



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 1, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

With no margin for error, 'no-show' Hurricanes playing a dangerous game

By Luke DeCock

When you let things come down to a broken stick, or a linesman throwing the wrong guy out of a faceoff, your fate is out of your hands. And probably has been for a while.

The Carolina Hurricanes could point to either as the reason the Vegas Golden Knights scored the late game-winner Friday night, but they had only themselves to blame for letting things come down to such relatively minor twists of fate.

There have been more moments of frustration for Rod Brind'Amour this season than in what amounted to a fairy-tale debut, but this 4-3 loss seemed to particularly irk the coach, as it absolutely should. The Hurricanes went into the break feeling pretty good about things, and those 10 days felt more like nine months after a first period that saw them outshot 16-6 and down two goals after less than 10 minutes.

"Terrible," Brind'Amour said. "It's not acceptable to come out and play like that for two periods. Two-and-a-half periods, to be honest with you."

This is a team with no margin for error. The Hurricanes have as little security in the playoff race as they typically have at the end of January, which is to say none at all, thanks to an NHL playoff system that contrives to leave the 12th-best team in the league out of a playoff spot. That's where the Hurricanes stand after Friday. Very little has to go wrong to send things spiraling south. A great deal has to go right to keep things headed north.

"We're in crunch mode here," said Jordan Martinook, whose play earned him a battlefield promotion to the top line with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen on a night few distinguished themselves. "We're right on the edge of it."

There is no room for a performance like this one, for example, when two teams came out of a week-long break and only one looked like it. A furious third-period comeback put the Hurricanes into position to claim at least a point, undeserved as it may have been, only for fortune to intervene, and not on their behalf.

Joel Edmundson's stick broke while firing a shot, and the resulting dribbler led first to a Vegas break the other way and next to a Aho hooking penalty trying to slow things down. On the ensuing faceoff in the Carolina end, the linesman kicked Jordan Staal out of the circle as the Hurricanes argued his stick was on the ice and Paul Stastny actually encroached on Staal. They were right to be concerned: Stastny beat Brock McGinn and Vegas scored the winner 6 seconds later.

It took the Hurricanes about 47 minutes to get in gear, but two goals less than four minutes apart from McGinn and Aho got the building up and engaged, and it started to feel like one of those nights when the noise might carry the Hurricanes through. The euphoria was short-lived, from broken stick to broken hearts in a matter of seconds.

"We got what we deserved," Brind'Amour said. "It's a tough one. We played about eight minutes of hockey. The situation we're in, that's a tough one."

Too many "no-shows," Brind'Amour said, and for a coach who goes out of his way to avoid criticizing his players -- Nino Niederreiter's impending status as a healthy scratch was addressed only cryptically Friday morning -- it had the ring of an indictment. A few more nights like this, and the case will be closed entirely.



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Back from long break, Hurricanes' late rally not enough against the Golden Knights

By Chip Alexander

There wasn't much for Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour to say Friday after a 4-3 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights at PNC Arena.

Did a poor start cause the Canes to chase the game the whole way?

"Yep," Brind'Amour said.

Was it the kind of game he feared?

"Yep."

Coming off an extended break for the 2020 NHL All-Star Weekend and then the team's bye week, Brind'Amour expected some sluggishness, perhaps a slip in mental focus. But this?

"It's terrible," he said. "It's not acceptable to come out and play like that for two periods. For two and a half periods, to be honest with you.

"They were good, I give them a ton of credit. They played the way they had to, played desperate, played fast. We weren't ready to kind of match that and that's what you get."

The Golden Knights (26-20-7), like the Canes, also had been off for the All-Star festivities and then their NHL bye week. But they were energized and ready from the drop of the puck, taking a 2-0 lead in the first period on goals by Paul Stastny and Jonathan Marchessault and leading 3-1 in the third before the Canes rallied.

Goals by Brock McGinn and then Sebastian Aho tied the score 3-3, bringing the crowd of 18,150 to full throat. Aho's goal, his 25th of the season, came on a power play with 3:39 left in regulation, the center redirecting a Jaccob Slavin shot, but the Golden Knights maintained their poise.

"They pushed back hard but we didn't sag," Vegas coach Pete DeBoer said.

Aho was called for a hooking penalty with 2:34 left in regulation. The Knights scored in six seconds on the power play, Alex Tuch getting the winning goal after a faceoff win by

the Golden Knights' Stastny, who then tipped a pass from defenseman Shea Theodore to Tuch for the easy shot and score.

The Canes pulled goalie Petr Mrazek for an extra attacker but the Knights were stout in front of goalie Malcolm Subban, who made his first start since Jan. 9 -- goalie Marc-Andre Fleury was suspended one game for skipping the All-Star Weekend after being selected to the Pacific Division team.

Aho and Teuvo Teravainen each had a goal and assist for the Canes, and Justin Williams, in his third game of the season, assisted on McGinn's goal. But there was not much to like for the Canes (29-19-3), who won their last two games before the break but now are out of playoff position in the Eastern Conference.

"We lost a lot of battles and played kind of slow," Teravainen said. "They started better and I think that was the game. We tried to get going but it took some time. Still, not very happy about the game."

Not Brind'Amour.

"We got what we deserved," he said. "We played about eight minutes of hockey. In the situation that we're in, that's a tough one. We were slow and they were fast.

Brind'Amour decided to make forward Nino Niederreiter the healthy scratch -- Niederreiter missing part of Thursday's team practice. During the game, Brind'Amour shuffled his lines, looking for some answers.

"There were just a lot of no-shows tonight," he said. "We're not good enough to have one or two guys not show. We had probably half a dozen and that makes it tough."

After the game, the Canes' locker room was a somber spot, with only the sounds of weights hitting the floor as the players went through a postgame workout.

"I wish I had the why," forward Jordan Martinook said in trying to describe the Canes' poor play. "I don't know. Maybe it's the break ... I don't know. I'm saying I don't know a lot because I don't know."



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Canes' Erik Haula says, 'I feel good. I feel confident. I'm ready to go.'

By Chip Alexander

With 32 games left in the regular season, it figures to be a sprint to the finish line for the Carolina Hurricanes, with every point precious in the push for the playoffs.

"It seems like that," Canes center Erik Haula said Thursday. "I think it should be like that every year and you should have the mentality that it will be. Ultimately that's when you're at your best."

Haula is determined to be at his best. A healthy scratch in the Canes' final game before the extended break for the NHL All-Star Weekend and bye week, he had considerable time to mull over the situation.

The return of former captain Justin Williams from semi-retirement has given Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour 13 available forwards — and a lineup decision to make. In Williams' first game back, Jan. 19 against the New York Islanders, forward Jordan Martinook was the healthy scratch. Then Haula, two days later against the Winnipeg Jets.

Haula's reaction? "It sucked. I was rattled for sure," he said.

Haula, who had gone nine straight games without a goal, said he discussed it with Brind'Amour, noting, "Ultimately he makes the decision on who plays and who doesn't play and he decided I wasn't going to play."

"Obviously, nobody wants to sit. No one wants to sit and I wasn't happy it was me but now we're past that."

The long break is over. The Vegas Golden Knights, Haula's former team, were in town for a Friday game at PNC Arena as the Canes (29-18-3) resumed their season with a tenuous grip on the second wild-card playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

"I know the level I can play at and that's where I'm trying to get to," Haula said. "Most of the season I've been on that level and I'm happy about that. It's getting back to that and that's the goal. Obviously I want to be one of the best players on this team, finishing the season."

"I feel good, I feel confident, I'm ready to go. "

Haula, 28, had a super start in his first season with the Canes, scoring seven goals in the first nine games, three on the power play. But he banged up a shoulder against the Anaheim Ducks in the Canes' ninth game, later missed some games, returned, missed 15 more games and hasn't been as consistent or productive as he was early in the season.

Haula said after the break he feels refreshed — no knee or shoulder issues. He was in the lineup Friday night, albeit in a 4-3 loss to the Golden Knights.

The Canes need No. 56 being a pest in front of goalies, a power-play threat, reliable in the defensive zone and dependable in the faceoff circle.

"He's one of our top guys and we need him to be able to play at the level he expects to," Brind'Amour said after Friday's

morning skate. "If we want to have a chance to get in (the playoffs), get on a run, we're going to need him doing what he does."

Haula is in the final year of his contract and will be a pending unrestricted free agent after the season. There's a financial incentive for him but it's also a matter of personal pride.

Playing the Golden Knights, he said, would be exciting. While he has a lot of close friends on the team, it was Vegas that traded him away after last season, after he wrecked his right knee and put in months of grueling rehab trying to return for the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Haula's hockey life has been both pleasing and painful.. The Finnish forward played college hockey at Minnesota and began his NHL career with the Minnesota Wild. After four seasons, the Wild made him available in the 2017 NHL expansion draft and the Golden Knights took him.

"It was tough," he said. "Minnesota was kind of like home for me."

But Haula became a part of a sensational feel-good story in Las Vegas. The Golden Knights captivated the city in their first season. It was as if the confetti never stopped falling as the Knights, with Haula scoring a career-high 29 goals, reached the 2018 Stanley Cup final before losing to the Washington Capitals in seven games.

"There's really no words for it," Haula said. "It was the best year of my life, probably, until we came up a little bit short. I'll never forget that and I don't think anybody on that team will. They're always going to carry that, the 'Misfits' and all that stuff."

"Good players, the right players, everything worked out. You hear sports stories all the time about how teams aren't always the best or expected to win. When it clicks ... this team is a good example of it last year."

Meaning the Hurricanes. Everything fell neatly into place as the Canes ended a nine-year playoff drought and surged to the Eastern Conference finals in Brind'Amour's first year as head coach.

The Canes now must find a way to compensate for the loss of do-everything defenseman Dougie Hamilton, out with a broken fibula. And Brind'Amour must leave an extra forward out of the lineup, game to game.

"They're making it tough on me and that's what's good. I don't want it to be an easy decision," Brind'Amour said. "Thirteen forwards that I want to play, can't do it. You'll see different guys going in and out all the time as long as we're healthy."

Haula said he probably would not catch up with any of his former teammates this week. Maybe in another week or so, he said, when the Canes play at Vegas.

"It's always fun to play all your buddies and turn them into your enemies for a few hours," he said, smiling.



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Recap: Canes Push Late But Fall to Golden Knights

Canes nullify two-goal deficit in third period but surrender late power-play goal in 4-3 loss

by Michael Smith

Despite erasing a two-goal deficit in a late third period comeback, the Carolina Hurricanes were edged, 4-3, by the Vegas Golden Knights.

Brock McGinn and Sebastian Aho scored four minutes apart in the third period to tie the score, but Alex Tuch's power-play tally with 2:28 left in regulation was the difference.

Here are five takeaways from the Canes' final game of January.

1. "It Was a Tough Game"

For a brief period of time - 71 seconds, to be exact - it seemed the Hurricanes would salvage at least a point from a game in which they probably deserved none.

And then, in a seemingly cruel string of unfortunate mishaps, that glimmer of hope was dashed, and the Canes skated away with the zero points they had coming after sputtering to start following a nine-day layoff.

"They were coming off their break, too. It looked like they had been playing for 10 [days], and we sat on the couch for 10 days. They did exactly what we wanted to do," Jordan Martinook said. "In the second we started picking it up, and in the third we made our push. ... We dug ourselves a hole, and it was hard to dig out of it."

That's the thing - the break for the Canes was no different than the break for the Golden Knights. Both teams were in the same boat, and Vegas had to row theirs farther to even get to Raleigh to play the dreaded first-game-after-a-long-break.

"Everybody has to make sure they're ready to play," Teuvo Teravainen said. "It's a long break, but for both teams it's the same thing."

"Terrible, terrible. It's not acceptable to come out and play like that for two periods, even two-and-a-half periods, to be honest with you. They were good. I give them a ton of credit. They played the way they had to," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We weren't ready to match that. That's what you get. We fought back. Unfortunate at the end."

2. Mounting a Push

Despite the start and then despite seeing a one-goal deficit double with about eight minutes left in regulation, the Hurricanes didn't wither.

It helped when, just 16 seconds after Vegas took a 3-1 lead, Brock McGinn snapped a shot glove-side high on Malcom Subban to bring the Canes back within a goal.

That salvaged life for the Canes and generated some juice inside PNC Arena. The Canes started buzzing around, and the crowd of 18,150 grew more and more vocal. Andrei Svechnikov burst into the zone with speed and drew a penalty on former Hurricane Nic Roy. Anticipation built through the media timeout, with the Canes taking the ice for a do-or-die power play on the other side of the break.

It took only eight seconds for the Canes to convert and tie the game, even though the on-ice officials weren't exactly sure without the brief assistance of video review. Jacob Slavin's point shot was redirected in the slot by Sebastian Aho, and the puck popped in and out of the net, which caused the initial confusion.

No mistaking what had happened, though. The Canes had tied the game.

Unfortunately, though ...

"We made a game, but at the same time, it really doesn't matter if we lose with four goals or one goal," Teravainen said. "It's still a loss."

3. "We Got What We Deserved"

A short time after Aho tied the game, a series of unfortunate events led to Vegas reclaiming the lead.

First, Joel Edmundson's stick shattered at the offensive zone blue line. As he raced to retrieve a new twig, Vegas skated down the ice to take advantage of his misfortunate. Aho was forced to take a hooking penalty on Max Pacioretty to prevent a scoring opportunity on what would have been a 2-on-1 rush.

And on the ensuing power play, just as the Canes had done just a minute prior, Vegas cashed in almost immediately.

Jordan Staal got the boot from the faceoff circle, which Brind'Amour wasn't happy about, and then Alex Tuch tucked the puck in off a touch from Paul Stastny.

"That's a pressure time we need to kill," Martinook said. "You've got to find a way to battle through."

Just like that, the Golden Knights had reclaimed the lead.

"We got what we deserved," Brind'Amour said. "It was a tough game."

4. Vegas Grabs Early Lead

Ask Brind'Amour, and he'll tell you: The start of the game is vitally important no matter what game it is, what time of day it is, what day of the week it is. It's a tone-setter, bottom line.

Coming off a nine-day layoff, though, and there is perhaps a little more truth to it. There's a good bit of mental and physical unknown coming off such an extended mid-season break, and



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the first goal, whether tangible, can help calm some of those nerves and settle a team back into the routine of game action.

The first goal - and then second - for Vegas likely helped assuage some of their concerns flying across the country after spending the last week and change away from an ice rink. For the Canes, finding themselves in an early hole, it likely had the opposite effect.

"They started way better, and I think that was the game," Teravainen stated simply.

Martinook couldn't quite put a "why" to the why of the starts for either team being so diametric.

"I'm saying 'I don't know' a lot because I don't know. I wish I had something to tell you," he said. "We obviously needed a lot more from everyone in the first period to set the tone for the night."

Goals from Paul Stastny and Jonathan Marchessault put Vegas up 2-0 before the game was even 10 minutes old. The Canes, a noted shot volume team, managed just six shots on goal in the first period, followed by nine in the second and 10 in the third.

"We prepared like we knew we had to, but we were slow. Everything was slow. They were fast. That's what it looks like when it goes that way," Brind'Amour said. "There were a lot of no-shows tonight. That was the problem. We're not good enough to have one or two guys no-show, but we had probably half a dozen. That makes it tough."

5. Teravainen Gets the Canes on the Board

After a sleepy first 20 minutes, the Canes began to awake from their slumber with a better middle frame. Tangible evidence of that was found on the scoreboard when Teravainen located a rebound off a shot from Martinook and slid it past Malcolm Subban.

That gave the Canes some life, even though they couldn't quite build on it in that moment.

Teravainen finished the evening with two points (1g, 1a) and leads the Canes in assists (39) and points (50) through 51 games this season.

Up Next

The Hurricanes host the Vancouver Canucks at 2 p.m. on Super Bowl Sunday before embarking on a four-game road trip through the Western Conference.



Tuch breaks tie late in third period, Golden Knights defeat Hurricanes

Subban makes 22 saves for first win since Dec. 22

by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Alex Tuch scored a power-play goal with 2:28 remaining to lift the Vegas Golden Knights to a 4-3 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at PNC Arena on Friday.

Tuch redirected Paul Stastny's touch pass into an open net with Hurricanes goalie Petr Mrazek drawn out of position.

"It was something we were looking to do," Tuch said. "We were able to execute, and I just put my stick on the ice and made sure I hit the net."

The Hurricanes trailed 3-1 in the third, but Brock McGinn scored on a snapshot under the crossbar at 12:25 to cut it to 3-2, and Sebastian Aho tied the game 3-3 when he redirected Jaccob Slavin's shot on the power play at 16:21.

"In the third, we made our push," Hurricanes forward Jordan Martinook said. "We just dug ourselves a hole and it was hard to get out of it. We needed a lot more in the first period from everyone to set the tone for the night."

Stastny and Jonathan Marchessault each had a goal and an assist, and Malcolm Subban made 22 saves for his first win since Dec. 22 for the Golden Knights (26-20-7).

Aho and Teuvo Teravainen each had a goal and an assist, and Mrazek made 33 saves for the Hurricanes (29-19-3), who had won two in a row.

Stastny's 15th goal of the season gave Vegas a 1-0 lead at 3:52 of the first period. After the Golden Knights cycled the puck in the right corner, Reilly Smith made a pass from the slot to Stastny for a tap-in at the right post.

Vegas took a 2-0 lead when Marchessault took Smith's pass through the neutral zone and scored on a wrist shot from the right circle at 9:59.

"We played with a little more pace than they did tonight, especially in the first period," Smith said. "I think that was the difference-maker."

Teravainen followed Martinook's shot and scored from the top of the crease to cut the Vegas lead to 2-1 at 9:55 of the second period.

Nate Schmidt pushed the lead to 3-1 at 12:09 of the third period when he took a backhand feed from Chandler Stephenson went top shelf.

"We lost a lot of battles, we played kind of slow," Teravainen said. "It's nice we made a game [of it] but it doesn't matter."

It was Subban's first start since a 5-2 loss to the Los Angeles Kings on Jan. 9.

"I didn't play for a while, so in the first, you want to make the first save and just get into the game," Subban said. "But my teammates made it easy for me."



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Subban's best save came at 4:16 of the second period when he went post-to-post for a right-pad save on Aho at the back door.

"I think I heard him call for it," Subban said. "You don't want to cheat, so I tried to stay square if [Hurricanes forward Justin Williams] passed it and then make a move."

The Golden Knights and Hurricanes each played their first game following the League-mandated break after the 2020 Honda NHL All-Star Game.

They said it

"The first period is how we want to play, on our toes, attacking, hard in the offensive zone, using our size and our physicality. That was 20 great minutes. In the second, we stepped off that a little. We looked like we played with the lead a little bit. The good thing is we can do it. It's just doing it for 60 minutes." -- Golden Knights coach Pete DeBoer

"It's terrible. It's not acceptable to come and play like that for two periods, two-and-a-half periods, to be honest with you. [Vegas] was good. I give them a ton of credit. They played desperate, they played fast. We just weren't ready to match

that, and that is what you get." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

Need to know

Stastny has a goal and an assist in three of the past four games. ... Smith had two assists for his ninth multipoint game this season. ... It was Subban first time playing against the Hurricanes. ... Schmidt and defenseman Brayden McNabb were each plus-3. ... Vegas goalie Marc-Andre Fleury did not play. He was serving a one-game suspension for missing the All-Star Game. ... Teravainen has five points (two goals, three assists) in the past two games. ... Hurricanes forwards Erik Haula and Ryan Dzingel each have gone 10 games without a goal. It was Haula's first game against his former team since he was traded to the Hurricanes on June 27.

What's next

Golden Knights: At the Nashville Predators on Saturday (8 p.m. ET; FS-TN, ATTSN-RM, NHL.TV)

Hurricanes: Host the Vancouver Canucks on Sunday (2 p.m. ET; ESPN+, SN360, SNW, SNP, FS-CR, NHL.TV)



Tuch's tiebreaking goal lifts Vegas over Carolina 4-3

By Ken Tysiac

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Alex Tuch scored a tiebreaking power-play goal with 2:28 remaining in the third period to lift the Vegas Golden Knights to a 4-3 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday night.

The Hurricanes had tied the score with a goal by Sebastian Aho on a power play of their own just 70 seconds earlier. But Aho was called for a hooking penalty with 2:34 remaining, and the Golden Knights won a faceoff and scored the winning goal with just 6 seconds elapsed on the penalty.

"That was a key moment obviously at 3-3 where they had all the momentum, and I liked our response," Golden Knights coach Peter DeBoer said. "We got back on our toes, we started to attack, drew a penalty, scored on the power play. So big goal, big win, important start to the road trip."

Jonathan Marchessault had a goal and an assist in the opening 10 minutes as Vegas got off to a fast start after a nine-day layoff. Nate Schmidt and Paul Stastny also scored for the Golden Knights. Reilly Smith assisted on both first-period goals, and Vegas improved to 2-1-1 since DeBoer replaced the fired Gerard Gallant as coach.

Aho and Teuvo Teravainen each had a goal and one assist, and Brock McGinn also scored for Carolina, which had won two in a row. Petr Mrazek made 33 saves as the Hurricanes overcame their slow start but couldn't finish.

"It's terrible," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's not acceptable to play like that for two periods — two and a half periods — to be honest with you. They were good, I give them a ton of credit. They played desperate, they played fast. They

did everything we said they were going to do and we just weren't ready to...match that, and that is what you get."

With both teams playing for the first time since Jan. 21, the Golden Knights looked fresh while the Hurricanes were sluggish in the opening period. Vegas had 13 of the first 15 shots on goal, and Stastny opened the scoring by slamming home a goalmouth feed from Smith just 3:52 into the game.

Marchessault made it 2-0 at 9:59 when he caught Carolina flat-footed during a line change, received a pass from Smith just past the Hurricanes' blue line and wristed a shot into the net on Mrazek's glove side.

"It's a key time of year," Smith said. "I think we just came out with a little more jump than they did, and took advantage of the opportunity on a couple bounces that we were able to get in the first period."

Teravainen halved the deficit with the only goal of the second period when he converted the rebound of a miss by Jordan Martinook.

Schmidt extended the Vegas lead to 3-1 in the third period before McGinn and Aho quickly answered to tie it. The crowd came to life as the home team suddenly had an opportunity to win after trailing for almost the entire game.

But the Golden Knights weren't rattled and struck back for the game-winner.

"Obviously at 3-1 in the third period, you want to close that game out," Marchessault said. "But they're a hard-working team. You've got to give credit to them. They came back, but good teams find a way to win. And we did."



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NOTES

Carolina has been a model of durability this season, becoming the first NHL team in history to have 13 different skaters appear in each of its first 50 games this season. One of those players, forward Nino Niederreiter, was a healthy scratch Friday for the 51st game of the season. ... Both teams' penalty killing units were hot until late in the third period. The Vegas penalty-killers hadn't allowed a goal in eight consecutive periods, killing seven straight penalties, before Aho scored.

The Hurricanes had killed 13 straight penalties over five games before Tuch's goal.

UP NEXT

Golden Knights: At Nashville on Saturday night in the fifth of their eight consecutive road games.

Hurricanes: Host Vancouver on Sunday in the last of five straight home games.



Hurricanes Start Slow, Make too Many Mistakes in Disappointing Loss to Golden Knights

The Hurricanes got in their own way at many points in their loss to the Golden Knights.

By Brett Finger

RALEIGH — That could've gone better.

In their first game back from their lengthy layoff during the All-Star break, the Carolina Hurricanes started slow, fought hard enough at some points to make it close, but then ultimately suffered a painful 4-3 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights on Friday.

The first period was an ordeal.

For about three minutes, the play was relatively even. Sloppy, but even. Just before the four minute mark, Vegas grabbed control of the game thanks to a defensive breakdown. Ryan Dzingel lost his man and left Jake Gardiner all alone in front, trying to defend both Reilly Smith and Paul Stastny. Stastny scored off of a pass from Smith on the play, and the Golden Knights took an early 1-0 lead.

The opening frame slipped further and further away from the Hurricanes. They just weren't ready whatsoever, and they had a very difficult time even breaking out of their own zone and producing any sort of offense.

A defensive mistake surrendered the game's first goal, and a bad line change surrendered the second goal.

Haydn Fleury cleared the puck out of his own zone and skated to the bench at the end of a long shift, but his clearing attempt only made it to the center-ice line. That created an odd-man rush the other way, and Jonathan Marchessault scored short-side on Petr Mrazek on the reload to extend the Vegas lead to 2-0.

Carolina caught a series of good breaks as the first period wore on, including a shot from Max Pacioretty that rang right off the post on a Golden Knights power play.

Through twenty minutes, Vegas outshot Carolina 16-6 en route to a 2-0 lead.

Signs of life weren't promising for the Canes in the first minute of period two. Warren Foegele got whistled for high-sticking in

the neutral zone and put Carolina behind the eight-ball right away.

The Hurricanes killed the penalty, though, and they started to slowly build their game from their own end, out.

The desperation seemed to be more present in the second period, as well, and they were rewarded with their first goal of the game just under halfway through regulation.

Teuvo Teravainen entered the offensive zone with poise, dropped the puck back to Jaccob Slavin, went right to the front of the net, and found the back of the net after Slavin's shot went wide and eventually bounced back to the stick of Teravainen.

The second period featured a much more competitive effort from the Hurricanes, and they managed to cut the Golden Knights lead in half entering the third period.

About that third period... it was an adventure.

Vegas started to accumulate more scoring chances than they had in the previous frame, but Mrazek made a number of big saves to keep the score within just a goal.

That changed at the 12:09 mark. Vegas extended their lead back to two goals thanks to a series of mistakes through the neutral zone by Carolina, started by a mistake from Joel Edmundson after a Jordan Martinook offensive zone face-off win.

Nate Schmidt grabbed the puck in the Vegas zone and transitioned through the neutral zone before beating the Carolina back-checkers to the net and making it a 3-1 hockey game.

That felt like a back-breaking goal at the time for the Hurricanes. It felt like that for every bit of the 16 seconds that passed before the Canes answered with a goal of their own.

Fleury made a great play through the neutral zone and into the offensive zone, dropped a pass off of a Vegas defender and onto the stick of Brock McGinn. McGinn rifled a choppy puck up and over the shoulder of Malcolm Subban to make it 3-2.



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The push continued for the Hurricanes in the shifts immediately following McGinn's goal. Andrei Svechnikov tried to pull off a gorgeous drive through the Vegas defense and nearly did before Nicolas Roy had no choice but to hook him in the slot. The former Canes prospect went to the box, and that gave the home team a chance.

Off the face-off, Jaccob Slavin took a long-range slap shot, favoring the shot toward Sebastian Aho in the slot. Aho got his stick on the shot and deflected it bar-down on Subban. The crowd erupted and the game was suddenly tied with 3:38 left on the clock.

Aho was the hero of the night to that point, but just moments later, he became the goat.

Edmundson broke his stick unexpectedly, giving the Golden Knights a rush the other way. Aho tried to cover for him, but he took a hooking penalty in the process, which gave Vegas a chance to respond.

And respond they did.

Off of a face-off win, Alex Tuch drove to the net and beat Jordan Staal to the doorstep. He got his stick on a loose puck in the crease and instantly sucked all the life out of a near-sellout PNC Arena crowd with 2:28 left in the third period.

Carolina Hurricanes Second Half Predictions

Gardiner bounces back, Slavin steps up, first round picks get traded, and more predictions for the Hurricanes in the second half.

By Brett Finger

The second half starts tonight for the Carolina Hurricanes.

Well, the last 32 games of the 82-game regular season starts tonight, or whatever.

In the middle of a tight Eastern Conference playoff picture, the Hurricanes have no time to waste. These games will be playoff games for them. They all matter.

Here are some predictions for the Hurricanes in the second half of the season, all of which will be correct because I'm a very smart person who has never been wrong before about anything.

The predictions will be accompanied by a "level of confidence" rating - on a scale of one Skol clap (least confident) to five Skol claps (most confident).

Justin Williams Makes a Big Impact

Let's start with an easy one.

It took all of one game for Williams to inject life back into a team that had been sputtering a bit in the few games before his debut.

He scored the game-deciding shootout goal against the New York Islanders in game one. His encore performance was even better. He scored two goals in a win over the Winnipeg Jets in the final game before the break.

He's on a goal-per-game pace right now. The world is his oyster. You know what they say, 38 is the new 24.

4-3 Golden Knights.

Carolina pulled the goalie and tried to tie the game yet again, but they couldn't even manage to get the puck out from their own zone as Vegas kept pinning them down and keeping the puck deep.

The final horn sounded, and the Hurricanes were on the wrong side of the final tally.

It was a disappointing game for a lot of reasons for Rod Brind'Amour's group, but more than anything, it was the lack of buy-in from a staggering number of players in black.

They left their goalie out to dry early and often, they didn't have a pulse for long stretches, and they took too many shifts off. All of that, combined with the fact that they hadn't played hockey in almost two weeks was a recipe for disaster. And while they managed to scrap their way back late in the game, their awful start and lack of energy at some important points in the game stood in the way of what could've been a happy return to the ice.

The Hurricanes fell to 29-19-3 with the loss. They'll hit the ice again Sunday afternoon when they host the Vancouver Canucks.

No, but really, he looked good in his first two games, and while I don't expect him to be a huge factor on the scoresheet every night, his impact goes well beyond that.

He will continue to breathe life into this team, as he did in his very shift of the season. His return couldn't have been timed better, both for him and the team. He'll have a noticeable impact on the Hurricanes down the stretch.

Level of Confidence: 5/5 Skol Claps

Jake Gardiner Gets Hot

The first 50 games for Gardiner as a Hurricane were a rollercoaster, but I think things will look be much better for him in the second half.

His best stretch this season came in the final ten games before the break. Seeing more consistent minutes with Brett Pesce did a lot for him, both before and after Dougie Hamilton's season-ending injury.

His career track record suggests that he is a second-half player. Since breaking into the NHL, he has produced .39 points per game in games before the All-Star break. He's a .52 point-per-game player after the All-Star break.

Breaking it down by month, Gardiner has produced .46 points per game in February, .56 points per game in March, and .54 points per game in April.

Gardiner has caught a lot of fair and unfair criticism through the infancy stages of his Hurricanes tenure, but his career track record and his recent play has me optimistic that he will turn things around and be a valuable, dynamic player.

Level of Confidence: 4/5 Skol Claps

Jaccob Slavin Enters the Norris Conversation



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The hole Hamilton leaves is big, and it will take a group effort to try to replicate what he does. I think Gardiner will see his play get to where it needs to be, and I think Slavin will take his game to a level we've never seen from him before.

This prediction stems from my belief in the player. Fresh off of his first All-Star weekend, his confidence should be at an all-time high, and he is going to get every opportunity to make an even larger impact than he has to this point. He'll get huge minutes - 5-on-5, power play, penalty kill, and every other possible situation that a hockey game can feature.

I think he will go into a mode that we saw from him in last year's postseason, where he set franchise records for point production from a defenseman. Slavin will see his minutes rise dramatically as the second half progresses, turning into the workhorse of the Carolina blue line. In the process, more and more Norris voters will take notice and he will be among the shortlist of defensemen in the run for a top-three finish for the award.

Level of Confidence: 3/5 Skol Claps

Issues with the Blue Line

I just talked about how I think Gardiner and Slavin will both have a great stretch run, but my belief in the blue line, as a whole, drops off quickly.

Once you get past Slavin, Gardiner, and Brett Pesce (who is excellent), I start to worry.

Joel Edmundson had a great (and probably very lucky) point streak earlier this season, but he has since come back down to Earth. His physicality and protection of teammates doesn't slump, but his overall play late in the first half offered some cause for concern. If he can bounce back a bit and be a steady number five defenseman (which I think is totally within the realm of possibility), he'll be fine.

Then, you have the bottom pairing.

Trevor van Riemsdyk has had a very iffy season. He started the year late due to the shoulder injury, but since returning a few weeks into the season, he just hasn't been consistent or reliable enough at even strength.

Haydn Fleury has shown me a lot this year. I think he has gotten better, but he hasn't gotten a chance to prove it on a game-to-game basis. He will get that chance, and he needs to take advantage of it. If he starts to struggle, I don't foresee him sticking around in the lineup too long.

In Charlotte, guys like Jake Bean and Gustav Forsling could get looks. Bean has had an excellent season and I think he's just about as close to NHL-ready as a 21-year-old offensive defenseman can be. I think he'll see some NHL games, but still, he is a young player and this Canes team wants to be a contender.

I'm not sure how much of a chance he'll get from Rod Brind'Amour and Dean Chynoweth. I wouldn't blame them if they felt uncomfortable about giving Bean a significant role in the middle of a playoff push.

Forsling has more track record at the NHL level and is more defense-oriented, so maybe he factors in if the Canes don't make a trade to bolster the blue line.

After Slavin, Pesce, and Gardiner, I think the Hurricanes will run into some issues - issues that will need to be addressed by the front office at some point via roster moves or trades.

Level of Confidence: 4/5 Skol Claps

2020 First-Round Pick Gets Traded

Before the Hamilton injury, I probably wouldn't have made this prediction (or I wouldn't have been as confident about it).

The Hurricanes were already rumored to have interest in adding a defenseman before the injury. Fleury will likely get a chance to earn his keep on the defensive depth chart, but if he or anyone else falters, I think Don Waddell and company will be quick to pull the trigger on a guy they like.

I also think that it's entirely possible they look into adding a forward. While they did pick up a few wins before the break, they did so with an offense that suddenly went dry. Adding another offensive weapon to the mix would make a real impact, especially on the second power play unit.

I think the player has to be controllable beyond this season for the Canes to throw a first-rounder out there, though. Regardless of the player's position, I just cannot see them giving up a first-round pick for a pure rental at this point in time.

They do have an additional first-round pick via the Patrick Marleau trade with the Toronto Maple Leafs. That pick is conditional, though, so it's a bit of a wild card at this point - if the Leafs miss the playoffs and wind up with a top-ten pick, the Canes get their 2021 first-round pick instead.

Level of Confidence: 3.5/5 Skol Claps

Hurricanes Make the Playoffs

When the clock strikes midnight on the NHL regular season, the Hurricanes will be in a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

They'll have to endure an all-out war to get there. The Metropolitan Division is an unbelievably challenging division, and it would be a tough task for the Hurricanes to make the postseason even if they hadn't gone 0-for-700 against Metro teams in the first half of the season.

Their issues in the division have put them in a precarious spot, meaning their remaining games within the division must be treated as must-win games. I do think this team is capable of turning things around down the stretch, though, even without Hamilton.

The goaltending will hold up, they'll generate enough offense, and their best players will play like their best players. The Canes will make the playoffs in consecutive seasons for the first time in 18 years.

Level of Confidence: 4/5 Skol Claps



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Canes fall at home in first game after break

By Ryan Henkel

Although the Hurricanes' nine days off ended, some of the team still looked like they were enjoying their vacations as they effortlessly trudged along through the first 20 minutes of hockey putting themselves in a 2-0 hole because of it.

And it was due to this effort, or lack-there-of, that had head coach Rod Brind'Amour livid post-game.

"It's terrible," Brind'Amour said. "It's terrible. It's not acceptable to come out and play like that for really two and a half periods. [The Golden Knights] were good, I give them a ton of credit. They played the way they had to. Played desperate. Played fast. Played how we said they were going to and we weren't ready to match that. That's what you get. We got what we deserved."

While the Hurricanes managed to surmount a comeback, tying the game in the fleeting minutes of regulation, it was all for naught as the team surrendered the game-winning goal only a minute later.

"We tried to get going, but it took some time," said Canes forward Teuvo Teravainen. "Not very happy about the game. It was nice we made it a game, but it doesn't matter because we lost. It really doesn't matter if we lose with four goals or one; it's still a loss."

And it was a heartbreaking one at that for the majority of the 18,150 in attendance as the Carolina Hurricanes fell 4-3 to the Vegas Golden Knights at PNC Arena Friday night.

The game started off poorly for Carolina as the first of the Golden Knights' goals came only 3:52 into the game on a blown coverage, as Reilly Smith managed to cycle into the slot unchecked and due to that he had enough time to wait and find Paul Stastny for a backdoor tap-in.

The second goal came a bit later off the stick of Jonathan Marchessault, left wide-open due to a poor line change by the Hurricanes. He skated down to the circle and beat Carolina netminder Petr Mrazek short-side with a wrist. A shot that needed to be saved.

Nothing went the Canes' way and they were still to be considered lucky to escape the first only down by two.

When asked post-game why the team started so poorly, assistant captain Jordan Martinook was at a loss for the right words.

"I don't know, I wish I had why... I don't know," Martinook said. "I think we kind of... You overthink sometimes or you just try and maybe you want to do it right and sometimes your mind just... I don't know. I'm saying I don't know a lot because I don't know. I wish I had something to tell you."

In the second, the Canes managed to get on the scoreboard as Teravainen nearly did it all himself. On the power play, the

Finnish winger stole the puck off the Vegas forecheck and took it all the way up the ice through all three zones. After leaving it off, he then managed to find the eventual rebound loose outside of the crease and cashed it in to cut the deficit.

The game went back and forth as the second expired and it ramped back up in the third period as the Hurricanes started to take more risks with the clock ticking and down by one.

However, this came back to bite them.

Joel Edmundson committed to a pinch and wound up on the wrong side of a 3-on-1 rush that even All-Star defenseman Jaccob Slavin could do nothing about. The rush led to Vegas blueliner Nate Schmidt alone in the slot, where he roofed it over Mrazek.

At that point it seemed completely over, but 16 seconds later, none other than Brock McGinn managed to find top-corner to basically bring the entire sequence back to square one.

With time expiring, Carolina found itself the warm recipient of a hooking call as Andrei Svechnikov barreled through the Vegas defense. Only eight seconds into the power play, the Hurricanes struck with Sebastian Aho tipping home a Slavin point shot.

It seemed as if the Hurricanes had come back. It seemed as though the team had been able to wake up just in time and secure a much needed point in the suffocatingly close Metropolitan race. But it wasn't so.

It was complete and utter bad luck, but who would it be more fitting to find it than against the professional hockey team from Las Vegas.

The Hurricanes were buzzing after the tying goal and the building was electric. With a few shot attempts going wide, the Canes were coming closer and closer to looking like the eventual winners. Then the puck found its way to the blueline where Edmundson wound up for a slapshot only for his stick to snap in two.

On the ensuing rush, Aho was forced to take a hooking call and on that ensuing power play, Vegas scored in only six seconds to take back the lead.

"If you watch however many games there are a year, I bet you it only happens once," said Martinook on the play.

It's true that you may never see that scenario again, but the Canes needed a big kill there and Brind'Amour felt that his team may have been screwed by more than just luck on the ensuing faceoff after the Aho call.

"I didn't like Jordo [Staal] getting kicked out of [the faceoff]. If you look back at it, it was actually the other guy that should have been kicked out. Jordo's stick was down and the other guy encroached and he reacted. So that was a tough one,



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especially at that time of the game. You usually let them play it out a little bit.”

There is no telling if the Canes would have killed the entirety of that penalty or the rest of that period without conceding a goal, but there is no denying that if Staal had been allowed to stay in the faceoff dot, the game had a much greater chance of having gone differently.

But, as Brind’Amour pointed out, they got what they deserved. The team is struggling to start on time and with more than a few goal-scorers drying up, you can’t expect to, and really shouldn’t, win like that.

“We prepared like we knew we had to, but we were slow,” Brind’Amour said. “Everything was slow. They were fast and that’s what it looks like when it goes that way. There was just a lot of no-shows tonight and that was the problem. We aren’t good enough to have one or two guys no-show and we had probably half a dozen.”

The issue of no-shows is one fairly new to the Brind’Amour regime this year in particular. The team last year built its whole identity on the basis of them showing up everyday and outworking their opponents and it seems to be this lack of effort that has crept into the locker room quite a few times this season.

The sentiment was also repeated by a few players.

Teravainen pointed out in his post-game interview that “Everybody has to make sure they are ready to play,” and Martinook mentioned that, “Everyone in here needs to know that we need to be that team,” when talking about desperation and outworking opponents.

The Hurricanes have a rather quick turnaround to address these issues as the team returns to PNC against the Vancouver Canucks, another desperate team in a extremely tight division, Sunday at 2 p.m.



Hurricanes’ 4-3 loss to Golden Knights “unacceptable” says Brind’Amour

Long layoff provided nothing to kickstart Carolina against energetic Vegas squad

By Peter Koutroumpis

RALEIGH, N.C. – Did they chase the game early?

“Yep.”

Was it the kind of result Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour was worried about?

“Yep,” he said again before continuing into his most pointed critique of his team this season following a 4-3 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights at PNC Arena on Friday night.

Despite goals from Teuvo Teravainen, Brock McGinn and Sebastian Aho, the Hurricanes were unable to pull off the comeback.

The loss denied them a valuable two points in a highly competitive battle for a playoff spot in the NHL’s Eastern conference.

“Terrible, terrible. Not acceptable. To come out and play like that for two periods...two-and-a-half periods to be honest with you. They were good, I give them a ton of credit. They played the way they had to – they played desperate, they played fast – they did everything we said they were gonna do. And we weren’t ready to match that.”

You can’t always get what you want

Even following a 10-day respite as a result of the NHL All-Star break, Carolina didn’t have its game going the way it needed to against an equally rested and motivated Vegas squad playing for new coach Peter DeBoer.

Everything was slow according to Brind’Amour and he stated that, in his opinion, up to half a dozen ‘no shows’ contributed to an effort that left them outshot by a 37-25 margin.

Golden Knights backup goaltender Malcolm Subban’s 22 saves earned him his seventh win of the season on the front end of a road back-to-back set for the Golden Knights while No. 1 Marc-Andre Fleury served a one-game suspension for missing the All-Star game.

Falling behind 2-0 by the midpoint of the opening period on goals from Golden Knights Paul Stastny and Jonathan Marchessault, the Hurricanes had some chances despite only testing Subban with six shots during the frame.

A wide-open dunk opportunity for Canes alternate captain Jordan Martinook on a Justin Williams feed from below the goal line was quickly denied by Subban’s pads.

Play reversed course and soon led to Vegas’ first goal.

It turned out to be that kind of game.

“They did what we wanted to do,” Martinook said.

“We wanted to get pucks in, not play in your own end and tire yourself out. We dug ourselves a hole and it was hard to dig out of it.”

Pull! Pull! Pull!

Teravainen’s 11th goal of the season pulled Carolina to within one at the 9:55 mark of the second period.

The 18,150 in attendance kept up their energy heading into the third, hopeful of the resurgence their team would make, as it had done many times before.

A goal from Nate Schmidt quieted that enthusiasm until McGinn’s snipe and Aho’s redirect just under four minutes apart evened the score at 3-3 with 3:39 to play.

It looked as though they were ready to climb out of the abyss, but a hooking penalty to Aho gave Vegas the opportunity to plunge the final dagger into any final comeback hopes.



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Alex Tuch's seventh goal of the season pinned the Canes' shoulders back down, and even with 2:28 remaining, it wasn't enough time to pull even again.

"That's hockey," Martinook said.

"Pressure time, we need a kill. There's a lot of things that happened there that are out of your control a little bit. That's hockey – you gotta find a way to battle through that stuff and try and kill that off, push back when they score on us."

Notables: Carolina finished 1-2 on the power play, 34-157 (21.7%) overall...On the PK, the Hurricanes went 2-3, 149-179 (83.2%) overall...Teravainen's two points (1g, 1a) gives him five points in his last two games. He leads the Hurricanes in assists (39) and points (50) through 51 games this season...Justin Williams and Haydn Fleury each posted an assist on McGinn's goal and each has earned points in back-to-back games.



Checkers lose to Marlies in return from All-Star break

by Paul Branecky

The Toronto Marlies used a spurt of three goals in less than two minutes to pull away and hand the Checkers their third straight loss, a 6-2 result in Toronto on Friday.

Those goals early in the second period, part of a run of four unanswered Marlies tallies after Morgan Geekie had given the Checkers an early lead, gave Toronto all the offense they would need in Charlotte's first visit to Toronto since last season's Eastern Conference Final.

Max McCormick scored the other goal for Charlotte, whose current run of three consecutive regulation losses marks its longest such streak of the season. Immediately prior to that, the team had won five straight and had just three losses in its previous 16 games combined.

Starting goaltender Anton Forsberg made 13 saves for Charlotte before Alex Nedeljkovic replaced him during the Marlies' torrid run to start the second period.

NOTES

Geekie has points in 10 straight games (7g, 5a), marking the longest point streak by a Checker since Greg McKegg tied a franchise record with a 12-game run from March 10-April 7, 2018 ... The last time the Checkers lost three straight games in regulation was part of a four-game run from Jan. 6-13, 2018 ... The Checkers have scored a power-play goal in nine straight games that they have been awarded a power-play opportunity (13-for-33, 39.4 percent) ... Checkers forward Terry Broadhurst recorded his first point of the season with an assist on Geekie's goal ... The Checkers fell to 2-1-0 against Toronto this season, with the home team winning each game ... Forwards Brian Gibbons, Colin Markison, Stelio Mattheos and Kerby Rychel missed the game due to injury ... Forward Jacob Pritchard and defenseman Derek Sheppard were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The teams will play a rematch in Toronto at 4 p.m. tomorrow before the Checkers return to Charlotte to begin a six-game home stand on Friday, Feb. 7.

TODAY'S LINKS

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<https://www.canescountry.com/2020/1/31/21117642/carolina-hurricanes-recap-start-slow-make-too-many-mistakes-loss-vegas-golden-knights-aho-teravainen>

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http://www.technicianonline.com/sports/article_d5deeb86-44ad-11ea-931e-a341c4ecb249.html

<http://trianglesportsnet.com/carolina-hockey-network/hurricanes-4-3-loss-to-golden-knights-unacceptable-says-brindamour/>

<http://gocheckers.com/game-recaps/checkers-lose-to-marlies-in-return-from-all-star-break>



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SportScan

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

1173818 Carolina Hurricanes

With no margin for error, 'no-show' Hurricanes playing a dangerous game

LUKE DECOCK

JANUARY 31, 2020 10:56 PM

RALEIGH

When you let things come down to a broken stick, or a linesman throwing the wrong guy out of a faceoff, your fate is out of your hands. And probably has been for a while.

The Carolina Hurricanes could point to either as the reason the Vegas Golden Knights scored the late game-winner Friday night, but they had only themselves to blame for letting things come down to such relatively minor twists of fate.

There have been more moments of frustration for Rod Brind'Amour this season than in what amounted to a fairy-tale debut, but this 4-3 loss seemed to particularly irk the coach, as it absolutely should. The Hurricanes went into the break feeling pretty good about things, and those 10 days felt more like nine months after a first period that saw them outshot 16-6 and down two goals after less than 10 minutes.

"Terrible," Brind'Amour said. "It's not acceptable to come out and play like that for two periods. Two-and-a-half periods, to be honest with you."

This is a team with no margin for error. The Hurricanes have as little security in the playoff race as they typically have at the end of January, which is to say none at all, thanks to an NHL playoff system that contrives to leave the 12th-best team in the league out of a playoff spot. That's where the Hurricanes stand after Friday. Very little has to go wrong to send things spiraling south. A great deal has to go right to keep things headed north.

"We're in crunch mode here," said Jordan Martinook, whose play earned him a battlefield promotion to the top line with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen on a night few distinguished themselves. "We're right on the edge of it."

There is no room for a performance like this one, for example, when two teams came out of a week-long break and only one looked like it. A furious third-period comeback put the Hurricanes into position to claim at least a point, undeserved as it may have been, only for fortune to intervene, and not on their behalf.

Joel Edmundson's stick broke while firing a shot, and the resulting dribbler led first to a Vegas break the other way and next to a Aho hooking penalty trying to slow things down. On the ensuing faceoff in the Carolina end, the linesman kicked Jordan Staal out of the circle as the Hurricanes argued his stick was on the ice and Paul Stastny actually encroached on Staal. They were right to be concerned: Stastny beat Brock McGinn and Vegas scored the winner 6 seconds later.

It took the Hurricanes about 47 minutes to get in gear, but two goals less than four minutes apart from McGinn and Aho got the building up and

engaged, and it started to feel like one of those nights when the noise might carry the Hurricanes through. The euphoria was short-lived, from broken stick to broken hearts in a matter of seconds.

"We got what we deserved," Brind'Amour said. "It's a tough one. We played about eight minutes of hockey. The situation we're in, that's a tough one."

Too many "no-shows," Brind'Amour said, and for a coach who goes out of his way to avoid criticizing his players -- Nino Niederreiter's impending status as a healthy scratch was addressed only cryptically Friday morning -- it had the ring of an indictment. A few more nights like this, and the case will be closed entirely.

News Observer LOADED: 02.01.2020

1173819 Carolina Hurricanes

Back from long break, Hurricanes' late rally not enough against the Golden Knights

CHIP ALEXANDER

JANUARY 31, 2020 10:10 PM

RALEIGH

There wasn't much for Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour to say Friday after a 4-3 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights at PNC Arena.

Did a poor start cause the Canes to chase the game the whole way?

"Yep," Brind'Amour said.

Was it the kind of game he feared?

"Yep."

Coming off a nine-day break for the NHL All-Star Weekend and then the team's bye week, Brind'Amour expected some sluggishness, perhaps a slip in mental focus. But this?

"It's terrible," he said. "It's not acceptable to come out and play like that for two periods. For two and a half periods, to be honest with you.

"They were good, I give them a ton of credit. They played the way they had to, played desperate, played fast. We weren't ready to kind of match that and that's what you get."

The Golden Knights (26-20-7), like the Canes, also had been off for the All-Star festivities and then their NHL week. But they were energized and ready from the drop of the puck, taking a 2-0 lead in the first period on goals by Paul Stastny and Jonathan Marchessault and leading 3-1 in the third before the Canes rallied.

Goals by Brock McGinn and then Sebastian Aho tied the score 3-3, bringing the crowd of 18,150 to full throat. Aho's goal, his 25th of the season, came on a power play with 3:39 left in regulation, but the Golden Knights maintained their poise.



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"They pushed back hard but we didn't sag," Vegas coach Pete DeBoer said.

Aho was called for a hooking penalty with 2:34 left in regulation. The Knights scored in six seconds on the power play, Alex Tuch getting the winning goal after a faceoff win by the Golden Knights' Stastny, who then tipped a pass from defenseman Shea Theodore to Tuch for the easy shot and score.

The Canes pulled goalie Petr Mrazek for an extra attacker but the Knights were stout in front of goalie Malcolm Subban, who made his first start since Jan. 9 -- goalie Marc-Andre Fleury suspended one game for skipping the All-Star Weekend after being selected to the Pacific Division team.

Aho and Teuvo Teravainen each had a goal and assist for the Canes, and Justin Williams, in his third game of the season, assisted on McGinn's goal. But there was not much to like for the Canes (29-19-3), who won their last two games before the break.

"We lost a lot of battles and played kind of slow," Teravainen said. "They started better and I think that was the game. We tried to get going but it took some time. Still, not very happy about the game."

Not Brind'Amour.

"We got what we deserved," he said. "We played about eight minutes of hockey. In the situation that we're in, that's a tough one. We were slow and they were fast."

Brind'Amour decided to make forward Nino Niederreiter the healthy scratch -- Niederreiter missing part of Thursday's team practice. During the game, Brind'Amour shuffled his lines, looking for some answers.

"There were just a lot of no-shows tonight," he said. "We're not good enough to have one or two guys not show. We had probably half a dozen and that makes it tough."

After the game, the Canes' locker room was a somber spot, with only the sounds of weights hitting the floor as the players went through a postgame workout.

"I wish I had the why," forward Jordan Martinook said in trying to describe the Canes' poor play. "I don't know. Maybe it's the break ... I don't know. I'm saying I don't know a lot because I don't know."

News Observer LOADED: 02.01.2020

1173820 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' Erik Haula says, 'I feel good. I feel confident. I'm ready to go.'

CHIP ALEXANDER

JANUARY 31, 2020 11:54 AM

RALEIGH

With 32 games left in the regular season, it figures to be a sprint to the finish line for the Carolina Hurricanes, with every point precious in the push for the playoffs.

"It seems like that," Canes center Erik Haula said Thursday. "I think it should be like that every year and you should have the mentality that it will be. Ultimately that's when you're at your best."

Haula is determined to be at his best. A healthy scratch in the Canes' final game before the extended break for the NHL All-Star Weekend and bye week, he had considerable time to mull over the situation.

The return of former captain Justin Williams from semi-retirement has given Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour 13 available forwards — and a lineup decision to make. In Williams' first game back, Jan. 19 against the New York Islanders, forward Jordan Martinook was the healthy scratch. Then Haula, two days later against the Winnipeg Jets.

Haula's reaction? "It sucked. I was rattled for sure," he said.

Haula, who had gone nine straight games without a goal, said he discussed it with Brind'Amour, noting, "Ultimately he makes the decision on who plays and who doesn't play and he decided I wasn't going to play."

"Obviously, nobody wants to sit. No one wants to sit and I wasn't happy it was me but now we're past that."

The long break is over. The Vegas Golden Knights, Haula's former team, are in town for a Friday game at PNC Arena and the Canes (29-18-3) resume their season with a tenuous grip on the second wild-card playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

"I know the level I can play at and that's where I'm trying to get to," Haula said. "Most of the season I've been on that level and I'm happy about that. It's getting back to that and that's the goal. Obviously I want to be one of the best players on this team, finishing the season."

"I feel good, I feel confident, I'm ready to go."

Haula, 28, had a super start in his first season with the Canes, scoring seven goals in the first nine games, three on the power play. But he banged up a shoulder against the Anaheim Ducks in the Canes' ninth game, later missed some games, returned, missed 15 more games and hasn't been as consistent or productive as he was early in the season.

Haula said after the break he feels refreshed — no knee or shoulder issues. He was in the lineup Friday night, centering Brock McGinn and Martin Necas.

The Canes need No. 56 being a pest in front of goalies, a power-play threat, reliable in the defensive zone and dependable in the faceoff circle.

"He's one of our top guys and we need him to be able to play at the level he expects to," Brind'Amour said Friday. "If we want to have a chance to get in (the playoffs), get on a run, we're going to need him doing what he does."

Haula is in the final year of his contract and will be a pending unrestricted free agent after the season. There's a financial incentive for him but it's also a matter of personal pride.

Playing the Golden Knights, he said, should be exiting. While he has a lot of close friends on the team, it was Vegas that traded him away after last season, after he wrecked his right knee and put in months of grueling rehab trying to return for the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Haula's hockey life has been both pleasing and painful.. The Finnish forward played college hockey at Minnesota and began his NHL career with the Minnesota Wild. After four seasons, the Wild made him available in the 2017 NHL expansion draft and the Golden Knights took him.

"It was tough," he said. "Minnesota was kind of like home for me."

But Haula became a part of a sensational feel-good story in Las Vegas. The Golden Knights captivated the city in their first season. It was as if the confetti never stopped falling as the Knights, with Haula scoring a career-high 29 goals, reached the 2018 Stanley Cup final before losing to the Washington Capitals in seven games.

"There's really no words for it," Haula said. "It was the best year of my life, probably, until we came up a little bit short. I'll never forget that and I don't think anybody on that team will. They're always going to carry that, the 'Misfits' and all that stuff."

"Good players, the right players, everything worked out. You hear sports stories all the time about how teams aren't always the best or expected to win. When it clicks ... this team is a good example of it last year."



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Meaning the Hurricanes. Everything fell neatly into place as the Canes ended a nine-year playoff drought and surged to the Eastern Conference finals in Brind'Amour's first year as head coach.

The Canes now must find a way to compensate for the loss of do-everything defenseman Dougie Hamilton, out with a broken fibula. And Brind'Amour must leave an extra forward out of the lineup, game to game.

"They're making it tough on me and that's what's good. I don't want it to be an easy decision," Brind'Amour said. "Thirteen forwards that I want to play, can't do it. You'll see different guys going in and out all the time as long as we're healthy."

Haula said he probably would not catch up with any of his former teammates this week. Maybe in another week or so, he said, when the Canes play at Vegas.

"It's always fun to play all your buddies and turn them into your enemies for a few hours," he said, smiling. "I'm sure it'll be a good battle."

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1173821 Carolina Hurricanes

Bag of Jerks, Part 2: Trade tiers, Jake Gardiner's time to shine and dressing room vibes

Sara Civian

Jan 31, 2020

Good morning, folks. Hurricanes hockey is finally back Friday.

Let's close out January (and this super long break) with the second of two Bags of Jerk.

Which adjectives or phrases would you use to compare/contrast the Canes' vibe at this time last year to their vibe (so far) this year? — Ross P.

I would say there are more expectations and pressure this season, but that's what happens when Rod Brind'Amour and Justin Williams sought out to raise the standard and succeeded.

There's an air of relevancy — it's no longer hip to know who Jaccob Slavin is. You'd better know who he is, you know?

At the same time, "fun" is still up there in the Top 8 adjectives I'd use to describe the team. "Hilarious" for sure, there are some characters in this room and that hasn't changed at all.

From a trade tier point of view, which roster players are least likely to be traded, a maybe to be traded or on the block? Maybe same thing for prospects/picks, who/what is untouchable versus one they'd be willing to move? — Jonathan G.

Trust me, Jonathan G., we will talk about this in-depth leading up to the deadline. This question is actually in my arsenal as a standalone article. I think it would be fun to play a game (Saw voice) in the comments before I dive in. Y'all comment on this with your own trade tiers and we'll compare notes shortly.

Last season they didn't want to make any huge deadline deals because of messing with team chemistry, and that ended up being the right move last year.

This year there have been multiple quotes about some people on the team not being completely bought in to the play-style that Rod preaches.

Assuming that means that there may be a couple folks that are expendable, how active of a trade deadline are we going to see? Rentals vs. players with term, etc. — Will A.

I think it might be slightly more active than last season, meaning there's a good chance a trade will actually happen — but I still don't think it'll shake the world. With Williams proving a more-than-competent own rental, there's not much doing on that front. The Canes have sniffed around for help on the blue line, but I have a feeling (pure speculation) a cornerstone of that return would be prospects and/or picks.

So there might be drama, but on a scale of 1 to 10, I'd project a 4.

Do you think the Canes will make the playoffs this year? — Mary P.

I do.

Who are the defenders most likely to be traded and what will it cost from the Canes point of view? Also, given that we tried to sign goaltender Robin Lehner over the summer and failed, will we try and acquire him before the deadline? Shouldn't be a steep price given that he's an UFA after this season. — Grant R.

Wait ... defenders? Anything is possible for a good enough return (especially knowing Hurricanes GM Don Waddell's history), but it's highly unlikely to me that the Canes will deal a defender before the upcoming deadline. If anything, it seems like a forward or a prospect.

And yes, there have been rumblings that the Hurricanes have inquired about Robin Lehner. But it's hard to believe the Blackhawks would deal him right now — especially considering they're in playoff contention. We'll have to keep tabs on how their season unfolds the next two weeks. I assume they'd want picks and/or prospects.

As I said in Part 1, I'm not even sure if it would be worth it — Lehner's been solid recently, and we all witnessed how great he was in the playoffs. I understand a lot goes into this, and Lehner's playing behind some non-ideal defense in Chicago. But he hasn't been that significantly better than the Petr Mrazek/James Reimer tandem to me.

It has been half a season, plus. The last couple of games may have given us hope. Is it possible Jake Gardiner will be able to fit into RBA's defensive game? — Tom S.

Of course!

Look, he's never been on any team other than the Leafs. It takes some time, especially when it was such a rigid system under Mike Babcock. It's the polar opposite with the Hurricanes. He's also in a reduced role compared to what he's used to. There's also that he was one of the most unlucky players in the entire NHL in terms of shooting percentage for most of the first half of the season. You can just tell he's got a certain swagger now that he's got a multi-point game under his belt.

Is it time to try Martin Necas and Andrei Svechnikov? — Jason D.

Y'all know I am usually gung-ho about this stuff (Who could forget the #FirstLineSvech campaign), but actually I don't think it's time. I love how Necas is progressing. I feel like you leave that alone but bump up his ice time — perhaps on the power play? Besides, I like them both on the right wing right now — that might change as Williams progresses.

I'm still team #FirstLineSvech, by the way. I want to see him with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen now and forever.

Given that "The Svecch" is basically an unstoppable shot, is there any chance the Canes would start putting him behind the net on power plays (especially five-on-three) when there's lots of room and let him Svecch to his heart's content? How about during OT — it would seem easier to get the shot off three-on-three than five-on-five? — Lance S.

First of all, it's "The Svecch," come on.

Second of all, I love the creativity, here — but not over Brind'Amour's dead body. For me, the beauty of The Svecch is in its unpredictability. It's like you're walking through the tall grass in Pokemon and a wild Svecch



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appears — super rare. It might actually be a good idea to put him back there to fake people out and go for a pass.

Kind of related: It seems the Canes have a handful of set-behind-the-net power play plays as it is. The bang-bang passes that occur there — many coming from Necas — amuse me.

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1173950 Vancouver Canucks

The history of the Vancouver Canucks, through a photographer's lens

JOHN MACKIE Updated: January 31, 2020

A few years ago, The Vancouver Sun was about to throw out a box of negatives of the Vancouver Canucks back when they were in the Western Hockey League.

So photographer Ralph Bower saved them.

"They were going into the garbage can, so I just took the box home. Why put it in the garbage?" said Bower, 85. "But I never looked at it. About five or 10 years later I was going through my old negs and there was a whole box of them."

The negs were important to Bower because he'd shot many of the pictures. He started working for the Sun in 1955, and photographed the Canucks until he retired on New Year's Eve, 1996/7.

Looking through a pile of prints recently, he could pick out players from decades back, from both the Canucks and visitors. Phil Maloney, Gump Worsley, Willie O'Ree — he's got action shots of them all.

He shot with a Speed Graphic in the old days, a camera that was technically limited but produced awesome photos. Especially when the players weren't wearing helmets or masks.

"You could see the expression on their face," he said. "Hockey in those days wasn't as fast — it's twice as fast today."

Bower is a bit of a pack rat — he kept prints and clippings of his photos when they ran in the paper. Which makes for a one-of-a-kind Canucks photo archive — the paper usually didn't keep game photos, particularly the larger 11-by-14 prints he favoured.

Rogers Hometown Hockey will be coming to North Vancouver on March 14 and 15. The "family-friendly hockey celebration" will be held at The Shipyards district at the foot of Lonsdale on the North Van waterfront.

The Polygon Gallery is also at the foot of Lonsdale, and decided to do a Canucks photo show in tandem with Hometown Hockey, starting March 7. They're going to be using old Sun and Province photos, and this week, curators Diane Evans and Justin Ramsey went through Bower's cache.

There are some incredible shots, such as goalie George Gardner spreading his arms like an eagle in flight, a dejected Dale Tallon on his knees in the Canucks goal after they've been scored on, and former Canucks owner Coley Hall posing shirtless with Dennis Ververgaert in 1973.

"Ververgaert was the first draft choice of the Canucks, and Coley Hall was the owner," Bower explains. "Coley said 'You guys aren't as tough as we used to be' and took his shirt off to match him at the press conference."

Coley would have been 67 at the time, Ververgaert was 20. But their physique was similar — and Hall was a renowned tough guy. When he was asked to testify on behalf of Canucks majority owner Tom Scallen

after Scallen was charged with theft, Hall reportedly said "let him rot in jail."

Bower started off taking Canucks photos at the Forum, at a time when the rink was surrounded by wire mesh, not Plexiglas. The lighting was dim, so you had to use a flash, which meant you had to be close to the action to get anything.

In order to get a photo without the wire, the photographers cut a little box in the wire near the net, which you could pull out when you wanted to take a photo.

"You opened a wire hole with a square window and put the camera through and shot with a flash, strobe," he said.

"I got hit once. Gordie Howe hit me, right in the arm. He shot the puck and it went right through the hole. He came right over, 'Are you all right?' I said 'It's not too bad.' He said 'Well it wasn't one of my hard shots!'"

Bower has mounted several shows of his Sun pix since he retired. On Feb. 5 at 7 p.m. he'll be teaming up with North Shore News photographer Mike Wakefield for a talk on Shooting The North Shore at the West Vancouver Memorial Library.

One of Bower's best shots shows goalie Dunc Wilson sprawled on the ice, snow covering his mask.

"A player had sprayed ice all over his mask when he came in on him, and when you looked in he had a mask covered with snow," said Bower.

"That made the picture. I didn't even know I had it, it's a dark room special."

By that he means that he shot rapid-fire photos and then discovered the snow in one of the frames. He was able to capture it thanks to his invention, hooking a camera up inside the net.

He triggered it with a doorbell.

"You know how a doorbell makes a ring? Well that went to the camera (via a wire under the ice), it made the motor work. There was no infrared. You had to run it by juice, follow me?"

It took a bit of talking to let the Canucks use his net-cam.

"I had it arranged to go in the net with (coach) Harry Neale, but he said (goalie Richard Brodeur) was pretty reluctant about it," he recounts.

"I said 'it's a major thing'. He said 'Well, OK.' But as soon as they finished the national anthem, (Brodeur) took his stick and plucked my camera out of the net."

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1173951 Vancouver Canucks

Demko stays sharp in the shadows with goal to hone role as best backup

Ed Willes

Here's the easy part: Thatcher Demko wants to become a No. 1 goalie in the NHL.

Now here's the tough part: Demko's ambition represents a complex equation that has something to do with his ability and a lot to do with any number of variables beyond his control.

His situation might change as early as this off-season with Jacob Markstrom's contract negotiation. It might change in 2021 with the Seattle expansion draft. It might even be further down the road before a team weighs all the factors and decides Demko is their guy.



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By then, who knows where the Canucks' backup will be in his career? It's all a little unsettling and that uncertainty can fog the mind if you let it. But Demko, who has a maturity that belies his 24 years, copes by breaking things down to their simplest terms.

Practices are his games. There just aren't 17,000 people watching him as he goes about his work.

"For me it's taking the mentality of being game-ready in practices," Demko says. "Obviously it's not a switch you can just turn on when you get the call. You have to have it going every day. I think it's going to help me in the long run."

Makes sense. It's helped him in the short run.

"I know I can play at this level," he continues. "For me right now, it's a learning role and a development role and just being a good teammate. I've always seen myself as a supportive, positive guy and I think this year that's my role."

Even if that can change with the snap of the fingers.

In this, his first full season as the Canucks' backup, Demko has served notice he's one of the NHL's emerging young goalies. True, his goals-against average and save percentage don't jump out at you, but the truest measure of a backup is his won-loss record and Demko is 10-5-1 in the 17 games he's played to date.

As for his future workload, that's another one of those variables, but if there were any questions about coach Travis Green's confidence in Demko they were answered when he gave him the net for Monday's 3-1 win over the visiting St. Louis Blues.

The Canucks also have five back-to-backs between now and the end of the season starting with this weekend in, first, Brooklyn, then Carolina. That means Demko will get his games down the stretch.

What he does with those starts might determine the Canucks' final place in the standings.

"I like goalies who stop the puck," Green says. "I don't like the ones who don't quite as much. We've got two guys we really believe in. It makes the decision easier."

The Markstrom-Demko tandem, in fact, has been the foundation on which the Canucks have built their season. It's difficult to know where, precisely, they rate among all goaltending duos around the NHL but one thing is certain: There are few teams that rely on their goalies to the extent the Canucks rely on Markstrom and Demko.

Markstrom's season has been covered extensively in this space and others and he turned in another gem in San Jose on Wednesday night, stopping 38 of 40 shots in a 5-2 Canucks win.

Demko, meanwhile, has allowed three goals or fewer in 12 of his 16 starts, including nine when he allowed two or less. There have been a couple of stinkers in there, most notably an 8-6 loss in Pittsburgh when he surrendered seven, inflating his save percentage and goals against in the process.

But he's also one of five NHL backups with less than 20 games who are double digits in wins.

"We help each other and we push each other," Markstrom says of Demko. "At the same time I'm a competitor and he's a competitor. We both want to play but there's only one net out there."

"It's not his fault if he isn't playing. It's the coach's fault and my fault."

Still, Demko doesn't take it personally. He knows what his role entails. He also knows the only way to achieve his career goals is through success in that role, and if he ever forgets, goalie coach Ian Clark is there to remind him.

"Because you're not playing as regularly and rhythmically as the starter, you have to have a certain mentality," Clark says. "It's a bit of a cliché for backup goalies, but your practices are your games. That's where you build confidence because that's the activity you're getting."

"All he can do is keep grinding and growing his game mentally, structurally, athletically. He's made a nice step in those regards."

So he's getting better. He's also working cheaply this season and next — just over a million per — and that's part of that complicated equation.

Markstrom is heading into unrestricted free agency this summer. Demko becomes an RFA a year later. With their cap challenges, it doesn't figure the Canucks can afford to pay Markstrom like a No. 1 and pay Demko like an elite backup.

There are some difficult decisions waiting for both the organization and the two players. But they also lie in the future.

In the meantime there are all those practices for Demko.

"It's my first full year and I'm just embracing that," he says. "My expectations are a little higher. I just want to keep getting better and make sure I'm consistently giving my team a chance to win."

For now, that's enough.

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1173952 Vancouver Canucks

Comet Bailey gets Canucks' call to inject some banging, make his mark

Patrick Johnston

NEW YORK CITY — "Can we stop at the next gas station?" is a familiar cry for a driver of any vehicle to hear. Often it's a kid asking a parent to pull over because they need to use the bathroom.

In the case of Justin Bailey and Zack MacEwen on Thursday, it was because they had just been called up by the Vancouver Canucks from the Utica Comets and the two forwards needed to jump off the team bus.

The Comets were just over an hour into a six-hour bus trip to Cleveland — the Canucks' AHL players were en route to play the Monsters twice this weekend — when the two lanky forwards got the call that it was time to head back to the NHL.

The next available exit was not a gas station, but a rest stop just west of Syracuse, N.Y., where the players pulled their hockey gear and suitcases off the bus. Then they found an Uber to drive them back to Utica where they repacked and hopped into a car the Canucks had hired to take them to the Big Apple, a four-hour drive.

"Obviously that was a pretty decent call to get," Bailey said with a smile Friday after his first regular-season practice with the Canucks at Chelsea Piers on the west side of Manhattan.

Bailey, who stands 6-foot-4 but is best known for his blazing speed, has been a key contributor to the Comets' success this season, who at 25-17-2-2 sit third in the AHL's North Division. The team has scored 162 goals this season, the second-most in the AHL, and 24 of those goals have come off Bailey's stick, tying him for the team lead with Reid Boucher.

Nine of those goals came via three hat tricks inside a week last month, the first of which came with Canucks GM Jim Benning in attendance. The scoring touch had a lot to do with good luck, Bailey said.



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"It was a fun week that week with scoring a few hat tricks there ... It was helping the team win and at the end of day that's what I'm trying to do on a nightly basis," he said.

"Obviously you want to be as detailed as you can when (Benning's) around, but at the same time it was just another game. But I was happy that I was able to get a hat trick with him in the building, for sure."

He has been called up by the Canucks this time not to be a scorer. He'll be counted on to be a banger, an energy player on the fourth line. And he knows it. He's played 63 games in the NHL for the Buffalo Sabres and Philadelphia Flyers during the past four seasons, scoring five goals in that span.

"For me it's making sure that I'm doing the role that I've been brought here to do. I think in the past when I was a little bit younger, 20, 21, I went from being a guy in the minors that's relied on to score a lot and was able to have a little bit of a bigger leash and then came up here and tried to do the same things.

"Coming up here at 24 from communicating with the coaching staff, you know, having a clear vision of what they want me to do and what things they expect from me on a nightly basis and just going out there and executing that."

Bailey added: "You make adjustments. I think when I went to Philly, I think I played that fourth-line role pretty well and that was a team that was pushing for the playoffs. So, you know, making sure I've taken these experiences I've had over the last four years of pro and making sure that I'm dialled in, ready to go."

Bailey and MacEwen were called up to the big club after Tyler Motte suffered an undisclosed upper-body injury during Thursday's game in San Jose after being hit into the boards by Sharks defenceman Erik Karlsson.

Motte left the ice in obvious discomfort. Canucks head coach Travis Green said he wasn't dealing with a head injury but wouldn't say anything beyond that. It appeared Motte may have damaged his shoulder or collarbone area. Whatever the injury, Motte returned to Vancouver and is being evaluated by the medical staff.

Antoine Roussel also missed Friday's practice in Manhattan, but Green said it was just a "maintenance day" for the winger and that he expected him to play on the weekend against the Islanders and Carolina Hurricanes.

MacEwen skated in Roussel's spot on left wing on the third line, with Adam Gaudette at centre and Brock Boeser on right wing. Bailey was the extra forward, with Tim Schaller sliding into Motte's spot on left wing on the fourth line. Green said it was possible that Bailey could get into one of the games on the weekend.

"Bailey, it's good to get him up here and have a look at him in practice. He's having a good year down there. Big guy, fast, we might see him on the weekend as well. We'll know more (Saturday)," Green said.

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1173953 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks at 50: End of the road for Vancouver's Little Lost Rocket

Staff Reporter

Columnists Jim Taylor and Tony Gallagher weighed in on the exit of by-then disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure to the Florida Panthers in January 1999

After a long holdout and many rumoured trades, disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure was finally traded on Jan. 17, 1999. The circumstances of him leaving town are still resented by some Canucks fans to this day. Reaction at the time was that the Canucks didn't get enough back in return.

Columnist Jim Taylor had a trademark take on the whole holdout/trade saga:

In the end, the Pavel Bure trade was like bad sex: much panting and endless foreplay followed by "You finished?"

Vancouver Canuck fans, who've waited so long for some sort of climax, there'll be little doubt who got, uh, the worst of the deal.

Essentially, it swaps one of hockey's premier scorers for a tough, free-wheeling defenceman (Bure for Ed Jovanovski), shuffles bit players (defencemen Bret Hedican and junior Brad Ference to Florida; veteran centre Dave Gagner, junior winger Mike Brown, and goalie prospect Kevin Weekes to Vancouver) and swaps draft picks, Florida's first-round for Vancouver's third either this year or next, Florida's option.

To people who bought their season tickets anticipating another year of the electrifying Bure, that's not going to be nearly enough.

Thus ends, for now, the Tale of the Little Lost Rocket.

Pavel's much-speculated secret reason for demanding a trade is out (he was upset because management never supported him when it was suggested that he's threatened not to play in the playoffs), coach Mike Keenan has given the trade his blessing, and Canuck fans are now free to get back to criticizing the Mark Messier deal.

But fear not. This is Vancouver, where the other shoe doesn't always drop but is always teetering on the tip of the heel. There will be another crisis on which the customers can chew.

Whether they liked it or not, they will find at least short-term relief in the Bure trade. Bad sex is better than no sex at all.

Tony Gallagher was the first to speak to Bure to get his reaction to the move, which to this day is somewhat cloaked in shadows and innuendo.

When Pavel Bure put down the telephone and told his mother Tanya he'd finally been traded, her emotions broke.

Truth be told, so did those of the Russian Rocket.

"My mom cried for a half an hour she was so happy," said Bure from his apartment in Moscow after learning he was part of the biggest deal in the history of both the Vancouver Canucks and Florida Panthers. "She cried because she said she was so happy for me. She said, 'I knew it was the hardest time of your life even though you had been strong through everything. I was so worried about you and I knew you were worried.'

"And it was very tough to be sitting for five months like that. I really missed hockey."

Mother and son headed to the local bar for a quick celebration hoist before Bure returned home for a short night, a result of his trek back to North America.

Bure was asked about his reasons for wanting to leave but he again chose the high road, even though it's becoming abundantly clear GM Brian Burke merely scratched the surface when he volunteered his understanding of the Rocket's reasons.

"I want to tell the people of Vancouver that I have nothing against the city or the people I know there. I have many friends and they will always be my friends. My problems were all with management and I will probably tell everyone what they were sometime soon. I don't know when. But I love the city and I want to make sure everyone knows that.

"When I went public telling I wanted to be traded, I was still living in Vancouver remember. And people came up to me and every single person said, 'Good luck wherever you go, we love you.' Nobody was mad



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at me in person, although some people in the media try to make them mad. I had seven great years there and I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart.”

Bure was so elated with the news he forgot he would be joining former teammates Kirk McLean and Sean Burke with the Panthers.

“Oh yeah, he’s there,” said Bure of McLean. “Who’s the other goalie? Oh right, of course. It should be pretty good there. The travel is a big thing for me. It will be a lot easier. They are in the same time zone as almost all of their games, up and down the coast. I’m looking forward to it.

“I missed the game so much. I love to score so much, to play in front of the people and hear the cheers. They give me so much feeling when I play. I have been practising, but playing in the games is the fun for me. I am happy to be playing again.”

Bure was so excited he didn’t much seem to care about the fact he will almost certainly soon be signing a long-term contract which will pay him close to \$50 million US over the five years following this one. With bonuses, that could like go much higher. It’s expected he will be paid “just” \$3 million US this shortened season. He was trying to get his mother a ticket to Calgary to stay with brother Valeri for a few days before she visits Miami.

“I guess after Calgary, maybe she’ll be ready for some warm weather.”

With those words, the greatest player ever to have played for the Canucks, took his leave.

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1173954 Vancouver Canucks

Self-critical and ‘rusty’ after knee surgery, how Antoine Roussel can give the Canucks a huge second-half boost

By Harman Dayal Jan 31, 2020 9

Just two or three decades ago, an ACL tear could have represented a career-ending injury.

That isn’t the case any more thanks to remarkable developments in medical technology and rehabilitation, but the road to recovery remains a gruelling, arduous process.

Six to nine months is the normal timeline to get back to action following a torn ACL, but the step from feeling healthy to playing your best hockey is a challenge that can span months after you’ve returned to the lineup.

Ask Antoine Roussel who had knee surgery in late March, and he’ll tell you that playing games upon returning was significantly more difficult than the eight months of rehab.

“The hardest part was starting to play again and playing my hard game,” Roussel told The Athletic on Tuesday. “It’s taking some time to get back to a decent level.

“I don’t think I’ve reached my level from last year yet.

“It takes time, I read guys like Corey Perry came back from surgery last year and said he felt like the whole year was tougher. I don’t think I’m in that trend, but it still feels like a build-up.”

From a surface level point of view, you could be convinced into believing that the rust hasn’t detrimentally affected his play. Roussel may not be repeating the 39-point pace he produced at in a career-year last season, but the five goals and eight points he’s registered through 23 games are almost identical to his career scoring rate.

Peel the layers of his performance back deeper, however, and it’s clear that the subtle ways in which he’s influenced his team’s even-strength control of games have eroded.

Ever since he’s emerged as a full-time NHL player, Roussel has shown the ability to tilt the ice in his team’s favour. As a Dallas Star, he finished each season with a shot and scoring chance share comfortably above 50 percent — his two-way presence is easily the most underappreciated part of his game. The 30-year-old French native established that same utility in a Canuck uniform last year. Of the seven forwards that played at least 100 minutes with Roussel in 2018-19, all but one saw a significant improvement in their ability to outshoot and out-chance the opposition.

The greatest beneficiary of Roussel’s two-way plaudits last season was Bo Horvat, who saw a huge boost in his performance whenever the 5-foot-11 winger joined his line.

Roussel’s uncharacteristically struggled in that department this season — the Canucks controlling just 45 percent of shot attempts and a paltry 38.1 percent of scoring chances. Expected to prop up Adam Gaudette who’s still got a ways to go in rounding out his 200-foot game, Roussel has instead hurt a third line that has been caved in its defensive zone and lost the territorial battle by a large margin.

“I had no legs for ten games,” Roussel said bluntly. “I was rusty, my pop wasn’t there and then you slowly get back there and I’m at game 22 now. So 12 games where I felt pretty decent, I’m just trying to build on that.”

Roussel’s self-assessment may sound very harsh, but there’s a lot of truth to his timeline. In the first 10 games he suited up for, Roussel controlled less than 40 percent of shot attempts and scoring chances. Since the ten-game mark, he owns the best shot attempt differential (49.4 percent share) of any forward not on Bo Horvat’s line and while his 42.5 percent expected goal share would suggest he’s still got a ways to go in driving quality chances, it represents a notable improvement nonetheless.

When you think about the strengths of Roussel’s game, it makes sense why his even-strength impact is so heavily contingent on the “pop” in his game. The fiery grinder succeeds as a tenacious disrupter on the forecheck who forces turnovers and recovers loose pucks. He can use his skating, smart stick and physicality to wreak havoc and win battles.

Look at the explosiveness with which he’s able to hunt the puck back in a couple of clips from a game last year, for example.

Couple Roussel’s puck pursuit with his underrated knack for making plays in transition and you understand why he can be so effective at pushing and keeping possession in the offensive zone.

By that same token, Roussel’s success in this area is dependent on his north-south speed game and with his knee not letting him hit that extra gear, it’s been a tough go in his first 23 games.

Refinding that valuable trait could be critical down the stretch.

We don’t know, for instance, how long Loui Eriksson will be able to sustain his current level of play on Horvat’s line. If Eriksson’s form slips down the stretch, a peak Roussel would give Travis Green another viable option to throw alongside Horvat in a matchup role. Alternatively, if the fiery winger stays with Gaudette, he’d be a big help for a third-line that hasn’t been feasting on the soft matchups like they ideally would be.

In any event, with each day that passes, Roussel’s knee is becoming and more comfortable being pushed to the limit — something that directly relates to how well he drives play at even-strength. If he can bounce back into being close to the player he was last year, it’d be a significant boon in adding another middle-six quality forward to the Canucks’ talent pool.

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1173955 Vancouver Canucks



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Inside the Canucks' warmup rituals: From half moons to bathroom breaks in unison, players are creatures of habit

By Thomas Drance Jan 31, 2020 29

The NHL is "the show," and that's intended literally.

Professional hockey is an entertainment product: a game is a live performance and everything backstage is tightly choreographed. There's even an official run of show, called a time sheet. It's drawn up by game presentation departments around the league and approved by the NHL, and it keeps the show flowing predictably for everyone from the team captain, to the head coach, to the colour commentator, to the mascot.

And ruling over it all, dictating all of the moving parts on an NHL game day: a little red digital clock, embedded high on the wall of every dressing room.

On a standard game day with a 7 p.m. puck drop, off-ice officials set that clock to run for 60 minutes at 5:45 p.m., so that it hits 00:00 at exactly 6:45 p.m. — the precise moment the warmup skate ends.

The time on that little red digital clock is the same countdown fans see on the Jumbotron and it's displayed prominently in every dressing room. With 16 minutes remaining on the little red digital clock, the warmup skate begins.

Because of muscle memory, superstition and a strict adherence to routine, you can be pretty sure where every player is — if you know their routines — and exactly what they're doing in the leadup to the warmup skate based on what that little red clock reads.

Pre-skate routines

"Everybody has a routine, every player," said Canucks captain Bo Horvat. "So if a player tells you he's not superstitious, he's lying to you."

That routine can include two touch soccer. It can be a specific, well-thought-out mix of activities designed to sharpen reflexes. It can be listening to music on headphones and stretching. It can be eating something, having the same exchange with a teammate, or even relieving themselves before putting on equipment.

That last one, hitting the toilet at a predictable moment in time on a game day, is a pretty common theme, which makes sense when you consider the gear involved.

"It's always the same," noted Canucks defenceman Troy Stecher. "Guys are going to the bathroom at the exact same time. You go in the gym and it's the same four guys in the gym every time, and they have different routines, but they're doing the exact same stretch. It's kind of weird."

Jay Beagle is one of those guys who takes a timed bathroom break, immediately prior to going down the tunnel.

"At 17:30 on the red clock, I'm taking a pee," he said. "Almost every time. Then coming back, I've got my helmet and my gloves and we go."

Another Canuck, who declined to be identified, shared his pregame ritual: "After warmups I go take a leak and when I do, the same teammate is taking a shit. Every single time."

Whether the habits are born of superstition or routine depends on the player, but the goal is the same: get ready to be at peak performance for puck drop.

"I'm a guy that thinks about it. I put a lot of preparation into my warmups," said Beagle. "I know exactly where I'm going to be at certain times, to make sure that I'm on schedule to get to where I want to be and feel the best for the game."

Tanner Pearson has an unusual habit of getting in some pregame pushups. "I come into the room after soccer, probably around 6ish. Roughly 44:00 on the red clock," he said. "I just do 20 of them. It started last year. Patric Hornqvist did them, so I started doing them. You do so much stuff to get the legs going, so I do it to get the upper-body going, get the core engaged."

In the minutes before warmups, players put on what remains of their gear. Your average beer leaguer would be astonished by how quickly some NHL players are able to gear up and down, like Superman in a phone booth.

Some get their equipment on relatively early. Some mill about in the tunnel, pumping up their teammates, and others just hang out in the room.

"I'm always sitting right before warmups," said Elias Pettersson. "And when the time comes at 16:15 or so, I just sort of walk out. A lot of guys are waiting in the hallway, or standing, but I'm just chilling."

And if the player is one who customarily takes warmup skate without a helmet, commonly referred to as "going no bucky," he may even be in front of a mirror doing his hair.

"I have to touch up my hair, but just water," said Pearson. "Guys who put gel on are crazy. You start sweating and it gets in your eyes."

"I might wet it, but I don't put any product in it," Tyler Myers added. "I know sometimes guys do, but I won't name names."

"I'm putting hair gel in my hair before warmups," admitted Canucks forward J.T. Miller.

Among Vancouver's skaters, it's almost exclusively veteran players who don't wear helmets during warmups. Miller, Pearson, Edler, Horvat, Stecher, Myers, Chris Tanev and Brandon Sutter are most likely to "go no bucky," although some additional skaters may ditch the helmets for a game in their hometown.

According to some of those veteran players, the Canucks don't have a standard rule for who can and can't take the warmup skate without a helmet. A younger guy "going no bucky" is more likely to hear about it, though.

"Maybe there is a rule," Miller said, "but we don't talk about it. Guys want to go no bucket, I don't give a shit. Guys are going to chirped for it, but that's part of the game."

Still other veterans insist on wearing a helmet because, in their own words, they might otherwise be a genuine safety risk.

"I wear a helmet every time because I'm a hazard out there," Beagle said. "I've been called a hazard by many people in warmups, because I like to buzz around."

Among the players who hang out in the hallway early, meanwhile, there's a variety of standard handshakes and routines. When Tim Schaller is in the lineup, for example, he and Adam Gaudette do a vertical version of the Chandler and Joey cool guy handshake which is followed by Gaudette and Beagle doing a couple of shoulder checks.

"We do a little handshake, and then he usually runs his shoulder into my chin," said Beagle of that particular tradition. "Gets me fired up."

Heading out onto the ice

There is an order to all things in these pregame preparations, particularly during the warmup skate itself, which can seem like a strange beast to onlookers.

Some of that order is dictated by seniority. Some of it by superstition. And some of it by institutional memory, going back decades.

Longtime Canucks defender Alexander Edler, for example, is responsible for watching the little red clock as it ticks down to 16:00 for the start of warmups. Shortly before it does, he's responsible for calling out that it's



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"time to go" to his teammates. As such, he's the first skater onto the ice for the warmup skate after the starting goaltender.

Edler does this every game day when he's healthy and in the lineup (if he's out, the responsibility is assumed by Jake Virtanen), and it's an institutional relic dating back to Kevin Bieksa, who is now retired.

"Bieksa used to do it and he said, why don't you do it," Edler explained. "So I said, 'OK.'"

"I assigned Eagle to do it because I told him he needed a responsibility," Bieksa recalled to The Athletic via text message. "True story."

By the time Canucks skaters filter onto the ice, they do so in a very predictable order. Of late, while the team has been winning and relatively healthy and the lineup fixed, it's tended to look like this in chronological order: starting goaltender, Edler, Virtanen, Myers, Roussel, Pearson, Miller, Tyler Motte, Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson, Loui Eriksson, Gaudette, Beagle, Oscar Fantenberg, Quinn Hughes, Tanev, Sutter, Bo Horvat and then the backup netminder.

Even in this, there's a legacy of years gone, co-mingled with superstitious habit, that shapes the order.

"I always go last coming out of the tunnel because when I started, I didn't know where to go," Horvat says. "So I just went last."

"The older guys had the place where they went, so I just filled in where I could and that was last. So I just went last. I didn't have any warmup duties, which is good. I hate picking pucks out of the net."

At the start of warmups and for the first couple of minutes players — including goaltenders — just circle the ice surface getting a few shots in and perhaps sending teammates some backhand saucer passes. Even in this, some players have a very specific routine they follow.

"I take three pucks from the right side, three pucks from the left side," currently injured Canucks forward Josh Leivo told The Athletic back in late November. "Then I just mess around, pass and stuff. I shoot three and three, before I do anything else."

"First shot is high left, second shot I try go low post and in, third shot is clapper," said Tanner Pearson of his routine.

The half moon

This freeform portion of warmups tends to last for a couple of minutes. Occasionally a skater will greet a former teammate or a friend at centre ice, while others get into their stretches in the neutral zone. By about the 14-minute mark, Stecher goes and fishes the pucks out of the net for the first time in the warmup skate, and once he's finished the starting goaltender takes the net to take a few shots and feel the puck.

On every NHL team, there's a designated player who picks pucks out of the net during the warmup skate. This player functions like a waiter during the half moon, and essentially goes to clear pucks out of the net every couple of minutes during warmups.

In Vancouver, it's Stecher who does the digging. It's a job that fell to him when the Sedin twins, Henrik and Daniel, assigned him to do it after Alexandre Burrows was traded to the Ottawa Senators midway through the 2016-17 season. Prior to Burrows, Matt Cooke held down the job, and Burrows fell into it for a similar reason — he was young when the position was vacated, and someone had to do it.

Stecher doesn't mind the assignment. In fact, he takes pride in doing it well.

"My first couple of games my teammates were like, 'Let's go!' 'Let's go!' and I didn't know how to time it," Stecher said, laughing as he recalled the work he put into mastering his technique — which includes flattening his stick to get pucks out in bunches early in the warmup skate, and later passing 3-4 pucks out of the net at a time.

The Richmond, B.C. native legitimately put study time into working on his technique, watching how other guys in the league did it and mastering his craft.

"I go flat stick and put them all in one big group," Stecher said. "I think it's way more efficient."

About a third of the way into the warmup skate, the Canucks — and all NHL teams — line up in the neutral zone and perform line rushes. This is a very basic pregame drill, a mock rush of sorts that players go through alongside their defence partner or linemates. It typically lasts for two or two-and-a-half minutes after which Stecher clears the net of pucks again and the players line up — in a very specific order — for the half moon.

The half moon, or horseshoe, is so-called because of how the players line up in an inverted U shape along the blue line, while Stecher (and then Virtanen) feed shooters the puck. Skaters take turns skating in and unleashing a shot on the starting goaltender, who tends to take at least five shots — though Jacob Markstrom will sometimes take eight or so.

Currently, Gaudette shoots first, then Motte. Miller goes third and always takes a slap shot. Pettersson is the fourth shooter.

"I always shoot it high glove," Pettersson said. "I always try to aim for the goalie's glove get them some reps."

After Pettersson, it's Edler. And this is where Stecher's work as a pass waiter in the half moon gets really detailed.

"Gauds and Millsy shoot kind of early, Petey shoots, and then Eddie," Stecher told The Athletic back in November, while Motte was still out of the lineup with injury.

"That's where my routine kicks off, I fire Eddie a bullet. Bennie, I throw him sauce. Virt and I do the same thing, we throw sauce to each other and catch it in our V-Triangle," Stecher continued, mimicking holding his feet together at his heels, with his two feet jutting out so that they form a V. "Then I sauce to Bo, who sometimes goes with the V, then I fire a bullet to Mysie. Then it's a soft little muffin to Boes!"

"And then when I move sides I always set a puck up close to the net and then I deke around it, I toe-drag around it and fire to Tanny. The last guy is usually Suttis, but since he's out right now it's usually Beags. I slide it under his stick, and then I stretch and Virt takes over from there."

Some players want these passes from Stecher in a specific way, but some of them aren't even aware of it. They're just used to the passes he delivers.

"I know Stechie fires me a pretty hard pass," Myers said of his spot in the half moon. "I might shoot one way or one spot, for a few games, then I might change it up. I don't worry too much about it."

While Myers doesn't worry about it too much, Horvat does. In fact, after playing around with the V-Triangle pass reception early on in the season, Horvat has become a convert. At the moment he never takes the pass from Stecher in the half moon without utilizing it.

"I saw Jake do it, I don't remember when I saw it," Horvat says, "But he kept doing it and we kept winning, and then he stopped doing it and we lost. Then I started doing it and I don't know, I've kind of kept going with it. Stech, I think, once gave me a shit pass and I kind of had to do it and then we won. So I had to keep doing it no matter how good or bad the pass was."

Horvat's also absolutely committed to taking the exact same shot every time.

"I always shoot blocker on the half moon," Horvat says. "100 percent of the time. Always, always, always."

"I know Bo is going to shoot blocker side and it's going to be a blocker save, and I'm already over there on that side so I have to get away from the rebound," Stecher says. "It's crazy, the routine is something you could do in your sleep."



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Winding down

As the warmup winds down, a few players take power laps in the neutral zone. Other players send sauce to one another from either side of the ice. Lately, Virtanen and Roussel have been setting each other up for five one-timers from either face-off dot. Beagle — every game — always does a bench spray, which involves a significant hockey stop that he directs at the Canucks bench. It commonly serves to give a hefty snow shower to camera people and Canucks team staff.

It's at the point where Beagle noticed the other day when no one got caught in the spray:

NOBODY TO SPRAY. POOR BEAGLE. 🐶
PIC.TWITTER.COM/TANF30XUXB

— VANCOUVER #CANUCKS (@CANUCKS) JANUARY 15, 2020

"I sprayed the one guy really bad last game," said Beagle, laughing as he recalled an incident in early December. "I think he was a camera guy for Sportsnet. I've done it every game for 13 years and I've never felt bad, but I did that time."

And in all of this, of course, Canucks players will look for kids and fans in the crowd to give souvenir pucks to.

"If I see a sign that says something about me, I try to give that person or kid a puck," Pettersson said. "Some games there's been a lot of signs, so I can't give them all a puck, but I always really appreciate it."

"I like to watch the crowd and say hello to any people I may know, and some people I don't even know!" said Roussel.

Horvat has a set routine even for this. He always gives away three pucks to Canucks fans. No more, no less. And it seems he chooses which fans will get the pucks not based on signs or Horvat jerseys, but based on their location around the glass.

"I always put three pucks over the glass to the fans, in certain spot," Horvat says. "Not to certain fans, but I pick my three spots where I throw them and that's where I throw them. I try to stick to my same routine."

GOOD GUY BO HORVAT JUST WANTED TO GIVE THIS @CANUCKS FAN A PUCK, BUT THE NETTING IN PHILLY WASN'T MAKING IT EASY FOR HIM. 🤔 PIC.TWITTER.COM/NMBLHST4FD

— SPORTSNET (@SPORTSNET) NOVEMBER 26, 2019

With a couple of minutes remaining in warmups, Canucks skaters and the backup goaltender play a final game called "Last Puck" or "Final Puck" or "Two Minute Drill" depending on the player or the team in question. The game starts when Edler sends a bullet pass to Stecher in the neutral zone.

"I end up getting last puck, where you'll see Eddie fire it all the way to the red line and we'll play last puck."

The game pits an unlimited number of skaters versus the backup goalie, as Stecher takes a long distance shot from the neutral zone, which is usually saved, and then Canucks teammates crowd the goaltender and try to score from point blank range with jam plays, shots off of rebounds and other short-range shot types. Miller recently tried to score with a Michigan lacrosse move. The game doesn't end until the puck is in the back of the net.

Finally, the clock winds down to 00:00, the buzzer sounds, and the teams clear the ice. Prior to his injury, Leivo was always the last Canucks skater to leave the ice at the end of the warm-up skate. He'd stay out and set up three pucks by the Canucks bench, then try to bank pucks off of the far boards and into the net.

As with most things in the warmup, it worked once, and it just kind of stuck.

"It was last year, I focused on banking the puck into the net at the end of warmups and I scored after," Leivo explained. "So that's what I do now and I'm sticking with it."

With warmup skate ended, the little red digital clock resets to 15:00 and counts down for the start of the show — which begins with the anthems, and not with puck drop itself — and Canucks players get back into the room and focus up for the game. It's at this point that the coaching staff will enter for a final chat and to read out the starting lineup (a task that differs from team to team, but is often outsourced to players or special guests).

Canucks head coach Travis Green isn't typically on the bench during the warmup skate. He's often in his office working, or having a coffee, or having a final strategic chat with his assistant coaches.

On some higher leverage game days, or in some more historic arena, he'll poke his head out and step onto the bench to get a feel for the atmosphere prior to the contest.

While players stick with a very specific routine pre-game, it's notable that Green doesn't remember what he used to do as a player. It's all a haze to him now, even as he remembers that he was very rigid about doing the same thing every game.

He also went "no bucky." It would've been a waste not to, what with the mullet he sported early on in his playing days.

"Wearing a helmet over that, it would've been a fine," the Canucks bench boss joked.

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Wheeler's 2020 NHL prospect pool rankings: No. 13 Vancouver Canucks

By Scott Wheeler Jan 31, 2020 59

Welcome to Scott Wheeler's 2020 rankings of every NHL organization's prospects. You can find the complete ranking and more information on the criteria here, as we count down daily from No. 31 to No. 1. The series, which includes evaluations and commentary from coaches and staff on more than 500 prospects, runs from Jan. 13 to Feb. 11.

This ranking is probably one of the stronger departures from the consensus throughout the series. That's true both in where the Canucks are ranked as a farm system overall (some would likely have them a few spots higher) and in the way their individual prospects are ranked (more on that below).

As a whole, the Canucks have proven to be one of the better drafting teams in recent memory. They've knocked a lot of top picks out of the park and they've mined lower rounds for talent and upside, hitting on several players.

While I'm higher than a lot of evaluators are on many of the Canucks' top prospects, I'm lower than most on the player most perceive as the organization's top prospect. Due to the recent graduations of Quinn Hughes, Adam Gaudette and Thatcher Demko, the pool has also begun to thin out a bit — something that's worth keeping an eye on seeing as they will also likely make the playoffs this year and lose their first-round pick in 2020 in the process.

Still, the Canucks boast one of the deeper prospect pools in the NHL, with intrigue at all three forward positions (though they certainly have less depth at centre than they do on the wing), some interesting D prospects and an intriguing goalie prospect. As I mentioned in Tuesday's look at the 16th-ranked Sabres prospect pool, the group of teams from No. 16 to No.



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6 in the series are all tight. If all of the Canucks' top three prospects pan out, their outcomes will look more favourable than 13th in a few years.

1. Nils Högländer, LW, 19 (Rögle BK)

If you've followed my work, this probably doesn't come as a huge surprise to you. When I released my final ranking for the 2019 draft last May, Vasili Podkolzin landed at No. 17 and Hoglander ranked just one spot back at No. 18. A month later, I believed one was a bit of a reach and the other was a bit of a steal. But they've always been close for me. And while Podkolzin is five months younger than Hoglander, I would argue the latter has had a better year relative to their respective ages. That was certainly true at the world juniors (though that's not to say Podkolzin didn't have a good tournament because he did) and it's true with their club teams, where Hoglander has more consistently made plays at the pro level. Hoglander's puck skills, playmaking ability and touch around the slot are the first things that leap out (besides, maybe, that he's a little small). I'm most impressed with his footwork, though. Hoglander does a brilliant job changing pace to slow down, bait defenders and then burst back into stride to pass them. He's also explosive in and out of his edges, which helps him stop and start to lose opposing players and create some separation.

Watch here the way a stop-up forces the defender into a blow-by, giving Hoglander the opportunity to get set for his shot:

Or watch here, the way Hoglander opens up his right foot to carve to a better angle and drag the puck into his lead heel:

Or watch how Hoglander's ability to rely on his edges and remain balanced helps him create a second opportunity off his own rebound, here:

Hoglander is proof you don't have to be the fastest player on the ice to be one of the best skaters. I would like to see a little more discipline in his game (with and without the puck) but he's stronger than you expect a 5-foot-9 winger to be and all of the offensive tools are there. He's got what it takes to be a low-end 1LW or a high-end 2LW.

2. Vasili Podkolzin, RW/LW, 18 (SKA St. Petersburg)

Podkolzin, who played just a few shifts a night early on in the KHL season, has begun to make the most of increased opportunity of late, with points in three straight games while I write this. His game has always flashed a lot of pro qualities. He's big, he's physical, he's powerful, he's strong on pucks, he plays on the inside, he's a pain in the ass, he doesn't give up on plays and he's got great hands. My concern with his game has always been about his ability to slow the game down and process it. If he needs to beat a defender one-on-one, he often can. If he needs to fight his way to the net, he often can. If there's an available passing lane to an obvious target, he's talented enough to execute through seams. But he lacks an on-ice awareness, which contributes to a style of play that revolves around doing the first thing he sees, rather than opening up his sightlines to assess the zone and utilize his linemates. As a result, I often feel like he looks like he's doing more than he actually is. It makes him a bit of a weird prospect. Most top players have that inherent sense to their game but need to develop their skills to a pro level. He has the skill and I'm not sure you can teach the rest, though experience will certainly help. I have little doubt he's going to be a useful NHLer, my worry is just that he may not become a line-driving offensive threat and that's what you want at 10th overall. His skating, while powerful, also splays from the knees and needs some tweaking.

3. Tyler Madden, C, 20 (Northeastern University)

Madden is another in a long line of Canucks success stories in the last few years. He has shown, despite lacking size, strength and a pull-away gear to his straightaway stride, that skill can solve a lot of those concerns. Northeastern, who'd just dealt with a similar player in Blackhawks forward Dylan Sikura, have proven they can help those players succeed in a heavy college hockey game, too. This year, Madden has built on his slick puck skills and superb cross-ice vision to add a goal scoring element to his game, taking him from one of college

hockey's best freshmen to one of college hockey's best players. When he's got the puck, he's capable of making plays out of nothing, whether that's with a creative pass through traffic, a dangle in tight or his ability to lose bigger defenders with a quick cut. He will face some challenges along the wall at the college level — and might be asked to play the wing — but he can run a power play and make things happen at even strength, both of which I suspect will translate. And though I wouldn't say he's a dominant defensive player, Madden's versatile enough to be trusted in all situations.

4. Olli Juolevi, LHD, 21 (Utica Comets)

You've probably heard me say — or write — this before but I really do believe Juolevi has NHL games under his belt by now were it not for the knee injury. He's not athletic enough to lose forecheckers with his speed or dynamic enough to score many goals from the point but Juolevi is unfazed by pressure when he has the puck and he's an excellent outlet passer, both of which are assets for most of the game's modern puck-moving defencemen. He can also make high-to-low plays in the offensive zone or slide down the wall to fire a pass east-to-west for a backdoor play. Though he's not an overly physical defender for his size, Juolevi also does a nice job gapping up with smooth footwork, disrupting passing lanes with his instincts and outsmarting opposing players along the wall. I still think he may become a contributing second-pairing defenceman.

5. Kole Lind, RW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Last year, as Lind struggled as an AHL rookie, I told a number of diehard Canucks fans in my life to be patient. Part of that was a belief in his tools, part of it was probably me not wanting to give up on a player I have been high on since his draft year. But Lind has begun to make true on his talent level this season. He has always had a dangerous shot in tight (he's not the kind of player who's so gifted that he's going to overpower goalies from a distance but he's a natural scorer who still has more to show there). This year, though, we're seeing some other elements of his game take steps. In my viewings, I've been impressed with how engaged he is in board battles, something that was a strength of his game at the junior level but faded a bit last year when he looked unusually timid. Lind is at his best when he's playing an honest, north-south game. He's not going to light up the highlight reel but he can make plays through holes, he's a fast skater and he doesn't really lack any one offensive quality. I still think he's the kind of player who projects to slide up and down an NHL lineup, capable of playing a depth role on a good team or supporting higher in the lineup as more of a complementary piece.

6. Jack Rathbone, LHD, 20 (Harvard University)

After a strong freshman year at Harvard, Rathbone has continued to show real promise as a sophomore. There have never been concerns with his talent level or his skating, both of which look easy for him on the ice. Rathbone's one of the smoother defenders in the NCAA, using four-way mobility to escape pressure, create for himself or his teammates from the point or shake past opposing players through the neutral zone. And while he's definitely on the smaller end for an NHL defenceman, I don't think it's going to be a major obstacle. He defends well with his feet, sticking with opposing puck carriers down the ice or winning races to loose pucks along the wall before he ever has to engage physically. Due to his size, he's not going to be the kind of player who jumps straight from the NCAA to the NHL following a monster junior or senior year. Just don't be surprised if he becomes an impact guy at the AHL level and gives the Canucks no choice but to audition him. Though size is still more of a roadblock for defenders than it is for forwards and some teams don't want to have too many little guys on their back end, preventing opportunities from worthy players in the process, that's not at the front of my mind when I evaluate a player. Rathbone's good.

7. Jett Woo, RHD, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

After a slow start, Woo has looked more and more like the player who dominated the WHL and earned an entry-level contract last year. I wouldn't worry too much about the dip in his production. Some of that is driven by a trade to a less talented team. Some of it is driven by the fact that he has spent most of the season playing behind Flyers prospect



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Egor Zamula in offensive situations. Woo is a throwback, playing a physical, simple brand of hockey that makes him hard to play against. He's also an elite athlete, which means when he hits, it hurts (it also means he's a powerful skater). While it means his coaches have to live with the odd penalty, they're usually OK with it because he brings an element most teams covet — and many lack. Woo's probably not going to play at the top of an NHL lineup, nor will he likely run a power play unit, but he can play tough minutes at even strength, move the puck up ice with leading passes and penalty kill. He's also just a good, hard-working player. I'm a fan.

8. Petrus Palmu, LW, 22 (JYP)

Palmu is tiny. Maybe even too tiny to play in the NHL no matter how talented he is. But his tininess also helps him have skills that few NHL players have. It helps him sneak past hits and side-step defenders as a carrier, a skill that he uses equally well off both wings. Watch the way he spins to the inside on his edges, using a sharp radius to cut to the middle off the right wing:

Now take note of the way he almost jumps to the inside to blow past another pinching defender on the left wing here:

Smaller players also have a stickhandling and coordination advantage because they're lower to the puck, offering them more control. That's at play in small areas, where Palmu excels at using his feet to kick pucks to his stick and quickly make a play:

While bigger players can leverage their length to generate torque on their sticks, smaller players tend to use their shorter sticks to lean off one foot without throwing themselves off balance in their range of motion through their shot:

If Palmu lacked any of these skills, he wouldn't be on a list like this. But he doesn't. He has what you'd hope a player his size has. He thinks the game one step ahead as a passer, even when chances on net for himself are there:

He executes tape-to-tape saucer passes most players don't:

Does that mean he's a lock to play in the NHL? Of course not. But I do think he has a lot more to show than he did in the AHL last season (and/or than he was given the opportunity to ...).

9. Michael DiPietro, G, 20 (Utica Comets)

I debated having DiPietro lower on this list after subpar play with the Ottawa 67's spilled into a mediocre start to his AHL career (though he was decent during Ottawa's playoff run). That, coupled with DiPietro's 6-foot frame, is enough to at least raise some questions. But he's also young, the Comets don't do a great job protecting their goalies from high danger chances (at least not this year) and he's got a lot of tools, led by rare athletic ability, that help him make tough post-to-post saves or go low-to-high to challenge shooters. I've seen some saveable pucks sneak through DiPietro this season but I'm willing to give him a pass on pedestrian play this season given it's his first full year at the pro level and he's got an extended track record of solid play.

10. Guillaume Brisebois, LHD, 22 (Utica Comets)

Brisebois has intrigued me dating back to his draft year in 2015 when I was with McKeen's Hockey as a bit of a case study in what a modern shutdown defenceman might look like. Though he's not huge, he plays the way I want a quote-unquote safe player to play. His idea of safe is a quick head-man pass, instead of a chip off the glass or a shot through traffic instead of a ring around the boards. He makes smart plays that produce a result, instead of those that just get the puck out or in. He's also a good skater for his size, which helps him snuff out plays in the neutral zone, gap up against fast skaters or pivot back on dumps without getting caught flatfooted. He's probably not going to play higher than the third pairing at the next level but he can be relied upon in tough minutes and I think he's just talented enough to potentially progress.

11. William Lockwood, RW, 21 (University of Michigan)

Lockwood was a good junior who became a good college player. Today, he's probably a cut above good college player while also serving as captain in his senior year. He has always been a well-rounded two-way winger who can finish off plays, hang onto the puck as a carrier when he needs to and play with pace. He's a little on the smaller end, though, and he hasn't progressed quite like you'd probably hope offensively, which limits his upside. I could see him becoming a very good AHL player who is a little bit of a tweener. The good news is that he's got the versatility you want in a depth player, so he's not a top-six or bust type.

12. Arvid Costmar, C, 18 (Linköping HC)

I watched Linköping's junior team play a fair amount last season but I always came away more impressed by Costmar's teammate, Nikola Pasic, than I did by him. Costmar was physical, he played hard in his own zone and he showed flashes of some impressive skills but he never really took over a game. So his dominance at the SuperElit level this year has surprised me a little, even if it hasn't translated at either pro level. Costmar looked unstoppable in one recent viewing with the junior team and he has a July birthday so he could just be playing catch-up. Costmar has more talent than I gave him credit for, I think. When he plays fast, he can make a lot of plays as both a scorer and a passer. He's not going to be a primary carrier on a line, per se, but he's got some versatility to his game.

13. Aidan McDonough, LW, 20 (Northeastern University)

I often worry about players who don't join their programs as true freshmen because if they stumble out of the gate or get a coach who leans heavily on veterans, it can mean that they don't work their way into more prominent roles until they're 23 or 24. If you want to remain a legitimate prospect and you're going to enter college at 20 instead of 18, you have to show that you look more like a sophomore or a junior than a freshman. Otherwise, it's hard to climb out of it. Nobody wants to start their pro career at 24. In a way, it can put more pressure on someone like McDonough, who needed to grow into his 6-foot-3 frame after a huge growth spurt. It took him time to remodel his game and build confidence with the puck again. He has looked good this season, though, playing at a point per game pace while chipping in offensively in a variety of ways. He's not all that physical for his size but he can make plays off the rush and he's got a decent top speed (his first couple of steps need some work). Keep an eye on him.

14. Linus Karlsson, C/RW, 20 (BIK Karlskoga)

After an uninspiring post-draft season and a trade from the Sharks to the Canucks for Jonathan Dahlen (a much better player, in my opinion), Karlsson has put together a nice follow-up campaign as an impact player in the second tier Allsvenskan. He's got a dangerous shot (wrist and one-timer), his playmaking has improved and he has always played a well-rounded, net-driven game in the middle of the ice. I would want to see him continue to contribute at a higher pro level before getting too excited, plus his skating is average, but coaches love him and he's got decent skill.

Here's that shot I was talking about (I know his 10 goals in 40 games doesn't leap out but that's good for a 20-year-old and he can pound it):

15. Jonah Gadjovich, LW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Speaking of players who are kind of slow, can rip it and endear themselves to coaches by playing on the inside. I like a lot of what Gadjovich brings. He's got some pro qualities, he's tough to knock off the puck and I think he has more offence than we've seen to date.

16. Toni Utunen, LHD, 19 (Tappara)

Think Brisebois, but younger and smaller. Utunen's a bit of a weird prospect because he doesn't have very many high-end skills and he's a 5-foot-11 defenceman. He has always played up an age group (or two) and excelled, though, because he's an excellent defender who makes the first right play almost every time he has the puck — and often when he doesn't. Can you defend your way into the NHL while making very few



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plays from the blue line in, at his size? It'll be tough. He's worth a mention, though.

17. Carson Focht, C, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

Focht's got pro size, he does a great job winning back pucks with his length and his body positioning and he's got a powerful shot with a quick release. All of those things make him really effective at the junior level. He doesn't have one quality that really flashes, though, so his upside is probably limited even if his puck skills continue to develop.

18. Ethan Keppen, LW, 18 (Flint Firebirds)

Being big and strong with an NHL shot normally gets players an opportunity to play pro but this has been a disappointing season for Keppen, who showed some power forward qualities last year without a lot of help around him.

Artyom Manukyan, RW, 21 (Avangard Omsk)

Manukyan is one of the smallest players in pro hockey but he oozes skill and I don't think anybody would be surprised if he worked his way into the NHL later in his career (I'm talking mid-to-late 20s) after slowly beginning to dominate in the KHL. I would normally have him higher on this list but he just returned from a five-month layoff with a hand injury so I want to watch him play and update my notes before I give him a definitive ranking. Consider him an honourable mention for now. He's one of the more fun young Russians right now and was a terror in the MHL.

The Tiers

Each of my prospect pool rankings will be broken down into team-specific tiers in order to give you a better sense of the talent proximity from one player to the next (a gap which is sometimes minute and in other cases quite pronounced).

The first thing you'll notice about the Canucks prospect tiers is that there's no clear standalone tier at the top, which there is for almost (almost) every other organization. In fact, they're actually the only one of the 31 teams with three players in that top tier. That's a good thing in that it speaks to organizational depth. It's a bad thing in that it also highlights that I'm a little unsure about Podkolzin, because there's some risk in the projections of Hoglander and Madden to the next level too. After that it's pretty straightforward, with Juolevi a slight cut above three other players who I think have real NHL upside (not the tweener kind that follows them).

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The history of the Vancouver Canucks, through a photographer's lens

JOHN MACKIE Updated: January 31, 2020

A few years ago, The Vancouver Sun was about to throw out a box of negatives of the Vancouver Canucks back when they were in the Western Hockey League.

So photographer Ralph Bower saved them.

"They were going into the garbage can, so I just took the box home. Why put it in the garbage?" said Bower, 85. "But I never looked at it. About five or 10 years later I was going through my old negs and there was a whole box of them."

The negs were important to Bower because he'd shot many of the pictures. He started working for the Sun in 1955, and photographed the Canucks until he retired on New Year's Eve, 1996/7.

Looking through a pile of prints recently, he could pick out players from decades back, from both the Canucks and visitors. Phil Maloney, Gump Worsley, Willie O'Ree — he's got action shots of them all.

He shot with a Speed Graphic in the old days, a camera that was technically limited but produced awesome photos. Especially when the players weren't wearing helmets or masks.

"You could see the expression on their face," he said. "Hockey in those days wasn't as fast — it's twice as fast today."

Bower is a bit of a pack rat — he kept prints and clippings of his photos when they ran in the paper. Which makes for a one-of-a-kind Canucks photo archive — the paper usually didn't keep game photos, particularly the larger 11-by-14 prints he favoured.

Rogers Hometown Hockey will be coming to North Vancouver on March 14 and 15. The "family-friendly hockey celebration" will be held at The Shipyards district at the foot of Lonsdale on the North Van waterfront.

The Polygon Gallery is also at the foot of Lonsdale, and decided to do a Canucks photo show in tandem with Hometown Hockey, starting March 7. They're going to be using old Sun and Province photos, and this week, curators Diane Evans and Justin Ramsey went through Bower's cache.

There are some incredible shots, such as goalie George Gardner spreading his arms like an eagle in flight, a dejected Dale Tallon on his knees in the Canucks goal after they've been scored on, and former Canucks owner Coley Hall posing shirtless with Dennis Ververgaert in 1973.

"Ververgaert was the first draft choice of the Canucks, and Coley Hall was the owner," Bower explains. "Coley said 'You guys aren't as tough as we used to be' and took his shirt off to match him at the press conference."

Coley would have been 67 at the time, Ververgaert was 20. But their physique was similar — and Hall was a renowned tough guy. When he was asked to testify on behalf of Canucks majority owner Tom Scallan after Scallan was charged with theft, Hall reportedly said "let him rot in jail."

Bower started off taking Canucks photos at the Forum, at a time when the rink was surrounded by wire mesh, not Plexiglas. The lighting was dim, so you had to use a flash, which meant you had to be close to the action to get anything.

In order to get a photo without the wire, the photographers cut a little box in the wire near the net, which you could pull out when you wanted to take a photo.

"You opened a wire hole with a square window and put the camera through and shot with a flash, strobe," he said.

"I got hit once. Gordie Howe hit me, right in the arm. He shot the puck and it went right through the hole. He came right over, 'Are you all right?' I said 'It's not too bad.' He said 'Well it wasn't one of my hard shots!'"

Bower has mounted several shows of his Sun pix since he retired. On Feb. 5 at 7 p.m. he'll be teaming up with North Shore News photographer Mike Wakefield for a talk on Shooting The North Shore at the West Vancouver Memorial Library.

One of Bower's best shots shows goalie Dunc Wilson sprawled on the ice, snow covering his mask.

"A player had sprayed ice all over his mask when he came in on him, and when you looked in he had a mask covered with snow," said Bower.

"That made the picture. I didn't even know I had it, it's a dark room special."



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By that he means that he shot rapid-fire photos and then discovered the snow in one of the frames. He was able to capture it thanks to his invention, hooking a camera up inside the net.

He triggered it with a doorbell.

"You know how a doorbell makes a ring? Well that went to the camera (via a wire under the ice), it made the motor work. There was no infrared. You had to run it by juice, follow me?"

It took a bit of talking to let the Canucks use his net-cam.

"I had it arranged to go in the net with (coach) Harry Neale, but he said (goalie Richard Brodeur) was pretty reluctant about it," he recounts.

"I said 'it's a major thing'. He said 'Well, OK.' But as soon as they finished the national anthem, (Brodeur) took his stick and plucked my camera out of the net."

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Demko stays sharp in the shadows with goal to hone role as best backup

Ed Willes

Here's the easy part: Thatcher Demko wants to become a No. 1 goalie in the NHL.

Now here's the tough part: Demko's ambition represents a complex equation that has something to do with his ability and a lot to do with any number of variables beyond his control.

His situation might change as early as this off-season with Jacob Markstrom's contract negotiation. It might change in 2021 with the Seattle expansion draft. It might even be further down the road before a team weighs all the factors and decides Demko is their guy.

By then, who knows where the Canucks' backup will be in his career? It's all a little unsettling and that uncertainty can fog the mind if you let it. But Demko, who has a maturity that belies his 24 years, copes by breaking things down to their simplest terms.

Practices are his games. There just aren't 17,000 people watching him as he goes about his work.

"For me it's taking the mentality of being game-ready in practices," Demko says. "Obviously it's not a switch you can just turn on when you get the call. You have to have it going every day. I think it's going to help me in the long run."

Makes sense. It's helped him in the short run.

"I know I can play at this level," he continues. "For me right now, it's a learning role and a development role and just being a good teammate. I've always seen myself as a supportive, positive guy and I think this year that's my role."

Even if that can change with the snap of the fingers.

In this, his first full season as the Canucks' backup, Demko has served notice he's one of the NHL's emerging young goalies. True, his goals-against average and save percentage don't jump out at you, but the truest measure of a backup is his won-loss record and Demko is 10-5-1 in the 17 games he's played to date.

As for his future workload, that's another one of those variables, but if there were any questions about coach Travis Green's confidence in

Demko they were answered when he gave him the net for Monday's 3-1 win over the visiting St. Louis Blues.

The Canucks also have five back-to-backs between now and the end of the season starting with this weekend in, first, Brooklyn, then Carolina. That means Demko will get his games down the stretch.

What he does with those starts might determine the Canucks' final place in the standings.

"I like goalies who stop the puck," Green says. "I don't like the ones who don't quite as much. We've got two guys we really believe in. It makes the decision easier."

The Markstrom-Demko tandem, in fact, has been the foundation on which the Canucks have built their season. It's difficult to know where, precisely, they rate among all goaltending duos around the NHL but one thing is certain: There are few teams that rely on their goalies to the extent the Canucks rely on Markstrom and Demko.

Markstrom's season has been covered extensively in this space and others and he turned in another gem in San Jose on Wednesday night, stopping 38 of 40 shots in a 5-2 Canucks win.

Demko, meanwhile, has allowed three goals or fewer in 12 of his 16 starts, including nine when he allowed two or less. There have been a couple of stinkers in there, most notably an 8-6 loss in Pittsburgh when he surrendered seven, inflating his save percentage and goals against in the process.

But he's also one of five NHL backups with less than 20 games who are double digits in wins.

"We help each other and we push other," Markstrom says of Demko. "At the same time I'm a competitor and he's a competitor. We both want to play but there's only one net out there."

"It's not his fault if he isn't playing. It's the coach's fault and my fault."

Still, Demko doesn't take it personally. He knows what his role entails. He also knows the only way to achieve his career goals is through success in that role, and if he ever forgets, goalie coach Ian Clark is there to remind him.

"Because you're not playing as regularly and rhythmically as the starter, you have to have a certain mentality," Clark says. "It's a bit of a cliché for backup goalies, but your practices are your games. That's where you build confidence because that's the activity you're getting."

"All he can do is keep grinding and growing his game mentally, structurally, athletically. He's made a nice step in those regards."

So he's getting better. He's also working cheaply this season and next — just over a million per — and that's part of that complicated equation.

Markstrom is heading into unrestricted free agency this summer. Demko becomes an RFA a year later. With their cap challenges, it doesn't figure the Canucks can afford to pay Markstrom like a No. 1 and pay Demko like an elite backup.

There are some difficult decisions waiting for both the organization and the two players. But they also lie in the future.

In the meantime there are all those practices for Demko.

"It's my first full year and I'm just embracing that," he says. "My expectations are a little higher. I just want to keep getting better and make sure I'm consistently giving my team a chance to win."

For now, that's enough.

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Comet Bailey gets Canucks' call to inject some banging, make his mark

Patrick Johnston

NEW YORK CITY — “Can we stop at the next gas station?” is a familiar cry for a driver of any vehicle to hear. Often it’s a kid asking a parent to pull over because they need to use the bathroom.

In the case of Justin Bailey and Zack MacEwen on Thursday, it was because they had just been called up by the Vancouver Canucks from the Utica Comets and the two forwards needed to jump off the team bus.

The Comets were just over an hour into a six-hour bus trip to Cleveland — the Canucks’ AHL players were en route to play the Monsters twice this weekend — when the two lanky forwards got the call that it was time to head back to the NHL.

The next available exit was not a gas station, but a rest stop just west of Syracuse, N.Y., where the players pulled their hockey gear and suitcases off the bus. Then they found an Uber to drive them back to Utica where they repacked and hopped into a car the Canucks had hired to take them to the Big Apple, a four-hour drive.

“Obviously that was a pretty decent call to get,” Bailey said with a smile Friday after his first regular-season practice with the Canucks at Chelsea Piers on the west side of Manhattan.

Bailey, who stands 6-foot-4 but is best known for his blazing speed, has been a key contributor to the Comets’ success this season, who at 25-17-2 sit third in the AHL’s North Division. The team has scored 162 goals this season, the second-most in the AHL, and 24 of those goals have come off Bailey’s stick, tying him for the team lead with Reid Boucher.

Nine of those goals came via three hat tricks inside a week last month, the first of which came with Canucks GM Jim Benning in attendance. The scoring touch had a lot to do with good luck, Bailey said.

“It was a fun week that week with scoring a few hat tricks there ... It was helping the team win and at the end of day that’s what I’m trying to do on a nightly basis,” he said.

“Obviously you want to be as detailed as you can when (Benning’s) around, but at the same time it was just another game. But I was happy that I was able to get a hat trick with him in the building, for sure.”

He has been called up by the Canucks this time not to be a scorer. He’ll be counted on to be a banger, an energy player on the fourth line. And he knows it. He’s played 63 games in the NHL for the Buffalo Sabres and Philadelphia Flyers during the past four seasons, scoring five goals in that span.

“For me it’s making sure that I’m doing the role that I’ve been brought here to do. I think in the past when I was a little bit younger, 20, 21, I went from being a guy in the minors that’s relied on to score a lot and was able to have a little bit of a bigger leash and then came up here and tried to do the same things.

“Coming up here at 24 from communicating with the coaching staff, you know, having a clear vision of what they want me to do and what things they expect from me on a nightly basis and just going out there and executing that.”

Bailey added: “You make adjustments. I think when I went to Philly, I think I played that fourth-line role pretty well and that was a team that was pushing for the playoffs. So, you know, making sure I’ve taken these experiences I’ve had over the last four years of pro and making sure that I’m dialled in, ready to go.”

Bailey and MacEwen were called up to the big club after Tyler Motte suffered an undisclosed upper-body injury during Thursday’s game in

San Jose after being hit into the boards by Sharks defenceman Erik Karlsson.

Motte left the ice in obvious discomfort. Canucks head coach Travis Green said he wasn’t dealing with a head injury but wouldn’t say anything beyond that. It appeared Motte may have damaged his shoulder or collarbone area. Whatever the injury, Motte returned to Vancouver and is being evaluated by the medical staff.

Antoine Roussel also missed Friday’s practice in Manhattan, but Green said it was just a “maintenance day” for the winger and that he expected him to play on the weekend against the Islanders and Carolina Hurricanes.

MacEwen skated in Roussel’s spot on left wing on the third line, with Adam Gaudette at centre and Brock Boeser on right wing. Bailey was the extra forward, with Tim Schaller sliding into Motte’s spot on left wing on the fourth line. Green said it was possible that Bailey could get into one of the games on the weekend.

“Bailey, it’s good to get him up here and have a look at him in practice. He’s having a good year down there. Big guy, fast, we might see him on the weekend as well. We’ll know more (Saturday),” Green said.

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Canucks at 50: End of the road for Vancouver’s Little Lost Rocket

Staff Reporter

Columnists Jim Taylor and Tony Gallagher weighed in on the exit of by-then disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure to the Florida Panthers in January 1999

After a long holdout and many rumoured trades, disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure was finally traded on Jan. 17, 1999. The circumstances of him leaving town are still resented by some Canucks fans to this day. Reaction at the time was that the Canucks didn’t get enough back in return.

Columnist Jim Taylor had a trademark take on the whole holdout/trade saga:

In the end, the Pavel Bure trade was like bad sex: much panting and endless foreplay followed by “You finished?”

Vancouver Canuck fans, who’ve waited so long for some sort of climax, there’ll be little doubt who got, uh, the worst of the deal.

Essentially, it swaps one of hockey’s premier scorers for a tough, free-wheeling defenceman (Bure for Ed Jovanovski), shuffles bit players (defencemen Bret Hedican and junior Brad Ference to Florida; veteran centre Dave Gagner, junior winger Mike Brown, and goalie prospect Kevin Weekes to Vancouver) and swaps draft picks, Florida’s first-round for Vancouver’s third either this year or next, Florida’s option.

To people who bought their season tickets anticipating another year of the electrifying Bure, that’s not going to be nearly enough.

Thus ends, for now, the Tale of the Little Lost Rocket.

Pavel’s much-speculated secret reason for demanding a trade is out (he was upset because management never supported him when it was suggested that he’s threatened not to play in the playoffs), coach Mike Keenan has given the trade his blessing, and Canuck fans are now free to get back to criticizing the Mark Messier deal.



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But fear not. This is Vancouver, where the other shoe doesn't always drop but is always teetering on the tip of the heel. There will be another crisis on which the customers can chew.

Whether they liked it or not, they will find at least short-term relief in the Bure trade. Bad sex is better than no sex at all.

Tony Gallagher was the first to speak to Bure to get his reaction to the move, which to this day is somewhat cloaked in shadows and innuendo.

When Pavel Bure put down the telephone and told his mother Tanya he'd finally been traded, her emotions broke.

Truth be told, so did those of the Russian Rocket.

"My mom cried for a half an hour she was so happy," said Bure from his apartment in Moscow after learning he was part of the biggest deal in the history of both the Vancouver Canucks and Florida Panthers. "She cried because she said she was so happy for me. She said, 'I knew it was the hardest time of your life even though you had been strong through everything. I was so worried about you and I knew you were worried.'

"And it was very tough to be sitting for five months like that. I really missed hockey."

Mother and son headed to the local bar for a quick celebration hoist before Bure returned home for a short night, a result of his trek back to North America.

Bure was asked about his reasons for wanting to leave but he again chose the high road, even though it's becoming abundantly clear GM Brian Burke merely scratched the surface when he volunteered his understanding of the Rocket's reasons.

"I want to tell the people of Vancouver that I have nothing against the city or the people I know there. I have many friends and they will always be my friends. My problems were all with management and I will probably tell everyone what they were sometime soon. I don't know when. But I love the city and I want to make sure everyone knows that.

"When I went public telling I wanted to be traded, I was still living in Vancouver remember. And people came up to me and every single person said, 'Good luck wherever you go, we love you.' Nobody was mad at me in person, although some people in the media try to make them mad. I had seven great years there and I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart."

Bure was so elated with the news he forgot he would be joining former teammates Kirk McLean and Sean Burke with the Panthers.

"Oh yeah, he's there," said Bure of McLean. "Who's the other goalie? Oh right, of course. It should be pretty good there. The travel is a big thing for me. It will be a lot easier. They are in the same time zone as almost all of their games, up and down the coast. I'm looking forward to it.

"I missed the game so much. I love to score so much, to play in front of the people and hear the cheers. They give me so much feeling when I play. I have been practising, but playing in the games is the fun for me. I am happy to be playing again."

Bure was so excited he didn't much seem to care about the fact he will almost certainly soon be signing a long-term contract which will pay him close to \$50 million US over the five years following this one. With bonuses, that could like go much higher. It's expected he will be paid "just" \$3 million US this shortened season. He was trying to get his mother a ticket to Calgary to stay with brother Valeri for a few days before she visits Miami.

"I guess after Calgary, maybe she'll be ready for some warm weather."

With those words, the greatest player ever to have played for the Canucks, took his leave.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 02.01.2020

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Self-critical and 'rusty' after knee surgery, how Antoine Roussel can give the Canucks a huge second-half boost

By Harman Dayal Jan 31, 2020 9

Just two or three decades ago, an ACL tear could have represented a career-ending injury.

That isn't the case any more thanks to remarkable developments in medical technology and rehabilitation, but the road to recovery remains a gruelling, arduous process.

Six to nine months is the normal timeline to get back to action following a torn ACL, but the step from feeling healthy to playing your best hockey is a challenge that can span months after you've returned to the lineup.

Ask Antoine Roussel who had knee surgery in late March, and he'll tell you that playing games upon returning was significantly more difficult than the eight months of rehab.

"The hardest part was starting to play again and playing my hard game," Roussel told The Athletic on Tuesday. "It's taking some time to get back to a decent level.

"I don't think I've reached my level from last year yet.

"It takes time, I read guys like Corey Perry came back from surgery last year and said he felt like the whole year was tougher. I don't think I'm in that trend, but it still feels like a build-up."

From a surface level point of view, you could be convinced into believing that the rust hasn't detrimentally affected his play. Roussel may not be repeating the 39-point pace he produced at in a career-year last season, but the five goals and eight points he's registered through 23 games are almost identical to his career scoring rate.

Peel the layers of his performance back deeper, however, and it's clear that the subtle ways in which he's influenced his team's even-strength control of games have eroded.

Ever since he's emerged as a full-time NHL player, Roussel has shown the ability to tilt the ice in his team's favour. As a Dallas Star, he finished each season with a shot and scoring chance share comfortably above 50 percent — his two-way presence is easily the most underappreciated part of his game. The 30-year-old French native established that same utility in a Canuck uniform last year. Of the seven forwards that played at least 100 minutes with Roussel in 2018-19, all but one saw a significant improvement in their ability to outshoot and out-chance the opposition.

The greatest beneficiary of Roussel's two-way plaudits last season was Bo Horvat, who saw a huge boost in his performance whenever the 5-foot-11 winger joined his line.

Roussel's uncharacteristically struggled in that department this season — the Canucks controlling just 45 percent of shot attempts and a paltry 38.1 percent of scoring chances. Expected to prop up Adam Gaudette who's still got a ways to go in rounding out his 200-foot game, Roussel has instead hurt a third line that has been caved in its defensive zone and lost the territorial battle by a large margin.

"I had no legs for ten games," Roussel said bluntly. "I was rusty, my pop wasn't there and then you slowly get back there and I'm at game 22 now. So 12 games where I felt pretty decent, I'm just trying to build on that."

Roussel's self-assessment may sound very harsh, but there's a lot of truth to his timeline. In the first 10 games he suited up for, Roussel controlled less than 40 percent of shot attempts and scoring chances. Since the ten-game mark, he owns the best shot attempt differential (49.4 percent share) of any forward not on Bo Horvat's line and while his



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42.5 percent expected goal share would suggest he's still got a ways to go in driving quality chances, it represents a notable improvement nonetheless.

When you think about the strengths of Roussel's game, it makes sense why his even-strength impact is so heavily contingent on the "pop" in his game. The fiery grinder succeeds as a tenacious disrupter on the forecheck who forces turnovers and recovers loose pucks. He can use his skating, smart stick and physicality to wreak havoc and win battles.

Look at the explosiveness with which he's able to hunt the puck back in a couple of clips from a game last year, for example.

Couple Roussel's puck pursuit with his underrated knack for making plays in transition and you understand why he can be so effective at pushing and keeping possession in the offensive zone.

By that same token, Roussel's success in this area is dependent on his north-south speed game and with his knee not letting him hit that extra gear, it's been a tough go in his first 23 games.

Refinding that valuable trait could be critical down the stretch.

We don't know, for instance, how long Loui Eriksson will be able to sustain his current level of play on Horvat's line. If Eriksson's form slips down the stretch, a peak Roussel would give Travis Green another viable option to throw alongside Horvat in a matchup role. Alternatively, if the fiery winger stays with Gaudette, he'd be a big help for a third-line that hasn't been feasting on the soft matchups like they ideally would be.

In any event, with each day that passes, Roussel's knee is becoming and more comfortable being pushed to the limit — something that directly relates to how well he drives play at even-strength. If he can bounce back into being close to the player he was last year, it'd be a significant boon in adding another middle-six quality forward to the Canucks' talent pool.

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Inside the Canucks' warmup rituals: From half moons to bathroom breaks in unison, players are creatures of habit

By Thomas Drance Jan 31, 2020 29

The NHL is "the show," and that's intended literally.

Professional hockey is an entertainment product: a game is a live performance and everything backstage is tightly choreographed. There's even an official run of show, called a time sheet. It's drawn up by game presentation departments around the league and approved by the NHL, and it keeps the show flowing predictably for everyone from the team captain, to the head coach, to the colour commentator, to the mascot.

And ruling over it all, dictating all of the moving parts on an NHL game day: a little red digital clock, embedded high on the wall of every dressing room.

On a standard game day with a 7 p.m. puck drop, off-ice officials set that clock to run for 60 minutes at 5:45 p.m., so that it hits 00:00 at exactly 6:45 p.m. — the precise moment the warmup skate ends.

The time on that little red digital clock is the same countdown fans see on the Jumbotron and it's displayed prominently in every dressing room. With 16 minutes remaining on the little red digital clock, the warmup skate begins.

Because of muscle memory, superstition and a strict adherence to routine, you can be pretty sure where every player is — if you know their routines — and exactly what they're doing in the leadup to the warmup skate based on what that little red clock reads.

Pre-skate routines

"Everybody has a routine, every player," said Canucks captain Bo Horvat. "So if a player tells you he's not superstitious, he's lying to you."

That routine can include two touch soccer. It can be a specific, well-thought-out mix of activities designed to sharpen reflexes. It can be listening to music on headphones and stretching. It can be eating something, having the same exchange with a teammate, or even relieving themselves before putting on equipment.

That last one, hitting the toilet at a predictable moment in time on a game day, is a pretty common theme, which makes sense when you consider the gear involved.

"It's always the same," noted Canucks defenceman Troy Stecher. "Guys are going to the bathroom at the exact same time. You go in the gym and it's the same four guys in the gym every time, and they have different routines, but they're doing the exact same stretch. It's kind of weird."

Jay Beagle is one of those guys who takes a timed bathroom break, immediately prior to going down the tunnel.

"At 17:30 on the red clock, I'm taking a pee," he said. "Almost every time. Then coming back, I've got my helmet and my gloves and we go."

Another Canuck, who declined to be identified, shared his pregame ritual: "After warmups I go take a leak and when I do, the same teammate is taking a shit. Every single time."

Whether the habits are born of superstition or routine depends on the player, but the goal is the same: get ready to be at peak performance for puck drop.

"I'm a guy that thinks about it. I put a lot of preparation into my warmups," said Beagle. "I know exactly where I'm going to be at certain times, to make sure that I'm on schedule to get to where I want to be and feel the best for the game."

Tanner Pearson has an unusual habit of getting in some pregame pushups. "I come into the room after soccer, probably around 6ish. Roughly 44:00 on the red clock," he said. "I just do 20 of them. It started last year. Patric Hornqvist did them, so I started doing them. You do so much stuff to get the legs going, so I do it to get the upper-body going, get the core engaged."

In the minutes before warmups, players put on what remains of their gear. Your average beer leaguer would be astonished by how quickly some NHL players are able to gear up and down, like Superman in a phone booth.

Some get their equipment on relatively early. Some mill about in the tunnel, pumping up their teammates, and others just hang out in the room.

"I'm always sitting right before warmups," said Elias Pettersson. "And when the time comes at 16:15 or so, I just sort of walk out. A lot of guys are waiting in the hallway, or standing, but I'm just chilling."

And if the player is one who customarily takes warmup skate without a helmet, commonly referred to as "going no bucky," he may even be in front of a mirror doing his hair.

"I have to touch up my hair, but just water," said Pearson. "Guys who put gel on are crazy. You start sweating and it gets in your eyes."

"I might wet it, but I don't put any product in it," Tyler Myers added. "I know sometimes guys do, but I won't name names."

"I'm putting hair gel in my hair before warmups," admitted Canucks forward J.T. Miller.



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Among Vancouver's skaters, it's almost exclusively veteran players who don't wear helmets during warmups. Miller, Pearson, Edler, Horvat, Stecher, Myers, Chris Tanev and Brandon Sutter are most likely to "go no bucky," although some additional skaters may ditch the helmets for a game in their hometown.

According to some of those veteran players, the Canucks don't have a standard rule for who can and can't take the warmup skate without a helmet. A younger guy "going no bucky" is more likely to hear about it, though.

"Maybe there is a rule," Miller said, "but we don't talk about it. Guys want to go no bucket, I don't give a shit. Guys are going to chirped for it, but that's part of the game."

Still other veterans insist on wearing a helmet because, in their own words, they might otherwise be a genuine safety risk.

"I wear a helmet every time because I'm a hazard out there," Beagle said. "I've been called a hazard by many people in warmups, because I like to buzz around."

Among the players who hang out in the hallway early, meanwhile, there's a variety of standard handshakes and routines. When Tim Schaller is in the lineup, for example, he and Adam Gaudette do a vertical version of the Chandler and Joey cool guy handshake which is followed by Gaudette and Beagle doing a couple of shoulder checks.

"We do a little handshake, and then he usually runs his shoulder into my chin," said Beagle of that particular tradition. "Gets me fired up."

Heading out onto the ice

There is an order to all things in these pregame preparations, particularly during the warmup skate itself, which can seem like a strange beast to onlookers.

Some of that order is dictated by seniority. Some of it by superstition. And some of it by institutional memory, going back decades.

Longtime Canucks defender Alexander Edler, for example, is responsible for watching the little red clock as it ticks down to 16:00 for the start of warmups. Shortly before it does, he's responsible for calling out that it's "time to go" to his teammates. As such, he's the first skater onto the ice for the warmup skate after the starting goaltender.

Edler does this every game day when he's healthy and in the lineup (if he's out, the responsibility is assumed by Jake Virtanen), and it's an institutional relic dating back to Kevin Bieksa, who is now retired.

"Bieksa used to do it and he said, why don't you do it," Edler explained. "So I said, 'OK'."

"I assigned Eagle to do it because I told him he needed a responsibility," Bieksa recalled to The Athletic via text message. "True story."

By the time Canucks skaters filter onto the ice, they do so in a very predictable order. Of late, while the team has been winning and relatively healthy and the lineup fixed, it's tended to look like this in chronological order: starting goaltender, Edler, Virtanen, Myers, Roussel, Pearson, Miller, Tyler Motte, Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson, Loui Eriksson, Gaudette, Beagle, Oscar Fantenberg, Quinn Hughes, Tanev, Sutter, Bo Horvat and then the backup netminder.

Even in this, there's a legacy of years gone, co-mingled with superstitious habit, that shapes the order.

"I always go last coming out of the tunnel because when I started, I didn't know where to go," Horvat says. "So I just went last."

"The older guys had the place where they went, so I just filled in where I could and that was last. So I just went last. I didn't have any warmup duties, which is good. I hate picking pucks out of the net."

At the start of warmups and for the first couple of minutes players — including goaltenders — just circle the ice surface getting a few shots in

and perhaps sending teammates some backhand saucer passes. Even in this, some players have a very specific routine they follow.

"I take three pucks from the right side, three pucks from the left side," currently injured Canucks forward Josh Leivo told The Athletic back in late November. "Then I just mess around, pass and stuff. I shoot three and three, before I do anything else."

"First shot is high left, second shot I try go low post and in, third shot is clapper," said Tanner Pearson of his routine.

The half moon

This freeform portion of warmups tends to last for a couple of minutes. Occasionally a skater will greet a former teammate or a friend at centre ice, while others get into their stretches in the neutral zone. By about the 14-minute mark, Stecher goes and fishes the pucks out of the net for the first time in the warmup skate, and once he's finished the starting goaltender takes the net to take a few shots and feel the puck.

On every NHL team, there's a designated player who picks pucks out of the net during the warmup skate. This player functions like a waiter during the half moon, and essentially goes to clear pucks out of the net every couple of minutes during warmups.

In Vancouver, it's Stecher who does the digging. It's a job that fell to him when the Sedin twins, Henrik and Daniel, assigned him to do it after Alexandre Burrows was traded to the Ottawa Senators midway through the 2016-17 season. Prior to Burrows, Matt Cooke held down the job, and Burrows fell into it for a similar reason — he was young when the position was vacated, and someone had to do it.

Stecher doesn't mind the assignment. In fact, he takes pride in doing it well.

"My first couple of games my teammates were like, 'Let's go!' 'Let's go!' and I didn't know how to time it," Stecher said, laughing as he recalled the work he put into mastering his technique — which includes flattening his stick to get pucks out in bunches early in the warmup skate, and later passing 3-4 pucks out of the net at a time.

The Richmond, B.C. native legitimately put study time into working on his technique, watching how other guys in the league did it and mastering his craft.

"I go flat stick and put them all in one big group," Stecher said. "I think it's way more efficient."

About a third of the way into the warmup skate, the Canucks — and all NHL teams — line up in the neutral zone and perform line rushes. This is a very basic pregame drill, a mock rush of sorts that players go through alongside their defence partner or linemates. It typically lasts for two or two-and-a-half minutes after which Stecher clears the net of pucks again and the players line up — in a very specific order — for the half moon.

The half moon, or horseshoe, is so-called because of how the players line up in an inverted U shape along the blue line, while Stecher (and then Virtanen) feed shooters the puck. Skaters take turns skating in and unleashing a shot on the starting goaltender, who tends to take at least five shots — though Jacob Markstrom will sometimes take eight or so.

Currently, Gaudette shoots first, then Motte. Miller goes third and always takes a slap shot. Pettersson is the fourth shooter.

"I always shoot it high glove," Pettersson said. "I always try to aim for the goalie's glove get them some reps."

After Pettersson, it's Edler. And this is where Stecher's work as a pass waiter in the half moon gets really detailed.

"Gauds and Millsy shoot kind of early, Petey shoots, and then Eddie," Stecher told The Athletic back in November, while Motte was still out of the lineup with injury.

"That's where my routine kicks off, I fire Eddie a bullet. Bennie, I throw him sauce. Virt and I do the same thing, we throw sauce to each other



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and catch it in our V-Triangle," Stecher continued, mimicking holding his feet together at his heels, with his two feet jetting out so that they form a V. "Then I sauce to Bo, who sometimes goes with the V, then I fire a bullet to Mysie. Then it's a soft little muffin to Boes!

"And then when I move sides I always set a puck up close to the net and then I deke around it, I toe-drag around it and fire to Tanny. The last guy is usually Sutts, but since he's out right now it's usually Beags. I slide it under his stick, and then I stretch and Virt takes over from there."

Some players want these passes from Stecher in a specific way, but some of them aren't even aware of it. They're just used to the passes he delivers.

"I know Stechie fires me a pretty hard pass," Myers said of his spot in the half moon. "I might shoot one way or one spot, for a few games, then I might change it up. I don't worry too much about it."

While Myers doesn't worry about it too much, Horvat does. In fact, after playing around with the V-Triangle pass reception early on in the season, Horvat has become a convert. At the moment he never takes the pass from Stecher in the half moon without utilizing it.

"I saw Jake do it, I don't remember when I saw it," Horvat says, "But he kept doing it and we kept winning, and then he stopped doing it and we lost. Then I started doing it and I don't know, I've kind of kept going with it. Stech, I think, once gave me a shit pass and I kind of had to do it and then we won. So I had to keep doing it no matter how good or bad the pass was."

Horvat's also absolutely committed to taking the exact same shot every time.

"I always shoot blocker on the half moon," Horvat says. "100 percent of the time. Always, always, always."

"I know Bo is going to shoot blocker side and it's going to be a blocker save, and I'm already over there on that side so I have to get away from the rebound," Stecher says. "It's crazy, the routine is something you could do in your sleep."

Winding down

As the warmup winds down, a few players take power laps in the neutral zone. Other players send sauce to one another from either side of the ice. Lately, Virtanen and Roussel have been setting each other up for five one-timers from either face-off dot. Beagle — every game — always does a bench spray, which involves a significant hockey stop that he directs at the Canucks bench. It commonly serves to give a hefty snow shower to camera people and Canucks team staff.

It's at the point where Beagle noticed the other day when no one got caught in the spray:

NOBODY TO SPRAY. POOR BEAGLE. 🐶
PIC.TWITTER.COM/TANF30XUXB

— VANCOUVER #CANUCKS (@CANUCKS) JANUARY 15, 2020

"I sprayed the one guy really bad last game," said Beagle, laughing as he recalled an incident in early December. "I think he was a camera guy for Sportsnet. I've done it every game for 13 years and I've never felt bad, but I did that time."

And in all of this, of course, Canucks players will look for kids and fans in the crowd to give souvenir pucks to.

"If I see a sign that says something about me, I try to give that person or kid a puck," Pettersson said. "Some games there's been a lot of signs, so I can't give them all a puck, but I always really appreciate it."

"I like to watch the crowd and say hello to any people I may know, and some people I don't even know!" said Roussel.

Horvat has a set routine even for this. He always gives away three pucks to Canucks fans. No more, no less. And it seems he chooses which fans

will get the pucks not based on signs or Horvat jerseys, but based on their location around the glass.

"I always put three pucks over the glass to the fans, in certain spot," Horvat says. "Not to certain fans, but I pick my three spots where I throw them and that's where I throw them. I try to stick to my same routine."

GOOD GUY BO HORVAT JUST WANTED TO GIVE THIS @CANUCKS FAN A PUCK, BUT THE NETTING IN PHILLY WASN'T MAKING IT EASY FOR HIM. 😊 PIC.TWITTER.COM/NMBLHST4FD

— SPORTSNET (@SPORTSNET) NOVEMBER 26, 2019

With a couple of minutes remaining in warmups, Canucks skaters and the backup goaltender play a final game called "Last Puck" or "Final Puck" or "Two Minute Drill" depending on the player or the team in question. The game starts when Edler sends a bullet pass to Stecher in the neutral zone.

"I end up getting last puck, where you'll see Eddie fire it all the way to the red line and we'll play last puck."

The game pits an unlimited number of skaters versus the backup goalie, as Stecher takes a long distance shot from the neutral zone, which is usually saved, and then Canucks teammates crowd the goaltender and try to score from point blank range with jam plays, shots off of rebounds and other short-range shot types. Miller recently tried to score with a Michigan lacrosse move. The game doesn't end until the puck is in the back of the net.

Finally, the clock winds down to 00:00, the buzzer sounds, and the teams clear the ice. Prior to his injury, Leivo was always the last Canucks skater to leave the ice at the end of the warm-up skate. He'd stay out and set up three pucks by the Canucks bench, then try to bank pucks off of the far boards and into the net.

As with most things in the warmup, it worked once, and it just kind of stuck.

"It was last year, I focused on banking the puck into the net at the end of warmups and I scored after," Leivo explained. "So that's what I do now and I'm sticking with it."

With warmup skate ended, the little red digital clock resets to 15:00 and counts down for the start of the show — which begins with the anthems, and not with puck drop itself — and Canucks players get back into the room and focus up for the game. It's at this point that the coaching staff will enter for a final chat and to read out the starting lineup (a task that differs from team to team, but is often outsourced to players or special guests).

Canucks head coach Travis Green isn't typically on the bench during the warmup skate. He's often in his office working, or having a coffee, or having a final strategic chat with his assistant coaches.

On some higher leverage game days, or in some more historic arena, he'll poke his head out and step onto the bench to get a feel for the atmosphere prior to the contest.

While players stick with a very specific routine pre-game, it's notable that Green doesn't remember what he used to do as a player. It's all a haze to him now, even as he remembers that he was very rigid about doing the same thing every game.

He also went "no bucky." It would've been a waste not to, what with the mullet he sported early on in his playing days.

"Wearing a helmet over that, it would've been a fine," the Canucks bench boss joked.

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Wheeler's 2020 NHL prospect pool rankings: No. 13 Vancouver Canucks

By Scott Wheeler Jan 31, 2020 59

Welcome to Scott Wheeler's 2020 rankings of every NHL organization's prospects. You can find the complete ranking and more information on the criteria here, as we count down daily from No. 31 to No. 1. The series, which includes evaluations and commentary from coaches and staff on more than 500 prospects, runs from Jan. 13 to Feb. 11.

This ranking is probably one of the stronger departures from the consensus throughout the series. That's true both in where the Canucks are ranked as a farm system overall (some would likely have them a few spots higher) and in the way their individual prospects are ranked (more on that below).

As a whole, the Canucks have proven to be one of the better drafting teams in recent memory. They've knocked a lot of top picks out of the park and they've mined lower rounds for talent and upside, hitting on several players.

While I'm higher than a lot of evaluators are on many of the Canucks' top prospects, I'm lower than most on the player most perceive as the organization's top prospect. Due to the recent graduations of Quinn Hughes, Adam Gaudette and Thatcher Demko, the pool has also begun to thin out a bit — something that's worth keeping an eye on seeing as they will also likely make the playoffs this year and lose their first-round pick in 2020 in the process.

Still, the Canucks boast one of the deeper prospect pools in the NHL, with intrigue at all three forward positions (though they certainly have less depth at centre than they do on the wing), some interesting D prospects and an intriguing goalie prospect. As I mentioned in Tuesday's look at the 16th-ranked Sabres prospect pool, the group of teams from No. 16 to No. 6 in the series are all tight. If all of the Canucks' top three prospects pan out, their outcomes will look more favourable than 13th in a few years.

1. Nils Högländer, LW, 19 (Rögle BK)

If you've followed my work, this probably doesn't come as a huge surprise to you. When I released my final ranking for the 2019 draft last May, Vasilii Podkolzin landed at No. 17 and Hoggländer ranked just one spot back at No. 18. A month later, I believed one was a bit of a reach and the other was a bit of a steal. But they've always been close for me. And while Podkolzin is five months younger than Hoggländer, I would argue the latter has had a better year relative to their respective ages. That was certainly true at the world juniors (though that's not to say Podkolzin didn't have a good tournament because he did) and it's true with their club teams, where Hoggländer has more consistently made plays at the pro level. Hoggländer's puck skills, playmaking ability and touch around the slot are the first things that leap out (besides, maybe, that he's a little small). I'm most impressed with his footwork, though. Hoggländer does a brilliant job changing pace to slow down, bait defenders and then burst back into stride to pass them. He's also explosive in and out of his edges, which helps him stop and start to lose opposing players and create some separation.

Watch here the way a stop-up forces the defender into a blow-by, giving Hoggländer the opportunity to get set for his shot:

Or watch here, the way Hoggländer opens up his right foot to carve to a better angle and drag the puck into his lead heel:

Or watch how Hoggländer's ability to rely on his edges and remain balanced helps him create a second opportunity off his own rebound, here:

Hoggländer is proof you don't have to be the fastest player on the ice to be one of the best skaters. I would like to see a little more discipline in his game (with and without the puck) but he's stronger than you expect a 5-

foot-9 winger to be and all of the offensive tools are there. He's got what it takes to be a low-end 1LW or a high-end 2LW.

2. Vasilii Podkolzin, RW/LW, 18 (SKA St. Petersburg)

Podkolzin, who played just a few shifts a night early on in the KHL season, has begun to make the most of increased opportunity of late, with points in three straight games while I write this. His game has always flashed a lot of pro qualities. He's big, he's physical, he's powerful, he's strong on pucks, he plays on the inside, he's a pain in the ass, he doesn't give up on plays and he's got great hands. My concern with his game has always been about his ability to slow the game down and process it. If he needs to beat a defender one-on-one, he often can. If he needs to fight his way to the net, he often can. If there's an available passing lane to an obvious target, he's talented enough to execute through seams. But he lacks an on-ice awareness, which contributes to a style of play that revolves around doing the first thing he sees, rather than opening up his sightlines to assess the zone and utilize his linemates. As a result, I often feel like he looks like he's doing more than he actually is. It makes him a bit of a weird prospect. Most top players have that inherent sense to their game but need to develop their skills to a pro level. He has the skill and I'm not sure you can teach the rest, though experience will certainly help. I have little doubt he's going to be a useful NHLer, my worry is just that he may not become a line-driving offensive threat and that's what you want at 10th overall. His skating, while powerful, also splays from the knees and needs some tweaking.

3. Tyler Madden, C, 20 (Northeastern University)

Madden is another in a long line of Canucks success stories in the last few years. He has shown, despite lacking size, strength and a pull-away gear to his straightaway stride, that skill can solve a lot of those concerns. Northeastern, who'd just dealt with a similar player in Blackhawks forward Dylan Sikura, have proven they can help those players succeed in a heavy college hockey game, too. This year, Madden has built on his slick puck skills and superb cross-ice vision to add a goal scoring element to his game, taking him from one of college hockey's best freshmen to one of college hockey's best players. When he's got the puck, he's capable of making plays out of nothing, whether that's with a creative pass through traffic, a dangle in tight or his ability to lose bigger defenders with a quick cut. He will face some challenges along the wall at the college level — and might be asked to play the wing — but he can run a power play and make things happen at even strength, both of which I suspect will translate. And though I wouldn't say he's a dominant defensive player, Madden's versatile enough to be trusted in all situations.

4. Olli Juolevi, LHD, 21 (Utica Comets)

You've probably heard me say — or write — this before but I really do believe Juolevi has NHL games under his belt by now were it not for the knee injury. He's not athletic enough to lose forecheckers with his speed or dynamic enough to score many goals from the point but Juolevi is unfazed by pressure when he has the puck and he's an excellent outlet passer, both of which are assets for most of the game's modern puck-moving defencemen. He can also make high-to-low plays in the offensive zone or slide down the wall to fire a pass east-to-west for a backdoor play. Though he's not an overly physical defender for his size, Juolevi also does a nice job gapping up with smooth footwork, disrupting passing lanes with his instincts and outsmarting opposing players along the wall. I still think he may become a contributing second-pairing defenceman.

5. Kole Lind, RW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Last year, as Lind struggled as an AHL rookie, I told a number of diehard Canucks fans in my life to be patient. Part of that was a belief in his tools, part of it was probably me not wanting to give up on a player I have been high on since his draft year. But Lind has begun to make true on his talent level this season. He has always had a dangerous shot in tight (he's not the kind of player who's so gifted that he's going to overpower goalies from a distance but he's a natural scorer who still has more to show there). This year, though, we're seeing some other elements of his game take steps. In my viewings, I've been impressed with how engaged



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he is in board battles, something that was a strength of his game at the junior level but faded a bit last year when he looked unusually timid. Lind is at his best when he's playing an honest, north-south game. He's not going to light up the highlight reel but he can make plays through holes, he's a fast skater and he doesn't really lack any one offensive quality. I still think he's the kind of player who projects to slide up and down an NHL lineup, capable of playing a depth role on a good team or supporting higher in the lineup as more of a complementary piece.

6. Jack Rathbone, LHD, 20 (Harvard University)

After a strong freshman year at Harvard, Rathbone has continued to show real promise as a sophomore. There have never been concerns with his talent level or his skating, both of which look easy for him on the ice. Rathbone's one of the smoother defenders in the NCAA, using four-way mobility to escape pressure, create for himself or his teammates from the point or shake past opposing players through the neutral zone. And while he's definitely on the smaller end for an NHL defenceman, I don't think it's going to be a major obstacle. He defends well with his feet, sticking with opposing puck carriers down the ice or winning races to loose pucks along the wall before he ever has to engage physically. Due to his size, he's not going to be the kind of player who jumps straight from the NCAA to the NHL following a monster junior or senior year. Just don't be surprised if he becomes an impact guy at the AHL level and gives the Canucks no choice but to audition him. Though size is still more of a roadblock for defenders than it is for forwards and some teams don't want to have too many little guys on their back end, preventing opportunities from worthy players in the process, that's not at the front of my mind when I evaluate a player. Rathbone's good.

7. Jett Woo, RHD, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

After a slow start, Woo has looked more and more like the player who dominated the WHL and earned an entry-level contract last year. I wouldn't worry too much about the dip in his production. Some of that is driven by a trade to a less talented team. Some of it is driven by the fact that he has spent most of the season playing behind Flyers prospect Egor Zamula in offensive situations. Woo is a throwback, playing a physical, simple brand of hockey that makes him hard to play against. He's also an elite athlete, which means when he hits, it hurts (it also means he's a powerful skater). While it means his coaches have to live with the odd penalty, they're usually OK with it because he brings an element most teams covet — and many lack. Woo's probably not going to play at the top of an NHL lineup, nor will he likely run a power play unit, but he can play tough minutes at even strength, move the puck up ice with leading passes and penalty kill. He's also just a good, hard-working player. I'm a fan.

8. Petrus Palmu, LW, 22 (JYP)

Palmu is tiny. Maybe even too tiny to play in the NHL no matter how talented he is. But his tininess also helps him have skills that few NHL players have. It helps him sneak past hits and side-step defenders as a carrier, a skill that he uses equally well off both wings. Watch the way he spins to the inside on his edges, using a sharp radius to cut to the middle off the right wing:

Now take note of the way he almost jumps to the inside to blow past another pinching defender on the left wing here:

Smaller players also have a stickhandling and coordination advantage because they're lower to the puck, offering them more control. That's at play in small areas, where Palmu excels at using his feet to kick pucks to his stick and quickly make a play:

While bigger players can leverage their length to generate torque on their sticks, smaller players tend to use their shorts sticks to lean off one foot without throwing themselves off balance in their range of motion through their shot:

If Palmu lacked any of these skills, he wouldn't be on a list like this. But he doesn't. He has what you'd hope a player his size has. He thinks the

game one step ahead as a passer, even when chances on net for himself are there:

He executes tape-to-tape saucer passes most players don't:

Does that mean he's a lock to play in the NHL? Of course not. But I do think he has a lot more to show than he did in the AHL last season (and/or than he was given the opportunity to ...).

9. Michael DiPietro, G, 20 (Utica Comets)

I debated having DiPietro lower on this list after subpar play with the Ottawa 67's spilled into a mediocre start to his AHL career (though he was decent during Ottawa's playoff run). That, coupled with DiPietro's 6-foot frame, is enough to at least raise some questions. But he's also young, the Comets don't do a great job protecting their goalies from high danger chances (at least not this year) and he's got a lot of tools, led by rare athletic ability, that help him make tough post-to-post saves or go low-to-high to challenge shooters. I've seen some saveable pucks sneak through DiPietro this season but I'm willing to give him a pass on pedestrian play this season given it's his first full year at the pro level and he's got an extended track record of solid play.

10. Guillaume Brisebois, LHD, 22 (Utica Comets)

Brisebois has intrigued me dating back to his draft year in 2015 when I was with McKeen's Hockey as a bit of a case study in what a modern shutdown defenceman might look like. Though he's not huge, he plays the way I want a quote-unquote safe player to play. His idea of safe is a quick head-man pass, instead of a chip off the glass or a shot through traffic instead of a ring around the boards. He makes smart plays that produce a result, instead of those that just get the puck out or in. He's also a good skater for his size, which helps him snuff out plays in the neutral zone, gap up against fast skaters or pivot back on dumps without getting caught flatfooted. He's probably not going to play higher than the third pairing at the next level but he can be relied upon in tough minutes and I think he's just talented enough to potentially progress.

11. William Lockwood, RW, 21 (University of Michigan)

Lockwood was a good junior who became a good college player. Today, he's probably a cut above good college player while also serving as captain in his senior year. He has always been a well-rounded two-way winger who can finish off plays, hang onto the puck as a carrier when he needs to and play with pace. He's a little on the smaller end, though, and he hasn't progressed quite like you'd probably hope offensively, which limits his upside. I could see him becoming a very good AHL player who is a little bit of a tweener. The good news is that he's got the versatility you want in a depth player, so he's not a top-six or bust type.

12. Arvid Costmar, C, 18 (Linköping HC)

I watched Linköping's junior team play a fair amount last season but I always came away more impressed by Costmar's teammate, Nikola Pasic, than I did by him. Costmar was physical, he played hard in his own zone and he showed flashes of some impressive skills but he never really took over a game. So his dominance at the SuperElit level this year has surprised me a little, even if it hasn't translated at either pro level. Costmar looked unstoppable in one recent viewing with the junior team and he has a July birthday so he could just be playing catch-up. Costmar has more talent than I gave him credit for, I think. When he plays fast, he can make a lot of plays as both a scorer and a passer. He's not going to be a primary carrier on a line, per se, but he's got some versatility to his game.

13. Aidan McDonough, LW, 20 (Northeastern University)

I often worry about players who don't join their programs as true freshmen because if they stumble out of the gate or get a coach who leans heavily on veterans, it can mean that they don't work their way into more prominent roles until they're 23 or 24. If you want to remain a legitimate prospect and you're going to enter college at 20 instead of 18, you have to show that you look more like a sophomore or a junior than a freshman. Otherwise, it's hard to climb out of it. Nobody wants to start



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their pro career at 24. In a way, it can put more pressure on someone like McDonough, who needed to grow into his 6-foot-3 frame after a huge growth spurt. It took him time to remodel his game and build confidence with the puck again. He has looked good this season, though, playing at a point per game pace while chipping in offensively in a variety of ways. He's not all that physical for his size but he can make plays off the rush and he's got a decent top speed (his first couple of steps need some work). Keep an eye on him.

14. Linus Karlsson, C/RW, 20 (BIK Karlskoga)

After an uninspiring post-draft season and a trade from the Sharks to the Canucks for Jonathan Dahlen (a much better player, in my opinion), Karlsson has put together a nice follow-up campaign as an impact player in the second tier Allsvenskan. He's got a dangerous shot (wrist and one-timer), his playmaking has improved and he has always played a well-rounded, net-driven game in the middle of the ice. I would want to see him continue to contribute at a higher pro level before getting too excited, plus his skating is average, but coaches love him and he's got decent skill.

Here's that shot I was talking about (I know his 10 goals in 40 games doesn't leap out but that's good for a 20-year-old and he can pound it):

15. Jonah Gadjovich, LW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Speaking of players who are kind of slow, can rip it and endear themselves to coaches by playing on the inside. I like a lot of what Gadjovich brings. He's got some pro qualities, he's tough to knock off the puck and I think he has more offence than we've seen to date.

16. Toni Utunen, LHD, 19 (Tappara)

Think Brisebois, but younger and smaller. Utunen's a bit of a weird prospect because he doesn't have very many high-end skills and he's a 5-foot-11 defenceman. He has always played up an age group (or two) and excelled, though, because he's an excellent defender who makes the first right play almost every time he has the puck — and often when he doesn't. Can you defend your way into the NHL while making very few plays from the blue line in, at his size? It'll be tough. He's worth a mention, though.

17. Carson Focht, C, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

Focht's got pro size, he does a great job winning back pucks with his length and his body positioning and he's got a powerful shot with a quick release. All of those things make him really effective at the junior level. He doesn't have one quality that really flashes, though, so his upside is probably limited even if his puck skills continue to develop.

18. Ethan Keppen, LW, 18 (Flint Firebirds)

Being big and strong with an NHL shot normally gets players an opportunity to play pro but this has been a disappointing season for Keppen, who showed some power forward qualities last year without a lot of help around him.

Artyom Manukyan, RW, 21 (Avangard Omsk)

Manukyan is one of the smallest players in pro hockey but he oozes skill and I don't think anybody would be surprised if he worked his way into the NHL later in his career (I'm talking mid-to-late 20s) after slowly beginning to dominate in the KHL. I would normally have him higher on this list but he just returned from a five-month layoff with a hand injury so I want to watch him play and update my notes before I give him a definitive ranking. Consider him an honourable mention for now. He's one of the more fun young Russians right now and was a terror in the MHL.

The Tiers

Each of my prospect pool rankings will be broken down into team-specific tiers in order to give you a better sense of the talent proximity from one player to the next (a gap which is sometimes minute and in other cases quite pronounced).

The first thing you'll notice about the Canucks prospect tiers is that there's no clear standalone tier at the top, which there is for almost (almost) every other organization. In fact, they're actually the only one of the 31 teams with three players in that top tier. That's a good thing in that it speaks to organizational depth. It's a bad thing in that it also highlights that I'm a little unsure about Podkolzin, because there's some risk in the projections of Hoglander and Madden to the next level too. After that it's pretty straightforward, with Juolevi a slight cut above three other players who I think have real NHL upside (not the tweener kind that follows them).

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The history of the Vancouver Canucks, through a photographer's lens

JOHN MACKIE Updated: January 31, 2020

A few years ago, The Vancouver Sun was about to throw out a box of negatives of the Vancouver Canucks back when they were in the Western Hockey League.

So photographer Ralph Bower saved them.

"They were going into the garbage can, so I just took the box home. Why put it in the garbage?" said Bower, 85. "But I never looked at it. About five or 10 years later I was going through my old negs and there was a whole box of them."

The negs were important to Bower because he'd shot many of the pictures. He started working for the Sun in 1955, and photographed the Canucks until he retired on New Year's Eve, 1996/7.

Looking through a pile of prints recently, he could pick out players from decades back, from both the Canucks and visitors. Phil Maloney, Gump Worsley, Willie O'Ree — he's got action shots of them all.

He shot with a Speed Graphic in the old days, a camera that was technically limited but produced awesome photos. Especially when the players weren't wearing helmets or masks.

"You could see the expression on their face," he said. "Hockey in those days wasn't as fast — it's twice as fast today."

Bower is a bit of a pack rat — he kept prints and clippings of his photos when they ran in the paper. Which makes for a one-of-a-kind Canucks photo archive — the paper usually didn't keep game photos, particularly the larger 11-by-14 prints he favoured.

Rogers Hometown Hockey will be coming to North Vancouver on March 14 and 15. The "family-friendly hockey celebration" will be held at The Shipyards district at the foot of Lonsdale on the North Van waterfront.

The Polygon Gallery is also at the foot of Lonsdale, and decided to do a Canucks photo show in tandem with Hometown Hockey, starting March 7. They're going to be using old Sun and Province photos, and this week, curators Diane Evans and Justin Ramsey went through Bower's cache.

There are some incredible shots, such as goalie George Gardner spreading his arms like an eagle in flight, a dejected Dale Tallon on his knees in the Canucks goal after they've been scored on, and former Canucks owner Coley Hall posing shirtless with Dennis Ververgaert in 1973.

"Ververgaert was the first draft choice of the Canucks, and Coley Hall was the owner," Bower explains. "Coley said 'You guys aren't as tough as we used to be' and took his shirt off to match him at the press conference."



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Coley would have been 67 at the time, Verregaert was 20. But their physique was similar — and Hall was a renowned tough guy. When he was asked to testify on behalf of Canucks majority owner Tom Scallen after Scallen was charged with theft, Hall reportedly said “let him rot in jail.”

Bower started off taking Canucks photos at the Forum, at a time when the rink was surrounded by wire mesh, not Plexiglas. The lighting was dim, so you had to use a flash, which meant you had to be close to the action to get anything.

In order to get a photo without the wire, the photographers cut a little box in the wire near the net, which you could pull out when you wanted to take a photo.

“You opened a wire hole with a square window and put the camera through and shot with a flash, strobe,” he said.

“I got hit once. Gordie Howe hit me, right in the arm. He shot the puck and it went right through the hole. He came right over, ‘Are you all right?’ I said ‘It’s not too bad.’ He said ‘Well it wasn’t one of my hard shots!’”

Bower has mounted several shows of his Sun pix since he retired. On Feb. 5 at 7 p.m. he’ll be teaming up with North Shore News photographer Mike Wakefield for a talk on Shooting The North Shore at the West Vancouver Memorial Library.

One of Bower’s best shots shows goalie Dunc Wilson sprawled on the ice, snow covering his mask.

“A player had sprayed ice all over his mask when he came in on him, and when you looked in he had a mask covered with snow,” said Bower.

“That made the picture. I didn’t even know I had it, it’s a dark room special.”

By that he means that he shot rapid-fire photos and then discovered the snow in one of the frames. He was able to capture it thanks to his invention, hooking a camera up inside the net.

He triggered it with a doorbell.

“You know how a doorbell makes a ring? Well that went to the camera (via a wire under the ice), it made the motor work. There was no infrared. You had to run it by juice, follow me?”

It took a bit of talking to let the Canucks use his net-cam.

“I had it arranged to go in the net with (coach) Harry Neale, but he said (goalie Richard Brodeur) was pretty reluctant about it,” he recounts.

“I said ‘it’s a major thing’. He said ‘Well, OK.’ But as soon as they finished the national anthem, (Brodeur) took his stick and plucked my camera out of the net.”

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1173951 Vancouver Canucks

Demko stays sharp in the shadows with goal to hone role as best backup

Ed Willes

Here’s the easy part: Thatcher Demko wants to become a No. 1 goalie in the NHL.

Now here’s the tough part: Demko’s ambition represents a complex equation that has something to do with his ability and a lot to do with any number of variables beyond his control.

His situation might change as early as this off-season with Jacob Markstrom’s contract negotiation. It might change in 2021 with the Seattle expansion draft. It might even be further down the road before a team weighs all the factors and decides Demko is their guy.

By then, who knows where the Canucks’ backup will be in his career? It’s all a little unsettling and that uncertainty can fog the mind if you let it. But Demko, who has a maturity that belies his 24 years, copes by breaking things down to their simplest terms.

Practices are his games. There just aren’t 17,000 people watching him as he goes about his work.

“For me it’s taking the mentality of being game-ready in practices,” Demko says. “Obviously it’s not a switch you can just turn on when you get the call. You have to have it going every day. I think it’s going to help me in the long run.”

Makes sense. It’s helped him in the short run.

“I know I can play at this level,” he continues. “For me right now, it’s a learning role and a development role and just being a good teammate. I’ve always seen myself as a supportive, positive guy and I think this year that’s my role.”

Even if that can change with the snap of the fingers.

In this, his first full season as the Canucks’ backup, Demko has served notice he’s one of the NHL’s emerging young goalies. True, his goals-against average and save percentage don’t jump out at you, but the truest measure of a backup is his won-loss record and Demko is 10-5-1 in the 17 games he’s played to date.

As for his future workload, that’s another one of those variables, but if there were any questions about coach Travis Green’s confidence in Demko they were answered when he gave him the net for Monday’s 3-1 win over the visiting St. Louis Blues.

The Canucks also have five back-to-backs between now and the end of the season starting with this weekend in, first, Brooklyn, then Carolina. That means Demko will get his games down the stretch.

What he does with those starts might determine the Canucks’ final place in the standings.

“I like goalies who stop the puck,” Green says. “I don’t like the ones who don’t quite as much. We’ve got two guys we really believe in. It makes the decision easier.”

The Markstrom-Demko tandem, in fact, has been the foundation on which the Canucks have built their season. It’s difficult to know where, precisely, they rate among all goaltending duos around the NHL but one thing is certain: There are few teams that rely on their goalies to the extent the Canucks rely on Markstrom and Demko.

Markstrom’s season has been covered extensively in this space and others and he turned in another gem in San Jose on Wednesday night, stopping 38 of 40 shots in a 5-2 Canucks win.

Demko, meanwhile, has allowed three goals or fewer in 12 of his 16 starts, including nine when he allowed two or less. There have been a couple of stinkers in there, most notably an 8-6 loss in Pittsburgh when he surrendered seven, inflating his save percentage and goals against in the process.

But he’s also one of five NHL backups with less than 20 games who are double digits in wins.

“We help each other and we push other,” Markstrom says of Demko. “At the same time I’m a competitor and he’s a competitor. We both want to play but there’s only one net out there.

“It’s not his fault if he isn’t playing. It’s the coach’s fault and my fault.”



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Still, Demko doesn't take it personally. He knows what his role entails. He also knows the only way to achieve his career goals is through success in that role, and if he ever forgets, goalie coach Ian Clark is there to remind him.

"Because you're not playing as regularly and rhythmically as the starter, you have to have a certain mentality," Clark says. "It's a bit of a cliché for backup goalies, but your practices are your games. That's where you build confidence because that's the activity you're getting.

"All he can do is keep grinding and growing his game mentally, structurally, athletically. He's made a nice step in those regards."

So he's getting better. He's also working cheaply this season and next — just over a million per — and that's part of that complicated equation.

Markstrom is heading into unrestricted free agency this summer. Demko becomes an RFA a year later. With their cap challenges, it doesn't figure the Canucks can afford to pay Markstrom like a No. 1 and pay Demko like an elite backup.

There are some difficult decisions waiting for both the organization and the two players. But they also lie in the future.

In the meantime there are all those practices for Demko.

"It's my first full year and I'm just embracing that," he says. "My expectations are a little higher. I just want to keep getting better and make sure I'm consistently giving my team a chance to win."

For now, that's enough.

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1173952 Vancouver Canucks

Comet Bailey gets Canucks' call to inject some banging, make his mark

Patrick Johnston

NEW YORK CITY — "Can we stop at the next gas station?" is a familiar cry for a driver of any vehicle to hear. Often it's a kid asking a parent to pull over because they need to use the bathroom.

In the case of Justin Bailey and Zack MacEwen on Thursday, it was because they had just been called up by the Vancouver Canucks from the Utica Comets and the two forwards needed to jump off the team bus.

The Comets were just over an hour into a six-hour bus trip to Cleveland — the Canucks' AHL players were en route to play the Monsters twice this weekend — when the two lanky forwards got the call that it was time to head back to the NHL.

The next available exit was not a gas station, but a rest stop just west of Syracuse, N.Y., where the players pulled their hockey gear and suitcases off the bus. Then they found an Uber to drive them back to Utica where they repacked and hopped into a car the Canucks had hired to take them to the Big Apple, a four-hour drive.

"Obviously that was a pretty decent call to get," Bailey said with a smile Friday after his first regular-season practice with the Canucks at Chelsea Piers on the west side of Manhattan.

Bailey, who stands 6-foot-4 but is best known for his blazing speed, has been a key contributor to the Comets' success this season, who at 25-17-2-2 sit third in the AHL's North Division. The team has scored 162 goals this season, the second-most in the AHL, and 24 of those goals have come off Bailey's stick, tying him for the team lead with Reid Boucher.

Nine of those goals came via three hat tricks inside a week last month, the first of which came with Canucks GM Jim Benning in attendance. The scoring touch had a lot to do with good luck, Bailey said.

"It was a fun week that week with scoring a few hat tricks there ... It was helping the team win and at the end of day that's what I'm trying to do on a nightly basis," he said.

"Obviously you want to be as detailed as you can when (Benning's) around, but at the same time it was just another game. But I was happy that I was able to get a hat trick with him in the building, for sure."

He has been called up by the Canucks this time not to be a scorer. He'll be counted on to be a banger, an energy player on the fourth line. And he knows it. He's played 63 games in the NHL for the Buffalo Sabres and Philadelphia Flyers during the past four seasons, scoring five goals in that span.

"For me it's making sure that I'm doing the role that I've been brought here to do. I think in the past when I was a little bit younger, 20, 21, I went from being a guy in the minors that's relied on to score a lot and was able to have a little bit of a bigger leash and then came up here and tried to do the same things.

"Coming up here at 24 from communicating with the coaching staff, you know, having a clear vision of what they want me to do and what things they expect from me on a nightly basis and just going out there and executing that."

Bailey added: "You make adjustments. I think when I went to Philly, I think I played that fourth-line role pretty well and that was a team that was pushing for the playoffs. So, you know, making sure I've taken these experiences I've had over the last four years of pro and making sure that I'm dialled in, ready to go."

Bailey and MacEwen were called up to the big club after Tyler Motte suffered an undisclosed upper-body injury during Thursday's game in San Jose after being hit into the boards by Sharks defenceman Erik Karlsson.

Motte left the ice in obvious discomfort. Canucks head coach Travis Green said he wasn't dealing with a head injury but wouldn't say anything beyond that. It appeared Motte may have damaged his shoulder or collarbone area. Whatever the injury, Motte returned to Vancouver and is being evaluated by the medical staff.

Antoine Roussel also missed Friday's practice in Manhattan, but Green said it was just a "maintenance day" for the winger and that he expected him to play on the weekend against the Islanders and Carolina Hurricanes.

MacEwen skated in Roussel's spot on left wing on the third line, with Adam Gaudette at centre and Brock Boeser on right wing. Bailey was the extra forward, with Tim Schaller sliding into Motte's spot on left wing on the fourth line. Green said it was possible that Bailey could get into one of the games on the weekend.

"Bailey, it's good to get him up here and have a look at him in practice. He's having a good year down there. Big guy, fast, we might see him on the weekend as well. We'll know more (Saturday)," Green said.

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Canucks at 50: End of the road for Vancouver's Little Lost Rocket

Staff Reporter



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Columnists Jim Taylor and Tony Gallagher weighed in on the exit of by-then disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure to the Florida Panthers in January 1999

After a long holdout and many rumoured trades, disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure was finally traded on Jan. 17, 1999. The circumstances of him leaving town are still resented by some Canucks fans to this day. Reaction at the time was that the Canucks didn't get enough back in return.

Columnist Jim Taylor had a trademark take on the whole holdout/trade saga:

In the end, the Pavel Bure trade was like bad sex: much panting and endless foreplay followed by "You finished?"

Vancouver Canuck fans, who've waited so long for some sort of climax, there'll be little doubt who got, uh, the worst of the deal.

Essentially, it swaps one of hockey's premier scorers for a tough, free-wheeling defenceman (Bure for Ed Jovanovski), shuffles bit players (defencemen Bret Hedican and junior Brad Ference to Florida; veteran centre Dave Gagner, junior winger Mike Brown, and goalie prospect Kevin Weekes to Vancouver) and swaps draft picks, Florida's first-round for Vancouver's third either this year or next, Florida's option.

To people who bought their season tickets anticipating another year of the electrifying Bure, that's not going to be nearly enough.

Thus ends, for now, the Tale of the Little Lost Rocket.

Pavel's much-speculated secret reason for demanding a trade is out (he was upset because management never supported him when it was suggested that he's threatened not to play in the playoffs), coach Mike Keenan has given the trade his blessing, and Canuck fans are now free to get back to criticizing the Mark Messier deal.

But fear not. This is Vancouver, where the other shoe doesn't always drop but is always teetering on the tip of the heel. There will be another crisis on which the customers can chew.

Whether they liked it or not, they will find at least short-term relief in the Bure trade. Bad sex is better than no sex at all.

Tony Gallagher was the first to speak to Bure to get his reaction to the move, which to this day is somewhat cloaked in shadows and innuendo.

When Pavel Bure put down the telephone and told his mother Tanya he'd finally been traded, her emotions broke.

Truth be told, so did those of the Russian Rocket.

"My mom cried for a half an hour she was so happy," said Bure from his apartment in Moscow after learning he was part of the biggest deal in the history of both the Vancouver Canucks and Florida Panthers. "She cried because she said she was so happy for me. She said, 'I knew it was the hardest time of your life even though you had been strong through everything. I was so worried about you and I knew you were worried.'

"And it was very tough to be sitting for five months like that. I really missed hockey."

Mother and son headed to the local bar for a quick celebration hoist before Bure returned home for a short night, a result of his trek back to North America.

Bure was asked about his reasons for wanting to leave but he again chose the high road, even though it's becoming abundantly clear GM Brian Burke merely scratched the surface when he volunteered his understanding of the Rocket's reasons.

"I want to tell the people of Vancouver that I have nothing against the city or the people I know there. I have many friends and they will always be my friends. My problems were all with management and I will probably tell everyone what they were sometime soon. I don't know when. But I love the city and I want to make sure everyone knows that.

"When I went public telling I wanted to be traded, I was still living in Vancouver remember. And people came up to me and every single person said, 'Good luck wherever you go, we love you.' Nobody was mad at me in person, although some people in the media try to make them mad. I had seven great years there and I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart."

Bure was so elated with the news he forgot he would be joining former teammates Kirk McLean and Sean Burke with the Panthers.

"Oh yeah, he's there," said Bure of McLean. "Who's the other goalie? Oh right, of course. It should be pretty good there. The travel is a big thing for me. It will be a lot easier. They are in the same time zone as almost all of their games, up and down the coast. I'm looking forward to it.

"I missed the game so much. I love to score so much, to play in front of the people and hear the cheers. They give me so much feeling when I play. I have been practising, but playing in the games is the fun for me. I am happy to be playing again."

Bure was so excited he didn't much seem to care about the fact he will almost certainly soon be signing a long-term contract which will pay him close to \$50 million US over the five years following this one. With bonuses, that could like go much higher. It's expected he will be paid "just" \$3 million US this shortened season. He was trying to get his mother a ticket to Calgary to stay with brother Valeri for a few days before she visits Miami.

"I guess after Calgary, maybe she'll be ready for some warm weather."

With those words, the greatest player ever to have played for the Canucks, took his leave.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 02.01.2020

1173954 Vancouver Canucks

Self-critical and 'rusty' after knee surgery, how Antoine Roussel can give the Canucks a huge second-half boost

By Harman Dayal Jan 31, 2020 9

Just two or three decades ago, an ACL tear could have represented a career-ending injury.

That isn't the case any more thanks to remarkable developments in medical technology and rehabilitation, but the road to recovery remains a gruelling, arduous process.

Six to nine months is the normal timeline to get back to action following a torn ACL, but the step from feeling healthy to playing your best hockey is a challenge that can span months after you've returned to the lineup.

Ask Antoine Roussel who had knee surgery in late March, and he'll tell you that playing games upon returning was significantly more difficult than the eight months of rehab.

"The hardest part was starting to play again and playing my hard game," Roussel told The Athletic on Tuesday. "It's taking some time to get back to a decent level.

"I don't think I've reached my level from last year yet.

"It takes time, I read guys like Corey Perry came back from surgery last year and said he felt like the whole year was tougher. I don't think I'm in that trend, but it still feels like a build-up."

From a surface level point of view, you could be convinced into believing that the rust hasn't detrimentally affected his play. Roussel may not be repeating the 39-point pace he produced at in a career-year last season,



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but the five goals and eight points he's registered through 23 games are almost identical to his career scoring rate.

Peel the layers of his performance back deeper, however, and it's clear that the subtle ways in which he's influenced his team's even-strength control of games have eroded.

Ever since he's emerged as a full-time NHL player, Roussel has shown the ability to tilt the ice in his team's favour. As a Dallas Star, he finished each season with a shot and scoring chance share comfortably above 50 percent — his two-way presence is easily the most underappreciated part of his game. The 30-year-old French native established that same utility in a Canuck uniform last year. Of the seven forwards that played at least 100 minutes with Roussel in 2018-19, all but one saw a significant improvement in their ability to outshoot and out-chance the opposition.

The greatest beneficiary of Roussel's two-way plaudits last season was Bo Horvat, who saw a huge boost in his performance whenever the 5-foot-11 winger joined his line.

Roussel's uncharacteristically struggled in that department this season — the Canucks controlling just 45 percent of shot attempts and a paltry 38.1 percent of scoring chances. Expected to prop up Adam Gaudette who's still got a ways to go in rounding out his 200-foot game, Roussel has instead hurt a third line that has been caved in its defensive zone and lost the territorial battle by a large margin.

"I had no legs for ten games," Roussel said bluntly. "I was rusty, my pop wasn't there and then you slowly get back there and I'm at game 22 now. So 12 games where I felt pretty decent, I'm just trying to build on that."

Roussel's self-assessment may sound very harsh, but there's a lot of truth to his timeline. In the first 10 games he suited up for, Roussel controlled less than 40 percent of shot attempts and scoring chances. Since the ten-game mark, he owns the best shot attempt differential (49.4 percent share) of any forward not on Bo Horvat's line and while his 42.5 percent expected goal share would suggest he's still got a ways to go in driving quality chances, it represents a notable improvement nonetheless.

When you think about the strengths of Roussel's game, it makes sense why his even-strength impact is so heavily contingent on the "pop" in his game. The fiery grinder succeeds as a tenacious disrupter on the forecheck who forces turnovers and recovers loose pucks. He can use his skating, smart stick and physicality to wreak havoc and win battles.

Look at the explosiveness with which he's able to hunt the puck back in a couple of clips from a game last year, for example.

Couple Roussel's puck pursuit with his underrated knack for making plays in transition and you understand why he can be so effective at pushing and keeping possession in the offensive zone.

By that same token, Roussel's success in this area is dependent on his north-south speed game and with his knee not letting him hit that extra gear, it's been a tough go in his first 23 games.

Refinding that valuable trait could be critical down the stretch.

We don't know, for instance, how long Loui Eriksson will be able to sustain his current level of play on Horvat's line. If Eriksson's form slips down the stretch, a peak Roussel would give Travis Green another viable option to throw alongside Horvat in a matchup role. Alternatively, if the fiery winger stays with Gaudette, he'd be a big help for a third-line that hasn't been feasting on the soft matchups like they ideally would be.

In any event, with each day that passes, Roussel's knee is becoming and more comfortable being pushed to the limit — something that directly relates to how well he drives play at even-strength. If he can bounce back into being close to the player he was last year, it'd be a significant boon in adding another middle-six quality forward to the Canucks' talent pool.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.01.2020

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Inside the Canucks' warmup rituals: From half moons to bathroom breaks in unison, players are creatures of habit

By Thomas Drance Jan 31, 2020 29

The NHL is "the show," and that's intended literally.

Professional hockey is an entertainment product: a game is a live performance and everything backstage is tightly choreographed. There's even an official run of show, called a time sheet. It's drawn up by game presentation departments around the league and approved by the NHL, and it keeps the show flowing predictably for everyone from the team captain, to the head coach, to the colour commentator, to the mascot.

And ruling over it all, dictating all of the moving parts on an NHL game day: a little red digital clock, embedded high on the wall of every dressing room.

On a standard game day with a 7 p.m. puck drop, off-ice officials set that clock to run for 60 minutes at 5:45 p.m., so that it hits 00:00 at exactly 6:45 p.m. — the precise moment the warmup skate ends.

The time on that little red digital clock is the same countdown fans see on the Jumbotron and it's displayed prominently in every dressing room. With 16 minutes remaining on the little red digital clock, the warmup skate begins.

Because of muscle memory, superstition and a strict adherence to routine, you can be pretty sure where every player is — if you know their routines — and exactly what they're doing in the leadup to the warmup skate based on what that little red clock reads.

Pre-skate routines

"Everybody has a routine, every player," said Canucks captain Bo Horvat. "So if a player tells you he's not superstitious, he's lying to you."

That routine can include two touch soccer. It can be a specific, well-thought-out mix of activities designed to sharpen reflexes. It can be listening to music on headphones and stretching. It can be eating something, having the same exchange with a teammate, or even relieving themselves before putting on equipment.

That last one, hitting the toilet at a predictable moment in time on a game day, is a pretty common theme, which makes sense when you consider the gear involved.

"It's always the same," noted Canucks defenceman Troy Stecher. "Guys are going to the bathroom at the exact same time. You go in the gym and it's the same four guys in the gym every time, and they have different routines, but they're doing the exact same stretch. It's kind of weird."

Jay Beagle is one of those guys who takes a timed bathroom break, immediately prior to going down the tunnel.

"At 17:30 on the red clock, I'm taking a pee," he said. "Almost every time. Then coming back, I've got my helmet and my gloves and we go."

Another Canuck, who declined to be identified, shared his pregame ritual: "After warmups I go take a leak and when I do, the same teammate is taking a shit. Every single time."

Whether the habits are born of superstition or routine depends on the player, but the goal is the same: get ready to be at peak performance for puck drop.

"I'm a guy that thinks about it. I put a lot of preparation into my warmups," said Beagle. "I know exactly where I'm going to be at certain times, to



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make sure that I'm on schedule to get to where I want to be and feel the best for the game."

Tanner Pearson has an unusual habit of getting in some pregame pushups. "I come into the room after soccer, probably around 6ish. Roughly 44:00 on the red clock," he said. "I just do 20 of them. It started last year. Patric Hornqvist did them, so I started doing them. You do so much stuff to get the legs going, so I do it to get the upper-body going, get the core engaged."

In the minutes before warmups, players put on what remains of their gear. Your average beer leaguer would be astonished by how quickly some NHL players are able to gear up and down, like Superman in a phone booth.

Some get their equipment on relatively early. Some mill about in the tunnel, pumping up their teammates, and others just hang out in the room.

"I'm always sitting right before warmups," said Elias Pettersson. "And when the time comes at 16:15 or so, I just sort of walk out. A lot of guys are waiting in the hallway, or standing, but I'm just chilling."

And if the player is one who customarily takes warmup skate without a helmet, commonly referred to as "going no bucky," he may even be in front of a mirror doing his hair.

"I have to touch up my hair, but just water," said Pearson. "Guys who put gel on are crazy. You start sweating and it gets in your eyes."

"I might wet it, but I don't put any product in it," Tyler Myers added. "I know sometimes guys do, but I won't name names."

"I'm putting hair gel in my hair before warmups," admitted Canucks forward J.T. Miller.

Among Vancouver's skaters, it's almost exclusively veteran players who don't wear helmets during warmups. Miller, Pearson, Edler, Horvat, Stecher, Myers, Chris Tanev and Brandon Sutter are most likely to "go no bucky," although some additional skaters may ditch the helmets for a game in their hometown.

According to some of those veteran players, the Canucks don't have a standard rule for who can and can't take the warmup skate without a helmet. A younger guy "going no bucky" is more likely to hear about it, though.

"Maybe there is a rule," Miller said, "but we don't talk about it. Guys want to go no bucket, I don't give a shit. Guys are going to chirped for it, but that's part of the game."

Still other veterans insist on wearing a helmet because, in their own words, they might otherwise be a genuine safety risk.

"I wear a helmet every time because I'm a hazard out there," Beagle said. "I've been called a hazard by many people in warmups, because I like to buzz around."

Among the players who hang out in the hallway early, meanwhile, there's a variety of standard handshakes and routines. When Tim Schaller is in the lineup, for example, he and Adam Gaudette do a vertical version of the Chandler and Joey cool guy handshake which is followed by Gaudette and Beagle doing a couple of shoulder checks.

"We do a little handshake, and then he usually runs his shoulder into my chin," said Beagle of that particular tradition. "Gets me fired up."

Heading out onto the ice

There is an order to all things in these pregame preparations, particularly during the warmup skate itself, which can seem like a strange beast to onlookers.

Some of that order is dictated by seniority. Some of it by superstition. And some of it by institutional memory, going back decades.

Longtime Canucks defender Alexander Edler, for example, is responsible for watching the little red clock as it ticks down to 16:00 for the start of warmups. Shortly before it does, he's responsible for calling out that it's "time to go" to his teammates. As such, he's the first skater onto the ice for the warmup skate after the starting goaltender.

Edler does this every game day when he's healthy and in the lineup (if he's out, the responsibility is assumed by Jake Virtanen), and it's an institutional relic dating back to Kevin Bieksa, who is now retired.

"Bieksa used to do it and he said, why don't you do it," Edler explained. "So I said, 'OK'."

"I assigned Eagle to do it because I told him he needed a responsibility," Bieksa recalled to The Athletic via text message. "True story."

By the time Canucks skaters filter onto the ice, they do so in a very predictable order. Of late, while the team has been winning and relatively healthy and the lineup fixed, it's tended to look like this in chronological order: starting goaltender, Edler, Virtanen, Myers, Roussel, Pearson, Miller, Tyler Motte, Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson, Loui Eriksson, Gaudette, Beagle, Oscar Fantenberg, Quinn Hughes, Tanev, Sutter, Bo Horvat and then the backup netminder.

Even in this, there's a legacy of years gone, co-mingled with superstitious habit, that shapes the order.

"I always go last coming out of the tunnel because when I started, I didn't know where to go," Horvat says. "So I just went last."

"The older guys had the place where they went, so I just filled in where I could and that was last. So I just went last. I didn't have any warmup duties, which is good. I hate picking pucks out of the net."

At the start of warmups and for the first couple of minutes players — including goaltenders — just circle the ice surface getting a few shots in and perhaps sending teammates some backhand saucer passes. Even in this, some players have a very specific routine they follow.

"I take three pucks from the right side, three pucks from the left side," currently injured Canucks forward Josh Leivo told The Athletic back in late November. "Then I just mess around, pass and stuff. I shoot three and three, before I do anything else."

"First shot is high left, second shot I try go low post and in, third shot is clapper," said Tanner Pearson of his routine.

The half moon

This freeform portion of warmups tends to last for a couple of minutes. Occasionally a skater will greet a former teammate or a friend at centre ice, while others get into their stretches in the neutral zone. By about the 14-minute mark, Stecher goes and fishes the pucks out of the net for the first time in the warmup skate, and once he's finished the starting goaltender takes the net to take a few shots and feel the puck.

On every NHL team, there's a designated player who picks pucks out of the net during the warmup skate. This player functions like a waiter during the half moon, and essentially goes to clear pucks out of the net every couple of minutes during warmups.

In Vancouver, it's Stecher who does the digging. It's a job that fell to him when the Sedin twins, Henrik and Daniel, assigned him to do it after Alexandre Burrows was traded to the Ottawa Senators midway through the 2016-17 season. Prior to Burrows, Matt Cooke held down the job, and Burrows fell into it for a similar reason — he was young when the position was vacated, and someone had to do it.

Stecher doesn't mind the assignment. In fact, he takes pride in doing it well.

"My first couple of games my teammates were like, 'Let's go!' 'Let's go!' and I didn't know how to time it," Stecher said, laughing as he recalled the work he put into mastering his technique — which includes flattening his stick to get pucks out in bunches early in the warmup skate, and later passing 3-4 pucks out of the net at a time.



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The Richmond, B.C. native legitimately put study time into working on his technique, watching how other guys in the league did it and mastering his craft.

"I go flat stick and put them all in one big group," Stecher said. "I think it's way more efficient."

About a third of the way into the warmup skate, the Canucks — and all NHL teams — line up in the neutral zone and perform line rushes. This is a very basic pregame drill, a mock rush of sorts that players go through alongside their defence partner or linemates. It typically lasts for two or two-and-a-half minutes after which Stecher clears the net of pucks again and the players line up — in a very specific order — for the half moon.

The half moon, or horseshoe, is so-called because of how the players line up in an inverted U shape along the blue line, while Stecher (and then Virtanen) feed shooters the puck. Skaters take turns skating in and unleashing a shot on the starting goaltender, who tends to take at least five shots — though Jacob Markstrom will sometimes take eight or so.

Currently, Gaudette shoots first, then Motte. Miller goes third and always takes a slap shot. Pettersson is the fourth shooter.

"I always shoot it high glove," Pettersson said. "I always try to aim for the goalie's glove get them some reps."

After Pettersson, it's Edler. And this is where Stecher's work as a pass waiter in the half moon gets really detailed.

"Gauds and Millsy shoot kind of early, Petey shoots, and then Eddie," Stecher told The Athletic back in November, while Motte was still out of the lineup with injury.

"That's where my routine kicks off, I fire Eddie a bullet. Bennie, I throw him sauce. Virt and I do the same thing, we throw sauce to each other and catch it in our V-Triangle," Stecher continued, mimicking holding his feet together at his heels, with his two feet jetting out so that they form a V. "Then I sauce to Bo, who sometimes goes with the V, then I fire a bullet to Mysie. Then it's a soft little muffin to Boes!"

"And then when I move sides I always set a puck up close to the net and then I deke around it, I toe-drag around it and fire to Tanny. The last guy is usually Sutts, but since he's out right now it's usually Beags. I slide it under his stick, and then I stretch and Virt takes over from there."

Some players want these passes from Stecher in a specific way, but some of them aren't even aware of it. They're just used to the passes he delivers.

"I know Stechie fires me a pretty hard pass," Myers said of his spot in the half moon. "I might shoot one way or one spot, for a few games, then I might change it up. I don't worry too much about it."

While Myers doesn't worry about it too much, Horvat does. In fact, after playing around with the V-Triangle pass reception early on in the season, Horvat has become a convert. At the moment he never takes the pass from Stecher in the half moon without utilizing it.

"I saw Jake do it, I don't remember when I saw it," Horvat says, "But he kept doing it and we kept winning, and then he stopped doing it and we lost. Then I started doing it and I don't know, I've kind of kept going with it. Stech, I think, once gave me a shit pass and I kind of had to do it and then we won. So I had to keep doing it no matter how good or bad the pass was."

Horvat's also absolutely committed to taking the exact same shot every time.

"I always shoot blocker on the half moon," Horvat says. "100 percent of the time. Always, always, always."

"I know Bo is going to shoot blocker side and it's going to be a blocker save, and I'm already over there on that side so I have to get away from the rebound," Stecher says. "It's crazy, the routine is something you could do in your sleep."

Winding down

As the warmup winds down, a few players take power laps in the neutral zone. Other players send sauce to one another from either side of the ice. Lately, Virtanen and Roussel have been setting each other up for five one-timers from either face-off dot. Beagle — every game — always does a bench spray, which involves a significant hockey stop that he directs at the Canucks bench. It commonly serves to give a hefty snow shower to camera people and Canucks team staff.

It's at the point where Beagle noticed the other day when no one got caught in the spray:

NOBODY TO SPRAY. POOR BEAGLE. 🐕
PIC.TWITTER.COM/TANF30XUXB

— VANCOUVER #CANUCKS (@CANUCKS) JANUARY 15, 2020

"I sprayed the one guy really bad last game," said Beagle, laughing as he recalled an incident in early December. "I think he was a camera guy for Sportsnet. I've done it every game for 13 years and I've never felt bad, but I did that time."

And in all of this, of course, Canucks players will look for kids and fans in the crowd to give souvenir pucks to.

"If I see a sign that says something about me, I try to give that person or kid a puck," Pettersson said. "Some games there's been a lot of signs, so I can't give them all a puck, but I always really appreciate it."

"I like to watch the crowd and say hello to any people I may know, and some people I don't even know!" said Roussel.

Horvat has a set routine even for this. He always gives away three pucks to Canucks fans. No more, no less. And it seems he chooses which fans will get the pucks not based on signs or Horvat jerseys, but based on their location around the glass.

"I always put three pucks over the glass to the fans, in certain spot," Horvat says. "Not to certain fans, but I pick my three spots where I throw them and that's where I throw them. I try to stick to my same routine."

GOOD GUY BO HORVAT JUST WANTED TO GIVE THIS @CANUCKS FAN A PUCK, BUT THE NETTING IN PHILLY WASN'T MAKING IT EASY FOR HIM. 🤔 PIC.TWITTER.COM/NMBLHST4FD

— SPORTSNET (@SPORTSNET) NOVEMBER 26, 2019

With a couple of minutes remaining in warmups, Canucks skaters and the backup goaltender play a final game called "Last Puck" or "Final Puck" or "Two Minute Drill" depending on the player or the team in question. The game starts when Edler sends a bullet pass to Stecher in the neutral zone.

"I end up getting last puck, where you'll see Eddie fire it all the way to the red line and we'll play last puck."

The game pits an unlimited number of skaters versus the backup goalie, as Stecher takes a long distance shot from the neutral zone, which is usually saved, and then Canucks teammates crowd the goaltender and try to score from point blank range with jam plays, shots off of rebounds and other short-range shot types. Miller recently tried to score with a Michigan lacrosse move. The game doesn't end until the puck is in the back of the net.

Finally, the clock winds down to 00:00, the buzzer sounds, and the teams clear the ice. Prior to his injury, Leivo was always the last Canucks skater to leave the ice at the end of the warm-up skate. He'd stay out and set up three pucks by the Canucks bench, then try to bank pucks off of the far boards and into the net.

As with most things in the warmup, it worked once, and it just kind of stuck.



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"It was last year, I focused on banking the puck into the net at the end of warmups and I scored after," Leivo explained. "So that's what I do now and I'm sticking with it."

With warmup skate ended, the little red digital clock resets to 15:00 and counts down for the start of the show — which begins with the anthems, and not with puck drop itself — and Canucks players get back into the room and focus up for the game. It's at this point that the coaching staff will enter for a final chat and to read out the starting lineup (a task that differs from team to team, but is often outsourced to players or special guests).

Canucks head coach Travis Green isn't typically on the bench during the warmup skate. He's often in his office working, or having a coffee, or having a final strategic chat with his assistant coaches.

On some higher leverage game days, or in some more historic arena, he'll poke his head out and step onto the bench to get a feel for the atmosphere prior to the contest.

While players stick with a very specific routine pre-game, it's notable that Green doesn't remember what he used to do as a player. It's all a haze to him now, even as he remembers that he was very rigid about doing the same thing every game.

He also went "no bucky." It would've been a waste not to, what with the mullet he sported early on in his playing days.

"Wearing a helmet over that, it would've been a fine," the Canucks bench boss joked.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.01.2020

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Wheeler's 2020 NHL prospect pool rankings: No. 13 Vancouver Canucks

By Scott Wheeler Jan 31, 2020 59

Welcome to Scott Wheeler's 2020 rankings of every NHL organization's prospects. You can find the complete ranking and more information on the criteria here, as we count down daily from No. 31 to No. 1. The series, which includes evaluations and commentary from coaches and staff on more than 500 prospects, runs from Jan. 13 to Feb. 11.

This ranking is probably one of the stronger departures from the consensus throughout the series. That's true both in where the Canucks are ranked as a farm system overall (some would likely have them a few spots higher) and in the way their individual prospects are ranked (more on that below).

As a whole, the Canucks have proven to be one of the better drafting teams in recent memory. They've knocked a lot of top picks out of the park and they've mined lower rounds for talent and upside, hitting on several players.

While I'm higher than a lot of evaluators are on many of the Canucks' top prospects, I'm lower than most on the player most perceive as the organization's top prospect. Due to the recent graduations of Quinn Hughes, Adam Gaudette and Thatcher Demko, the pool has also begun to thin out a bit — something that's worth keeping an eye on seeing as they will also likely make the playoffs this year and lose their first-round pick in 2020 in the process.

Still, the Canucks boast one of the deeper prospect pools in the NHL, with intrigue at all three forward positions (though they certainly have less depth at centre than they do on the wing), some interesting D prospects and an intriguing goalie prospect. As I mentioned in Tuesday's look at the 16th-ranked Sabres prospect pool, the group of teams from No. 16 to No.

6 in the series are all tight. If all of the Canucks' top three prospects pan out, their outcomes will look more favourable than 13th in a few years.

1. Nils Högländer, LW, 19 (Rögle BK)

If you've followed my work, this probably doesn't come as a huge surprise to you. When I released my final ranking for the 2019 draft last May, Vasili Podkolzin landed at No. 17 and Hoglander ranked just one spot back at No. 18. A month later, I believed one was a bit of a reach and the other was a bit of a steal. But they've always been close for me. And while Podkolzin is five months younger than Hoglander, I would argue the latter has had a better year relative to their respective ages. That was certainly true at the world juniors (though that's not to say Podkolzin didn't have a good tournament because he did) and it's true with their club teams, where Hoglander has more consistently made plays at the pro level. Hoglander's puck skills, playmaking ability and touch around the slot are the first things that leap out (besides, maybe, that he's a little small). I'm most impressed with his footwork, though. Hoglander does a brilliant job changing pace to slow down, bait defenders and then burst back into stride to pass them. He's also explosive in and out of his edges, which helps him stop and start to lose opposing players and create some separation.

Watch here the way a stop-up forces the defender into a blow-by, giving Hoglander the opportunity to get set for his shot:

Or watch here, the way Hoglander opens up his right foot to carve to a better angle and drag the puck into his lead heel:

Or watch how Hoglander's ability to rely on his edges and remain balanced helps him create a second opportunity off his own rebound, here:

Hoglander is proof you don't have to be the fastest player on the ice to be one of the best skaters. I would like to see a little more discipline in his game (with and without the puck) but he's stronger than you expect a 5-foot-9 winger to be and all of the offensive tools are there. He's got what it takes to be a low-end 1LW or a high-end 2LW.

2. Vasili Podkolzin, RW/LW, 18 (SKA St. Petersburg)

Podkolzin, who played just a few shifts a night early on in the KHL season, has begun to make the most of increased opportunity of late, with points in three straight games while I write this. His game has always flashed a lot of pro qualities. He's big, he's physical, he's powerful, he's strong on pucks, he plays on the inside, he's a pain in the ass, he doesn't give up on plays and he's got great hands. My concern with his game has always been about his ability to slow the game down and process it. If he needs to beat a defender one-on-one, he often can. If he needs to fight his way to the net, he often can. If there's an available passing lane to an obvious target, he's talented enough to execute through seams. But he lacks an on-ice awareness, which contributes to a style of play that revolves around doing the first thing he sees, rather than opening up his sightlines to assess the zone and utilize his linemates. As a result, I often feel like he looks like he's doing more than he actually is. It makes him a bit of a weird prospect. Most top players have that inherent sense to their game but need to develop their skills to a pro level. He has the skill and I'm not sure you can teach the rest, though experience will certainly help. I have little doubt he's going to be a useful NHLer, my worry is just that he may not become a line-driving offensive threat and that's what you want at 10th overall. His skating, while powerful, also splays from the knees and needs some tweaking.

3. Tyler Madden, C, 20 (Northeastern University)

Madden is another in a long line of Canucks success stories in the last few years. He has shown, despite lacking size, strength and a pull-away gear to his straightaway stride, that skill can solve a lot of those concerns. Northeastern, who'd just dealt with a similar player in Blackhawks forward Dylan Sikura, have proven they can help those players succeed in a heavy college hockey game, too. This year, Madden has built on his slick puck skills and superb cross-ice vision to add a goal scoring element to his game, taking him from one of college



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hockey's best freshmen to one of college hockey's best players. When he's got the puck, he's capable of making plays out of nothing, whether that's with a creative pass through traffic, a dangle in tight or his ability to lose bigger defenders with a quick cut. He will face some challenges along the wall at the college level — and might be asked to play the wing — but he can run a power play and make things happen at even strength, both of which I suspect will translate. And though I wouldn't say he's a dominant defensive player, Madden's versatile enough to be trusted in all situations.

4. Olli Juolevi, LHD, 21 (Utica Comets)

You've probably heard me say — or write — this before but I really do believe Juolevi has NHL games under his belt by now were it not for the knee injury. He's not athletic enough to lose forecheckers with his speed or dynamic enough to score many goals from the point but Juolevi is unfazed by pressure when he has the puck and he's an excellent outlet passer, both of which are assets for most of the game's modern puck-moving defencemen. He can also make high-to-low plays in the offensive zone or slide down the wall to fire a pass east-to-west for a backdoor play. Though he's not an overly physical defender for his size, Juolevi also does a nice job gapping up with smooth footwork, disrupting passing lanes with his instincts and outsmarting opposing players along the wall. I still think he may become a contributing second-pairing defenceman.

5. Kole Lind, RW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Last year, as Lind struggled as an AHL rookie, I told a number of diehard Canucks fans in my life to be patient. Part of that was a belief in his tools, part of it was probably me not wanting to give up on a player I have been high on since his draft year. But Lind has begun to make true on his talent level this season. He has always had a dangerous shot in tight (he's not the kind of player who's so gifted that he's going to overpower goalies from a distance but he's a natural scorer who still has more to show there). This year, though, we're seeing some other elements of his game take steps. In my viewings, I've been impressed with how engaged he is in board battles, something that was a strength of his game at the junior level but faded a bit last year when he looked unusually timid. Lind is at his best when he's playing an honest, north-south game. He's not going to light up the highlight reel but he can make plays through holes, he's a fast skater and he doesn't really lack any one offensive quality. I still think he's the kind of player who projects to slide up and down an NHL lineup, capable of playing a depth role on a good team or supporting higher in the lineup as more of a complementary piece.

6. Jack Rathbone, LHD, 20 (Harvard University)

After a strong freshman year at Harvard, Rathbone has continued to show real promise as a sophomore. There have never been concerns with his talent level or his skating, both of which look easy for him on the ice. Rathbone's one of the smoother defenders in the NCAA, using four-way mobility to escape pressure, create for himself or his teammates from the point or shake past opposing players through the neutral zone. And while he's definitely on the smaller end for an NHL defenceman, I don't think it's going to be a major obstacle. He defends well with his feet, sticking with opposing puck carriers down the ice or winning races to loose pucks along the wall before he ever has to engage physically. Due to his size, he's not going to be the kind of player who jumps straight from the NCAA to the NHL following a monster junior or senior year. Just don't be surprised if he becomes an impact guy at the AHL level and gives the Canucks no choice but to audition him. Though size is still more of a roadblock for defenders than it is for forwards and some teams don't want to have too many little guys on their back end, preventing opportunities from worthy players in the process, that's not at the front of my mind when I evaluate a player. Rathbone's good.

7. Jett Woo, RHD, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

After a slow start, Woo has looked more and more like the player who dominated the WHL and earned an entry-level contract last year. I wouldn't worry too much about the dip in his production. Some of that is driven by a trade to a less talented team. Some of it is driven by the fact that he has spent most of the season playing behind Flyers prospect

Egor Zamula in offensive situations. Woo is a throwback, playing a physical, simple brand of hockey that makes him hard to play against. He's also an elite athlete, which means when he hits, it hurts (it also means he's a powerful skater). While it means his coaches have to live with the odd penalty, they're usually OK with it because he brings an element most teams covet — and many lack. Woo's probably not going to play at the top of an NHL lineup, nor will he likely run a power play unit, but he can play tough minutes at even strength, move the puck up ice with leading passes and penalty kill. He's also just a good, hard-working player. I'm a fan.

8. Petrus Palmu, LW, 22 (JYP)

Palmu is tiny. Maybe even too tiny to play in the NHL no matter how talented he is. But his tininess also helps him have skills that few NHL players have. It helps him sneak past hits and side-step defenders as a carrier, a skill that he uses equally well off both wings. Watch the way he spins to the inside on his edges, using a sharp radius to cut to the middle off the right wing:

Now take note of the way he almost jumps to the inside to blow past another pinching defender on the left wing here:

Smaller players also have a stickhandling and coordination advantage because they're lower to the puck, offering them more control. That's at play in small areas, where Palmu excels at using his feet to kick pucks to his stick and quickly make a play:

While bigger players can leverage their length to generate torque on their sticks, smaller players tend to use their shorts sticks to lean off one foot without throwing themselves off balance in their range of motion through their shot:

If Palmu lacked any of these skills, he wouldn't be on a list like this. But he doesn't. He has what you'd hope a player his size has. He thinks the game one step ahead as a passer, even when chances on net for himself are there:

He executes tape-to-tape saucer passes most players don't:

Does that mean he's a lock to play in the NHL? Of course not. But I do think he has a lot more to show than he did in the AHL last season (and/or than he was given the opportunity to ...).

9. Michael DiPietro, G, 20 (Utica Comets)

I debated having DiPietro lower on this list after subpar play with the Ottawa 67's spilled into a mediocre start to his AHL career (though he was decent during Ottawa's playoff run). That, coupled with DiPietro's 6-foot frame, is enough to at least raise some questions. But he's also young, the Comets don't do a great job protecting their goalies from high danger chances (at least not this year) and he's got a lot of tools, led by rare athletic ability, that help him make tough post-to-post saves or go low-to-high to challenge shooters. I've seen some saveable pucks sneak through DiPietro this season but I'm willing to give him a pass on pedestrian play this season given it's his first full year at the pro level and he's got an extended track record of solid play.

10. Guillaume Brisebois, LHD, 22 (Utica Comets)

Brisebois has intrigued me dating back to his draft year in 2015 when I was with McKeen's Hockey as a bit of a case study in what a modern shutdown defenceman might look like. Though he's not huge, he plays the way I want a quote-unquote safe player to play. His idea of safe is a quick head-man pass, instead of a chip off the glass or a shot through traffic instead of a ring around the boards. He makes smart plays that produce a result, instead of those that just get the puck out or in. He's also a good skater for his size, which helps him snuff out plays in the neutral zone, gap up against fast skaters or pivot back on dumps without getting caught flatfooted. He's probably not going to play higher than the third pairing at the next level but he can be relied upon in tough minutes and I think he's just talented enough to potentially progress.

11. William Lockwood, RW, 21 (University of Michigan)



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Lockwood was a good junior who became a good college player. Today, he's probably a cut above good college player while also serving as captain in his senior year. He has always been a well-rounded two-way winger who can finish off plays, hang onto the puck as a carrier when he needs to and play with pace. He's a little on the smaller end, though, and he hasn't progressed quite like you'd probably hope offensively, which limits his upside. I could see him becoming a very good AHL player who is a little bit of a tweener. The good news is that he's got the versatility you want in a depth player, so he's not a top-six or bust type.

12. Arvid Costmar, C, 18 (Linköping HC)

I watched Linköping's junior team play a fair amount last season but I always came away more impressed by Costmar's teammate, Nikola Pasic, than I did by him. Costmar was physical, he played hard in his own zone and he showed flashes of some impressive skills but he never really took over a game. So his dominance at the SuperElit level this year has surprised me a little, even if it hasn't translated at either pro level. Costmar looked unstoppable in one recent viewing with the junior team and he has a July birthday so he could just be playing catch-up. Costmar has more talent than I gave him credit for, I think. When he plays fast, he can make a lot of plays as both a scorer and a passer. He's not going to be a primary carrier on a line, per se, but he's got some versatility to his game.

13. Aidan McDonough, LW, 20 (Northeastern University)

I often worry about players who don't join their programs as true freshmen because if they stumble out of the gate or get a coach who leans heavily on veterans, it can mean that they don't work their way into more prominent roles until they're 23 or 24. If you want to remain a legitimate prospect and you're going to enter college at 20 instead of 18, you have to show that you look more like a sophomore or a junior than a freshman. Otherwise, it's hard to climb out of it. Nobody wants to start their pro career at 24. In a way, it can put more pressure on someone like McDonough, who needed to grow into his 6-foot-3 frame after a huge growth spurt. It took him time to remodel his game and build confidence with the puck again. He has looked good this season, though, playing at a point per game pace while chipping in offensively in a variety of ways. He's not all that physical for his size but he can make plays off the rush and he's got a decent top speed (his first couple of steps need some work). Keep an eye on him.

14. Linus Karlsson, C/RW, 20 (BIK Karlskoga)

After an uninspiring post-draft season and a trade from the Sharks to the Canucks for Jonathan Dahlen (a much better player, in my opinion), Karlsson has put together a nice follow-up campaign as an impact player in the second tier Allsvenskan. He's got a dangerous shot (wrist and one-timer), his playmaking has improved and he has always played a well-rounded, net-driven game in the middle of the ice. I would want to see him continue to contribute at a higher pro level before getting too excited, plus his skating is average, but coaches love him and he's got decent skill.

Here's that shot I was talking about (I know his 10 goals in 40 games doesn't leap out but that's good for a 20-year-old and he can pound it):

15. Jonah Gadjovich, LW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Speaking of players who are kind of slow, can rip it and endear themselves to coaches by playing on the inside. I like a lot of what Gadjovich brings. He's got some pro qualities, he's tough to knock off the puck and I think he has more offence than we've seen to date.

16. Toni Utunen, LHD, 19 (Tappara)

Think Brisebois, but younger and smaller. Utunen's a bit of a weird prospect because he doesn't have very many high-end skills and he's a 5-foot-11 defenceman. He has always played up an age group (or two) and excelled, though, because he's an excellent defender who makes the first right play almost every time he has the puck — and often when he doesn't. Can you defend your way into the NHL while making very few

plays from the blue line in, at his size? It'll be tough. He's worth a mention, though.

17. Carson Focht, C, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

Focht's got pro size, he does a great job winning back pucks with his length and his body positioning and he's got a powerful shot with a quick release. All of those things make him really effective at the junior level. He doesn't have one quality that really flashes, though, so his upside is probably limited even if his puck skills continue to develop.

18. Ethan Keppen, LW, 18 (Flint Firebirds)

Being big and strong with an NHL shot normally gets players an opportunity to play pro but this has been a disappointing season for Keppen, who showed some power forward qualities last year without a lot of help around him.

Artyom Manukyan, RW, 21 (Avangard Omsk)

Manukyan is one of the smallest players in pro hockey but he oozes skill and I don't think anybody would be surprised if he worked his way into the NHL later in his career (I'm talking mid-to-late 20s) after slowly beginning to dominate in the KHL. I would normally have him higher on this list but he just returned from a five-month layoff with a hand injury so I want to watch him play and update my notes before I give him a definitive ranking. Consider him an honourable mention for now. He's one of the more fun young Russians right now and was a terror in the MHL.

The Tiers

Each of my prospect pool rankings will be broken down into team-specific tiers in order to give you a better sense of the talent proximity from one player to the next (a gap which is sometimes minute and in other cases quite pronounced).

The first thing you'll notice about the Canucks prospect tiers is that there's no clear standalone tier at the top, which there is for almost (almost) every other organization. In fact, they're actually the only one of the 31 teams with three players in that top tier. That's a good thing in that it speaks to organizational depth. It's a bad thing in that it also highlights that I'm a little unsure about Podkolzin, because there's some risk in the projections of Hoglander and Madden to the next level too. After that it's pretty straightforward, with Juolevi a slight cut above three other players who I think have real NHL upside (not the tweener kind that follows them).

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1173950 Vancouver Canucks

The history of the Vancouver Canucks, through a photographer's lens

JOHN MACKIE Updated: January 31, 2020

A few years ago, The Vancouver Sun was about to throw out a box of negatives of the Vancouver Canucks back when they were in the Western Hockey League.

So photographer Ralph Bower saved them.

"They were going into the garbage can, so I just took the box home. Why put it in the garbage?" said Bower, 85. "But I never looked at it. About five or 10 years later I was going through my old negs and there was a whole box of them."



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The negs were important to Bower because he'd shot many of the pictures. He started working for the Sun in 1955, and photographed the Canucks until he retired on New Year's Eve, 1996/7.

Looking through a pile of prints recently, he could pick out players from decades back, from both the Canucks and visitors. Phil Maloney, Gump Worsley, Willie O'Ree — he's got action shots of them all.

He shot with a Speed Graphic in the old days, a camera that was technically limited but produced awesome photos. Especially when the players weren't wearing helmets or masks.

"You could see the expression on their face," he said. "Hockey in those days wasn't as fast — it's twice as fast today."

Bower is a bit of a pack rat — he kept prints and clippings of his photos when they ran in the paper. Which makes for a one-of-a-kind Canucks photo archive — the paper usually didn't keep game photos, particularly the larger 11-by-14 prints he favoured.

Rogers Hometown Hockey will be coming to North Vancouver on March 14 and 15. The "family-friendly hockey celebration" will be held at The Shipyards district at the foot of Lonsdale on the North Van waterfront.

The Polygon Gallery is also at the foot of Lonsdale, and decided to do a Canucks photo show in tandem with Hometown Hockey, starting March 7. They're going to be using old Sun and Province photos, and this week, curators Diane Evans and Justin Ramsey went through Bower's cache.

There are some incredible shots, such as goalie George Gardner spreading his arms like an eagle in flight, a dejected Dale Tallon on his knees in the Canucks goal after they've been scored on, and former Canucks owner Coley Hall posing shirtless with Dennis Ververgaert in 1973.

"Vergeraert was the first draft choice of the Canucks, and Coley Hall was the owner," Bower explains. "Coley said 'You guys aren't as tough as we used to be' and took his shirt off to match him at the press conference."

Coley would have been 67 at the time, Ververgaert was 20. But their physique was similar — and Hall was a renowned tough guy. When he was asked to testify on behalf of Canucks majority owner Tom Scallen after Scallen was charged with theft, Hall reportedly said "let him rot in jail."

Bower started off taking Canucks photos at the Forum, at a time when the rink was surrounded by wire mesh, not Plexiglas. The lighting was dim, so you had to use a flash, which meant you had to be close to the action to get anything.

In order to get a photo without the wire, the photographers cut a little box in the wire near the net, which you could pull out when you wanted to take a photo.

"You opened a wire hole with a square window and put the camera through and shot with a flash, strobe," he said.

"I got hit once. Gordie Howe hit me, right in the arm. He shot the puck and it went right through the hole. He came right over, 'Are you all right?' I said 'It's not too bad.' He said 'Well it wasn't one of my hard shots!'"

Bower has mounted several shows of his Sun pix since he retired. On Feb. 5 at 7 p.m. he'll be teaming up with North Shore News photographer Mike Wakefield for a talk on Shooting The North Shore at the West Vancouver Memorial Library.

One of Bower's best shots shows goalie Dunc Wilson sprawled on the ice, snow covering his mask.

"A player had sprayed ice all over his mask when he came in on him, and when you looked in he had a mask covered with snow," said Bower.

"That made the picture. I didn't even know I had it, it's a dark room special."

By that he means that he shot rapid-fire photos and then discovered the snow in one of the frames. He was able to capture it thanks to his invention, hooking a camera up inside the net.

He triggered it with a doorbell.

"You know how a doorbell makes a ring? Well that went to the camera (via a wire under the ice), it made the motor work. There was no infrared. You had to run it by juice, follow me?"

It took a bit of talking to let the Canucks use his net-cam.

"I had it arranged to go in the net with (coach) Harry Neale, but he said (goalie Richard Brodeur) was pretty reluctant about it," he recounts.

"I said 'it's a major thing'. He said 'Well, OK.' But as soon as they finished the national anthem, (Brodeur) took his stick and plucked my camera out of the net."

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1173951 Vancouver Canucks

Demko stays sharp in the shadows with goal to hone role as best backup

Ed Willes

Here's the easy part: Thatcher Demko wants to become a No. 1 goalie in the NHL.

Now here's the tough part: Demko's ambition represents a complex equation that has something to do with his ability and a lot to do with any number of variables beyond his control.

His situation might change as early as this off-season with Jacob Markstrom's contract negotiation. It might change in 2021 with the Seattle expansion draft. It might even be further down the road before a team weighs all the factors and decides Demko is their guy.

By then, who knows where the Canucks' backup will be in his career? It's all a little unsettling and that uncertainty can fog the mind if you let it. But Demko, who has a maturity that belies his 24 years, copes by breaking things down to their simplest terms.

Practices are his games. There just aren't 17,000 people watching him as he goes about his work.

"For me it's taking the mentality of being game-ready in practices," Demko says. "Obviously it's not a switch you can just turn on when you get the call. You have to have it going every day. I think it's going to help me in the long run."

Makes sense. It's helped him in the short run.

"I know I can play at this level," he continues. "For me right now, it's a learning role and a development role and just being a good teammate. I've always seen myself as a supportive, positive guy and I think this year that's my role."

Even if that can change with the snap of the fingers.

In this, his first full season as the Canucks' backup, Demko has served notice he's one of the NHL's emerging young goalies. True, his goals-against average and save percentage don't jump out at you, but the truest measure of a backup is his won-loss record and Demko is 10-5-1 in the 17 games he's played to date.

As for his future workload, that's another one of those variables, but if there were any questions about coach Travis Green's confidence in



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Demko they were answered when he gave him the net for Monday's 3-1 win over the visiting St. Louis Blues.

The Canucks also have five back-to-backs between now and the end of the season starting with this weekend in, first, Brooklyn, then Carolina. That means Demko will get his games down the stretch.

What he does with those starts might determine the Canucks' final place in the standings.

"I like goalies who stop the puck," Green says. "I don't like the ones who don't quite as much. We've got two guys we really believe in. It makes the decision easier."

The Markstrom-Demko tandem, in fact, has been the foundation on which the Canucks have built their season. It's difficult to know where, precisely, they rate among all goaltending duos around the NHL but one thing is certain: There are few teams that rely on their goalies to the extent the Canucks rely on Markstrom and Demko.

Markstrom's season has been covered extensively in this space and others and he turned in another gem in San Jose on Wednesday night, stopping 38 of 40 shots in a 5-2 Canucks win.

Demko, meanwhile, has allowed three goals or fewer in 12 of his 16 starts, including nine when he allowed two or less. There have been a couple of stinkers in there, most notably an 8-6 loss in Pittsburgh when he surrendered seven, inflating his save percentage and goals against in the process.

But he's also one of five NHL backups with less than 20 games who are double digits in wins.

"We help each other and we push other," Markstrom says of Demko. "At the same time I'm a competitor and he's a competitor. We both want to play but there's only one net out there.

"It's not his fault if he isn't playing. It's the coach's fault and my fault."

Still, Demko doesn't take it personally. He knows what his role entails. He also knows the only way to achieve his career goals is through success in that role, and if he ever forgets, goalie coach Ian Clark is there to remind him.

"Because you're not playing as regularly and rhythmically as the starter, you have to have a certain mentality," Clark says. "It's a bit of a cliché for backup goalies, but your practices are your games. That's where you build confidence because that's the activity you're getting.

"All he can do is keep grinding and growing his game mentally, structurally, athletically. He's made a nice step in those regards."

So he's getting better. He's also working cheaply this season and next — just over a million per — and that's part of that complicated equation.

Markstrom is heading into unrestricted free agency this summer. Demko becomes an RFA a year later. With their cap challenges, it doesn't figure the Canucks can afford to pay Markstrom like a No. 1 and pay Demko like an elite backup.

There are some difficult decisions waiting for both the organization and the two players. But they also lie in the future.

In the meantime there are all those practices for Demko.

"It's my first full year and I'm just embracing that," he says. "My expectations are a little higher. I just want to keep getting better and make sure I'm consistently giving my team a chance to win."

For now, that's enough.

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1173952 Vancouver Canucks

Comet Bailey gets Canucks' call to inject some banging, make his mark

Patrick Johnston

NEW YORK CITY — "Can we stop at the next gas station?" is a familiar cry for a driver of any vehicle to hear. Often it's a kid asking a parent to pull over because they need to use the bathroom.

In the case of Justin Bailey and Zack MacEwen on Thursday, it was because they had just been called up by the Vancouver Canucks from the Utica Comets and the two forwards needed to jump off the team bus.

The Comets were just over an hour into a six-hour bus trip to Cleveland — the Canucks' AHL players were en route to play the Monsters twice this weekend — when the two lanky forwards got the call that it was time to head back to the NHL.

The next available exit was not a gas station, but a rest stop just west of Syracuse, N.Y., where the players pulled their hockey gear and suitcases off the bus. Then they found an Uber to drive them back to Utica where they repacked and hopped into a car the Canucks had hired to take them to the Big Apple, a four-hour drive.

"Obviously that was a pretty decent call to get," Bailey said with a smile Friday after his first regular-season practice with the Canucks at Chelsea Piers on the west side of Manhattan.

Bailey, who stands 6-foot-4 but is best known for his blazing speed, has been a key contributor to the Comets' success this season, who at 25-17-2-2 sit third in the AHL's North Division. The team has scored 162 goals this season, the second-most in the AHL, and 24 of those goals have come off Bailey's stick, tying him for the team lead with Reid Boucher.

Nine of those goals came via three hat tricks inside a week last month, the first of which came with Canucks GM Jim Benning in attendance. The scoring touch had a lot to do with good luck, Bailey said.

"It was a fun week that week with scoring a few hat tricks there ... It was helping the team win and at the end of day that's what I'm trying to do on a nightly basis," he said.

"Obviously you want to be as detailed as you can when (Benning's) around, but at the same time it was just another game. But I was happy that I was able to get a hat trick with him in the building, for sure."

He has been called up by the Canucks this time not to be a scorer. He'll be counted on to be a banger, an energy player on the fourth line. And he knows it. He's played 63 games in the NHL for the Buffalo Sabres and Philadelphia Flyers during the past four seasons, scoring five goals in that span.

"For me it's making sure that I'm doing the role that I've been brought here to do. I think in the past when I was a little bit younger, 20, 21, I went from being a guy in the minors that's relied on to score a lot and was able to have a little bit of a bigger leash and then came up here and tried to do the same things.

"Coming up here at 24 from communicating with the coaching staff, you know, having a clear vision of what they want me to do and what things they expect from me on a nightly basis and just going out there and executing that."

Bailey added: "You make adjustments. I think when I went to Philly, I think I played that fourth-line role pretty well and that was a team that was pushing for the playoffs. So, you know, making sure I've taken these experiences I've had over the last four years of pro and making sure that I'm dialled in, ready to go."

Bailey and MacEwen were called up to the big club after Tyler Motte suffered an undisclosed upper-body injury during Thursday's game in



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San Jose after being hit into the boards by Sharks defenceman Erik Karlsson.

Motte left the ice in obvious discomfort. Canucks head coach Travis Green said he wasn't dealing with a head injury but wouldn't say anything beyond that. It appeared Motte may have damaged his shoulder or collarbone area. Whatever the injury, Motte returned to Vancouver and is being evaluated by the medical staff.

Antoine Roussel also missed Friday's practice in Manhattan, but Green said it was just a "maintenance day" for the winger and that he expected him to play on the weekend against the Islanders and Carolina Hurricanes.

MacEwen skated in Roussel's spot on left wing on the third line, with Adam Gaudette at centre and Brock Boeser on right wing. Bailey was the extra forward, with Tim Schaller sliding into Motte's spot on left wing on the fourth line. Green said it was possible that Bailey could get into one of the games on the weekend.

"Bailey, it's good to get him up here and have a look at him in practice. He's having a good year down there. Big guy, fast, we might see him on the weekend as well. We'll know more (Saturday)," Green said.

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Canucks at 50: End of the road for Vancouver's Little Lost Rocket

Staff Reporter

Columnists Jim Taylor and Tony Gallagher weighed in on the exit of by-then disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure to the Florida Panthers in January 1999

After a long holdout and many rumoured trades, disgruntled superstar Pavel Bure was finally traded on Jan. 17, 1999. The circumstances of him leaving town are still resented by some Canucks fans to this day. Reaction at the time was that the Canucks didn't get enough back in return.

Columnist Jim Taylor had a trademark take on the whole holdout/trade saga:

In the end, the Pavel Bure trade was like bad sex: much panting and endless foreplay followed by "You finished?"

Vancouver Canuck fans, who've waited so long for some sort of climax, there'll be little doubt who got, uh, the worst of the deal.

Essentially, it swaps one of hockey's premier scorers for a tough, free-wheeling defenceman (Bure for Ed Jovanovski), shuffles bit players (defencemen Bret Hedican and junior Brad Ference to Florida; veteran centre Dave Gagner, junior winger Mike Brown, and goalie prospect Kevin Weekes to Vancouver) and swaps draft picks, Florida's first-round for Vancouver's third either this year or next, Florida's option.

To people who bought their season tickets anticipating another year of the electrifying Bure, that's not going to be nearly enough.

Thus ends, for now, the Tale of the Little Lost Rocket.

Pavel's much-speculated secret reason for demanding a trade is out (he was upset because management never supported him when it was suggested that he's threatened not to play in the playoffs), coach Mike Keenan has given the trade his blessing, and Canuck fans are now free to get back to criticizing the Mark Messier deal.

But fear not. This is Vancouver, where the other shoe doesn't always drop but is always teetering on the tip of the heel. There will be another crisis on which the customers can chew.

Whether they liked it or not, they will find at least short-term relief in the Bure trade. Bad sex is better than no sex at all.

Tony Gallagher was the first to speak to Bure to get his reaction to the move, which to this day is somewhat cloaked in shadows and innuendo.

When Pavel Bure put down the telephone and told his mother Tanya he'd finally been traded, her emotions broke.

Truth be told, so did those of the Russian Rocket.

"My mom cried for a half an hour she was so happy," said Bure from his apartment in Moscow after learning he was part of the biggest deal in the history of both the Vancouver Canucks and Florida Panthers. "She cried because she said she was so happy for me. She said, 'I knew it was the hardest time of your life even though you had been strong through everything. I was so worried about you and I knew you were worried.'

"And it was very tough to be sitting for five months like that. I really missed hockey."

Mother and son headed to the local bar for a quick celebration hoist before Bure returned home for a short night, a result of his trek back to North America.

Bure was asked about his reasons for wanting to leave but he again chose the high road, even though it's becoming abundantly clear GM Brian Burke merely scratched the surface when he volunteered his understanding of the Rocket's reasons.

"I want to tell the people of Vancouver that I have nothing against the city or the people I know there. I have many friends and they will always be my friends. My problems were all with management and I will probably tell everyone what they were sometime soon. I don't know when. But I love the city and I want to make sure everyone knows that.

"When I went public telling I wanted to be traded, I was still living in Vancouver remember. And people came up to me and every single person said, 'Good luck wherever you go, we love you.' Nobody was mad at me in person, although some people in the media try to make them mad. I had seven great years there and I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart."

Bure was so elated with the news he forgot he would be joining former teammates Kirk McLean and Sean Burke with the Panthers.

"Oh yeah, he's there," said Bure of McLean. "Who's the other goalie? Oh right, of course. It should be pretty good there. The travel is a big thing for me. It will be a lot easier. They are in the same time zone as almost all of their games, up and down the coast. I'm looking forward to it.

"I missed the game so much. I love to score so much, to play in front of the people and hear the cheers. They give me so much feeling when I play. I have been practising, but playing in the games is the fun for me. I am happy to be playing again."

Bure was so excited he didn't much seem to care about the fact he will almost certainly soon be signing a long-term contract which will pay him close to \$50 million US over the five years following this one. With bonuses, that could like go much higher. It's expected he will be paid "just" \$3 million US this shortened season. He was trying to get his mother a ticket to Calgary to stay with brother Valeri for a few days before she visits Miami.

"I guess after Calgary, maybe she'll be ready for some warm weather."

With those words, the greatest player ever to have played for the Canucks, took his leave.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 02.01.2020



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Self-critical and 'rusty' after knee surgery, how Antoine Roussel can give the Canucks a huge second-half boost

By Harman Dayal Jan 31, 2020 9

Just two or three decades ago, an ACL tear could have represented a career-ending injury.

That isn't the case any more thanks to remarkable developments in medical technology and rehabilitation, but the road to recovery remains a gruelling, arduous process.

Six to nine months is the normal timeline to get back to action following a torn ACL, but the step from feeling healthy to playing your best hockey is a challenge that can span months after you've returned to the lineup.

Ask Antoine Roussel who had knee surgery in late March, and he'll tell you that playing games upon returning was significantly more difficult than the eight months of rehab.

"The hardest part was starting to play again and playing my hard game," Roussel told The Athletic on Tuesday. "It's taking some time to get back to a decent level.

"I don't think I've reached my level from last year yet.

"It takes time, I read guys like Corey Perry came back from surgery last year and said he felt like the whole year was tougher. I don't think I'm in that trend, but it still feels like a build-up."

From a surface level point of view, you could be convinced into believing that the rust hasn't detrimentally affected his play. Roussel may not be repeating the 39-point pace he produced at in a career-year last season, but the five goals and eight points he's registered through 23 games are almost identical to his career scoring rate.

Peel the layers of his performance back deeper, however, and it's clear that the subtle ways in which he's influenced his team's even-strength control of games have eroded.

Ever since he's emerged as a full-time NHL player, Roussel has shown the ability to tilt the ice in his team's favour. As a Dallas Star, he finished each season with a shot and scoring chance share comfortably above 50 percent — his two-way presence is easily the most underappreciated part of his game. The 30-year-old French native established that same utility in a Canuck uniform last year. Of the seven forwards that played at least 100 minutes with Roussel in 2018-19, all but one saw a significant improvement in their ability to outshoot and out-chance the opposition.

The greatest beneficiary of Roussel's two-way plaudits last season was Bo Horvat, who saw a huge boost in his performance whenever the 5-foot-11 winger joined his line.

Roussel's uncharacteristically struggled in that department this season — the Canucks controlling just 45 percent of shot attempts and a paltry 38.1 percent of scoring chances. Expected to prop up Adam Gaudette who's still got a ways to go in rounding out his 200-foot game, Roussel has instead hurt a third line that has been caved in its defensive zone and lost the territorial battle by a large margin.

"I had no legs for ten games," Roussel said bluntly. "I was rusty, my pop wasn't there and then you slowly get back there and I'm at game 22 now. So 12 games where I felt pretty decent, I'm just trying to build on that."

Roussel's self-assessment may sound very harsh, but there's a lot of truth to his timeline. In the first 10 games he suited up for, Roussel controlled less than 40 percent of shot attempts and scoring chances. Since the ten-game mark, he owns the best shot attempt differential (49.4 percent share) of any forward not on Bo Horvat's line and while his

42.5 percent expected goal share would suggest he's still got a ways to go in driving quality chances, it represents a notable improvement nonetheless.

When you think about the strengths of Roussel's game, it makes sense why his even-strength impact is so heavily contingent on the "pop" in his game. The fiery grinder succeeds as a tenacious disrupter on the forecheck who forces turnovers and recovers loose pucks. He can use his skating, smart stick and physicality to wreak havoc and win battles.

Look at the explosiveness with which he's able to hunt the puck back in a couple of clips from a game last year, for example.

Couple Roussel's puck pursuit with his underrated knack for making plays in transition and you understand why he can be so effective at pushing and keeping possession in the offensive zone.

By that same token, Roussel's success in this area is dependent on his north-south speed game and with his knee not letting him hit that extra gear, it's been a tough go in his first 23 games.

Refinding that valuable trait could be critical down the stretch.

We don't know, for instance, how long Loui Eriksson will be able to sustain his current level of play on Horvat's line. If Eriksson's form slips down the stretch, a peak Roussel would give Travis Green another viable option to throw alongside Horvat in a matchup role. Alternatively, if the fiery winger stays with Gaudette, he'd be a big help for a third-line that hasn't been feasting on the soft matchups like they ideally would be.

In any event, with each day that passes, Roussel's knee is becoming and more comfortable being pushed to the limit — something that directly relates to how well he drives play at even-strength. If he can bounce back into being close to the player he was last year, it'd be a significant boon in adding another middle-six quality forward to the Canucks' talent pool.

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Inside the Canucks' warmup rituals: From half moons to bathroom breaks in unison, players are creatures of habit

By Thomas Drance Jan 31, 2020 29

The NHL is "the show," and that's intended literally.

Professional hockey is an entertainment product: a game is a live performance and everything backstage is tightly choreographed. There's even an official run of show, called a time sheet. It's drawn up by game presentation departments around the league and approved by the NHL, and it keeps the show flowing predictably for everyone from the team captain, to the head coach, to the colour commentator, to the mascot.

And ruling over it all, dictating all of the moving parts on an NHL game day: a little red digital clock, embedded high on the wall of every dressing room.

On a standard game day with a 7 p.m. puck drop, off-ice officials set that clock to run for 60 minutes at 5:45 p.m., so that it hits 00:00 at exactly 6:45 p.m. — the precise moment the warmup skate ends.

The time on that little red digital clock is the same countdown fans see on the Jumbotron and it's displayed prominently in every dressing room. With 16 minutes remaining on the little red digital clock, the warmup skate begins.



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Because of muscle memory, superstition and a strict adherence to routine, you can be pretty sure where every player is — if you know their routines — and exactly what they're doing in the leadup to the warmup skate based on what that little red clock reads.

Pre-skate routines

"Everybody has a routine, every player," said Canucks captain Bo Horvat. "So if a player tells you he's not superstitious, he's lying to you."

That routine can include two touch soccer. It can be a specific, well-thought-out mix of activities designed to sharpen reflexes. It can be listening to music on headphones and stretching. It can be eating something, having the same exchange with a teammate, or even relieving themselves before putting on equipment.

That last one, hitting the toilet at a predictable moment in time on a game day, is a pretty common theme, which makes sense when you consider the gear involved.

"It's always the same," noted Canucks defenceman Troy Stecher. "Guys are going to the bathroom at the exact same time. You go in the gym and it's the same four guys in the gym every time, and they have different routines, but they're doing the exact same stretch. It's kind of weird."

Jay Beagle is one of those guys who takes a timed bathroom break, immediately prior to going down the tunnel.

"At 17:30 on the red clock, I'm taking a pee," he said. "Almost every time. Then coming back, I've got my helmet and my gloves and we go."

Another Canuck, who declined to be identified, shared his pregame ritual: "After warmups I go take a leak and when I do, the same teammate is taking a shit. Every single time."

Whether the habits are born of superstition or routine depends on the player, but the goal is the same: get ready to be at peak performance for puck drop.

"I'm a guy that thinks about it. I put a lot of preparation into my warmups," said Beagle. "I know exactly where I'm going to be at certain times, to make sure that I'm on schedule to get to where I want to be and feel the best for the game."

Tanner Pearson has an unusual habit of getting in some pregame pushups. "I come into the room after soccer, probably around 6ish. Roughly 44:00 on the red clock," he said. "I just do 20 of them. It started last year. Patric Hornqvist did them, so I started doing them. You do so much stuff to get the legs going, so I do it to get the upper-body going, get the core engaged."

In the minutes before warmups, players put on what remains of their gear. Your average beer leaguer would be astonished by how quickly some NHL players are able to gear up and down, like Superman in a phone booth.

Some get their equipment on relatively early. Some mill about in the tunnel, pumping up their teammates, and others just hang out in the room.

"I'm always sitting right before warmups," said Elias Pettersson. "And when the time comes at 16:15 or so, I just sort of walk out. A lot of guys are waiting in the hallway, or standing, but I'm just chilling."

And if the player is one who customarily takes warmup skate without a helmet, commonly referred to as "going no bucky," he may even be in front of a mirror doing his hair.

"I have to touch up my hair, but just water," said Pearson. "Guys who put gel on are crazy. You start sweating and it gets in your eyes."

"I might wet it, but I don't put any product in it," Tyler Myers added. "I know sometimes guys do, but I won't name names."

"I'm putting hair gel in my hair before warmups," admitted Canucks forward J.T. Miller.

Among Vancouver's skaters, it's almost exclusively veteran players who don't wear helmets during warmups. Miller, Pearson, Edler, Horvat, Stecher, Myers, Chris Tanev and Brandon Sutter are most likely to "go no bucky," although some additional skaters may ditch the helmets for a game in their hometown.

According to some of those veteran players, the Canucks don't have a standard rule for who can and can't take the warmup skate without a helmet. A younger guy "going no bucky" is more likely to hear about it, though.

"Maybe there is a rule," Miller said, "but we don't talk about it. Guys want to go no bucket, I don't give a shit. Guys are going to chirped for it, but that's part of the game."

Still other veterans insist on wearing a helmet because, in their own words, they might otherwise be a genuine safety risk.

"I wear a helmet every time because I'm a hazard out there," Beagle said. "I've been called a hazard by many people in warmups, because I like to buzz around."

Among the players who hang out in the hallway early, meanwhile, there's a variety of standard handshakes and routines. When Tim Schaller is in the lineup, for example, he and Adam Gaudette do a vertical version of the Chandler and Joey cool guy handshake which is followed by Gaudette and Beagle doing a couple of shoulder checks.

"We do a little handshake, and then he usually runs his shoulder into my chin," said Beagle of that particular tradition. "Gets me fired up."

Heading out onto the ice

There is an order to all things in these pregame preparations, particularly during the warmup skate itself, which can seem like a strange beast to onlookers.

Some of that order is dictated by seniority. Some of it by superstition. And some of it by institutional memory, going back decades.

Longtime Canucks defender Alexander Edler, for example, is responsible for watching the little red clock as it ticks down to 16:00 for the start of warmups. Shortly before it does, he's responsible for calling out that it's "time to go" to his teammates. As such, he's the first skater onto the ice for the warmup skate after the starting goaltender.

Edler does this every game day when he's healthy and in the lineup (if he's out, the responsibility is assumed by Jake Virtanen), and it's an institutional relic dating back to Kevin Bieksa, who is now retired.

"Bieksa used to do it and he said, why don't you do it," Edler explained. "So I said, 'OK'."

"I assigned Eagle to do it because I told him he needed a responsibility," Bieksa recalled to The Athletic via text message. "True story."

By the time Canucks skaters filter onto the ice, they do so in a very predictable order. Of late, while the team has been winning and relatively healthy and the lineup fixed, it's tended to look like this in chronological order: starting goaltender, Edler, Virtanen, Myers, Roussel, Pearson, Miller, Tyler Motte, Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson, Loui Eriksson, Gaudette, Beagle, Oscar Fantenberg, Quinn Hughes, Tanev, Sutter, Bo Horvat and then the backup netminder.

Even in this, there's a legacy of years gone, co-mingled with superstitious habit, that shapes the order.

"I always go last coming out of the tunnel because when I started, I didn't know where to go," Horvat says. "So I just went last."

"The older guys had the place where they went, so I just filled in where I could and that was last. So I just went last. I didn't have any warmup duties, which is good. I hate picking pucks out of the net."

At the start of warmups and for the first couple of minutes players — including goaltenders — just circle the ice surface getting a few shots in



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and perhaps sending teammates some backhand saucer passes. Even in this, some players have a very specific routine they follow.

"I take three pucks from the right side, three pucks from the left side," currently injured Canucks forward Josh Leivo told The Athletic back in late November. "Then I just mess around, pass and stuff. I shoot three and three, before I do anything else."

"First shot is high left, second shot I try go low post and in, third shot is clapper," said Tanner Pearson of his routine.

The half moon

This freeform portion of warmups tends to last for a couple of minutes. Occasionally a skater will greet a former teammate or a friend at centre ice, while others get into their stretches in the neutral zone. By about the 14-minute mark, Stecher goes and fishes the pucks out of the net for the first time in the warmup skate, and once he's finished the starting goaltender takes the net to take a few shots and feel the puck.

On every NHL team, there's a designated player who picks pucks out of the net during the warmup skate. This player functions like a waiter during the half moon, and essentially goes to clear pucks out of the net every couple of minutes during warmups.

In Vancouver, it's Stecher who does the digging. It's a job that fell to him when the Sedin twins, Henrik and Daniel, assigned him to do it after Alexandre Burrows was traded to the Ottawa Senators midway through the 2016-17 season. Prior to Burrows, Matt Cooke held down the job, and Burrows fell into it for a similar reason — he was young when the position was vacated, and someone had to do it.

Stecher doesn't mind the assignment. In fact, he takes pride in doing it well.

"My first couple of games my teammates were like, 'Let's go!' 'Let's go!' and I didn't know how to time it," Stecher said, laughing as he recalled the work he put into mastering his technique — which includes flattening his stick to get pucks out in bunches early in the warmup skate, and later passing 3-4 pucks out of the net at a time.

The Richmond, B.C. native legitimately put study time into working on his technique, watching how other guys in the league did it and mastering his craft.

"I go flat stick and put them all in one big group," Stecher said. "I think it's way more efficient."

About a third of the way into the warmup skate, the Canucks — and all NHL teams — line up in the neutral zone and perform line rushes. This is a very basic pregame drill, a mock rush of sorts that players go through alongside their defence partner or linemates. It typically lasts for two or two-and-a-half minutes after which Stecher clears the net of pucks again and the players line up — in a very specific order — for the half moon.

The half moon, or horseshoe, is so-called because of how the players line up in an inverted U shape along the blue line, while Stecher (and then Virtanen) feed shooters the puck. Skaters take turns skating in and unleashing a shot on the starting goaltender, who tends to take at least five shots — though Jacob Markstrom will sometimes take eight or so.

Currently, Gaudette shoots first, then Motte. Miller goes third and always takes a slap shot. Pettersson is the fourth shooter.

"I always shoot it high glove," Pettersson said. "I always try to aim for the goalie's glove get them some reps."

After Pettersson, it's Edler. And this is where Stecher's work as a pass waiter in the half moon gets really detailed.

"Gauds and Millsy shoot kind of early, Petey shoots, and then Eddie," Stecher told The Athletic back in November, while Motte was still out of the lineup with injury.

"That's where my routine kicks off, I fire Eddie a bullet. Bennie, I throw him sauce. Virt and I do the same thing, we throw sauce to each other

and catch it in our V-Triangle," Stecher continued, mimicking holding his feet together at his heels, with his two feet jutting out so that they form a V. "Then I sauce to Bo, who sometimes goes with the V, then I fire a bullet to Mysie. Then it's a soft little muffin to Boes!"

"And then when I move sides I always set a puck up close to the net and then I deke around it, I toe-drag around it and fire to Tanny. The last guy is usually Suttis, but since he's out right now it's usually Beags. I slide it under his stick, and then I stretch and Virt takes over from there."

Some players want these passes from Stecher in a specific way, but some of them aren't even aware of it. They're just used to the passes he delivers.

"I know Stechie fires me a pretty hard pass," Myers said of his spot in the half moon. "I might shoot one way or one spot, for a few games, then I might change it up. I don't worry too much about it."

While Myers doesn't worry about it too much, Horvat does. In fact, after playing around with the V-Triangle pass reception early on in the season, Horvat has become a convert. At the moment he never takes the pass from Stecher in the half moon without utilizing it.

"I saw Jake do it, I don't remember when I saw it," Horvat says, "But he kept doing it and we kept winning, and then he stopped doing it and we lost. Then I started doing it and I don't know, I've kind of kept going with it. Stech, I think, once gave me a shit pass and I kind of had to do it and then we won. So I had to keep doing it no matter how good or bad the pass was."

Horvat's also absolutely committed to taking the exact same shot every time.

"I always shoot blocker on the half moon," Horvat says. "100 percent of the time. Always, always, always."

"I know Bo is going to shoot blocker side and it's going to be a blocker save, and I'm already over there on that side so I have to get away from the rebound," Stecher says. "It's crazy, the routine is something you could do in your sleep."

Winding down

As the warmup winds down, a few players take power laps in the neutral zone. Other players send sauce to one another from either side of the ice. Lately, Virtanen and Roussel have been setting each other up for five one-timers from either face-off dot. Beagle — every game — always does a bench spray, which involves a significant hockey stop that he directs at the Canucks bench. It commonly serves to give a hefty snow shower to camera people and Canucks team staff.

It's at the point where Beagle noticed the other day when no one got caught in the spray:

NOBODY TO SPRAY. POOR BEAGLE. 🐶
PIC.TWITTER.COM/TANF30XUXB

— VANCOUVER #CANUCKS (@CANUCKS) JANUARY 15, 2020

"I sprayed the one guy really bad last game," said Beagle, laughing as he recalled an incident in early December. "I think he was a camera guy for Sportsnet. I've done it every game for 13 years and I've never felt bad, but I did that time."

And in all of this, of course, Canucks players will look for kids and fans in the crowd to give souvenir pucks to.

"If I see a sign that says something about me, I try to give that person or kid a puck," Pettersson said. "Some games there's been a lot of signs, so I can't give them all a puck, but I always really appreciate it."

"I like to watch the crowd and say hello to any people I may know, and some people I don't even know!" said Roussel.

Horvat has a set routine even for this. He always gives away three pucks to Canucks fans. No more, no less. And it seems he chooses which fans



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will get the pucks not based on signs or Horvat jerseys, but based on their location around the glass.

"I always put three pucks over the glass to the fans, in certain spot," Horvat says. "Not to certain fans, but I pick my three spots where I throw them and that's where I throw them. I try to stick to my same routine."

GOOD GUY BO HORVAT JUST WANTED TO GIVE THIS @CANUCKS FAN A PUCK, BUT THE NETTING IN PHILLY WASN'T MAKING IT EASY FOR HIM. 😊 PIC.TWITTER.COM/NMBLHST4FD

— SPORTSNET (@SPORTSNET) NOVEMBER 26, 2019

With a couple of minutes remaining in warmups, Canucks skaters and the backup goaltender play a final game called "Last Puck" or "Final Puck" or "Two Minute Drill" depending on the player or the team in question. The game starts when Edler sends a bullet pass to Stecher in the neutral zone.

"I end up getting last puck, where you'll see Eddie fire it all the way to the red line and we'll play last puck."

The game pits an unlimited number of skaters versus the backup goalie, as Stecher takes a long distance shot from the neutral zone, which is usually saved, and then Canucks teammates crowd the goaltender and try to score from point blank range with jam plays, shots off of rebounds and other short-range shot types. Miller recently tried to score with a Michigan lacrosse move. The game doesn't end until the puck is in the back of the net.

Finally, the clock winds down to 00:00, the buzzer sounds, and the teams clear the ice. Prior to his injury, Leivo was always the last Canucks skater to leave the ice at the end of the warm-up skate. He'd stay out and set up three pucks by the Canucks bench, then try to bank pucks off of the far boards and into the net.

As with most things in the warmup, it worked once, and it just kind of stuck.

"It was last year, I focused on banking the puck into the net at the end of warmups and I scored after," Leivo explained. "So that's what I do now and I'm sticking with it."

With warmup skate ended, the little red digital clock resets to 15:00 and counts down for the start of the show — which begins with the anthems, and not with puck drop itself — and Canucks players get back into the room and focus up for the game. It's at this point that the coaching staff will enter for a final chat and to read out the starting lineup (a task that differs from team to team, but is often outsourced to players or special guests).

Canucks head coach Travis Green isn't typically on the bench during the warmup skate. He's often in his office working, or having a coffee, or having a final strategic chat with his assistant coaches.

On some higher leverage game days, or in some more historic arena, he'll poke his head out and step onto the bench to get a feel for the atmosphere prior to the contest.

While players stick with a very specific routine pre-game, it's notable that Green doesn't remember what he used to do as a player. It's all a haze to him now, even as he remembers that he was very rigid about doing the same thing every game.

He also went "no bucky." It would've been a waste not to, what with the mullet he sported early on in his playing days.

"Wearing a helmet over that, it would've been a fine," the Canucks bench boss joked.

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Wheeler's 2020 NHL prospect pool rankings: No. 13 Vancouver Canucks

By Scott Wheeler Jan 31, 2020 59

Welcome to Scott Wheeler's 2020 rankings of every NHL organization's prospects. You can find the complete ranking and more information on the criteria here, as we count down daily from No. 31 to No. 1. The series, which includes evaluations and commentary from coaches and staff on more than 500 prospects, runs from Jan. 13 to Feb. 11.

This ranking is probably one of the stronger departures from the consensus throughout the series. That's true both in where the Canucks are ranked as a farm system overall (some would likely have them a few spots higher) and in the way their individual prospects are ranked (more on that below).

As a whole, the Canucks have proven to be one of the better drafting teams in recent memory. They've knocked a lot of top picks out of the park and they've mined lower rounds for talent and upside, hitting on several players.

While I'm higher than a lot of evaluators are on many of the Canucks' top prospects, I'm lower than most on the player most perceive as the organization's top prospect. Due to the recent graduations of Quinn Hughes, Adam Gaudette and Thatcher Demko, the pool has also begun to thin out a bit — something that's worth keeping an eye on seeing as they will also likely make the playoffs this year and lose their first-round pick in 2020 in the process.

Still, the Canucks boast one of the deeper prospect pools in the NHL, with intrigue at all three forward positions (though they certainly have less depth at centre than they do on the wing), some interesting D prospects and an intriguing goalie prospect. As I mentioned in Tuesday's look at the 16th-ranked Sabres prospect pool, the group of teams from No. 16 to No. 6 in the series are all tight. If all of the Canucks' top three prospects pan out, their outcomes will look more favourable than 13th in a few years.

1. Nils Högländer, LW, 19 (Rögle BK)

If you've followed my work, this probably doesn't come as a huge surprise to you. When I released my final ranking for the 2019 draft last May, Vasilii Podkolzin landed at No. 17 and Hoggländer ranked just one spot back at No. 18. A month later, I believed one was a bit of a reach and the other was a bit of a steal. But they've always been close for me. And while Podkolzin is five months younger than Hoggländer, I would argue the latter has had a better year relative to their respective ages. That was certainly true at the world juniors (though that's not to say Podkolzin didn't have a good tournament because he did) and it's true with their club teams, where Hoggländer has more consistently made plays at the pro level. Hoggländer's puck skills, playmaking ability and touch around the slot are the first things that leap out (besides, maybe, that he's a little small). I'm most impressed with his footwork, though. Hoggländer does a brilliant job changing pace to slow down, bait defenders and then burst back into stride to pass them. He's also explosive in and out of his edges, which helps him stop and start to lose opposing players and create some separation.

Watch here the way a stop-up forces the defender into a blow-by, giving Hoggländer the opportunity to get set for his shot:

Or watch here, the way Hoggländer opens up his right foot to carve to a better angle and drag the puck into his lead heel:

Or watch how Hoggländer's ability to rely on his edges and remain balanced helps him create a second opportunity off his own rebound, here:

Hoggländer is proof you don't have to be the fastest player on the ice to be one of the best skaters. I would like to see a little more discipline in his game (with and without the puck) but he's stronger than you expect a 5-



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foot-9 winger to be and all of the offensive tools are there. He's got what it takes to be a low-end 1LW or a high-end 2LW.

2. Vasili Podkolzin, RW/LW, 18 (SKA St. Petersburg)

Podkolzin, who played just a few shifts a night early on in the KHL season, has begun to make the most of increased opportunity of late, with points in three straight games while I write this. His game has always flashed a lot of pro qualities. He's big, he's physical, he's powerful, he's strong on pucks, he plays on the inside, he's a pain in the ass, he doesn't give up on plays and he's got great hands. My concern with his game has always been about his ability to slow the game down and process it. If he needs to beat a defender one-on-one, he often can. If he needs to fight his way to the net, he often can. If there's an available passing lane to an obvious target, he's talented enough to execute through seams. But he lacks an on-ice awareness, which contributes to a style of play that revolves around doing the first thing he sees, rather than opening up his sightlines to assess the zone and utilize his linemates. As a result, I often feel like he looks like he's doing more than he actually is. It makes him a bit of a weird prospect. Most top players have that inherent sense to their game but need to develop their skills to a pro level. He has the skill and I'm not sure you can teach the rest, though experience will certainly help. I have little doubt he's going to be a useful NHLer, my worry is just that he may not become a line-driving offensive threat and that's what you want at 10th overall. His skating, while powerful, also splays from the knees and needs some tweaking.

3. Tyler Madden, C, 20 (Northeastern University)

Madden is another in a long line of Canucks success stories in the last few years. He has shown, despite lacking size, strength and a pull-away gear to his straightaway stride, that skill can solve a lot of those concerns. Northeastern, who'd just dealt with a similar player in Blackhawks forward Dylan Sikura, have proven they can help those players succeed in a heavy college hockey game, too. This year, Madden has built on his slick puck skills and superb cross-ice vision to add a goal scoring element to his game, taking him from one of college hockey's best freshmen to one of college hockey's best players. When he's got the puck, he's capable of making plays out of nothing, whether that's with a creative pass through traffic, a dangle in tight or his ability to lose bigger defenders with a quick cut. He will face some challenges along the wall at the college level — and might be asked to play the wing — but he can run a power play and make things happen at even strength, both of which I suspect will translate. And though I wouldn't say he's a dominant defensive player, Madden's versatile enough to be trusted in all situations.

4. Olli Juolevi, LHD, 21 (Utica Comets)

You've probably heard me say — or write — this before but I really do believe Juolevi has NHL games under his belt by now were it not for the knee injury. He's not athletic enough to lose forecheckers with his speed or dynamic enough to score many goals from the point but Juolevi is unfazed by pressure when he has the puck and he's an excellent outlet passer, both of which are assets for most of the game's modern puck-moving defencemen. He can also make high-to-low plays in the offensive zone or slide down the wall to fire a pass east-to-west for a backdoor play. Though he's not an overly physical defender for his size, Juolevi also does a nice job gapping up with smooth footwork, disrupting passing lanes with his instincts and outsmarting opposing players along the wall. I still think he may become a contributing second-pairing defenceman.

5. Kole Lind, RW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Last year, as Lind struggled as an AHL rookie, I told a number of diehard Canucks fans in my life to be patient. Part of that was a belief in his tools, part of it was probably me not wanting to give up on a player I have been high on since his draft year. But Lind has begun to make true on his talent level this season. He has always had a dangerous shot in tight (he's not the kind of player who's so gifted that he's going to overpower goalies from a distance but he's a natural scorer who still has more to show there). This year, though, we're seeing some other elements of his game take steps. In my viewings, I've been impressed with how engaged

he is in board battles, something that was a strength of his game at the junior level but faded a bit last year when he looked unusually timid. Lind is at his best when he's playing an honest, north-south game. He's not going to light up the highlight reel but he can make plays through holes, he's a fast skater and he doesn't really lack any one offensive quality. I still think he's the kind of player who projects to slide up and down an NHL lineup, capable of playing a depth role on a good team or supporting higher in the lineup as more of a complementary piece.

6. Jack Rathbone, LHD, 20 (Harvard University)

After a strong freshman year at Harvard, Rathbone has continued to show real promise as a sophomore. There have never been concerns with his talent level or his skating, both of which look easy for him on the ice. Rathbone's one of the smoother defenders in the NCAA, using four-way mobility to escape pressure, create for himself or his teammates from the point or shake past opposing players through the neutral zone. And while he's definitely on the smaller end for an NHL defenceman, I don't think it's going to be a major obstacle. He defends well with his feet, sticking with opposing puck carriers down the ice or winning races to loose pucks along the wall before he ever has to engage physically. Due to his size, he's not going to be the kind of player who jumps straight from the NCAA to the NHL following a monster junior or senior year. Just don't be surprised if he becomes an impact guy at the AHL level and gives the Canucks no choice but to audition him. Though size is still more of a roadblock for defenders than it is for forwards and some teams don't want to have too many little guys on their back end, preventing opportunities for worthy players in the process, that's not at the front of my mind when I evaluate a player. Rathbone's good.

7. Jett Woo, RHD, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

After a slow start, Woo has looked more and more like the player who dominated the WHL and earned an entry-level contract last year. I wouldn't worry too much about the dip in his production. Some of that is driven by a trade to a less talented team. Some of it is driven by the fact that he has spent most of the season playing behind Flyers prospect Egor Zamula in offensive situations. Woo is a throwback, playing a physical, simple brand of hockey that makes him hard to play against. He's also an elite athlete, which means when he hits, it hurts (it also means he's a powerful skater). While it means his coaches have to live with the odd penalty, they're usually OK with it because he brings an element most teams covet — and many lack. Woo's probably not going to play at the top of an NHL lineup, nor will he likely run a power play unit, but he can play tough minutes at even strength, move the puck up ice with leading passes and penalty kill. He's also just a good, hard-working player. I'm a fan.

8. Petrus Palmu, LW, 22 (JYP)

Palmu is tiny. Maybe even too tiny to play in the NHL no matter how talented he is. But his tininess also helps him have skills that few NHL players have. It helps him sneak past hits and side-step defenders as a carrier, a skill that he uses equally well off both wings. Watch the way he spins to the inside on his edges, using a sharp radius to cut to the middle off the right wing:

Now take note of the way he almost jumps to the inside to blow past another pinching defender on the left wing here:

Smaller players also have a stickhandling and coordination advantage because they're lower to the puck, offering them more control. That's at play in small areas, where Palmu excels at using his feet to kick pucks to his stick and quickly make a play:

While bigger players can leverage their length to generate torque on their sticks, smaller players tend to use their shorts sticks to lean off one foot without throwing themselves off balance in their range of motion through their shot:

If Palmu lacked any of these skills, he wouldn't be on a list like this. But he doesn't. He has what you'd hope a player his size has. He thinks the



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game one step ahead as a passer, even when chances on net for himself are there:

He executes tape-to-tape saucer passes most players don't:

Does that mean he's a lock to play in the NHL? Of course not. But I do think he has a lot more to show than he did in the AHL last season (and/or than he was given the opportunity to ...).

9. Michael DiPietro, G, 20 (Utica Comets)

I debated having DiPietro lower on this list after subpar play with the Ottawa 67's spilled into a mediocre start to his AHL career (though he was decent during Ottawa's playoff run). That, coupled with DiPietro's 6-foot frame, is enough to at least raise some questions. But he's also young, the Comets don't do a great job protecting their goalies from high danger chances (at least not this year) and he's got a lot of tools, led by rare athletic ability, that help him make tough post-to-post saves or go low-to-high to challenge shooters. I've seen some saveable pucks sneak through DiPietro this season but I'm willing to give him a pass on pedestrian play this season given it's his first full year at the pro level and he's got an extended track record of solid play.

10. Guillaume Brisebois, LHD, 22 (Utica Comets)

Brisebois has intrigued me dating back to his draft year in 2015 when I was with McKeen's Hockey as a bit of a case study in what a modern shutdown defenceman might look like. Though he's not huge, he plays the way I want a quote-unquote safe player to play. His idea of safe is a quick head-man pass, instead of a chip off the glass or a shot through traffic instead of a ring around the boards. He makes smart plays that produce a result, instead of those that just get the puck out or in. He's also a good skater for his size, which helps him snuff out plays in the neutral zone, gap up against fast skaters or pivot back on dumps without getting caught flatfooted. He's probably not going to play higher than the third pairing at the next level but he can be relied upon in tough minutes and I think he's just talented enough to potentially progress.

11. William Lockwood, RW, 21 (University of Michigan)

Lockwood was a good junior who became a good college player. Today, he's probably a cut above good college player while also serving as captain in his senior year. He has always been a well-rounded two-way winger who can finish off plays, hang onto the puck as a carrier when he needs to and play with pace. He's a little on the smaller end, though, and he hasn't progressed quite like you'd probably hope offensively, which limits his upside. I could see him becoming a very good AHL player who is a little bit of a tweener. The good news is that he's got the versatility you want in a depth player, so he's not a top-six or bust type.

12. Arvid Costmar, C, 18 (Linköping HC)

I watched Linköping's junior team play a fair amount last season but I always came away more impressed by Costmar's teammate, Nikola Pasic, than I did by him. Costmar was physical, he played hard in his own zone and he showed flashes of some impressive skills but he never really took over a game. So his dominance at the SuperElit level this year has surprised me a little, even if it hasn't translated at either pro level. Costmar looked unstoppable in one recent viewing with the junior team and he has a July birthday so he could just be playing catch-up. Costmar has more talent than I gave him credit for, I think. When he plays fast, he can make a lot of plays as both a scorer and a passer. He's not going to be a primary carrier on a line, per se, but he's got some versatility to his game.

13. Aidan McDonough, LW, 20 (Northeastern University)

I often worry about players who don't join their programs as true freshmen because if they stumble out of the gate or get a coach who leans heavily on veterans, it can mean that they don't work their way into more prominent roles until they're 23 or 24. If you want to remain a legitimate prospect and you're going to enter college at 20 instead of 18, you have to show that you look more like a sophomore or a junior than a freshman. Otherwise, it's hard to climb out of it. Nobody wants to start

their pro career at 24. In a way, it can put more pressure on someone like McDonough, who needed to grow into his 6-foot-3 frame after a huge growth spurt. It took him time to remodel his game and build confidence with the puck again. He has looked good this season, though, playing at a point per game pace while chipping in offensively in a variety of ways. He's not all that physical for his size but he can make plays off the rush and he's got a decent top speed (his first couple of steps need some work). Keep an eye on him.

14. Linus Karlsson, C/RW, 20 (BIK Karlskoga)

After an uninspiring post-draft season and a trade from the Sharks to the Canucks for Jonathan Dahlen (a much better player, in my opinion), Karlsson has put together a nice follow-up campaign as an impact player in the second tier Allsvenskan. He's got a dangerous shot (wrist and one-timer), his playmaking has improved and he has always played a well-rounded, net-driven game in the middle of the ice. I would want to see him continue to contribute at a higher pro level before getting too excited, plus his skating is average, but coaches love him and he's got decent skill.

Here's that shot I was talking about (I know his 10 goals in 40 games doesn't leap out but that's good for a 20-year-old and he can pound it):

15. Jonah Gadjovich, LW, 21 (Utica Comets)

Speaking of players who are kind of slow, can rip it and endear themselves to coaches by playing on the inside. I like a lot of what Gadjovich brings. He's got some pro qualities, he's tough to knock off the puck and I think he has more offence than we've seen to date.

16. Toni Utunen, LHD, 19 (Tappara)

Think Brisebois, but younger and smaller. Utunen's a bit of a weird prospect because he doesn't have very many high-end skills and he's a 5-foot-11 defenceman. He has always played up an age group (or two) and excelled, though, because he's an excellent defender who makes the first right play almost every time he has the puck — and often when he doesn't. Can you defend your way into the NHL while making very few plays from the blue line in, at his size? It'll be tough. He's worth a mention, though.

17. Carson Focht, C, 19 (Calgary Hitmen)

Focht's got pro size, he does a great job winning back pucks with his length and his body positioning and he's got a powerful shot with a quick release. All of those things make him really effective at the junior level. He doesn't have one quality that really flashes, though, so his upside is probably limited even if his puck skills continue to develop.

18. Ethan Keppen, LW, 18 (Flint Firebirds)

Being big and strong with an NHL shot normally gets players an opportunity to play pro but this has been a disappointing season for Keppen, who showed some power forward qualities last year without a lot of help around him.

Artyom Manukyan, RW, 21 (Avangard Omsk)

Manukyan is one of the smallest players in pro hockey but he oozes skill and I don't think anybody would be surprised if he worked his way into the NHL later in his career (I'm talking mid-to-late 20s) after slowly beginning to dominate in the KHL. I would normally have him higher on this list but he just returned from a five-month layoff with a hand injury so I want to watch him play and update my notes before I give him a definitive ranking. Consider him an honourable mention for now. He's one of the more fun young Russians right now and was a terror in the MHL.

The Tiers

Each of my prospect pool rankings will be broken down into team-specific tiers in order to give you a better sense of the talent proximity from one player to the next (a gap which is sometimes minute and in other cases quite pronounced).



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The first thing you'll notice about the Canucks prospect tiers is that there's no clear standalone tier at the top, which there is for almost (almost) every other organization. In fact, they're actually the only one of the 31 teams with three players in that top tier. That's a good thing in that it speaks to organizational depth. It's a bad thing in that it also highlights that I'm a little unsure about Podkolzin, because there's some risk in the projections of Hoglander and Madden to the next level too. After that it's pretty straightforward, with Juolevi a slight cut above three other players who I think have real NHL upside (not the tweener kind that follows them).

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