, power, shot and finish. He's expanding his game by playing centre this season. Kravtsov's skill set, along with his adaptability, allows him to impact the game in multiple ways. His style of play is similar to that of the recently retired Rick Nash.

Denisenko, 18, is a dynamic offensive player who has a tremendous level of confidence in his play. Skating for Lokomotiv Yaroslavl in the KHL this season, Denisenko can shoot as well as make a play and has qualities that are reminiscent of Tampa Bay Lightning star Nikita Kucherov.

Cale Makar, 20, (No. 3) of the Colorado Avalanche is the top defenceman on this year's list. Currently playing NCAA hockey for the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, the 20-year-old has the ability to control the game when he's on the ice. Dynamic with a flair for the spectacular, Makar will be a welcome addition to the Avalanche blueline.

Portland Winterhawks centre Cody Glass, 19, is at No. 4 for a second consecutive year. The first-ever draft pick of the Vegas Golden Knights looks every bit the number-one centre teams covet. He's more of a playmaker, but his ability to skate, attack and open up ice to create offensive opportunities allows him to be a consistent threat.

Our top five is rounded out by Anaheim Ducks property Troy Terry, 21, who is excelling in the American Hockey League this season with the San Diego Gulls (37 points in 32 games). The American right winger is a great skater who creates plays at a high pace to make life uncomfortable for opponents. It's difficult to understand why he hasn't been given a shot at the NHL level by a Ducks team screaming out for offence.

The rest of the top 10 features Martin Necas (No. 6), a Czech centre and Hurricanes prospect who has 26 points in 30 games for the AHL's Charlotte Checkers this season; Eeli Tolvanen (No. 7), a right winger and Nashville Predators prospect who has 12 points in 24 games for the AHL's Milwaukee Admirals this season; Canucks blueliner Quinn Hughes (No. 8), who is currently playing for the University of Michigan; and Russian goaltenders Ilya Sorokin (No. 9) of the Islanders and Igor Shesterkin (No. 10) of the Rangers, who are both having strong seasons in the KHL.

On the team side, the Florida Panthers and Los Angeles Kings are tied for the lead with four players each in the top 50.

Craig's List: Top 5 Leafs prospects

TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button shows his Top 5 Leafs prospects and explains which player has made the biggest jump in Toronto's organization.

Denisenko (No. 2) is joined by fellow Panther prospects centre Aleksii Heponiemi (No. 15), right wing Serron Noel (No. 20) and right wing Owen Tippett (No. 40). The Kings are represented by centre Rasmus Kupari (No. 30), centre Gabe Vilardi (No. 34), defenceman Mikey Anderson (No. 43) and winger Akil Thomas (No. 44).

The Montreal Canadiens and Vancouver Canucks lead the way for Canadian teams with three players each in our top 50.

The Habs have Russian defenceman Alexander Romanov (No. 19), American centre Ryan Poehling (No. 36) and Canadian winger Nick Suzuki (No. 39), while the Canucks have Hughes (No. 8), centre Adam Gaudette (No. 41) and goaltender Thatcher Demko (No. 46).

The Ottawa Senators are represented by two players — right wing Drake Batherson (No. 23) and left wing Alex Formenton (No. 25). The Maple Leafs (defenceman Rasmus Sandin at No. 26) and Jets (left wing Kristian Vesalainen at No. 22) have one player each in the rankings. The Oilers don't have any players in the top 50.

Note: The first column in the table below indicates the prospect's placement in our 2018 rankings:

-	1	Vitali Kravtsov	19	NYR	
		Chelyabinsk (KHL)	36	6	17
-	2	Grigori Denisenko	18	Fla	
		Yaroslavl (KHL)	17	3	3
11	3	Cale Makar	20	Col	
		UMass/Amherst (NCAA)	20	8	24
4	4	Cody Glass	19	VGK	
		Portland (WHL)	30	12	58
-	5	Troy Terry	21	Ana	San
		Diego (AHL)	32	16	37
3	6	Martin Necas	20	Car	
		Charlotte (AHL)	30	9	26
2	7	Eeli Tolvanen	19	Nsh	
		Milwaukee (AHL)	24	4	12



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-	8	Quinn Hughes	19	Van		22	34	Gabe Vilardi	19	Los	
		Michigan (NCAA)	19	3	22			Kingston (WHL)			
7	9	Ilya Sorokin	23	NYI	Moskva	-	35	Ty Smith	18	NJ	Spokane (WHL)
(KHL)	31	1.20	.940				32	4	48		
9	10	Igor Shesterkin	23	NYR	St.	-	36	Ryan Poehling	20	Mtl	St.
Petersburg (KHL)	22	1.23	.947					Cloud St (NCAA)	18	17	
20	11	Erik Brannstrom	19	VGK	Chicago	33	37	Morgan Frost	19	Phi	S.S.
(AHL)	27	4	20					Marie (OHL)	35	23	65
36	12	Adam Fox	20	Car	Harvard	-	38	Denis Gurianov	22	Dal	Texas
(NCAA)	15	7	23					(AHL)	28	11	31
-	13	Ukka-Pekka Luukkonen	19	Buf		23	39	Nick Suzuki	19	Mtl	Guelph
		Sudbury (OHL)	28	.923				(OHL)	33	23	53
14	14	Kirill Kaprizov	21	Min	Moskva	41	40	Owen Tippett	19	Fla	
(KHL)	44	20	31					Saginaw (OHL)	28	21	38
17	15	Aleksi Heponiemi	20	Fla	Kärpät	26	41	Adam Gaudette	22	Van	Utica
(SM Liiga)		30	8	27				(AHL)	7	4	7
15	16	Jordan Kyrrou	20	StL	San	37	42	Dante Fabbro	20	Nsh	Boston
Antonio (AHL)	26	11	25					U (NCAA)	19	4	17
-	17	Filip Zadina	19	Det	Grands	-	43	Mikey Anderson	19	Los	Minn-
Rapids (AHL)	30	10	20					Duluth (NCAA)	18	3	8
-	18	Noah Dobson	19	NYI	Rouyn-	-	44	Akil Thomas	19	Los	Niagara
Noranda (QMJHL)	28	9	16					(OHL)	36	18	56
-	19	Alexander Romanov	19	Mtl	Moskva	30	45	Phillippe Myers	21	Phi	Lehigh
(KHL)	29	0	0					Valley (AHL)	38	7	24
-	20	Serron Noel	18	Fla	Oshawa	42	46	Thatcher Demko	23	Van	
(OHL)	43	24	56					Vancouver (NHL)			
-	21	Jason Robertson	19	Dal	Niagara	35	47	Pierre-Olivier Joseph	19	Ari	
(OHL)	35	31	62					Drummondville (QMJHL)	9	0	4
-	22	Kristian Vesalainen	19	Wpg	Jokerit	38	48	Dillon Dube	20	Cgy	
(KHL)	17	5	12					Stockton (AHL)	11	2	11
29	23	Drake Batherson	20	Ott		25	49	Alex Nylander	20	Buf	
		Belleville (AHL)	26	8	25			Rochester (AHL)	35	9	24
-	24	Janne Kuokkanen	20	Car		-	50	Max Jones	20	Ana	San
		Charlotte (AHL)	33	11	30			Diego (AHL)	32	12	24
-	25	Alex Formenton	19	Ott	London	1		Dillon Dube	20	Cgy	Stockton (AHL)
(OHL)	13	7	16					11	2	11	
-	26	Rasmus Sandin	18	Tor	Toronto	2		Oliver Kylington	21	Cgy	Stockton (AHL)
(AHL)	18	5	10					18	7	14	
10	27	Ilya Samsonov	21	Wsh		3		Andrew Mangiapane	19	Cgy	Stockton (AHL)
		Hershey (AHL)	18	3.60	.866			13	7	14	
13	28	Lias Andersson	20	NYR	Hartford	4		Matthew Phillips	19	Cgy	Stockton (AHL)
(AHL)	21	5	15					34	10	23	
-	29	Barrett Hayton	18	Ari	S.S.	5		Tyler Parsons	20	Cgy	Stockton (AHL)
Marie (OHL)	23	18	39					9	4.70	.870	
-	30	Rasmus Kupari	18	Los	Kärpät						
(SM Liiga)	29	8	23								
-	31	Urho Vaakanainen	20	Bos		1		Kailer Yamamoto	20	Edm	Edmonton (NHL)
		Providence (AHL)	9	0	5			13	1	2	
-	32	Joel Farabee	18	Phi	Boston	2		Evan Bouchard	19	Edm	London (OHL)
U (NCAA)	19	6	16					17	5	22	
-	33	Alexander Alexeyev	19	Wsh	Red	3		Dmitri Samorukov	19	Edm	Guelph (OHL)
Deer (WHL)	33	7	35					34	3	20	



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4	Olivier Rodrigue	18	Edm	Drummondville					
(QMJHL)	33	2.53	.898						
5	Kirill Maksimov	19	Edm	Niagara (OHL)	1	Kristian Vesalainen	19	Wpg	Jokerit (KHL)
	38	28	57			17	5	12	
					2	Dylan Samberg	19	Wpg	Minn-Duluth
					(NCAA)	17	2	5	
1	Alexander Romanov	19	Mtl	Moskva (KHL)	3	Sami Niku	22	Wpg	Winnipeg (NHL)
	29	0	0			7	0	0	
2	Ryan Poehling	20	Mtl	St. Cloud St	4	Declan Chisholm	20	Wpg	Peterborough
(NCAA)	18	3	17		(OHL)	41	3	32	
3	Nick Suzuki	19	Mtl	Guelph (OHL)	5	David Gustavsson	19	Wpg	HV 71 (SHL)
	33	23	53			16	0	4	
4	Jacob Olofsson	19	Mtl	Timra (SHL)	TSN.CA LOADED: 01.16.2019				
	23	2	6						
5	Cayden Primeau	19	Mtl	Northeastern					
(NCAA)	16	2.22	.923						
1	Drake Batherson	20	Ott	Belleville (AHL)					
	26	8	25						
2	Alex Formenton	19	Ott	London (OHL)					
	13	7	16						
3	Josh Norris	19	Ott	Michigan (NCAA)					
	17	10	19						
4	Jacob Bernard-Docker	18	Ott	North					
Dakota (NCAA)	21	4	13						
5	Filip Gustavsson	21	Ott	Belleville (AHL)					
	27	3.48	.886						
1	Rasmus Sandin	18	Tor	Toronto (AHL)					
	18	5	10						
2	Timothy Liljegren	19	Tor	Toronto (AHL)					
	19	2	8						
3	Trevor Moore	23	Tor	Toronto (AHL)					
	30	19	26						
4	Ian Scott	20	Tor	Prince Albert (WHL)	31				
	1.78	.937							
5	Carl Grundstrom	21	Tor	Frolunda (SHL)					
	37	11	26						
1	Quinn Hughes	19	Van	Michigan (NCAA)					
	19	3	22						
2	Adam Gaudette	22	Van	Utica (AHL)					
	7	4	7						
3	Thatcher Demko	23	Van	Vancouver (NHL)					
4	Jonathan Dahlen	21	Van	Utica (AHL)					
	38	9	20						
5	Tyler Madden	19	Van	Northeastern					
(NCAA)	16	6	18						