



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 6, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

The Canes start a road trip by shutting out the Penguins 4-0. Here's the plus/minus.

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes began a five-game road trip, their longest of the season, on Tuesday by beating the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-0.

The plus/minus:

PLUS

Curtis McElhinney. First start in net since Jan. 15? No problem for the old pro. The goalie now has his first shutout with the Canes and the ninth of his career.

The D corps. All of the D. Jacob Slavin, Justin Faulk, Brett Pesce, Dougie Hamilton, Trevor van Riemsdyk, Calvin de Haan. Got the job done. Gapped up well, moved the puck smartly, Pesce scored. It was all there.

Jacob Slavin. It was one of his best games of the season. His stick work and body positioning against the Pens' Sidney Crosby was near flawless. "You didn't see Sidney get wound up too many times," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

Justin Faulk. Another solid game in a season that has had several for No. 27. Six blocked shots, four hits, plus-2 night.

Jordan Martinook. Can 2019 get any better for him? Becomes a father, new contract extension, scoring goals.

Got the first one Tuesday, late in the first period and one the Pens' Kris Letang called deflating. A playoff spot would be a nice way to cap a memorable regular season, Martinook would say.

Aggressive play. The Canes set the tone early and kept it up. The tougher team won this night, winning a lot of the 50-50 puck battles. Brock McGinn knocking the Pens' Jared McCann to the ice with a big, clean hit in the first was an energizer. "We were ready to play," Brind'Amour said.

MINUS

Canes power play. The Canes spent considerable time working on the power play in practice Monday, then looked mostly dysfunctional on Tuesday on their two power-play opportunities, getting one shot. Still too slow with the puck movement. The Pens weren't much better.

Sidney Crosby. Minus-2 night for the Pens captain. Had a couple of Grade-A scoring chances but couldn't find the net, as he so often does against Carolina. "It was a tight game and you have to capitalize," Crosby said.

Jordan Staal, Evgeni Malkin injuries. Both teams were missing big centers -- Staal still recovering from concussion symptoms, Malkin out with an upper-body injury. Always a better game when the big boys play.

Blocking shots in the NHL: 'You close your eyes and pray'

By Chip Alexander

Brock McGinn was down on the ice, in pain. A lot of pain.

The Carolina Hurricanes forward had just blocked a shot by defenseman Shea Theodore of the Vegas Golden Knights on Friday, the puck catching McGinn near his left ankle. He struggled to get up, finally hobbling to the bench, grimacing as others around him patted him on the back.

Nearly everyone in the arena seemed to have their eyes on McGinn, as if somehow feeling part of his pain.

What does it feel like to block a shot in the National Hockey League?

"It's a good hurt," McGinn said Monday.

Come again? A good hurt?

"Blocking shots, I've always kind of liked to do it," McGinn said.

Nearby, defenseman Calvin de Haan smiled. "Ginner's a little crazy," he said.

It's a necessary part of being a hockey player, especially a role player like McGinn, who sees a lot of shorthanded time on the penalty kill. Defensemen block countless shots, with all parts of their bodies.

"You just close your eyes and brace yourself and hope you get hit in a good spot," de Haan said. "It takes a big set of cojones to get in front of some of those pucks. Ginner's pretty fearless and guys really rally around that kind of stuff."

Man, does it hurt

McGinn was helping to protect a 4-2 lead against Vegas at PNC Arena. Theodore had both goals for the Golden Knights and was winding up for another big slap shot, looking to make it a one-goal game. McGinn lowered his left leg to the ice, putting himself in harm's way, taking the full brunt of the shot.

Moments later, defenseman Justin Faulk flipped the loose puck nearly the length of the rink and into an empty net for a 5-2 lead. But McGinn was the one everyone first congratulated at the bench, including Faulk.



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"It's an important piece of a team," McGinn said of shot-blocking. "When you see guys out there sacrificing and trying to block shots, I think that it shows the guys that you care and want to be there. It just sort of brings everybody in."

But, man, does it hurt.

Frozen pucks

A hockey puck is a piece of vulcanized rubber that's an inch thick, three inches in diameter and weighs about six ounces. The pucks are frozen before games, all the better for moving smoother and faster on the ice.

That's all well and good until someone like, say, Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals winds up for a 100 mph one-timer on that frozen black disk.

Canes defenseman Brett Pesce has been in that position before. And ...

"You thinking, 'Don't hit me,'" he said, laughing. "You close your eyes and pray it doesn't hit you in the wrong spot and doesn't break anything."

Pesce leads the Canes with 86 blocks this season and de Haan and defenseman Jaccob Slavin each has 85. Faulk,

who had a team-high six blocked shots in the Canes' 4-0 road win Tuesday over the Pittsburgh Penguins, has 75. Carolina, as a team, has one of the lowest totals in the NHL. The Canes also allow the fewest shots against in the league.

An art form

It's something of an art form, blocking shots, and something that has to be practiced, Pesce said, as unappealing as that might sound.

"There's a lot of anticipation," Pesce said. "You have to anticipate where the puck's going and when and where it's going off the stick. It's like any other read in hockey, reading where the puck's going to go."

Pesce said in his first year in the NHL, he caught a shot off his ankle and suffered a fracture. He tried to play through the pain but finally had to shut it down for a while. But nearly all blocked shots hurt, he said.

"It always leaves a mark on your body," he said. "It takes a special someone to get in front of an 80 or 90 mile per hour shot. But you do it for your team. It can really get the boys going."

THE ATHLETIC

Who is on the hot seat as the NHL trade deadline approaches?

By Scott Burnside

Ah, the hot seat. This time of the year there are lots of them around the NHL.

For many folks, whether they're general managers, coaches or players, the trade deadline is as stressful a time as there is during the season. Fortunes wax and wane but this is where the buck stops for many, where seasons are won and lost, careers take abrupt turns.

Who's under the glare of the spotlight? Which GMs, coaches and players are feeling some uncomfortable warmth on their nether regions as the hours tick by toward 3 p.m. EST on Feb. 25?

Jim Nill, GM, Dallas Stars

A year ago at the trade deadline, GM Jim Nill threw down the gauntlet to his team saying he felt the answer to a playoff berth was in the dressing room already. The Stars then went winless in eight straight in March and missed the playoffs for the eighth time in the past 10 years. This season, of course, team president Jim Lites made headlines by publicly blasting captain Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin for their lack of productivity. The public lambasting drew lots of criticism from around the league; whether you can connect A to B is undetermined, but the Stars have been pretty darned good since. They sit in third place in the Central Division and opened up an eight-point gap on ninth-place Colorado.

Behind stellar netminding from Ben Bishop and Anton Khudobin, the Stars rank second in the league in goals

allowed per game. But if they're going to move from simply getting in the door to being a team that has a shot at making some noise in the postseason, it's hard to imagine another straight no-move trade deadline for Nill is going to cut it. The team is top heavy in scoring and through 50 games did not have a 20-goal scorer (Seguin now has 22 goals in 53 contests). After Benn, Seguin and Alexander Radulov, there isn't a player who has surpassed single digits in goals. The team currently ranks 29th in the league in goals per game. So, it doesn't take much of a stretch to suggest that goal scoring is a priority and ideally down the middle, although a source close to the team suggested that getting a true No. 2 center is likely an offseason task and a rental winger would be a priority at the deadline.

The Stars don't have a ton in the system to offer to acquire a top-end player, but defenseman Julius Honka should be attractive to lots of teams even though he hasn't quite found his footing in Dallas.

A year ago Nill won a battle of wills with former head coach Ken Hitchcock at the end of another disappointing season in Dallas, but having employed three coaches in the past three seasons (Lindy Ruff, Hitchcock and now rookie head coach Jim Montgomery), the pressure is as high as it's ever been for Nill, especially with the team hosting the 2020 Winter Classic at the Cotton Bowl.

Jason Botterill, GM Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres have missed the playoffs seven straight times and haven't won a playoff round since 2007. Long-suffering



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Sabre fans felt that maybe the playoff thaw would come this season when they reeled off 10 straight wins early in the season. But the team flattened out before rebounding slightly around the All-Star break. They still remain very much in the hunt in the Eastern Conference, but they definitely need some additional scoring up front to support the dynamic duo of Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner, who have a combined 48 goals and 101 points through 51 games. After that it's a pretty significant drop and coach Phil Housley has been doing some major revamping of the forward group in the hopes of generating more offense.

The biggest pressure GM Jason Botterill will likely feel is externally from antsy fans – and maybe from himself, especially if the team continues its zig-zag approach to the standings. Organizationally the team preached patience and waiting for its homegrown talent to coalesce into a Stanley Cup contender. That makes sense unless you think making a significant add sends the message to your dressing room that it's time to be a winner. Of course, there are no guarantees if you add an offensive piece like an Artemi Panarin (why not dream the big dream?) or Jakub Silfverberg or even a Mats Zuccarello, but if you don't add and you don't make the playoffs, well, it's a lot easier to second-guess being conservative.

The Sabres have lots of good prospects coming and the defense is young but able, led by rookie of the year candidate Rasmus Dahlin, so the future will look bright regardless. "I don't think (Botterill) is under much pressure internally," one former NHLer and longtime analyst said. "The fans will be wanting help at the deadline but the organization has a plan and I don't think they will steer away from that." Doesn't mean they shouldn't. Right?

Semyon Varlamov/Philipp Grubauer, goaltenders, Colorado Avalanche

Buoyed by arguably the NHL's best line of Mikko Rantanen, Nathan MacKinnon and Gabriel Landeskog, the Avs charged out of the gate and looked like they were going to build off last season with a second-straight playoff berth. Not so fast. In spite of adding Grubauer to help push veteran starter Semyon Varlamov, the Avs goaltending hasn't stabilized at all. In fact, it's destabilized has put GM Joe Sakic in a rather unpleasant bind. No doubt he'd like to add some offensive depth to help balance out the top line. But with the Avs sitting 24th in the league in goals allowed per game, an alarming 3.25 per game, and with neither Grubauer nor Varlamov able to show any consistency over the past 30 games or so, the Avs are suddenly life and death to make the playoffs. Varlamov hasn't won two straight since the end of November, and Grubauer, acquired at the draft and signed to a three-year deal, has been particularly disappointing with a 3.38 GAA and .891 save percentage.

The preparation of being the guy game after game is completely different, noted one longtime NHL netminder and analyst. "Some guys can do it and some guys can't," he said.

The Avs have committed to Grubauer and Varlamov is coming to the end of his contract, so the future in goal looks anything but defined, and by extension, Varlamov's future as an NHLer starter appears very much in doubt.

"I definitely wouldn't sign him," the netminder said of Varlamov. Now, the Avalanche still have lots to be excited about given they own Ottawa's first-round pick at June's draft, which might well turn into the first-overall pick and Jack Hughes. But in the here and now, not sure Sakic can justify sending assets out in the hopes that the goaltending rights itself and that it will be enough to get the Avs into the postseason.

Ken Hitchcock, coach, Edmonton Oilers

So, let's get this straight. The Oilers, a team with four No. 1 draft picks between 2010 and 2015, have made the playoffs just once since 2006 and this season fired both their coach (Todd McLellan) and GM (Peter Chiarelli), but they are all in for the playoffs. But they don't want to necessarily trade their first-round draft pick or any of the few top prospects in their system. Well, as long as they're not being unreasonable.

From the outside it might appear that the pressure lands squarely on assistant GM Keith Gretzky, who will handle the trade deadline for the beleaguered Oilers as they try and stay in the hunt in the sluggish Western Conference playoff race. But the real pressure is on veteran coach Hitchcock. One NHL coach said it's like Hockey 101 for the Oilers as they struggle to check consistently and deliver strong positional play.

And there's the no small matter of basically having two players, Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, deliver all of the team's offense. The two combined for 56 goals and 134 points coming out of the bye week. The rest of the Oiler roster chipped in 88 goals. Hitchcock recently split up his top three players – McDavid, Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins – but still saw his team blow leads.

Hitchcock is "up to his ass in alligators," the coach said. Hitchcock also has to find the right rhythm in his goaltender use now that the team placed their chips on newcomer Mikko Koskinen, bestowing a lavish three-year, \$13.5 million contract on the 6-foot-7, 30-year-old who's played just 33 NHL games, making incumbent Cam Talbot's days numbered in Edmonton – a departure that could be tied to the trade deadline.

The problem another NHL source familiar with the team said is that, it doesn't matter who is coaching, the dynamic is still the same. "They're slow. They're not skilled enough," the source said. "I don't think anybody can change around what's there."

Hitchcock came out of retirement to take what is essentially his dream job, coaching in the NHL in his hometown. If the team continues to stumble and misses the playoffs for the 12th time in 13 years, it may well be the last we see of one of the game's greatest coaches. If Hitchcock can push enough buttons to coax the Oilers into the postseason, well, he should earn a spot on the Jack Adams Trophy ballot as coach of the year. Like a lot of things with this team, not a lot of middle ground.

Jarmo Kekalainen, GM, Columbus Blue Jackets

You knew we'd get here eventually, didn't you? No NHL GM has more on his plate come deadline time than Kekalainen. His two top stars, Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, are set to become unrestricted free agents in the summer and



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have indicated they either won't be coming back under any circumstances or won't entertain that kind of discussion until the offseason. Panarin has been as advertised, collecting 59 points in his first 49 games. But Bobrovsky is another story, sitting with a pedestrian 3.01 GAA and .901 save percentage, hardly the kind of numbers that instill confidence that this is a team that could do some damage come playoff time, especially when you consider that Bobrovsky has been at best ordinary the past two springs for the Blue Jackets.

The theory, if you're Kekalainen, is that if you keep both Bobrovsky and Panarin because you believe this is a team capable of at least winning the team's first playoff series it's like adding two rentals. But with the Blue Jackets reeling into February having lost five straight, this team looks like it is finally crumbling under all of the outside pressures. As one longtime NHL netminder said recently, it's hard for players to come to the rink every day and throw everything behind a goaltender that clearly doesn't want to be there. The fact Bobrovsky was suspended by the team for a game before the All-Star break for basically abandoning his teammates after being pulled from a game has done little to suggest he's a guy you want in your dressing room.

Another longtime netminder and analyst said it's pretty basic stuff in terms of dressing room chemistry. "You've got to like your goaltender," he said. Not sure that's the case with Bobrovsky, so Kekalainen needs to bite the bullet, accept whatever return he might get and hope for some addition by subtraction. Of course trading Bobrovsky, who has a limited no-trade deal, is easier said than done.

As for Panarin, another longtime NHL analyst said the sooner the Blue Jackets can make a deal to find a new home for Panarin, the sooner they can try and regroup. He suggested Boston where Jake DeBrusk and a first-round pick might be a fair return for the talented winger.

Beyond that, the Blue Jackets have to ask themselves if they really are built for any kind of playoff run regardless of what happens with Panarin and Bobrovsky. They are very thin down the middle, the analyst said, and it's hard to imagine them having success against perennial Metropolitan Division powers Washington and Pittsburgh.

Don Waddell, GM, Carolina Hurricanes

It was roughly a year ago that new owner Tom Dundon persuaded longtime Atlanta Thrashers GM Waddell, who

was the head of the business operations with the Hurricanes, to take on the GM duties. Waddell made a blockbuster move in the summer, bringing in Dougie Hamilton and Micheal Ferland, along with top defensive prospect Adam Fox from Calgary for Noah Hanifin and Elias Lindholm. Both Lindholm and Hanifin are thriving for a Calgary team that is first in the Pacific Division. Waddell also traded Jeff Skinner to Buffalo for a package of prospects and draft picks, and Skinner is one of the NHL's top goal-producers. Skinner had control over his fate with a no-trade clause, so Waddell's options were limited, but the cumulative effect of the deals has still been lamentable as the Hurricanes continue to struggle offensively.

They are currently 24th in the league in goals scored and 24th on the power play. Here's where it gets interesting and exponentially more difficult for Waddell. The Hurricanes are almost certainly going to move Ferland, who has been a positive add in spite of some injury issues but as a pending unrestricted free agent doesn't fit the team's long-term plans. And they at some point need to move one of their right-handed defensemen – Hamilton, Justin Faulk or Brett Pesce – in order to make room for Fox, who has been a standout at Harvard and could step right into an NHL lineup next season if he signs with the Hurricanes.

"I think Ferland's bags are already packed," one source familiar with the Hurricanes said. But the dilemma is whether you wait until the draft to move a right-handed defenseman or maintain the status quo and hope that the return for Ferland is enough to bump up the offense.

Waddell has already helped to prepare for the seemingly imminent departure of Ferland by adding big-bodied Nino Niederreiter from Minnesota. Niederreiter is already finding chemistry with All-Star Sebastien Aho and chipped in five goals in his first six games as a Hurricane. That makes the Ferland departure easier to take, the source said. But if the Hurricanes stay within a point or two of the playoffs heading into Feb. 25, does Waddell get the green light to add a rental player? What would adding Zuccarello or Matt Duchene do to help a sputtering power play down the middle? What would such a move mean to a fan base that is starting to connect with the youthful Hurricanes under rookie coach Rod Brind'Amour? What is the value of such goodwill even if the Canes miss again? Is it worth a pick or prospect or two? Easy questions to ask, not so easy to answer.



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Recap: McElhinney, Canes Shut Out Penguins

McElhinney makes 23 save in his first shutout of the season

by Michael Smith

PITTSBURGH - Curtis McElhinney made 23 saves to earn his first shutout of the season, as he and the Carolina Hurricanes blanked the Pittsburgh Penguins, 4-0.

Jordan Martinook, Brett Pesce, Micheal Ferland (empty net) and Andrei Svechnikov tallied goals for the Hurricanes, who begin this season-long, five-game road trip with two points against a divisional opponent.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game.

One

From the net out, led by McElhinney's calming demeanor and veteran presence, the Hurricanes put forth a complete team effort to keep one of the league's best teams off the board, the reverse of what happened in the Canes' own building just before Christmas.

"Especially a team of that caliber, to come out and play the exact style that we need to play to be successful is definitely nice to see," Martinook said. "For Mac to come back in and play phenomenal, it just adds to our confidence in our goaltenders. That was a complete win, and I think everybody should be pretty happy about that."

"No complaints. I'll never complain about a shutout," McElhinney said. "It's nice to get a lead on the road, especially against a team like Pittsburgh."

"The guys know how we have to play to be effective. Part of it is certainly not letting off the gas. Just go play. Don't worry about the score," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We did that for the most part tonight and got rewarded for it."

Two

All-Star Weekend and the bye week came at a beneficial time for McElhinney, who, after his Jan. 15 start in New York City, was sidelined with a lower-body injury. With Alex Nedeljkovic stepping in for the three-game road trip through Western Canada, the Canes' veteran netminder had two weeks to rest his bothersome knee.

McElhinney returned from the team's eight-day break refreshed and ready to get back in net, and tonight he made his first start in three weeks.

"I was originally hurt around Christmastime. This worked out pretty well. It was nice to get two weeks," he said. "The body feels great, and it was nice to get a few practices in before this game."

It was as if McElhinney hadn't missed a beat.

"You look at Mac. He's just so calm. It almost looks easy," Martinook said. "For him to come in there and do that job is phenomenal and gives us more confidence than we already have in him."

McElhinney was sharp all night, but some of his best work came in the first period when the Penguins had the upper-hand in scoring opportunities.

Jared McCann dangled through the Canes' defense into open ice in the slot, and McElhinney went down to the ice to flash his right pad and make an early save. McElhinney also turned away a chance from Juuso Riikola, who drove the net with speed in attempt to sneak a backhand shot past the Canes' goaltender to no avail.

"He's been out a long time, but he's a veteran. He can handle that," Brind'Amour said. "He made some saves when we needed him to tonight. It allowed us to just kind of relax, not panic and not have to chase the game. He was good. The whole team. Solid effort."

Three

Martinook played in his 300th career NHL game tonight, and he marked off the occasion with a career high in goals, a timely marker in the final minute of the first period to give the Hurricanes a lead heading into the intermission.

Brock McGinn laid the puck off to Martinook, whose wrist shot blistered off the outside of Matt Murray's glove, the inside of the post and in with 44.7 seconds left in the period.

"I was trying to use the D as screen, and I think it actually went off him a little bit. A good play by Ginner to drive him back. You got get a little lucky sometimes," Martinook said. "Whenever you can play with the lead, it's definitely key."

"The first one is nice to just kind of break the ice," Brind'Amour said. "It was a good first period. Pretty even, but we get the break to go up. We didn't have to get chasing the game. We just keep playing."

Four

Not to be left out, Pesce joined in on the career high scoring fun.

In the second period, Justin Williams' strong work in the corner worked the puck up to Pesce at the point. He let a shot go from downtown that beat Murray high through a screen provided by Nino Niederreiter.



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The goal was Pesce's fifth of the season, a new career best in just his 44th game of the season.

"You're going to need all four lines and some D men scoring at some point in the season," McElhinney said. "It takes a little bit of pressure off some of the other guys, and it's nice to see them get rewarded for their hard work."

Five

Bringing a 2-0 lead into the third period, the Hurricanes slammed the door shut, limiting the Penguins to just five shots on goal. Ferland sealed the win with an empty-net goal at the 18:29 mark of the third period, while Svechnikov skated around Murray to add in his 13th of the season with 42 seconds left.

"They've got some skilled players that can roll around. That power play is huge," McElhinney said of the Penguins. "We did a good job defending that power play."

"I felt like the third was probably our best period. We didn't give them a whole lot," Martinook said. "It was a good win. I think we're all looking forward to Buffalo."

Up Next

The Hurricanes head to Buffalo to square off with the Sabres on Thursday, the front half of a back-to-back in the state of New York.

"It's certainly a nice way to start the road trip," McElhinney said. "Right now, we're in a critical spot where we've just got to keep pushing every game."



Black History Month spotlight: Weekes' incredible spring

Goalie steps in to help Hurricanes reach Final in 2002

by John Kreiser

As part of the NHL's celebration of Black History Month, NHL.com will highlight great moments and important figures in black hockey history each day throughout February. Pioneers like Willie O'Ree, Angela James and Grant Fuhr will be featured.

Today we look at former goalie and current NHL Network analyst Kevin Weekes.

Kevin Weekes was not exactly a traditional hockey goalie. Born in Toronto after his family had emigrated from Barbados, he told The New York Times he began playing hockey at age 6 because an older cousin was playing the game with friends.

"If I wanted to hang out with those guys, I had to play goalie," he said. "You don't really have much say when you're 6 years old and the guys around you are 13, 14."

Selected by the Florida Panthers in the second round (No. 41) of the 1993 NHL Draft, he was sent to his fifth NHL team, the Carolina Hurricanes, in a trade with the Tampa Bay Lightning on March 5, 2002, to add goalie depth.

Arturs Irbe started the first four games for Carolina in the 2002 Eastern Conference Quarterfinals against the New Jersey Devils, with Weekes relieving him in Games 3 and 4. But coach Paul Maurice started Weekes in Game 5 and was rewarded with a 40-save performance in a 3-2 overtime victory, Weekes' first playoff start since he was a 15-year-old playing junior hockey in Toronto. His biggest save came when he robbed New Jersey's John Madden in overtime.

Maurice stayed with the hot goalie in Game 6, and Weekes outplayed Martin Brodeur by making 32 saves in a 1-0 victory that clinched the series.

Weekes started Game 1 of the conference semifinals against the Montreal Canadiens and made 25 saves in a 2-0 victory. It was his last win that postseason; Carolina eventually went back to Irbe and reached the Stanley Cup Final, losing to the Detroit Red Wings.

Weekes was the No. 1 goalie for the Hurricanes in 2002-03 and 2003-04 and played with the New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils before retiring in 2009. He became the first black analyst in the sport, joining "Hockey Night in Canada" and NHL Network.



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McElhinney makes 23 saves, Hurricanes shut out Penguins

Helps Carolina to 11th win in past 16 games in return from lower-body injury

by Wes Crosby

PITTSBURGH -- Curtis McElhinney made 23 saves and the Carolina Hurricanes won for the 11th time in 16 games, 4-0 against the Pittsburgh Penguins at PPG Paints Arena on Tuesday.

The shutout was McElhinney's first this season and ninth in 205 NHL games (154 starts). He had three with the Toronto Maple Leafs last season, the most recent coming when he made 33 saves against the Montreal Canadiens on March 17, 2018.

McElhinney, returning from a lower-body injury, made his first start since Jan. 15, a 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers.

"No complaints. I'll never complain about a shutout," McElhinney said. "So it's nice to get a lead on the road, especially against a good team like Pittsburgh. ... I probably should've taken the extra week. I was originally hurt around Christmas time. So this worked out pretty well. It was nice to get two weeks. Body feels great. It was nice to get a few practices in before this game."

Jordan Martinook, Brett Pesce, Micheal Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov scored for the Hurricanes (26-21-6), who are 11-4-1 in their past 16 games.

Matt Murray made 28 saves for the Penguins (28-19-6), who have lost six of their past nine games (3-6-0) after winning 10 of their previous 11. They were shut out for the second time this season, the first coming in a 5-0 home loss to the Maple Leafs on Nov. 3.

"When we're at our best in the offensive zone, we stay close and support one another in the battles and on the 50-50s," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "When there's 50-50 pucks or there's not a lot of ice to play on, you need a third stick. You've got to stay close. ... I didn't think, tonight, there was a circumstance where we were under siege. There wasn't an exorbitant amount of shots being taken."

"We've got to find a way to score. We've got to find a way to make it hard on their team defense by having more offensive zone time."

In his 300th NHL game, Martinook gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead with 45 seconds remaining in the first period. After Brock McGinn dropped the puck to him at the top of the left circle, Martinook took a snap shot off Murray's glove and in for his NHL career-high 12th goal this season.

"To come out and kind of play the exact style we need to play to be successful is definitely nice to see," Martinook

said. "For [McElhinney] to come back in and play phenomenal just adds to our confidence of our goaltenders. That was a complete win and I think everybody should be pretty happy about that."

Pesce extended the lead to 2-0 at 12:58 of the second period with his NHL career-high fifth goal this season, and second goal in three games. He sent a snap shot from above the left circle past a screen from Nino Niederreiter glove side.

Ferland made it 3-0 on an empty-net goal with 1:31 remaining in the third period before Svechnikov pushed it to 4-0 on a wrist shot with 42 seconds left.

The Penguins were held without a shot in the third period until Kris Letang tipped one on with 8:53 remaining.

"We have to play 60 minutes," Letang said. "We have to be invested with 20 guys. ... We had good shifts, and after that, they had good shifts. So it's just a question of sustaining the attack, sustaining our momentum."

They said it

"We know how we have to play as a group. That's what's nice. We don't always do it, but the guys know how we have to play to be effective. Part of it is certainly not letting off the gas, and just go play. Not worry about the score. I think we did that for the most part tonight and got rewarded." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

"We didn't capitalize. We had a couple [chances] go through the legs and out the other way, hit the post and things like that. It was a tight game, and you've got to capitalize when you get your chances in a game like that. We didn't, and they did." -- Penguins captain Sidney Crosby

Need to know

Forward Justin Williams had one assist in his 400th game with the Hurricanes. He has 283 points (110 goals, 173 assists) in seven seasons with Carolina. ... Penguins forward Evgeni Malkin missed a third straight game with an upper-body injury that has him listed as day to day. He skated before practice Monday and the morning skate Tuesday. ... The Penguins lost to the Hurricanes for the fifth time under Sullivan. They are 10-4-1 against Carolina since hiring Sullivan on Dec. 12, 2015. ... Referee Brian Pochmara left the game with a lower-body injury. The third period was played with three officials.

What's next

Hurricanes: At the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; MSG-B, FS-SE, NHL.TV)

Penguins: At the Florida Panthers on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; SNE, SNO, FS-F, ATTSN-PT, NHL.TV)



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McElhinney, Hurricanes shut down Penguins 4-0

By WILL GRAVES

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Curtis McElhinney's been doing this a long time. More than a decade into his well-traveled NHL career, the Carolina Hurricanes goaltender understands how things tighten up after the All-Star break.

His team scrambling for a spot in the postseason for the first time in nearly 10 years, McElhinney provided the Hurricanes with a jolt, turning aside 23 shots for his first shutout of the season in a 4-0 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday.

"He made some saves when he needed to tonight and was able to (let) us relax and not have to chase the game," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

Brett Pesce and Jordan Martinook scored from way out to give the Hurricanes the lead and Michael Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov poured it on late as Carolina began a pivotal five-game trip by becoming just the second team all season to hold the Penguins scoreless. McElhinney picked up the ninth shutout of his 11-year career by stuffing Jared McCann and Jake Guentzel with sprawling saves in the first period and never letting up.

"We're in a critical spot where we need to just have to keep pushing every game," McElhinney said.

Matt Murray made 28 saves for the Penguins but lost for the third time in four starts since the All-Star break. Pittsburgh struggled to generate any consistent offensive pressure against McElhinney while playing without injured star Evgeni Malkin, who missed his third consecutive game with an upper-body injury.

"Obviously he's one of the best players in the world but since I've been here five years we've always battled through injuries and doesn't matter who is injured, we still have enough guys in here who can step up," Penguins forward Patric Hornqvist said. "We just have to find it."

The Penguins began Tuesday tied with Washington for second place in the Metropolitan Division while Carolina sat three points behind Columbus for the second wild-card spot in the jam-packed Eastern Conference with 30 games remaining. The Hurricanes have hung around thanks in large part to the steady play of the 35-year-old McElhinney, who improved to 12-6-1 while collecting his first shutout since March 17, 2018, while playing for Toronto.

Pittsburgh tested McElhinney early. McCann, acquired in a trade with Florida last week, collected a loose puck in front and darted across the crease. McElhinney went to his belly in an effort to poke check, missed, and then raised his right

leg, which stopped McCann's shot when McCann couldn't get the puck in the air. He made another big stop on Guentzel later in the period and fended off a shot by Sidney Crosby from the left circle with a right pad save.

"You look at (McElhinney), he's just so calm," Martinook said. "It almost looks easy. Everything looks easy. So for him to come in there and do that job is phenomenal, and gives us more confidence than we already had in him."

The Hurricanes didn't let the reprieve go to waste. Martinook took a drop pass from Jacob Slavin and ripped a wrist shot from the top of the left circle that deflected off the end of Murray's glove and into the net with 44 seconds left in the first.

Pittsburgh had a chance to tie it when Hornqvist drew a penalty then found himself alone on the door step on the ensuing power play midway through the second period. His wrist shot ended up in McElhinney's glove. Pesce doubled Carolina's lead shortly after the penalty expired, letting a shot go from atop the left circle that found its way through traffic — including sprawled Pittsburgh defender Jack Johnson and by Murray 12:58 into the second.

That was more than enough for McElhinney, who received plenty of help in front of him. The Penguins didn't even record a shot over the first 10 minutes of the third period and Carolina's lead was never in doubt. Ferland scored into an empty net with 1:31 left and Svechnikov added one for insurance with 42 seconds remaining after Murray returned to the ice.

"We had some really good looks, everybody I thought," Crosby said. "It was a tight game and we've got to find ways to win games like that."

NOTES: Both teams went 0 for 2 on the power play. ... Referee Brian Pochmara left in the second period with a lower-body injury and did not return. ... Pittsburgh D Justin Schultz skated with his teammates Wednesday morning and is close to a return after fracturing his left leg in Montreal on Oct. 13. ... Pittsburgh C Matt Cullen played in his 1,487th career game, tying Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky for 22nd on the all-time list. ... Carolina improved 21-1-2 when leading after two periods. ... Crosby played in his 914th game, one short of Hall of Famer Mario Lemieux's franchise record.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Travel to Buffalo on Thursday to face the Sabres.

Penguins: Begin a three-game road trip on Thursday in Florida against the Panthers.



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YAHOO! SPORTS

Power Rankings: The Sharks are playing out of their minds

Ryan Lambert

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

31. Ottawa Senators (Last week: 25)

30. Los Angeles Kings (LW: 29)

29. Anaheim Ducks (LW: 27)

It's one of those things, at this point, where you're like, "Okay, I get it, you say you don't want to fire the coach and you kinda can't blow up the roster because of all the NMCs." That makes sense. But you just gave up NINE goals, right? And you're angling to re-sign a 28-year-old who's good but not, like, a huge difference-maker who definitely won't be moving the needle for you when you're ready to compete again four years from now?

Forget firing Randy Carlyle, forget blowing up the roster. You gotta fire Bob Murray. This guy is in way over his head, having seen a bunch of very bad contracts catch up with him in a hurry. If he legitimately thinks this team is a healthy Corey Perry or Ryan Kesler away from not being on pace for 80 points, he's out of his mind. Look how well John Gibson played before his last two disastrous starts brought his save percentage down to .916.

This team is horrible and only going to get worse as The Core ages; Getzlaf and Perry are 33 and they don't have anyone who could reasonably score more than, say, 55 points in a full season. So what are we talking about?

28. New York Rangers (LW: 30)

27. Chicago (LW: 28)

Here's how bad everyone wants this team to still be good: They won four games in a row, two each on either side of the All-Star break, so there was an article yesterday on the Athletic saying, "Think where they'd be if Jeremy Colliton had coached all year."

Which like, okay, maybe not dead last in their division, but saying "They're five points out!" ignores so many things.

Games in hand — Chicago has at least one more played than every team in the wild card hunt.

The points system — five points is really tough to make up even if you get hot.

How many teams are between them —they're still worse than Anaheim, Edmonton, Arizona, St. Louis, and Colorado (none of which anyone thinks is a particularly good team) in the standings before they even claim Vancouver's playoff spot.

Slightly-less-than-recent history — before this four-game winning streak, they lost five in a row.

They had a better coach who they fired — Quenneville was 6-6-3 this year, which isn't good, but Colliton is 14-18-6, and even if we're giving him a whole month of leeway, they're 11-8-4 (a pace for less than 93 points) with a plus-1 goal difference.

Reality — they may be "five points out" but they're also "five points above dead last in the West."

So: Who cares?

26. Detroit Red Wings (LW: 26)

25. New Jersey Devils (LW: 24)

24. Philadelphia Flyers (LW: 31)

I almost wrote about the seven-game winning streak for 31 Takes yesterday but I didn't really want to hammer the fact that they're still seven points out of a playoff spot that much. Like, it's nice to win I guess but no one's opinion of this team should have changed that much.

The time to make Carter Hart the No. 1 goalie was Oct. 1, and doing it now is only hurting their draft position. Maybe they don't care about that, but it feels like they should because as good as Hart is and will be, sneaking into the playoffs isn't going to accomplish anything (more on that tomorrow).

23. Edmonton Oilers (LW: 18)

A thing that's great about the Oilers is every time they do something cool where you're like, "Well at least they still have McDavid and Draisaitl, and maybe that's all you need," all the no-talents on the roster pull the rug out from under you and remind you that nothing in that city is ever going to change.

That game against the Flyers was so funny, man. They should have won it in a walk but they Oilersed their way to an OT loss instead. It was so bad even the local media couldn't say "At least they got a point."

22. Arizona Coyotes (LW: 22)

21. Florida Panthers (LW: 23)

20. St. Louis Blues (LW: 21)

Much like the Flyers, these guys are winning a lot lately but to what end? They're three points out of the playoffs with a game in hand, but if they pulled the chute in the last two seasons by trading Kevin Shattenkirk and Paul Stastny, how are they gonna not-do that this time around?

Maybe you can say this is their go-for-it year given how much they added in the summer, but if they overtake Vancouver or Minnesota, what's it get them? A first-round bounce-out, and at best that goes seven games against Winnipeg, San Jose, or Calgary.

This will also be discussed tomorrow.

19. Vancouver Canucks (LW: 20)



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18. Buffalo Sabres (LW: 13)

If you want a good laugh, look at the Sabres' practice lines from yesterday.

People thought this team could be top-three in the Atlantic! Kyle Okposo, man.

17. Colorado Avalanche (LW: 17)

16. Minnesota Wild (LW: 14)

Not trying to read tooooooo much into five-game samples, but: That Rask-for-Niederreiter trade really doesn't seem to be working out well for the Wild. You didn't have to be a genius to see that coming. It's one of those things where Niederreiter never got a huge chance to be a bigger contributor offensively with Boudreau, and Rask isn't either.

But it seems to me that this is mainly because Rask is going to show you he shouldn't get one, whereas with Niederreiter it was because he just wasn't a Coach's Favorite.

15. Montreal Canadiens (LW: 16)

14. Dallas Stars (LW: 19)

I wonder if anyone in the world can figure these guys out. They have star power (ha ha ha) up front and on the blue line to be competitive in the middle of the playoff group — something like the fifth- to seventh-best team in the West seems plausible in theory — plus Ben Bishop and Anton Khudobin have very quietly put together a very good season (.925 and .926, respectively).

AND YET: This four-game winning streak follows a four-game losing streak, and that's not out of the ordinary for them. They've had two four-game winning streaks, two four-game losing streaks, and one each of winning or losing three games straight as well.

They have a plus-3 goal difference, the depth stinks, their CEO carpet-bombed the biggest names on the team, and they've had .920-plus goaltending all year with a new coach. Impossible to figure out.

13. Columbus Blue Jackets (LW: 9)

12. Carolina Hurricanes (LW: 12)

I was all set to go in on Brian Burke for grumbling his way through another boring-ass Fun Isn't Fun take but I don't have the energy at this point. Like, these boring old clowns who get to be The Voice of this sport aren't gonna go anywhere and you get the feeling that the next generation of TV personalities is only going to age into the same level of being insufferable.

It's the same stuff with boomers just getting pissed off about stuff they don't understand ("SELFIES? IN MY DAY WE HAD TO SIT STILL FOR 90 SECONDS AND EVERYONE IN YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY HAD TO BE IN THE PICTURE!") because it's different from how it was In Their Day, when everything had to be serious because everyone you knew died at 48 from black lung if you lived within 50 miles of a city with more than 250,000 people in it.

So whatever. Just like the Storm Surge thing isn't for Brian Burke's planet-wrecking, closed-the-door-behind-them

generation, his tired hockey's-only-good-if-someone-is-getting-incurable-brain-trauma schtick isn't for anyone who doesn't remember where they were when they heard Groucho Marx died.

Peace and love, peace and love.

11. New York Islanders (LW: 15)

10. Pittsburgh Penguins (LW: 10)

9. Boston Bruins (LW: 8)

If you're gonna lose, as the Bruins did in two of their three games this week, you might as well lose in OT or the shootout, as the Bruins did in both of their losses.

But beating Washington is the Bruins equivalent of the Capitals beating Pittsburgh in the playoffs. This unlocks a world of possibilities for them, as long as everyone can stay healthy, which... eh.

8. Winnipeg Jets (LW: 11)

7. Washington Capitals (LW: 6)

6. Vegas Golden Knights (LW: 4)

It's a little easier to swallow losing four straight, in which you only score six goals, if that's the first time you lost two in a row in regulation since early November.

At this point, they're up eight points on Vancouver, though the Canucks have two games in hand. They're basically locked into the third spot in that division regardless of what happens (within reason) the rest of the way.

They've got it figured out for the most part but you gotta get back on track, which should be possible tonight when they play..... at Tampa? Okay, well, maybe the game after that then.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs (LW: 7)

Very excited for 30 more games of everyone freaking out about how many right-shot defenders the Leafs have even as they pummel three-quarters of the teams they play over that stretch.

4. Nashville Predators (LW: 5)

3. Calgary Flames (LW: 2)

2. San Jose Sharks (LW: 3)

This is what the San Jose Sharks had in mind when they added Erik Karlsson to this defense over the summer.

It's not so much that the Flames took a step back (though that inexplicable Mike Smith start in Washington doesn't help) but rather that the Sharks are just playing out of their minds.

Three losses, all in a row, in the last 12 games, and only seven in regulation since the start of December. You also get the feeling that they're not even at their full operational capacity yet. These next four months are gonna be so fun.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (LW: 1)

Still on pace for 126 points. You gotta be kidding me.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap: Curtis McElhinney Earns First Shutout with Hurricanes, 4-0 Over Penguins

The Hurricanes started their road trip in style with a 4-0 victory over the Penguins.

By Zeke Lukow

The Carolina Hurricanes came into Pittsburgh looking to redeem themselves and put their loss to the Calgary Flames behind them. This game also saw Curtis McElhinney make his first start since the 6-1 beating the Canes took at Madison Square Garden. Despite his tough last outing McElhinney still entered the game boasting a .914 save percentage.

It's better now, after a 4-0 shutout of the Penguins that served as Mac's first whitewashing in a Hurricanes sweater.

McElhinney outplayed his counterpart, Matt Murray, throughout the game. Mac was unstoppable in the first two periods stopping everything that came his way at even strength and on the power play.

Carolina came out with a ton of energy to start the game, rushing to the puck and putting the body on the puck carrier. However, this did not translate into a ton of scoring opportunities early. Both teams were mistake prone in the first, but the Penguins generated high danger chances and scoring opportunities.

In a period where the Canes looked to be lucky to escape tied 0-0, they were the ones who broke through with 44 seconds left. Brock McGinn skated into the zone with Jordan Martinook trailing, McGinn dropped the puck back to Martinook who beat Murray glove side for his 12th goal of the year. The goal marked a new career high-mark for Martinook who received a two-year extension last week.

The second period could not have been more different for the two teams. The Canes kept up constant pressure and made every zone exit tough on the Penguins. Long sustained offensive zone pressure led to mistakes

by the Penguins. They really struggled to find rhythm offensively and with their passing. With the Pens trying to force more stretch passes it led to more mistakes and plenty of icing calls.

The Hurricanes were eventually rewarded for their efforts. With eight minutes left in the period, Brett Pesce was able to extend the lead to two. Pesce regained the puck along the boards and fired a shot high glove for a goal.

One of the most impressive aspects of the win was the Canes' play in the third. They did not fall into a defensive shell allowing for the Penguins to pepper McElhinney with shots. Instead, they kept up pressure in an intelligent way. Defensemen did not pinch in the offensive zone and they only went for cross-ice passes when it was 100% safe.

In the defensive zone, they pounced on the puck carrier preventing the Penguins from being able to fully set up in the zone. Instead, the Penguins had to rely on scrambles and bad angle chances. McElhinney was able to stop whatever did get through in the third to complete the shutout. This is his first of the season and his ninth career shutout. Rod Brind'Amour also smartly matched up Jaccob Slavin on Sidney Crosby every time he was on the ice, and multiple times he shut him down one-on-one.

Micheal Ferland eventually scored an empty-netter with over a minute to seal the deal - but the scoring wasn't over there. A minute later, Andrei Svechnikov took the puck from the Pens on their blue line, skated in and beat Murray to end his scoring drought.

It's just the fourth win for the Canes over Mike Sullivan as Penguins coach since he took over in 2015. Carolina now heads to Buffalo as the road trip continues against the Sabres on Thursday.

Charlotte Checkers Corner: Bad Things Come In Twos?

Charlotte suffers a pair of overtime losses to the Providence Bruins in a shortened week.

By Justin Lape

Charlotte earned two points in as many games but still ended up on the wrong end of the score sheet as the Checkers suffered a pair of overtime losses at home in a shortened week.

There are scant positives to take away from the losses having only scored a goal. However, the defense and goaltending played well enough to earn the points for the

Checkers as they extend their lead to eight points over the entire American Hockey League. The scary trend? Charlotte has lost five of their last six games after winning six of seven.

Weekend Recap

Charlotte scored their lone goal of the weekend in Friday's 2-1 overtime loss to Providence. Aleksii Saarela released a shot from the point that was tipped in by Julien Gauthier with 27 seconds left in the game to send it to overtime. However, Cameron Hughes scored in overtime to give Providence the win. Alex Nedeljkovic played well for the Checkers, stopping



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29 of 31 shots. Zane McIntyre stopped 28 of the 29 Checkers shots he faced.

The Checkers were fortunate enough to secure a point as they suffered a 1-0 overtime loss to Providence on Saturday. Gemel Smith scored in overtime against Scott Darling to give the Bruins the win. The Checkers put 37 shots on Bruins goalie Dan Vladar and generated chances on four power plays but could not convert.

Thought of the Week

Dear Haydn Fleury,

You're not a bad player. Quite frankly, you're a competent defenseman at the NHL and an elite one at the AHL level. I'm not sure why the Hurricanes keep choosing you specifically to call-up and send down other than having an extra body for games. All I want to say is two things: I'm sorry you have had to go through this recently, and don't buy real estate in Raleigh or the Queen City.

Sincerely,

Canes Country and its readers

Player(s) of the Week

Well, obviously not the offense. Only one goal in a pair of games is not great but this weeks players of the week go to both goaltenders. Scott Darling and Alex Nedeljkovic did all they could this weekend to secure two points. Unfortunately, Charlotte's strong offense hit a rough patch.

Looking Ahead

The Cleveland Monsters come to town for a pair of games Tuesday and Wednesday. Charlotte will then hit the road for two games against the Hershey Bears. The two games will begin a five-game road trip for Charlotte before they return home on Feb. 22.

After working way to NHL, hard-nosed Maenalanen finds role with Canes

Saku Maenalanen played with Sebastian Aho on Karpat and Teuvo Teravainen on the 2014 Finnish World Junior team. Now he's joined them both on the Canes, and carved out a role with his own style of play.

By Andrew Schnittker

Carolina Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell made a number of moves during his first offseason in charge. Many of them, such as the Lindholm/Hanifin/Ferland/Hamilton/Fox and Skinner trades, got plenty of attention.

The signing of Finnish forward Saku Maenalanen to a one-year, two-way deal in May went mostly under the radar. Maenalanen, a friend of Canes forwards Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen who played with them at the World Championship, would add forward depth and compete for a spot on the fourth line.

Following a mid-season callup, however, Maenalanen has emerged as a key cog in the Canes' bottom six. He's chipped in four goals and six points in 15 games, and his hard-nosed, grinding style of play has made him a valuable member of the fourth line.

Maenalanen has played that way his whole life, and he's found it translated well to the NHL game.

"Of course there's more rink," Maenalanen said. "But I try to play the same way, working hard, skate hard, play my own game."

Maenalanen's play has impressed both of his fellow Finns on this team. He and Aho hail from the same hometown and played together on Karpat's junior and pro teams.

While the pair's style of play could not be more different, Carolina's top-line center appreciates what Maenalanen has brought to the table.

"I think he's done a pretty good job," Aho said. "He looks pretty comfortable up here. It helps. He's a big body who can

skate. So it really makes it easier for him. I think he's doing it right. He's not cheating on the ice. He just works hard."

Teravainen, the Canes' other top scorer who hails from Finland, also knows Maenalanen well.

The two were linemates for team Finland at the 2014 IIHF World Junior Tournament, which saw Teravainen lead all players with 15 points, and Maenalanen was the top goal scorer with seven in seven games for the gold medal-winning Finns.

"He's a good player; he works hard," Teravainen said. "He's a goal scorer, too. He can play a two-way game. He's strong. He kind of does a little bit of everything. He has some experience playing in the Finnish pro league for many years with the men. Of course it's a little bit of a new world for him with a new language and the smaller rink. So it's good to see he can handle all that stuff."

While that language barrier is difficult for any player in a new country, having his "Finnish friends" in Aho and Teravainen already on the team has been a help to Maenalanen.

When he was considering signing with Carolina during last year's World Championship, Maenalanen talked with Aho to get a rundown on playing in Raleigh and what it was like. What his countryman told him must have swayed him.

It's turned out to be a good choice for Maenalanen, as he's been a good fit in the Canes' bottom six, and having two fellow Finns has eased his transition.

"It's easier to get in the team with obviously we both know him pretty well," Aho said. "His English is not really strong yet but he's getting better at that too. It's good to have Finns here so he can talk with the guys."

At 24, Maenalanen is the same age as Teravainen and three years older than Aho, but made the jump to North America two years after Aho and five years after Teravainen.



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Everyone develops at their own pace, and Maenalanen needed to add size and strength to handle the physicality of North American hockey in smaller rinks. The way he worked his way to the NHL and improved himself is something his Finnish teammates admire.

"It's a good example," Teravainen said. "You have to work hard every day to get better. Even if you're not on the junior national team and stuff, you can still get better."

Of course, Maenalanen had another step to work his way through to get to the NHL. After a solid training camp, he lost out on the Canes' numbers game and was sent to Charlotte, where he put up seven goals and 14 points in 31 games ahead of his first recall in December.

Canes head coach Rod Brind'Amour was impressed by Maenalanen in camp, but the team felt he needed more time to adjust to playing in North America. He did that, and has made an impact for Carolina since joining the NHL ranks.

"Everyone looks at goals, but to me, it's just how he's playing is the way we needed," Brind'Amour said. "He may score he may not on those. ... But it's the fact that every shift he's out

there, he's productive. That's kind of what he did in training camp too. I don't know that he scored a bunch in training camp but he was certainly productive in the sense that he was winning his shift. He's pretty much doing what we hoped we would do."

Just as Maenalanen worked his way from Finland to North America and from the AHL to the NHL, Brind'Amour expects to see him earn a larger role with the team if he continues to impress with his hard-working style of play.

"He'll play more as we go along if he continues to do that," Brind'Amour said. "Obviously you want to get the guys out there that are making things happen. So he's been good. To me it's the level of play. He's competitive and his pace has been really good. That's something that we need."

Maenalanen had interest from other NHL teams when he decided to sign with the Canes back in May. He called the Hurricanes, with two of his fellow Finnish players and Finns already signed, "the best fit" for him.

Turns out, he was a pretty good fit for them too.



Checkers Get Back on Track with Win Over Cleveland

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

After a couple tough contests over the weekend, the Checkers got back on track with a convincing 3-1 victory over the Cleveland Monsters.

The home side wasted no time getting their offense clicking as Aleksii Saarela one-timed a quick feed from Jake Bean less than six minutes in to put Charlotte on top. Things continued to tilt the Checkers' way in the middle frame, with Josiah Didier chipping in a rebound for his first tally of the season and Morgan Geekie unleashing a rocket slap shot to run the lead to 3-0 through 40 minutes of play.

The Monsters finally broke through early in the third, taking advantage of a five-on-three power play, but that would be the only blemish on Alex Nedeljkovic's night as he finished with 32 saves to claim his league-leading 22nd win.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the game

We had a good start and then we didn't play particularly well down the stretch. We had a lot of quality chances early on and didn't give them much.

Vellucci on breaking through offensively after scoring just one goal in the previous two games
We stayed with it and we pressured. Geekie's had a lot of

chances the last three or four games and didn't score, and he had another great one early on and the goalie made a nice save, then he finally was rewarded with one.

Vellucci on Josiah Didier's goal

He had a lot of great chances and then he buried his rebound. I'm really happy for him because he was really excited and the guys on the bench were excited for him. Anytime our D can join the rush and get in the play, we want them to do that.

Josiah Didier on getting a win on the heels of two straight overtime losses

Those were two hard-fought playoff-type games against Providence and unfortunately we lost both in overtime but I thought we played really well. To be able to bounce back tonight, come out with a great start and come out with the win was huge.

Didier on his first goal of the season

It feels great to be able to put that first one in. It was a great win on the faceoff and I just tried to bury it and then got the rebound

Didier on defensemen joining the rush

It's the way we want to play. We want to play with four or five guys on the rush, and we've got guys on the back end that are great playmakers and puckhandlers, guys that can score



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and play defense as well. It doesn't matter who's out on the ice because we've got the group of guys that can put the puck in the net.

NOTES

The Checkers have points in each of their last four games (2-0-2) ... Of the Checkers' last six goals, Aleksi Saarela scored three and assisted on another ... Alex Nedeljkovic pushed his league-leading wins total to 22. He has a 7-0-1 record in 2019 ... Roland McKeown's fighting major was the second of

Steven Lorentz Assigned To Florida

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Charlotte Checkers today assigned Steven Lorentz to the ECHL's Florida Everblades.

The second-year pro has logged 13 games this season with the Checkers and recorded a goal and an assist, both of which are the first in his AHL career. Lorentz has been with Charlotte since early December for his most recent stint with the team but has been a healthy extra more often than not,

his AHL career ... This was the first meeting between Cleveland and Charlotte since March 30, 2017 ... Janne Kuokkanen returned to the lineup after missing the last four games due to injury ... Forward Zack Stortini and defenseman Dennis Robertson were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The Checkers wrap up their home stand with a rematch on Winning Wednesday \$1 beer night at the coliseum

appeared in just four games since Christmas.

The forward now returns to Florida, where he put up 21 points through 17 games this season and ranked second on the team in scoring at the time of his recall.

With Janne Kuokkanen slated to return from injury tonight, the Checkers currently have 13 healthy options at forward.



Tipsheet: Under Brind'Amour, Hurricanes are NHL's silliest team

As a young player for the St. Louis Blues, Rod Brind'Amour was deadly serious.

His response to every development -- good, bad or ugly -- was to go lift some more weights. He was an uptight kid playing for an uptight coach, Brian Sutter, and he didn't become a star until he departed for the Philadelphia Flyers in the disastrous trade that brought Ron Sutter and Murray Baron to the STL.

These days Brind'Amour is coaching the Carolina Hurricanes and he wants the boys to cut loose. The 'Canes follow their home victories with choreographed on-ice team celebrations that irk NHL traditionalists.

"We want to have fun when you win," Brind'Amour explained to reporters earlier this season. "The game should be fun. We want the players to enjoy winning and the fans to enjoy being here. Our owner (colorful Tom Dundon) has been pushing that all the way. Why wouldn't you try something different?"

Well, because it's stupid. What would Brian Sutter think of a team staging a postgame "Duck, Duck, Goose" contest at center ice?

That's what the 'Canes did after beating the Vegas Golden Knights 5-2 last week. Then the team trumpeted the stunt on social media, triggering plenty of "tsk, tsk" comments from folks who hate to see a NHL rink turn into an elementary school playground.

In the old days, a team staging such a celebration would have to play "Duck, Duck and Duck Some More" the next time it faced an opponent it mocked with such silliness.

Back in the league's (Chuck) Norris Division era, such high jinks would have led to rematch head hunting. Perhaps the Hurricanes would play a new game like "Hunting For My Scattered Teeth" or "Who Turned On My Blood Spigot?"

But gritty Hurricanes veteran Justin Williams insists the team means no disrespect with its antics.

"We're trying to rebrand the Carolina Hurricanes into being relevant, I guess," Williams told reporters. "This is one small thing. This is just a celebration after the game. But it means something to us because there hasn't been a lot of success here, and we're trying to show people that we won't stand for it."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1129131 Carolina Hurricanes

Blocking shots in the NHL: 'You close your eyes and pray'

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

FEBRUARY 05, 2019 12:40 PM

Brock McGinn was down on the ice, in pain. A lot of pain.

The Carolina Hurricanes forward had just blocked a shot by defenseman Shea Theodore of the Vegas Golden Knights on Friday, the puck catching McGinn near his left ankle. He struggled to get up, finally hobbling to the bench, grimacing as others around him patted him on the back.

Nearly everyone in the arena seemed to have their eyes on McGinn, as if somehow feeling part of his pain.

What does it feel like to block a shot in the National Hockey League?

"It's a good hurt," McGinn said Monday.

Come again? A good hurt?

"Blocking shots, I've always kind of liked to do it," McGinn said.

Nearby, defenseman Calvin de Haan smiled. "Ginner's a little crazy," he said.

It's a necessary part of being a hockey player, especially a role player like McGinn, who sees a lot of shorthanded time on the penalty kill. Defensemen block countless shots, with all parts of their bodies.

"You just close your eyes and brace yourself and hope you get hit in a good spot," de Haan said. "It takes a big set of cojones to get in front of some of those pucks. Ginner's pretty fearless and guys really rally around that kind of stuff."

McGinn was helping to protect a 4-2 lead against Vegas at PNC Arena. Theodore had both goals for the Golden Knights and was winding up for another big slap shot, looking to make it a one-goal game. McGinn lowered his left leg to the ice, putting himself in harm's way, taking the full brunt of the shot.

Moments later, defenseman Justin Faulk flipped the loose puck nearly the length of the rink and into an empty net for a 5-2 lead. But McGinn was the one everyone first congratulated at the bench, including Faulk.

"It's an important piece of a team," McGinn said of shot-blocking. "When you see guys out there sacrificing and trying to block shots, I think that it shows the guys that you care and want to be there. It just sort of brings everybody in."

But, man, does it hurt.

A hockey puck is a piece of vulcanized rubber that's an inch thick, three inches in diameter and weighs about six ounces. The pucks are frozen before games, all the better for moving smoother and faster on the ice.

That's all well and good until someone like, say, Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals winds up for a 100 mph one-timer on that frozen black disk.

Canes defenseman Brett Pesce has been in that position before. And ...

"You thinking, 'Don't hit me,'" he said, laughing. "You close your eyes and pray it doesn't hit you in the wrong spot and doesn't break anything."

Pesce and de Haan lead the Canes with 84 blocks apiece this season and defenseman Jaccob Slavin has 83. Carolina, as a team, has one of the lowest totals in the NHL. The Canes also allow the fewest shots against in the league.

It's something of an art form, blocking shots, and something that has to be practiced, Pesce said, as unappealing as that might sound.

"There's a lot of anticipation," Pesce said. "You have to anticipate where the puck's going and when and where it's going off the stick. It's like any other read in hockey, reading where the puck's going to go."

Pesce said in his first year in the NHL, he caught a shot off his ankle and suffered a fracture. He tried to play through the pain but finally had to shut it down for a while. But nearly all blocked shots hurt, he said.

"It always leaves a mark on your body," he said. "It takes a special someone to get in front of an 80 or 90 mile per hour shot. But you do it for your team. It can really get the boys going."

News Observer LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129218 NHL

Standings slow down trade action ahead of deadline

By STEPHEN WHYNO

When the Maple Leafs sent a first-round pick and two prospects to the Kings for Jake Muzzin, it didn't exactly open the flood gates a month before the trade deadline.

That is because the standings are slowing everything down.

With less than three weeks until the Feb. 25 deadline, there are nine teams within five points of a playoff berth behind the 16 currently holding a slot. The NHL appears to be in wait-and-see mode, even though some big-name players are out there in the trade market. There are far more buyers than sellers right now as general managers wait to see what unfolds and how close they can get to contending.

"We'll know better by Feb. 25 where we're at," said Florida GM Dale Tallon, whose team is nine points out. "We'll go game by game and week by week and then we'll decide before the deadline what we're going to do. Performance will dictate what we do."

Who is the biggest sleeper in Washington's impressive 2019 signing class?



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The Panthers already made one move, acquiring picks and pending free agents Derick Brassard and Riley Sheahan from the Penguins for Jared McCann and Nick Bjugstad. Of course, they could still try to acquire pending free agent winger Artemi Panarin and/or goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky from Columbus.

Panarin and Bobrovsky are two of the hottest commodities who could be available, along with Ottawa forwards Matt Duchene and Mark Stone, Philadelphia winger Wayne Simmonds and Carolina winger Micheal Ferland. Need a goalie and don't want to pay for a two-time Vezina Trophy winner like Bobrovsky? Edmonton's Cam Talbot or Detroit's Jimmy Howard are possibilities.

A lack of true sellers could drive up the prices and delay the falling dominoes.

"Sometimes it drags out a little bit," Washington GM Brian MacLellan said. "I think people get frustrated with it, but people are trying to get full value for things they perceive need to be getting full value (for), and it takes it to the end to figure out what is the actual value."

MacLellan said the defending Stanley Cup champion Capitals are active in trade talks. Their championship window is wide open now. For teams like the Flyers, the window isn't yet open without some changes.

"We could both buy and sell," Flyers GM Chuck Fletcher said. "Every decision we make, if we're going to try to improve our team going forward and we can get that player now, great. To be better next year, we may have to try to get better this year."

Plenty of calls should be going to Los Angeles GM Rob Blake, who acknowledged the Kings are "at the bottom of the league." They have a potential rental in forward Carl Hagelin and some older players with years left on their deals like Jeff Carter and Alec Martinez. It is a team in transition after winning the Cup in 2012 and 2014.

"We're looking at a lot of different options," Blake said. "I don't want to get into specifics of players, but we are actively looking at making moves for the future of the organization."

MATTHEWS CASHES IN

Toronto agreed to terms with franchise center Auston Matthews on a \$58.17 million, five-year extension. Matthews will make much of his money in signing bonuses during the length of the contract that counts \$11.634 million against the salary cap through 2023-24. Matthews and the Maple Leafs agreed on something shorter than the eight years Connor McDavid got in Edmonton to keep his salary under \$12 million. It remains to be seen what that means for teammate Mitch Marner and Winnipeg winger Patrik Laine in upcoming contract negotiations, both on cap-strapped teams wanting to win now where perhaps a shorter contract is better.

GAME OF THE WEEK

The San Jose Sharks visit the Calgary Flames on Thursday in a matchup of the top two teams in the Pacific Division.

LEADERS (through Monday)

Goals: Alex Ovechkin (Washington), 37; Assists: Nikita Kucherov (Tampa Bay), 58; Points: Kucherov, 80; Ice time: Drew Doughty (Los Angeles), 26:42; Wins: Marc-Andre Fleury (Vegas), 27; Goals-against average: Robin Lehner (N.Y. Islanders), 2.02; Save percentage: Lehner, .932.

Seattle Times LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129219 NHL

Maple Leafs sign Auston Matthews to 5-year, \$58 million deal

By The Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Auston Matthews, one of the NHL's great young talents, signed a five-year contract extension with the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday at an annual average of \$11.6 million.

The 21-year-old center was making the maximum \$925,000 a year under his three-year rookie deal. He was eligible to become a restricted free agent July 1.

Matthews, a former No. 1 overall draft pick and a rookie of the year, is in his third season with Toronto. He has 97 goals and 81 assists in 182 regular-season games. This season he has 23 goals and 23 assists, but he has played in only 38 of Toronto's 52 games because of injury.

The NHL rookie of the year from Scottsdale, Arizona, has represented Toronto at the NHL All-Star Game in each of his three seasons.

The precise average annual payout is \$11.634 million — the 34 at the end appearing to be a nod to his jersey number. The bulk of the money reportedly is in signing bonuses. He will make just \$750,000 in salary each of the five years while getting bonuses of \$15.2 million, \$15.2 million, 9.7 million, 7.2 million and \$7.2 million.

His extension comes after 22-year-old Maple Leafs forward William Nylander signed a six-year deal in December worth \$10.2 million this season and \$6.9 million the following seasons.

Seattle Times LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129120 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres' power play scores twice after changes

By Jason Wolf

Published Wed, Feb 6, 2019

Phil Housley made it clear the Buffalo Sabres' reshuffled lines, defensive pairings and power play units were subject to change.

But after the Sabres scored twice with an extra skater in a 5-4 shootout victory against the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday night at KeyBank Center, his changes to jumpstart the power play may stick.

Evan Rodrigues and Rasmus Dahlin each scored with the man advantage as the Sabres went 2 for 2 on the power play against Minnesota after converting just 3 of 33 opportunities over the previous 13 games. Minnesota entered the game with the fifth-best penalty kill in the NHL (83.8 percent).

It was the first time the Sabres scored two power play goals in a game since Dec. 15, when they lost 4-3 in a shootout at Washington.

"The power play is work," Eichel said after Tuesday morning's skate, before earning an assist on both power play goals against the Wild. "Some of these kills in the NHL, they're full-out pressure for two minutes. Everybody has got to be on the same page. But as soon as you get a goal on the power play, your confidence starts building and the guys start getting in a groove a bit.

"At times this year, the power play has been good for us and you look at the game in Washington. There's been times where it's obviously not helped us. It's about building momentum for our group and if we get the opportunity, trying to capitalize."



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Housley reshaped the team's power play units as part of sweeping changes on Monday, when the Sabres' 17 percent success rate ranked 22nd in the NHL.

The first power play unit now features Eichel and Dahlin at the points, with Jeff Skinner, Casey Mittelstadt and Sam Reinhart up front.

The second power play unit features Rasmus Ristolainen and Rodrigues at the points, along with Conor Sheary, Kyle Okposo and Tage Thompson.

"We had good chemistry, both units," Dahlin said. "I think we played faster this time, had a lot of shots on the net. I think that was the biggest change."

The Sabres' two power play goals on five shots against the Wild equaled their total over the previous 11 games combined.

They were 2 for 28 on the power play in that span, and 1 for 19 over the last seven games – with Okposo snapping a 0 for 18 skid in the third period of Friday's 7-3 loss to Chicago.

The Sabres have scored on the power play in consecutive games for the first time since Dec. 22 and 27 against Anaheim and St. Louis, respectively.

"It's good for them," Housley said. "It's good for their confidence. They haven't been rewarded. They've had good looks, and they haven't gotten the results, but it's good for them for their confidence."

Rodrigues scored on the team's first opportunity Tuesday, with Okposo screening Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk to give the Sabres a 1-0 lead just 4:31 into the game. Ristolainen earned an assist, in addition to Eichel.

It was Rodrigues' fifth goal in the last seven games. His seven goals this season tie a career high.

"I'm just starting to get the bounces now," Rodrigues said. "I kept saying throughout the year that the chances were coming, and I wasn't capitalizing. That's all I needed to do was just start burying my chances, not get frustrated with my game because I thought I was playing well. Now they're finally starting to go in."

Dahlin scored on a hard wrister in the second period, after a pass from Eichel, to give the Sabres a 3-1 lead with 8:27 remaining in the frame. Mittelstadt also picked up an assist on the goal.

"The simplification of just shooting the puck probably will be good," Eichel said, essentially foreshadowing Dahlin's goal. "At times this year, we've been one-and-done in terms of having just one chance in the zone and then the puck gets cleared. It's important to make it tough on the other team. If you look at our goals this year, a lot of them have been after the first initial attack, retrieving the puck and making a play off it. It's important to do that."

Buffalo News LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129121 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres survive scare, beat Wild behind Reinhart's shootout goal

By Lance Lysowski

Published Tue, Feb 5, 2019|Updated Wed, Feb 6, 2019

Sam Reinhart helped change the narrative for the Buffalo Sabres with one shot Tuesday night. Reinhart, skating in alone during the third

shootout round in KeyBank Center, released a shot hard enough that the puck rolled slowly through Devan Dubnyk to cross the goal line.

Linus Ullmark proceeded to stop Zach Parise at the other end of the ice to clinch the Sabres' 5-4 win over the Minnesota Wild. Buffalo, now 26-20-6, blew a two-goal lead in the second period and allowed the tying goal with 1:37 remaining in regulation.

A loss would have raised additional questions about their roster and playoff hopes. Instead, the Sabres kept pace with Carolina -- which defeated Pittsburgh, 4-0, Tuesday night -- and showed tangible signs of progress, despite some familiar lapses near their own net.

"The games are kind of winding down in a hurry, and we know how important every game is," Reinhart, who also scored the go-ahead goal in the third period, said.

Housley threw his forward lines and defensive pairings into a blender following a 7-3 loss to Chicago on Friday night. Additionally, the Sabres' coach changed his power-play personnel and opted to use Linus Ullmark as his starting goalie for the second of seven straight home games.

Some changes worked, others didn't. Buffalo scored two power-play goals, beginning with Evan Rodrigues' to give the Sabres a 1-0 lead 4:31 into the game. Rasmus Dahlin added another at 11:33 into the second period for a two-goal advantage.

Ullmark, who posted a .891 save percentage over his previous seven games, made 41 saves -- not counting the three he made during the shootout.

On the other hand, the Sabres again struggled in their own zone.

Lawrence Pilut's turnover -- the result of a pass missed by Vladimir Sobotka -- resulted in Jared Spurgeon scoring the tying goal at 6:29 into the second period. After the Sabres took a 3-1 lead, Charlie Coyle tied the score, 3-3, when he beat Pilut and Rodrigues to a loose puck in the crease, and poked it over the goal line with 2:55 left in the second period.

"We had some breakdowns, especially in the second," Rodrigues said. "Just a little bit lackadaisical. I thought we sat back a little bit. We let them come up with a ton of speed in the neutral zone. ... When a team comes at you with that much speed in the neutral zone it's hard to stop them."

The Sabres were outshot, 10-1, for the first six minutes of the second period. Conversely, in the first period they had 10 shot attempts on Dubnyk before Minnesota had one.

With the net empty and six Wild players on the ice, Minnesota tied the score when Parise jammed a puck between the inside of the post and Ullmark's right leg pad to send the game into overtime.

"It's a game we found a way to win," Housley said. "In the second period -- you don't want to sound negative -- but we had a 3-1 lead. That's a time to really lock it down and keep a simple game. I thought we were trying to get four and not in the right way. In the defensive zone, guys were beating us back to the net. We've got to learn how to tighten it up."

Housley finally found some 5-on-5 success by tinkering his forward lines in the third period. Jack Eichel, reunited with Jeff Skinner and Jason Pominville for the final 15 minutes of regulation, finished with nine shots on goal in 25 minutes, 57 seconds of ice time. But it was the line of Reinhart, Conor Sheary and Casey Mittelstadt that scored what could have been the decisive goal.

Reinhart one-timed a pass from Jake McCabe into the open net to make it 4-3 with 13:35 remaining in regulation. Reinhart also had success skating alongside Rodrigues and C.J. Smith, who scored his second goal of the season at 7:32 into the second period.

"I thought we really had a lot of quality zone time, a lot of good looks," Housley said of his third-period changes. "We had to shorten the bench there a little bit towards the end. ... I liked the way the guys stayed aggressive with the game."



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Though Housley will have some difficult decisions to make, Tuesday night revealed a number of potential options for forward lines.

However, defense is why they have not won back-to-back games in nearly two months. The Wild (26-22-5) had 45 shots on goal during regulation and overtime. There were still too many turnovers and long possessions in the Sabres' defensive zone.

This was the eighth time in nine games the Sabres had allowed three or more goals. They allowed three goals only three times during their 10-game winning streak in November.

"As important as [goaltending] is in this league, to win hockey games we feel that we have to do a better job limiting them," Reinhart said.

Buffalo News LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129122 Buffalo Sabres

Mike Harrington: Time for Sabres to turn the crease over to Linus Ullmark

By Mike Harrington

Published Tue, Feb 5, 2019 | Updated Tue, Feb 5, 2019

You start from the top before you dig deeper. Doesn't matter who you want to blame. The Buffalo Sabres are just flat-out giving up too many goals.

Tuesday's 5-4 shootout win against Minnesota marked the eighth time in the last nine games opponents have scored at least three times. There's been a pair of seven-goal blowups in there, against Edmonton and Chicago. And the one time the Sabres kept the yield under three, they still lost in a 1-0 affair in Dallas.

Goals are often everyone's fault, as the goalies are the last line of defense. My view has long been considered harsh on goalies, often passing exclusive blame when the responsibility could have been shared.

But there's no doubt after Tuesday's game, even after he gave up four goals, that it's time for the Sabres to give Linus Ullmark a run in the crease. He made 41 saves through regulation and overtime and two more in the shootout. It's hard to ask for much more.

And he even took a knee to the head from Zach Parise on the final shootout attempt. Hunched over as he left the ice while his teammates celebrated, you wondered how Ullmark would respond.

How does he feel?

"I feel fantastic. A win 5-4. I feel absolutely awesome," Ullmark said. "I have no clue what happened. I made the save."

It was a game that featured 84 shots on goal (45 by Minnesota) and the Sabres gave up the tying goal with 1:37 left and Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk on the bench for an extra attacker. They gave up 19 shots on goal and three goals in the second period. And still won.

"We really tried this game to keep it down but there's going to be games where it's a 5-4 game, 6-5 game, whatever," Ullmark said. "Every game you have to focus on next puck. I can't stop after I make, say, 10 saves. It doesn't work like that."

It's hard to argue much about Ullmark's night.

"It's sort of indicative of the way we've been playing," said coach Phil Housley. "We've been focusing on tightening it up. There's times in the game you really have to be smart and not beat ourselves. Tonight we

almost beat ourselves but Linus played outstanding, really attacked the game.

"He was really charging out to pucks, fighting through traffic and didn't give them a lot of second opportunities. It's just tough to see that fourth goal go in because he's played such a good game up to that point."

Ullmark was strong on the short side early. He robbed old friend Marcus Foligno in the first period after a Lawrence Pilut turnover. He stopped Parise on a breakaway in overtime and made a couple of other stops in the extra session on the Wild standouts.

"Some of the saves he made tonight were incredible," said forward C.J. Smith, who saw lots of Ullmark heroics last year in Rochester. "Probably one of the main reasons we ended up winning that game. He made some really timely saves."

The Sabres have given Carter Hutton ample opportunity in the last two months. He kind of mirrors the team: Great during the 10-game winning streak and pretty mediocre since.

Housley has kept going back to Hutton, seemingly to a fault. Last week's decision seemed the most egregious after Hutton gave up four goals in a win in Columbus and Ullmark was strong in the loss to Dallas. Back came Hutton to start Friday's game against Chicago and he was gone by the end of the second period.

Ullmark got the call Tuesday, as the Chicago loss should be considered a tipping point for Hutton.

The issue seems pretty clear. Hutton signed the three-year free agent contract over the summer and Ullmark is the prospect. When you're the coach, you're going to play the veteran free agent your GM signed. That's how the game works, and not just in Buffalo.

But now the calendar has hit February and the playoff push is real. After Tuesday's performance, assuming he's OK physically, Ullmark is certainly going to start Thursday against Carolina – which has beaten the Sabres seven straight times. Hutton will undoubtedly get another chance here this weekend, when the Sabres host Detroit and Winnipeg in back-to-back matinees.

But for the next little while, this should be Ullmark's crease. The numbers have been roughly the same with both goalies except for the record. Ullmark is 11-5-3 while Hutton is 15-15-3. Part of that is what Housley likes to call "run support," using the baseball analogy of a team getting more runs for certain pitchers. The Sabres haven't scored much for Hutton.

Sometimes, that's because a team is more conservative in front of certain goalies who might be struggling. Ullmark wasn't going to get drawn into such a discussion.

"I'll take it day by day. Tomorrow is a new day. Practice," Ullmark said. "The sun will rise – even if it's been bad weather lately. So I'm not taking anything for granted. I'm just looking forward to tomorrow."

This wasn't an easy game by any means. The Sabres gave up three more goals and 19 more shots in the second period Tuesday. They're minus-13 on the season in the middle frame. They have to figure out the "long change" period.

Ullmark gave up a tough wraparound goal to Jared Sturgeon in the second period that Housley said he came close to challenging for goalie interference. Parise's tying goal late in the third just snuck past Ullmark's leg inside the post. It was a real downer. Ullmark didn't let it linger in OT.

"There's another game in two days and then there's a back-to-back coming up," Ullmark said. "Every game is a battle. We want to make the playoffs, we have to make a push. We know that. Every game is the most important game of the day."

"Just refocus. Focus on the next puck. All the simple stuff. It doesn't matter if it's 4-4, 6-5, 10-5 or whatever. We play 60 minutes, 65 or a shootout today."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Buffalo News LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129123 Buffalo Sabres

The Wraparound: Sabres 5, Wild 4, SO

By Lance Lysowski

Published Tue, Feb 5, 2019|Updated Wed, Feb 6, 2019

Phil Housley blew up his forward lines for the second time in three days, and his latest experiment yielded an important goal in the third period Tuesday night.

But mixing and matching personnel did little to address his team's poor defensive play. The Buffalo Sabres allowed the tying goal with 1:37 remaining in regulation but beat the Minnesota Wild, 5-4, in a shootout at KeyBank Center.

Sam Reinhart scored the go-ahead goal in the third period, only for Zach Parise to send the game to overtime. Reinhart then won it with a goal in the third shootout round.

The Sabres (26-20-6) kept pace in the playoff race – Carolina, which has 58 points, defeated Pittsburgh, 4-0, Tuesday – and matched their win total from last season.

Evan Rodrigues, C.J. Smith and Rasmus Dahlin also scored for Buffalo, which squandered a two-goal lead in the second period. Linus Ullmark made 41 saves in net. Following a stagnant start to the third period, Housley moved Jeff Skinner and Jason Pominville to the top line with Jack Eichel.

When that group was unable to score, Reinhart skated onto the ice with his new linemates – Casey Mittelstadt and Conor Sheary – and one-timed a pass from Jake McCabe into the open net.

Jared Spurgeon scored twice and Charlie Coyle had the tying goal in the second period for the Wild.

Opening salvo: The Sabres' power play, which was also retooled after going 3-for-33 over its previous 13 games, broke through at 4:31 into the first period when Kyle Okposo screened goalie Devan Dubnyk, which helped Rodrigues' wrist shot from the right-wing circle end up in the back of the net. It was Rodrigues' seventh goal of the season and his fifth in the past seven games.

It was only the second time since Nov. 24 that the Sabres had at least one power play goal in consecutive games.

Slow start: The Sabres had already attempted 10 shots on goal when the Wild recorded its first shot on goal 7:06 into the first period.

Koivu collision: Minnesota center Mikko Koivu left for the visitors' dressing room and did not return after an awkward collision with Sabres winger Tage Thompson, who tried to avoid making contact when the two skated into each other near the Wild's blue line.

Mid-air goal: Spurgeon tied the score, 1-1, at 6:29 into the second period when he batted a puck out of the air and over Ullmark's shoulder. The goal came after the Sabres killed two minor penalties.

He's back: Smith, recalled from Rochester prior to Monday's practice, scored at 7:32 when he one-timed a pass from Reinhart, who intercepted a pass near the opposing blue line.

Power play: The Sabres scored a second power play goal for the first time since Dec. 15 when Dahlin fired a wrist shot through a crowd to

make it 3-1 at 11:33 into the second. That tied Dahlin with Aaron Ekblad for the fifth-most points by an 18-year-old defenseman in NHL history.

Quick answer: The Wild scored two unanswered goals to tie the score, 3-3, beginning with Spurgeon's wraparound at 13:43. Coyle followed less than four minutes later when he poked a loose puck over the goal line. The Sabres were outshot, 19-11, in the second period.

Home away from home: The Wild had won five straight games in Buffalo and was 9-2 all-time in KeyBank Center.

Unlikely killer: With Johan Larsson missing a second consecutive game because of injury, Eichel was asked to contribute on the penalty kill. Entering the game, Eichel had played only 17 minutes, 35 seconds shorthanded all season. He nearly scored a shorthanded goal in the first period Tuesday by skating around Ryan Suter for an open look on Dubnyk.

Lineup: Larsson missed a second consecutive game with an upper-body injury. Defensemen Matt Hunwick and Nathan Beaulieu were healthy scratches, as Lawrence Pilut was back in the Sabres' lineup.

Next: The Sabres return to practice Wednesday in preparation for a Thursday night game against the Carolina Hurricanes.

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1129124 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres vs. Wild: Five Things to Know

By Mike Harrington

Published Tue, Feb 5, 2019|Updated Tue, Feb 5, 2019

Since the Minnesota Wild entered the NHL in 2000, they have staged a completely backwards head-to-head matchup with the Buffalo Sabres. The Sabres are just 2-8-1 against Minnesota in KeyBank Center and have lost five straight – but are 8-4 when taming the Wild in XCel Energy Center.

The Sabres posted a 3-2 win in Minnesota on Nov. 17 in the fifth game of their 10-game winning streak and a win tonight (7 p.m., MSG and WGR Radio) would give them a sweep of Minnesota for the first time since the Wild entered the NHL. The Sabres have not beaten Minnesota at home since a 3-1 win on March 24, 2012.

Here are Five Things to Know about Game 2 of Buffalo's seven-game homestand:

1. The lineup: The Sabres' morning skate today showed off the same completely new lineup that Phil Housley unveiled in practice on Monday, highlighted by Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner being broken up for the first time since early in the season.

2. Punchless power play: The Sabres are also expected to unveil new power-play units to revive a unit that's 1 for 19 over its last seven games and just 3 for 33 over the last 13. Buffalo has slipped to 22nd in the NHL on the power play and this will be a tough test against a Minnesota team that's fifth in the NHL on the penalty kill.

"We've had really good possession time but we've got to get back to more of that shot mentality, just the volume of shots," Housley said. "We know we're not going to score on every power play but it does create momentum for us when we're in the zone and we're getting chances. Those are the things we're looking for to lift our bench. Obviously we need some production but just trying to find continuity within the groups."



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3. In the nets: The Sabres will have Linus Ullmark in goal tonight, sporting a stat line of 10-5-3/2.89/.914. Ullmark has lost his last two starts after winning five of his previous seven. He made 37 saves in the November victory in Minnesota. With Carter Hutton struggling, is this Ullmark's chance to grab the starting job? Housley was noncommittal.

"When you evaluate it on a game to game situation, Linus has played some good hockey," Housley said. "Hopefully he has a great game tonight and we'll make that evaluation the next day."

Minnesota is expected to counter with starter Devan Dubnyk (20-17-3, 2.55/.914). His first game with the Wild was here in 2015, a 7-0 shutout that remains Minnesota's greatest margin of victory.

4. The playoff races: The Sabres are ninth in the Eastern Conference and three points behind Columbus for the final wild-card slot. They are losing touch with the rest of the Atlantic Division, as they are seven points behind fourth-place Boston and eight behind third-place Montreal. Minnesota is fourth in the Central Division, four points behind Dallas, and has a two-point lead on Vancouver for the first West wild-card. The Wild are shooting for their seventh straight playoff appearance but they have only two series in the previous six trips.

5. By the numbers: The Sabres are just 2-5 against the Central Division this season, with Friday's 7-3 drubbing by Chicago extending their losing streak to four. The Wild, meanwhile, are 7-4 against the Atlantic. ... Minnesota winger Marcus Foligno has four goals, seven assists and a minus-3 rating while playing on the fourth line. The former Sabre is one of six Wild players to appear in all 52 games this season. He had eight goals and 15 assists last year, his first with the Wild after the trade from Buffalo in July, 2017. ... Zach Parise leads the Wild in goals (20) and points (45). Minnesota turned its season around with an 8-4 January, after going just 4-8-1 in December and seemingly putting coach Bruce Boudreau's job in jeopardy.

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1129125 Buffalo Sabres

Jack Eichel on Sabres shuffle: 'I think this can be a good thing for us'

By Mike Harrington

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It's Big Line Shift II for the Buffalo Sabres Tuesday night in KeyBank Center against the Minnesota Wild, and captain Jack Eichel is hopeful the team gets the same kind of benefit from coach Phil Housley's major moves that it did in October.

"The main key is just to work. That's the big thing," Eichel said after Tuesday's morning skate. "When you're put with new guys, your first instinct is just to work hard and I think that's what makes it easy. That's probably what he's looking for now. We're going to keep things simple. If we get back to a simple game, get our forecheck going and create offense from that, I think it should be good for us."

Eichel is going to be centering Conor Sheary and Kyle Okposo in tonight's game, the first time he has not had All-Star Jeff Skinner on his wing since Housley put the pair together on Oct. 19 in Los Angeles. They have played the last 43 games together and both made the All-Star Game.

"We've played together for a few months now but I think any time during the season you have to be ready to take anything on," Eichel said. "Obviously, our team hasn't been going the way we want right now. I

don't know if a change was needed or whatever but whenever things aren't going well you look for changes to spark the group. I think this can be a good thing for us. Hopefully it sparks us and get on a roll."

Eichel has just two goals in his last 10 games and Skinner, who has 31 goals on the season, is in his first extended slump with just one goal in his last seven. But Skinner has had huge shot totals with no results in two recent games, with 10 shots on goal Friday against Chicago and seven in the 7-2 loss Jan. 14 in Edmonton.

"The biggest thing is just to stick together," Eichel said. "When adversity hits, it's easy to look around and start blaming other things. It's important for our group in the room to stick together and I think we've done a good job of that even with the fact we've had a tough time getting out of this slump we've been in. We've been playing a good game, losing a game, been a little inconsistent. But even through that, the group has really stuck together and stayed tight. I think that's important and will benefit us."

Sheary, who has one goal in his last 14 games, briefly played with Eichel at the start of the season and has plenty of experience playing on a line with Sidney Crosby in Pittsburgh during the Penguins' 2016 and 2017 Stanley Cup championship runs. So he's looking forward to getting another chance with Buffalo's captain.

"With his ability to create plays and create openings just on his own ability, you can just kind of try to find that open space and you know he can find you," Sheary said. "That's just one adjustment that I'll try to make tonight, just to find that open area and maybe get to the net for him. ... It's not going to change my forecheck, my speed. I'm not going to change any of that game. I think you try to complement a player like that because you know when they have the puck, a lot of good things happen."

Although the Sabres are just 3-7 in their last 10 games, they remain only three points behind Columbus for the final Eastern Conference playoff spot, with the Blue Jackets playing later tonight in Colorado.

"It's not like we've put ourselves in a terrible position. We're still there," Eichel said. "We win a few games and that's what's important. For us, the big focus right now is just worrying about that next game. It's important not to get too high or too low. At times this year during the 10-game winning streak I think we can get really high. During a slump like this, we can get low. It's important as a group to pretty much stay even keel and worry about that next game."

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1129126 Buffalo Sabres

Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: How Rasmus Dahlin has impacted team and vice versa

By Josh Barnett

Published Tue, Feb 5, 2019

Travis Yost has been involved in the world of hockey analytics for a decade and is currently part of TSN's Hockey Analytics team. Prior to joining TSN, Travis was a contributor at the Ottawa Citizen, the Sporting News and NHL Numbers, and has been a consultant for an NHL franchise. He will be contributing breakdowns on the Buffalo Sabres for The Buffalo News this season. Follow Travis on Twitter: @travisyost.



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Playoffs or not, I think everyone in and around Buffalo recognized how critical the 2018-19 season would be from a player development standpoint.

And at least in terms of order of importance, nothing was more critical than ensuring that the Sabres' 18-year-old rookie defenseman had a smooth start to his NHL career.

It is quite rare to see an 18-year-old get the type of minutes Rasmus Dahlin has received this year.

Even though hockey has increasingly evolved into a young man's game, teams are still generally protective of young puck-movers.

Since the 2007-08 season, only 29 other teenage defenders of similar age and disposition receive similarly high volume usage. Some of those players were a year older, and some of those players were utilized much less. At any rate, it's not uncharted territory for Dahlin, but he's certainly something of an exception to the standard NHL developmental curve:

It's one thing for Dahlin to have the confidence of the coaching staff to deploy him this aggressively. The mere fact that the most common deployment comparables for Dahlin are players such as Victor Hedman and Erik Karlsson should tell you everything you need to know about how the brain trust in Buffalo views Dahlin's current talent and future potential.

But ice time is just one measure. Dahlin might have the confidence of the coaching staff, but that confidence can wane when the play doesn't meet the pedigree. Case in point: Players such as Michael Del Zotto (20th overall, 2008) and Dmitry Kulikov (14th overall, 2009) were similarly utilized during their rookie years, but watched their ice time erode as their play slipped.

I don't think that will be an issue with Dahlin. One of the points we have been beating all season is that the Sabres are a top-heavy team of the highest order. Performance from their core players is the reason why they are firmly in a playoff race, but performance across the rest of their roster (and ultimately, the majority of their players) is why they are going to be fighting until the finish despite a 10-game winning streak that should have all but solidified their playoff berth. The roster is understandably flawed and thin during this transition year. Right now, the team is just trying to patchwork things in the stretch run.

One way that Buffalo has been able to combat top-heaviness has a lot to do with how Dahlin is deployed. One of the hallmarks of a great NHL defenseman is that he can play in any situation with any range of teammates and drive performance. Historically speaking, most high-end defenders – not dissimilar to high-end wingers or high-end centers – can spike the production of their teammates when they are on the ice. With Dahlin, that means not only being able to manage the most important minutes (facing tough competition with Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel, and company), but also the peripheral minutes (playing with weaker talent against relatively weaker competition).

If we look at Dahlin's "With Or Without You" numbers, we can measure performance by three separate strokes. First, we can see how Dahlin and a given player drive performance together. Then, we can look at how Dahlin plays away from a given player. And lastly, we can see how a player performs away from Dahlin. If we believe that Dahlin is the caliber defender we all think he is, we should be able to see consistent performance spikes whenever Dahlin sees a new teammate.

So far, that looks to be the case. Let's look at it from two measures – Corsi percent (how well Dahlin and teammates drive play territorially), and Goal percent (how well Dahlin and teammates turn that offensive zone pressure into a goal advantage).

First, the Corsi percent measure:

Directionally, the trend is obvious. Both forwards and applicable defensive pairmates see reasonably strong performance from a Corsi percent perspective when playing with Dahlin. This makes sense – Buffalo has received 51.5 percent of the shots in its favor with Dahlin on the ice, and that's been true across most of Buffalo's lineup.

The only outliers tend to be guys who play in emphatic checking line roles (such as Vladimir Sobokta and, to some extent, Tage Thompson), or guys who just generally have poor performance numbers in the first place (such as Rasmus Ristolainen).

The key piece is that middle section – how Dahlin performs away from a given player. You can see that Dahlin isn't reliant on any particular player or group of players to drive his performance. He's nearly getting 50 percent of the shots when not playing with the likes of Jeff Skinner and Jack Eichel, which seems almost impossible when you consider how top heavy this team has been.

The other side of the coin is also illuminating. Players see huge draw-downs in performance when they move away from Dahlin. In fact, the only regular teammate who has seen better results away from Dahlin has been forward Conor Sheary. Otherwise, it's virtually all negative or flat. That's a huge endorsement of Dahlin's play; less so of the rest of the roster.

But the question you might ask – shots are great, but how does it drive goals? And does the trend change when we go to a goal-based analysis?

The trend is directionally the same but more dire in nature. Buffalo doesn't have a goal problem when Dahlin is on the ice, and that's regardless of who he is playing with. All the challenges within Buffalo's lineup tend to come with Dahlin off the ice.

To that end, you are left with two questions: How does Buffalo go about building up the rest of the roster, and how much has the rest of the roster actually suppressed Dahlin's impact in his rookie season? We have talked at length about the first question. The second one, not so much. But it's an important consideration for both Jason Botterill and Phil Housley going forward.

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1129127 Buffalo Sabres

Stimson: An evaluation of Jason Botterill's moves since joining the Sabres in June 2017

By Ryan Stimson

Feb 5, 2019

As the Sabres appear headed for yet another disappointing season, many fans have expressed their frustration at players, coaches, and the front office on Twitter. Even with a 10-game winning streak earlier this season, the Sabres find themselves three points out of the final wild card spot. They have 56 points in 51 games, a 90-point pace for a full season. They have earned only 20 points in the 26 games since November 29th, the day the streak ended. That is a 63-point pace, or one point better than their last-place NHL finish last season. Their play has been average at best through the season and while there are some bright spots (Rasmus Dahlin and Lawrence Pilut the two brightest), this organization deserves a hard look as to whether or not they can turn it around. Today, we'll take a look at the moves Jason Botterill has made since arriving in May 2017 to try and answer whether fans should feel good about the team moving forward. All GAR or WAR references and charts are from EvolvingHockey. Let's get to it.

After the 7-3 humbling at the hands of the Blackhawks on Friday, this is a look at the Sabres' five-game rolling shot differential. The team has some good results early on, but has been roughly average since then, with some stretches well below average and some recent performances to bring it back above. The team can improve through efforts of the



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coaching staff as well as the front office. I've already written a bit about areas Housley can improve the team, so today we'll spend more time on Botterill.

Since a general manager's job is about adding talent to the team to win games by accumulating picks, high-end prospects or ready-made NHL players, all while keeping an eye on the future and the salary cap, we're going to see exactly how much value Botterill has provided Housley since hiring the head coach in June 2017.

The Sabres roster that finished the 2017 season was slightly above replacement level. The forwards were worth 0.15 GAR/60, or 0.15 Goals Above Replacement per 60 minutes of play, but the team was dragged down a bit by their backs, who were just above replacement level at 0.02 GAR/60. This is what Botterill inherited and he immediately went to work improving the team.

2017

Thanks to the amazing CapFriendly, we have a transaction list for each signing and trade for each GM in the league. Botterill's first move after coming aboard was to sign Victor Antipin from the KHL. Antipin finished the year playing in 47 games and having basically a replacement-level year according to EvolvingHockey. Antipin and Casey Nelson had very similar years. Antipin has since gone back to Russia.

On the trade front, Botterill's first move was acquiring Nathan Beaulieu for a third round pick in June 2017. The move was hailed at the time, as Beaulieu was a player favored by most of the analytics community. Unfortunately, the season he was coming off of was an outlier compared to the rest of his career at that point.

Not long after, Botterill swung a deal with the Minnesota Wild for Jason Pominville and Marco Scandella, Scandella was a player on the decline after his first below-replacement season in Minnesota. He's been worse here in Buffalo, but this should have given the Sabres pause before pulling the trigger, similar to Beaulieu. Players can reach another level at various stages of their careers, but teams have to ask what is more likely to happen? In the case of Beaulieu, I could see the argument for acquiring him and hoping that he would be a bit better than his early career, but perhaps not quite as good as his recent season. In Scandella's case, you'd probably hope for something similar, but there were warning signs for each.

Pominville, on the other hand, has played at a high level for a long time.

It was worth it to gamble on Scandella in order to bring Pommers back, considering the outgoing players were of lesser value. All told, this transaction and the Beaulieu acquisition improved the Sabres roster by 0.6 GAR/60, with most of that coming from Pominville and Beaulieu. The team lost value in Marcus Foligno going away, while Tyler Ennis and Scandella were a swap of replacement-level players at the time.

Botterill made many other signings to fill in the roster, but many did not provide a good return on investment. Summer signings included Benoît Pouliot, Jacob Josefson, and Seth Griffith. Pouliot was thought to be an astute signing as he had many solid seasons before coming to Buffalo apart from his last season in Edmonton. It's similar to Scandella as he had multiple good seasons before one down year. Josefson and Griffith were both replacement level players. Unfortunately, each were below-replacement level players during the 2017 – 2018 season, among others that were already on the roster. This contributed to the team's overall performance as worse than the prior year. The forwards' GAR/60 dropped to 0.04 from 0.15 and the backs were exactly at replacement level. Not a great first year for Botterill, but there's only so much that a GM can do in a season, so let's move to last summer.

2018

Botterill got started before the 2018 season ended, signing William Borgen and Casey Mittelstadt to entry-level contracts. He later signed Victor Olofsson to his ELC, re-signed Casey Nelson and then made his biggest signing of the offseason: Lawrence Pilut. Where would this team be without him? Drafting Dahlin was a no-brainer, acquiring Jeff Skinner

for Cliff Pu and some picks was a no-brainer, acquiring Conor Sheary for a conditional 4th round pick was a no-brainer, but someone in the front office did a damn good job recommending Pilut and then Botterill executed by signing him. These were excellent moves.

I won't re-litigate the Ryan O'Reilly trade that much here. I've written about it and while it's difficult to know if there was any pressure internally from ownership to move him before his signing bonus was due, the Pegulas famously said if they needed money they'd "drill a well." If the owner tells the GM to do something, they have to do it and we can't really fault them, but you'd hope a GM can convince the owner why something would be a good or bad move and allow them time to make a better deal. We may never know exactly why the move was made – I don't buy the locker room cancer talk due to someone honestly expressing some frustration with the team on locker cleanup day.

I will mention a few quick points on what the trade did to the team, however. It is important to note that had the Sabres kept ROR, it wouldn't have precluded them from acquiring Skinner due to the nearly equal cap hits exchanged in that trade. This is a point that is lost on some Twitter users.

A side effect of the ROR trade was that the extra bodies that came back in the trade have clogged roster spots. I get playing Tage Thompson to see how he performs, but Patrik Berglund and Vladimir Sobotka were veteran players slowly depreciating in value. The NHL as a whole is largely conservative when it comes to giving young players extended looks, but I would much rather play an under 24-year-old player who may or may not be good but is entering the prime of their ability than a 30-year-old player who will never be as good as they used to be again, especially if they are not a good player to begin with.

I will just add this: O'Reilly was the Sabres' fourth most valuable forward by GAR/60 in 2017 – 2018. The Sabres replaced him with their two worst forwards by GAR/60 in Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson. O'Reilly is worth 0.571 GAR/60 this season with the Blues, or a little better than last season. Sobotka and Thompson combined for a -1.069 GAR/60. Patrik Berglund was about replacement-level. That's a swing of 1.64 GAR/60 from that trade. Considering only the on-ice impact of the trade, it has been an utter disaster and was foreseeable at the time.

Having said that, the Sabres are an improved team, both upon last year and the year prior to Botterill taking over. He has improved the team significantly in some areas. The forwards are currently producing 0.21 GAR/60, which is a 33 percent increase from when Botterill took over (0.15). The backs are producing at 0.12 GAR/60, or six times the value when he took the job. It's safe to say the team has improved from a talent standpoint.

Of course, there is the question of between the pipes. Out went Robin Lehner – who was dealing with far more than the pressures of a game and looks to have made tremendous strides in his quality of life – and in came Carter Hutton. Their seasons could not have been more different. Lehner is second in the league in goals saved above expected according to EvolvingHockey, saving 14.4 goals more than one would expect given the quality and volume he's faced. Hutton finds himself 45th, yielding 4.6 more goals than one would expect. Linus Ullmark has been slightly better, but still negative, yielding 3.3 more than expected. Would the Sabres be in a solid playoff position had they retained Lehner?

Many in the community weren't sold on signing Hutton off one career year in his 30s, myself included. It's fair to say no one could have predicted Lehner's rebound, especially given what we now know he was working through, but the Hutton move hasn't provided much value yet.

2019

Botterill's work isn't done. Tampa Bay is the team at the top of the division and league, setting the standard for team-building at the moment. No one else comes close. Their forwards collectively are performing at a rate equal to 0.57 GAR/60, or more than twice as much as the Sabres forwards. Their backs are at 0.39, or three times as good as the Sabres. While this season continues to be frustrating, it's



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important to keep in mind the team, across the entire season, has played at a 90-point pace. Had they mixed in a few more wins last month and a few more losses back in November, fans wouldn't feel like the sky is falling. There is progress being made in the talent acquisition department. Whether that talent is being used to the maximum benefit of the team is another question.

How can the team take the next step?

With the trade deadline approaching – and I encourage you to check out John Vogl's piece heading into deadline month – it's important to keep in mind where the Sabres are at on their trajectory. Their 5v5 play has been much better offensively, but defensively the team is as bad as it was last season. They should look to continue to improve the talent on the blue line by subtracting the below-replacement level players, specifically Scandella and Zach Bogosian.

With each having one more year on their deals (Bogo at \$5.1M AAV, Scandella at \$4M AAV), it may be difficult to move them, but every attempt should be made.

The Sabres should be clearing as much cap space as they can to prepare an offer sheet for multiple players. All the talk is on Mitch Marner or Brayden Point, but Timo Meier is one target the Sabres should consider. Jacob Trouba is another RFA this summer that would round out a top four of Dahlin, Pilut and Rasmus Ristolainen for sure. Acquiring as many picks and prospects at this deadline will alleviate any lost in an offer sheet transaction.

Conclusion

Botterill has added more talent to the team than he had when he arrived when it comes to the skaters and he's done it in just under two seasons. The team should add a few more prospects and picks at the deadline to continue acquiring currency. The decision to move on from Lehner and sign Hutton has not been in Botterill's favor. Every GM is going to have hits and misses and while the O'Reilly trade set the team back this season, they have improved enough in other areas to make it a definitive step forward. Smart teams are always buying and selling and that should be Buffalo's approach at this deadline as well. While we never know what conversations are being held and trades that are almost-made, I think it's fair to reason that Botterill felt more veteran depth was needed entering this season. Would the team really be worse off with Victor Oloffson, CJ Smith, or Danny O'Regan getting Sobotka or Thompson's minutes right now? Or Berglund's vacated minutes? Would the blue line be even better with Brendan Guhle in place of Scandella or Bogosian?

Botterill has done an okay job, but I think it's fair to criticize him for being unable to move depreciating veteran players that have undeservedly taken up roster spots that could be given to younger players to provide extended looks for evaluation purposes. There's no reason to delay, as the team is unlikely to get back into a playoff spot before the trade deadline. If an organization truly wants to be progressive and take advantage of front offices who are content with the status quo, this is one of the signs we should look to to determine that. The New England Patriots are often lauded for moving a player before the rest of the league catches up to their declining performance – is there someone out there who believes Scandella, Bogosian, and Sobotka could help them in the playoffs? The Sabres get better with them off the roster.

I'm not calling for Botterill to make moves as a result of the team's recent play. Hot and cold streaks shouldn't force GMs to make moves. No one was clamoring for Botterill to add pieces to contend while the team was winning 10 in a row, right? Equally, no one should be calling for Botterill to do something with the sole purpose of getting them out of this skid. Hockey is a random, chaotic game. Humans are always so desperate to explain things that we lose sight of that. If the winning streak had occurred in January, the narrative around the team would be different, wouldn't it? The timing of wins should not change the high-level view of the team for evaluation purposes. Botterill has improved the talent level of the team overall, but I am only cautiously optimistic for the deadline and 2019 offseason at this moment. There needs to be some

addition by subtraction before I can feel confident in the organization's plan going forward.

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1129215 New York Rangers

Rangers finally about to give their backup some more work

By Brett Cyrgalis February 6, 2019

Alex Georgiev is not planning for an increased workload down the stretch, even though that seems likely to happen. Instead, the Rangers' backup goalie is taking one day at a time — which includes a scheduled start for the Garden match against the Bruins on Wednesday night.

"Hockey is so unpredictable, you can't plan even one week ahead," Georgiev said after Tuesday's practice in Tarrytown. "You have to go day by day."

Georgiev, 23, spent the 10-day break with AHL Hartford, playing three games. He returned and played the Rangers' first game out of the break, a 1-0 loss to the Flyers on Jan. 29. That has helped him stay sharp while only getting 14 starts in the Blueshirts' first 52 games.

It's on the coaching staff — including goaltending guru Benoit Allaire — to monitor how starter Henrik Lundqvist feels. Lundqvist, who will turn 37 on March 2 and has carried quite the load for the first half of the season, is going to start Friday night against the Hurricanes after the pregame ceremony honoring the Rangers' 1994 Stanley Cup-winning team.

"It's something that Benny and I talked about today and I'll talk to Hank some more about it," coach David Quinn said. "Just something we have to stay on top of."

"He's got a situation where we think it's probably best to give him off days leading into games," Quinn said. "Obviously he's a guy that gives his all. We don't worry about his conditioning or sharpness. Right now, that's just the best course of action to allow him to have his best health and allow him to play, night in and night out."

Since missing five games around Christmas with that upper-body injury, Fast has played 16 straight. The team only has 12 healthy forwards, and no call-up was planned.

"We don't see it being something — unless he gets injured in a game or whatnot. But we'll continue to take this path barring something crazy happening," Quinn said.

Defenseman Neal Pionk is set to be a healthy scratch Wednesday, so it looks like rugged winger Cody McLeod will rejoin the lineup, on the fourth line next to Boo Nieves and Jimmy Vesey.

Nieves has had some good moments since being called up Dec. 18, but Quinn doesn't want him to get overly focused on his lack of production: he has just two goals and seven points in 20 games.

"When he's playing a simple game, he's an effective player," Quinn said. "Sometimes what can happen to Boo is he lets the points and the offensive piece of his game get in the way of all of the other things he's going to need to do to be a consistent player at this level."

Defenseman Freddy Claeason practiced again in a non-contact jersey after rejoining the Rangers for Monday's morning skate. He has been out since suffering a right shoulder injury Jan. 12.

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1129216 New York Rangers

Why Rangers coach finally told Neal Pionk to take a seat

By Brett Cyrgalis February 5, 2019

There it was, the dreaded on-ice conversation at the end of practice: Rangers coach David Quinn talking in an animated way, young defenseman Neal Pionk nodding his head in acknowledgment. This is how a player gets notified he is going to be a healthy scratch.

Pionk, 23, has played a lot of difficult minutes for the Blueshirts this season, his second as a professional. But an injury and then a severe dropoff in his play have left Quinn with the obvious choice to keep Pionk in street clothes for Wednesday night's Garden match against the Bruins.

"Listen, we've asked him to do an awful lot," Quinn said after Tuesday's practice in Tarrytown. "He's played against everybody's top players, and he's done a really good job. The injury kind of slowed him down a little bit. I think he's lost a little bit of his confidence. Might be good to give him a night off, get him back to feeling good about himself. Work on some things we have to address to get him back to playing the way he was."

Pionk spent the better part of the first half of the season on the right side of the top pair, next to Marc Staal. He was getting big minutes in every situation, including both special teams. He was showing flashes of offensive instincts to go along with his terrific skating ability (Who can forget that 200-foot rush and game-winner against the Canadiens on Nov. 6?) as well as a solidified performance in his own zone.

But then he blocked a shot in a game just after Christmas and suffered a lower-body injury. It was not bad enough to force Pionk to the sideline and he didn't allow the pain to force him out of the lineup.

That is when Pionk started playing without his usual vigor and confidence. He played eight games from Dec. 27-Jan. 10 before finally needing to sit out Jan. 12 against the Islanders.

"I think during the stretch when he was sucking it up and playing through a tough injury — give him a lot of credit, that's how tough he is — I thought he lost a little bit of his confidence and swagger through that process," Quinn said. "We have to help him get it back. And, I like the way the other guys are playing."

Pionk missed three of four games going into the 10-day break, which encompassed the bye week and the All-Star Game. Since the Rangers' return to action, Quinn has decided to dress seven defensemen in two of the four games, including the last-minute 4-3 overtime loss to the Kings on Monday night.

That game was a struggle for Pionk, who essentially was the roaming defenseman as Tony DeAngelo took most of the even-strength turns next to Staal. The worst moment came when Pionk iced the puck without any pressure near him, and on the ensuing defensive-zone draw couldn't stay with Anze Kopitar (understandable), who tied the game, 2-2, with a lifted backhand in front.

"He just looks indecisive," Quinn said. "Usually he's a guy that, when he's moving his feet, he makes great decisions, he's decisive in the defensive zone. He just looks unsure of himself. When he's on his game, he's very decisive. He does things fast, he competes, and he moves pucks quickly. He's just a half-fraction off in these decisions."

Rest assured, the Rangers have not lost faith in the free-agent signee out of Minnesota-Duluth. They are just as confident as he is concerning his ability.

But sometimes a step back can do a bit of good, and that is what the Blueshirts are hoping with this little bump in the road for Pionk.

"We've touched on this with these young players — there are going to be peaks and valleys," Quinn said. "They are going to have some down times, and he is going through a little bit of one right now."

New York Post LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129217 New York Rangers

Neal Pionk fighting a crisis of confidence and is to get night off

By Colin Stephenson

GREENBURGH, N.Y.— For the majority of the season, Neal Pionk was the Rangers' No. 1 defenseman. He was the point man on the No. 1 power-play unit, and was the righthanded half of the top defensive pair, both at even strength and on the penalty kill. And he led the team in ice time every night.

But lately, things haven't been going well for Pionk, the 23-year-old, second-year pro out of the University of Minnesota-Duluth. A lower-body injury, sustained blocking a shot in late December, caused him to miss three of four games in mid-January and appears to have factored in his slippage in play. In his last 10 games, dating to before the bye-week/All Star break, Pionk is a combined minus-10. And he has just one assist in his last 14 games.

When the Rangers host the Boston Bruins Wednesday in the third game of their five-game homestand at Madison Square Garden, Pionk won't be in the lineup.

"Yeah, he's the guy we'll probably hold out," coach David Quinn said after practice Tuesday. "Listen, we've asked him to do an awful lot. He's played against everybody's top players and he's done a really good job. The injury kind of slowed him down a little bit. I think he's lost a little bit of his confidence. It might be good to give him a night off and let him get back to feeling good about himself and kind of work on some things that we've got to get him back to playing the way he was."

Quinn said Pionk looks "indecisive" lately, and the coach said that's just part of the natural ups and downs that come with being a young player.

"When he's on his game, he's very decisive, and he does things fast," Quinn said. "And he competes, and he moves pucks quickly. And he's just a half-a-fraction-of-a-second off in these decisions."

Pionk insists his struggles don't stem from being tired, but he does admit he has lost some confidence. And, he said, confidence is a big key to playing well.

"You need that confidence to make those plays," he said. "You know you can make them, you have your whole life, right? And then you come to the highest level in the world and when you lose that confidence, you're going to get eaten up. So that confidence is highly important to maintain and keep in this league."

To regain his confidence, Pionk said he'll lean on his work ethic and begin working harder in practice. It's the only way he knows how to fix what's broken.

Notes & quotes: Jesper Fast missed practice again Tuesday and Quinn said the forward has "a situation" that the team believes can be managed by not having him practice on days before games. He will be playing in games, however . . . Quinn said Alexandar Georgiev will start in goal Wednesday.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 02.06.2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1129204 New Jersey Devils

New Jersey Devils vs. Los Angeles Kings: LIVE score updates and chat (2/5/19)

By Chris Ryan

Nico Hischier, Kyle Palmieri, Travis Zajac, Andy Greene, Blake Coleman and the New Jersey Devils will begin a four-game home stand when they host Ilya Kovalchuk and the Los Angeles Kings at 7 p.m. on Tuesday at Prudential Center in Newark.

Kovalchuk will play his first game in New Jersey since retiring from the NHL to play in Russia following the 2012-13 season. Zajac will return to the lineup following a one-game absence.

Devils' lines vs. Kings

Join NJ.com's live chat in the comment section, and follow along with live updates in the box above.

Here is everything you need to know about the home game:

What: New Jersey Devils (20-24-7) vs. Los Angeles Kings (21-27-4)

When: 7 p.m. EST, Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2019

Where: Prudential Center, Newark, New Jersey

TV: MSG+

Live stream: MSG Go

Star Ledger LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129205 New Jersey Devils

Ilya Kovalchuk helps Kings down Devils in return to New Jersey

Abbey Mastracco Feb. 5, 2019

NEWARK -- The Los Angeles Kings scored three times in the first two minutes of the third period but it was the fourth goal scored in the period that sent the crowd at The Rock heading for the turnstiles.

Ilya Kovalchuk scored with just 2:24 left to play, but as you know by now he doesn't score goals for the Devils anymore. He wasn't a big factor for the Kings up until that point, unless you count the crowd factor, but three goals by the road team in a span of 1:52 will take the home crowd out of the equation quickly.

Facing his old team for the first time since he decided he didn't want to be a part of that team anymore, Kovalchuk helped his new team down the Devils 5-1 on Tuesday at Prudential Center.

"I was actually happy that I score," Kovalchuk said. "That's the best answer."

Before Kovalchuk's theatrics, it was two penalties in the second period that led to the undoing of the Devils.

Tied at 1 with the Kings after Pavel Zacha scored his career-high ninth early in the period, New Jersey had a good chance to take a lead with a

power play at 17:06. But less than 30 seconds later Damon Severson slashed Tyler Toffoli and he ended up in the back of the New Jersey net. About a minute later, Kyle Palmieri caught Brendan Leipsic with his stick in the neutral zone and he was whistled for a trip.

The penalty kill did a solid job of killing off those penalties to get to the end of the period but the Kings still had power play time to start the third and they quickly cashed in.

Anze Kopitar set up Toffoli on the rush and Keith Kinkaid came way out of his net to give Toffoli a wide target. He potted it with seven seconds left on the power play to give the Kings a 2-1 lead.

Toffoli only needed another 35 seconds to score again and defenseman Dion Phaneuf soon followed with a point shot through traffic for his first goal of the season at 1:52.

Zacha finished off a spectacular feed from Jesper Bratt 3:31 into the second period. Set up below the goal line, Bratt sent a no-look, backhanded pass through his legs to Zacha, who beat Jack Campbell (30 saves) for the score.

Feb 5, 2019; Newark, NJ, USA; New Jersey Devils goaltender Keith Kinkaid (1) skates past Los Angeles Kings left wing Ilya Kovalchuk (17) during the first period at Prudential Center.

Kempe scored his third in the last two nights at 6:21 in the first, prompting another round of boos from the Devils' faithful with Kovalchuk on the ice. The puck went off the stick of Drew Stafford and coach John Hynes felt they had a chance to make a play to prevent the goal and failed to do so.

"When you look at this game, three out of five goals the puck is on our stick and we can't execute," Hynes said. "And that's something that's hurt us all year. We've got to continue to work at that and help these guys understand they've got to move the puck and the execution has to be better."

The Devils outshot Los Angeles 22-15 through the second two periods and had two power plays to work with but Kovalchuk's goal was the dagger that forced his detractors out of the building completely.

"You never expect anything, but it's OK, you know?" Kovalchuk said. "It's their emotions, and it's how they react, so I was doing my thing."

With both of these teams at the bottom of their respective divisions, it was a meaningless game in the grand scheme of things, unless you count draft positioning. But in the rematch of the 2012 Stanley Cup Final, it was the Kings who came out on top once again, only this time they did it with the player who helped get the Devils to that Cup final.

Notes

Kinkaid made 20 saves in his first loss against Los Angeles and is now 4-1-0 in six games for his career.... Cory Schneider backed up Kinkaid for the first time since Dec. 15, marking his return from an abdominal strain. ... The Devils scratched Brett Seney and Eric Gryba.

Bergen Record LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129206 New Jersey Devils

'They don't boo nobodies': NJ Devils welcome back Ilya Kovalchuk

Abbey Mastracco, Feb. 5, 2019

NEWARK – Devils captain Andy Greene was on the roof of his house in Michigan when he received a text message from a teammate on July 11, 2013. Rumors had been swirling for weeks and at that moment, the



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rumors became truth: Ilya Kovalchuk was leaving the NHL to return to his native Russia and play for the KHL.

Greene can't remember who the text message was from, though he thinks it may have been former Devils forward Danius Zubrus, but he recalls the nature of the message: Shock and disbelief. He climbed down off of the roof to be able to fully digest the news that one of the players so influential to New Jersey's success would be bailing on the team to play for a league generally seen as inferior to the NHL.

"A totally different league, a totally different everything," Greene said Tuesday at Prudential Center, following the Devils' morning skate. "It wasn't like it was a lateral move."

Greene and alternate captain Travis Zajac are the only players who remain in New Jersey from the Kovalchuk era but the current Devils will get a look at him Tuesday night, when they host the Los Angeles Kings at Prudential Center. Kovalchuk was injured when the Devils made their West Coast swing in December, which maybe makes this meeting all the more intriguing.

It will be the first time the Russian star has faced his former team since he walked away from them in 2013.

Ilya Kovalchuk, here in 2012.

And while Greene and Zajac harbor no ill will toward their former teammate, they know the fans have never forgiven him.

The reception is expected to be quite icy.

"They don't boo nobodies, as the saying goes," Zajac said. "I get a kick out of it."

Kovalchuk, a dynamic, high-scoring winger who amassed 201 points in four seasons in New Jersey, walked away from \$77 million and a chance to finish what the team started in 2012 when they fell to, well, his current team, the Kings, in the 2012 Stanley Cup Final. While many point to his departure as the downfall of the Devils, New Jersey did fail to make the playoffs in the lockout-shortened season, which was his last in the NHL.

But his departure spawned years of animosity and countless "Kovalsuck" jerseys in northern New Jersey. Fans never forget and they rarely forgive and Kovalchuk is ready for whatever comes when he touches the puck at Prudential Center.

"It's a free country. Everybody can do whatever they want," he told reporters Tuesday night at Madison Square Garden. "I'm just a hockey player. I'll go there and try my best and try to do everything to help my team to win."

Kovalchuk still has connections to New Jersey beyond his former teammates. He owns a house in Alpine and he returned there Monday after the Kings' morning skate. He had lunch with Devils defenseman Egor Yakovlev, a teammate of his at the Sochi Olympics and in the KHL with SKA St. Petersburg.

It was Kovalchuk who encouraged Yakovlev to come to the Devils when New Jersey was pursuing him. He lauded the area, telling Yakovlev it would be a great place for his budding family. And it was Kovalchuk who encouraged the 27-year-old to take advantage of an opportunity to play in the NHL.

"He said if you have an opportunity to play in the NHL, go," Yakovlev said an interview earlier this season, through a translator.

Yakovlev said Kovalchuk is a great guy and a great player even at 35. Though his role on the Kings has been debated and the coaches have been hesitant to put him into tight late-game situations, Greene and Zajac said they still see the same player they once saw on their own team.

"He's pretty similar," Zajac said. "When he's got the puck he's extremely dangerous. He's always had a great shot. He can make plays happen because he's a big body and he's got great hands in tight. We have to be aware of him tonight."

Maybe things would have turned out differently had Kovalchuk's back held up in 2012. Maybe there would be one more banner or even two had the NHL not gone into another lockout and had Kovalchuk never had that taste of home in the KHL.

It will be hard not to look back and think "What if?" when the 2012 Stanley Cup Final opponents meet once again, but these two teams are so far from contending again that it's pointless to look back. All anyone can do now is look forward, even if that means looking forward to booing a once-beloved star.

"I'm pretty sure it will be a lot of booing but I love it," he said. "So it's all good."

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1129207 New Jersey Devils

How they line up: Travis Zajac returns to action for NJ Devils against Kings

Abbey Mastracco, Feb. 5, 2019

NEWARK -- Good morning from Newark, where the Devils are getting set to face Ilya Kovalchuk for the first time since he left the team to return to home to Russia and play in the KHL.

Get ready for the boos.

But in other news, Travis Zajac and Ben Lovejoy both took the ice Tuesday morning for the morning skate. Zajac resumed his place on the second line with Miles Wood and Blake Coleman so look for him to return to action against the Los Angeles Kings. However, Ben Lovejoy does not appear to be ready just yet as he skated as an extra with Eric Gryba.

New Jersey Devils center Travis Zajac (19) shoots and scores a goal on Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy (88) during the first period at Amalie Arena.

Noted King killer Keith Kinkaid took the starter's net so Cory Schneider will back him up. Kinkaid is 4-0-0 with two shutouts, including the first one of his career, in five appearances against the Kings and John Hynes likes to play the matchup game when it comes to goaltenders. Schneider will have to wait a few more days to make his triumphant return.

The Kings are coming off a win over the Rangers on Monday night so no morning skate for L.A. In a rematch of the 2014 Stanley Cup Final, Arian Kempe had a three-point night and captain Anze Kopitar scored to help the Kings defeat New York 4-3.

Our old pal Kovalchuck had two assists and two shots on goal.

The two teams from the 2012 Stanley Cup Final are battling out for a lottery pick, both in last place in their respective divisions. The road to Jack Hughes goes through Prudential Center... Well, maybe. We can't forget about Ottawa, after all.

On a personal note, it's always nice to see the West Coast teams. I covered the Kings and Ducks for four seasons for FOX Sports, NHL.com, the AP and a few other outlets, flying up and down the Southern California freeways between Orange County and L.A. The 2014 Stanley Cup Final was a fun ride and an unforgettable career memory.

And having covered the Kings for so long, I can say they look... Well, pretty much the same. They're still a hard-checking Western Conference team who likes to cycle the puck and they still rely on the same cast of characters: Kopitar, Jeff Carter, Drew Doughty, Alec Martinez and Jonathan Quick. Memories!



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Here are the projected lineups for the Devils and Kings. Keep in mind, the lineup for Los Angeles may look different once they take the ice. Nate Thompson may return but Carter could be out after getting injured Monday. Both are considered game-time decisions.

Devils (20-24-7, 47 points)

Marcus Johansson - Nico Hischier - Kyle Palmieri

Miles Wood - Travis Zajac - Blake Coleman

Jesper Bratt - Pavel Zacha - Drew Stafford

Brian Boyle - Kevin Rooney - Kurtis Gabriel

Andy Greene - Damon Severson

Mirco Mueller - Will Butcher

Egor Yakovlev - Steven Santini

Keith Kinkaid

Cory Schneider

Scratched: Eric Gryba, Brett Seney

Injured: Travis Zajac (lower-body), Sami Vatanen (concussion), Ben Lovejoy (lower-body), Stefan Noesen (lower-body), Taylor Hall (lower-body), Joey Anderson (ankle surgery)

Kings (21-27-4, 46 points)

Alex Iafallo - Anze Kopitar - Dustin Brown

Brenden Leipsic - Jeff Carter - Tyler Toffoli

Carl Hagelin - Adrian Kempe - Ilya Kovalchuk

Kyle Clifford - Mike Amadio - Austin Wagner

Derek Forbort - Doughty

Alec Martinez - Oscar Fantenberg

Dion Phaneuf - Paul LaDue

Jack Campbell

Jonathan Quick

Injured: Nate Thompson, Trevor Lewis, Johnny Brodzinski

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1129208 New Jersey Devils

Ilya Kovalchuk gets the last laugh in his return to New Jersey

By Associated Press February 5, 2019

The Kings' Ilya Kovalchuk accepts congratulations from teammates after scoring a goal during the Devils' 5-1 loss Tuesday night.

New Jersey Devils fans came to the Prudential Center to jeer Ilya Kovalchuk. The home team certainly didn't give them a reason to cheer.

Tyler Toffoli scored twice in 35 seconds early in the third period to spark the Los Angeles Kings to a 5-1 victory over the Devils on Tuesday night at Prudential Center in Newark.

Toffoli, who had the overtime winner Monday against the New York Rangers, helped send the Kings to their third win in four games.

Adrian Kempe, Dion Phaneuf and Kovalchuk also scored for Los Angeles. Jack Campbell made 29 saves and Anze Kopitar had three assists.

It was the first game in New Jersey for Kovalchuk since he left the Devils in 2013 to continue his career in Russia. He signed with the Kings as a free agent last summer.

Kovalchuk was booed loudly when his picture appeared on the scoreboard as one of the Los Angeles starters. The hostile reception continued throughout the game whenever he hit the ice, and especially when he handled the puck.

He returned the favor, scoring with 2:24 remaining to boost the lead to 5-1.

"That's not something you're expecting, but that's OK," Kovalchuk said of the game-long razzing. "You know that's their emotions, and that's how they react, so that's what I think. I was happy when I scored. That's always the best answer."

Pavel Zacha scored for New Jersey, and Keith Kinkaid stopped 20 shots.

The Kings' Tyler Toffoli scores one of his two third-period goals.

The game was tied 1-1 before the Kings scored three goals in the first 1:52 of the third period.

Toffoli started the outburst on a power play 32 seconds in. He took a flip pass from Kopitar and rifled the puck under the crossbar before striking again just 35 seconds later.

"To start the third period with the power play was huge, and we went in with the plan of getting the puck to the net," Toffoli said. "Kopitar found me in the slot and we put it in. It kind of kept rolling from there. We took over the game in the first two minutes, and did a good job and did the right things necessary to win."

Phaneuf added his first of the season on a point shot that glanced off a New Jersey defender, and suddenly the Kings were in control.

Kempe opened the scoring at 6:21 of the first period with a shot from the slot that handcuffed Kinkaid.

It was the only goal of the opening period — and Kempe's third in the last two games.

The momentum shifted New Jersey's way to start the second as the Devils fired nine of the first 10 shots of the period. The pressure paid off when Zacha evened the score at 3:31 on a sensational setup by Jesper Bratt. Skating behind the Kings net, Bratt fed a no-look backhand pass to the slot where Zacha slammed it home.

It was another disheartening loss for the Devils, who have been unable to generate positive momentum in a season that has slipped away from them.

"It seems like we put together a good game here and there," captain Andy Greene said. "It's not like we're not working hard. They're mental mistakes. It just seems when that happens, we're getting busted for it. The goals are happening. We're letting them in. We compound one mistake into two or three."

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1129209 New Jersey Devils

Rachel Doerrie's rise in hockey will continue elsewhere, but the impact she left on the Devils goes beyond the ice

By Corey Masiasak Feb 5, 2019



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Two months ago, Rachel Doerrie was spending her time fulfilling a dream of working in the NHL and planning out a way to use her position to help others.

One month ago, Doerrie's rocket-fueled rise to future front office superstar changed course, and will continue somewhere other than New Jersey.

Tuesday, Doerrie will be on a plane to Europe when an idea of hers comes to fruition at Prudential Center. Sure, Devils coach John Hynes might deploy some of the tactics Doerrie suggested or helped cultivate during her time in the Player Information/Video department when New Jersey plays the Los Angeles Kings.

But it is also going to be the Devils' first Mental Health Awareness night at The Rock. For Doerrie, it's a cause with deep personal connections. Both she and her younger sister battle mental illnesses.

Regardless of what happens with the team on the ice in the future, if this franchise initiative becomes an annual event, as expected, it will in some ways be part of Doerrie's lasting legacy in New Jersey despite her relatively brief tenure with the club.

Doerrie and a friend in the Devils' sales department, Chris Frezza, came up with the idea together, before she addressed the topic in a larger group.

"(Devils CEO) Scott O'Neil had a meeting where he got together with coordinator-level people in the office. It was just sort of an informal 'let's talk' thing," Doerrie said. "He asked if we had any questions for him. I said, 'I want to know why this organization doesn't do anything in the mental health space because it's something that is really important, especially given the fact that athletes have come out and said they've suffered from mental health issues and felt like they didn't get enough support.'"

"Soon after that, (Frezza) presented the idea for the game and said, 'I got this idea from Rachel. I think this is a very good idea.' The organization decided it was a good idea and decided to get involved."

Doerrie and Frezza began to work with various departments — ticket sales, marketing, community initiatives — and researched the best practices of other NHL clubs who have hosted similar events. Frezza eventually left the franchise to work for the 76ers, the Devils' NBA sibling in the Harris Blitzer Sports & Entertainment empire.

Then, on the morning of Jan. 4 she received word from human relations that her position as an assistant in the player information/video department, was being eliminated because of a new direction, which includes the addition of a vice president of analytics.

"It's sort of the one thing that I'm really disappointed that I didn't get to see through," Doerrie said. "Because, do I love hockey? Yes, but I also believe if you have a platform, you'd better do something good with it. This (mental health awareness) is the thing I'd really like to use my platform. I'm disappointed I won't be there, but I'm really happy the organization is open-minded enough to say you know what, this is a very good thing and we need to be involved."

Doerrie, while growing up in Newmarket, Ont., started skating when she was four years old and was playing organized hockey with the boys by the time she was six. Her father, Michael, is a massive hockey fan and his oldest daughter followed suit.

There were some inclinations that her passion for the game and particular set of skills might evolve into something special even when she was young.

"Her father was in a pretty big hockey pool," Karen Doerrie, Rachel's mother, said. "They go to a hotel for the draft and it's a big deal. She would do all the homework for him, all the research to help him pick the players and they would split the winnings. So when you're 10, 11 years old and your dad comes home with a couple thousand dollars for you

because of your hockey homework, life's pretty good. She's just always been enthralled.

"She would tell me when she spent hours sitting on the couch watching the draft and studying things, I'd say, 'Why are you filling your brain with all of this information? When is this ever going to be useful?' And ever since she was 11 or 12 years old, it was always, 'Mom, I'm going to be in hockey.' When she was 15 or 16, that was when she first said she wanted to be the first female general manager in hockey and break the old boys' school. I thought 'Wow, that's pretty lofty. OK, let's go!'"

While she was at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, Doerrie spent two seasons working for Dave Matsos, then the coach of the Sudbury Wolves in the OHL. She also had an internship with Maple Leafs Sports & Entertainment and was invited to a Hockey Canada women's development camp.

She wrote a story for the The Bloggers' Tribune in 2016 entitled "Why I'll be the first Female NHL GM." It certainly caught some peoples' attention.

"I always like people who put things out in the universe about themselves and gamble on themselves," said Jeff Marek, a host of Sportsnet's NHL coverage and the "31 Thoughts" podcast alongside Elliotte Friedman. "That's a bold thing to say. It's one thing to say that privately, but it's quite another to put it out there and try to create a self-fulfilling prophecy for yourself. I was startled by it because who says that? But here's this young, confident, smart woman who is comfortable enough to say this is my goal and this is what I want to achieve. I reached out to her to say, 'Hey, that's a bold thing to do. Good for you.'"

A friendship grew out of that first message to Doerrie. Soon Marek, who regularly canvasses different groups in the hockey community about potential news or discussion topics of the day, began reaching out to her about junior hockey items. Then she became a part of his women's hockey group. And then his NHL discussions, too.

"At one point I was like, 'Hang on, Rachel is on a million of my lists. How did that happen?'" Marek said. "She doesn't just look at something and say 'OK that's what it is, so let's move on.' She'll challenge me on tons of things and she'll challenge herself.

"She's in a male-dominated field. Here's someone that almost has that Amelia Earhart vibe about her. I think Amelia Earhart is one of the great feminists of all time. It's me and the plane. Screw everybody else. For Rachel, it's her, her brain and the game. That's it. She's going to sink or swim based on her work ethic and her brain."

Doerrie was invited to the Maple Leafs' development camp in the summer of 2017, and spent time working on and off the ice with various members of the organization. A photo of her ran in one of the Toronto newspapers. It wasn't exactly a "you have arrived" kind of moment, though.

"There's Kyle Dubas and a couple other guys and they're all identified by name," Marek said. "Then there's Rachel. The caption says 'Kyle Dubas, Sheldon Keefe, so and so, so and so and a female staffer.' She's the only female on the ice and no one is curious to find out who she is. When she calls me, it shows up on my phone as female staffer. No matter what she does in this industry and the heights that she reaches, I will always refer to her as female staffer."

Doerrie started contributing to The Athletic in September 2017, including this story about the success of the Devils' top line. More people started to take notice, including New Jersey general manager Ray Shero. When the Devils hired Doerrie in December 2017, she became the youngest member of an NHL analytics department.

Not the youngest woman. The youngest, period.

Doerrie with her stepfather, Matt Richard, mother Karen and brother Michael at Prudential Center. (Courtesy of Rachel Doerrie)

She quickly became a valued member of the Devils' hockey operations department. Earlier this season, Devils coach John Hynes lauded the club's analytics department to an assembled group of media,



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emphasizing how well his staff and the department worked together and the impact the sharing of information and ideas had on the organization.

MSG's Steve Cangelosi asked Hynes when he felt like "the really good system" they had in place came together. Hynes responded, "around the middle of last season." That certainly lines up with Doerrie's hire.

When Hynes talked about how the Devils were focused on being more successful at even strength this season, he detailed the process of how the club tackled offseason projects and how intel flows between departments. It did not take long for Doerrie and Hynes to develop a bond.

Earlier this season, Hynes was an in-studio guest for Sportsnet's coverage the night before the Devils played the Maple Leafs in Toronto. Marek got to spend the night watching hockey with him.

"Doug MacLean wanted to talk about short-side goals and the conversation turned into scoring chance percentages and you have a six percent of scoring when you're below the dot here on the right side as left-handed shot versus a right-handed shot and John started to get really into the conversation," Marek said. "He was like, 'Oh yeah, we track all of this info on this is a low-percentage shot or this is a high-percentage shot and if you add a pass to it, it jumps from six percent to 33 percent on this.' And he's just coming at us like this waterfall of information. I'm sitting there thinking, 'Where have I had this conversation before?'"

"Oh yeah, I know. It's Rachel, and the work that she's done. When you hear a high-level coach like John Hynes who is in the NHL and has been behind the bench at a World Cup and the fact that he's recognized the value in the work she's doing, that's a real tip of the cap to someone like Rachel."

Doerrie talked about some of what she did while working for the Devils when she was a guest on the Hockey PDOCast with Dimitri Filipovic. The news of her no longer working for the organization was a surprise throughout the hockey community.

"I really enjoyed working with the coaching staff," Doerrie said. "I learned a lot from John and the rest of the coaching staff and how you can use old-school things and new-school things. It's really the importance of how you use all of the information available to you for what you believe the is the best way for your team to succeed. I also learned the importance of having a clear-cut vision. If you don't have something you're striving towards and you don't have a direction, it is very hard to respect your line of thinking. If you have a clear vision and you stick to it, it's cut and dry — you're either part of the vision or not. John does a very job of sticking to the things that he believes makes a successful hockey team."

Doerrie with her grandfather, Wolfgang Schulze, and his train set, which took up most of a two-car garage. (Courtesy of Rachel Doerrie)

Doerrie has had plenty of people she looks up to as mentors, whether it's her mother or Matsos, who is now the coach of the Hamilton Bulldogs in the OHL, or Marek. Her grandfather, Wolfgang Schulze, was more than that.

"He was her rock," Karen Doerrie said. "When there was trouble at home with mom and dad, fighting before the divorce, Opa was there to come and get her and go for an ice cream to get her out of the house. If there was a school play, Opa was there. He went to every hockey game."

"Rachel was the only grandchild that he ever held, and he has eight or nine grandchildren. The only one he ever changed a diaper for, given a bottle too, gone on vacation with. Their relationship, I mean it is beautiful, but there was probably other than myself nobody more important to Rachel than Opa. One hundred percent. He made no bones about it. Rachel was his favorite."

"The sun would rise and set on both of their shoulders," added Matt Richard, Rachel's stepfather.

They were on a family vacation together in Mexico in June 2016 when Rachel walked into a room and found her grandfather in the midst of a heart attack. He passed away a few days later in a hospital.

"That absolutely rocked her world," Karen said.

"The one thing I remember from that day besides the CPR was him getting wheeled out (out of the hotel room) and looking at me and telling me he loved me," Rachel said. "I think I knew at that point that it wasn't good. There was a bottle of rum in the room and I just drank straight from the bottle. I knew I was going to be in for a tough experience."

"One of the things that people look for is closure, and I never got that. I never got to say goodbye. He never had a funeral and to this day that is a very sore subject."

"I went into a spiral and didn't realize it. It was only after I got hired by the Devils and moved to New Jersey that I realized how deep in I was. When I moved here, I was alone. I had no family here, I was the youngest person in the business and I was a female so I felt alone."

There's a framed collection of photos of Rachel with her grandfather in the dining room of her house. She also has 22 photos of him in her room, because that was his favorite number. (Courtesy of Rachel Doerrie)

For the first six months of Doerrie's time with the Devils, she was living out her dream of working in the NHL. It should have been the greatest time of her life. It wasn't.

"I was smiling to hide the pain," she said. "I was spiraling. I wasn't abusing drugs or drinking heavily, but I wasn't eating. I had lost a lot of weight. The worst thing you can do is hide it behind a smile, because then you're fucked."

Doerrie buried herself in the work because it was what she always loved to do. At times, she struggled to eat anything but McDonald's — she used to make weekly trips there with her grandfather.

She was making new friends and forging new work relationships in New Jersey. But when Doerrie went home in late July of last year, those who knew her best sensed something was wrong.

"I was hanging out with my best friend," Rachel said. "This was a turning point for me, because he looked at me and said 'What happened to you?' I didn't know what he meant, but he said, 'You are not the person that I know.' That was sort of the trigger for me that you know what, something is going on and I need to get this sorted out."

"I went to a psychiatrist and said, 'Listen, something's wrong but I don't know what it is.' That's when I was diagnosed with PTSD. It is PTSD with anxious and depressive symptoms. It's obviously not as severe as like wartime PTSD, but it's a different type. It's triggered by different things. The way your brain works is there's pathways that cause you to react to certain things. When something happens, your brain goes through these pathways and you make decisions or react to that. Because of what I'd gone through as a child and continued to go through in my adolescent years, and then with my grandfather passing away, my pathways didn't develop in the same way. I didn't have the ability to react in a 'normal' way because those pathways just weren't there. It's like learning to walk. If your brain doesn't know how to walk, you ain't walking. That pathway isn't there."

Doerrie's own battle with mental illness is not the biggest reason she wanted to use her position with the Devils to try to help others. Before her grandfather passed away and before her hockey career began to blossom, her younger sister, Katarina, was battling issues of her own.

"I'm not sure it really all hit me until I realized that I was also going through something. I just asked her, 'What do you need? Because I don't know how to help you.' She was like, 'Sometimes I just need you to listen,'" Rachel said. "For me it's about three words: accept, understand, listen. Accept that they have something and they have it. End of story. Understand that you aren't going to understand what's going on. And listen. They might say, 'I need this today.' Sometimes that might be 'I think we need some time apart, because I have stuff to figure out and you have stuff to figure out.' As hard as that is to hear as a sister, if that's what she needs today, then so be it."



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"My sister felt alone for a really long time, and I don't want anyone to go through that. She was a young teenager, like 13, and I don't want anyone to have to go through things like that."

Some of the features of the Devils' Mental Health Awareness night include a portion of the ticket sales going to various mental health organization in New Jersey. The Devils will host a "Hockey Talks" panel before the game that will include Aimee Kimball, who is the club's director of player and team development, and Lacey Mark, a Devils fan who has appeared on "The Bachelor" and "Bachelor In Paradise."

They'll also host a number of organizations, each set up with a table in the concourse to offer information about mental illnesses and support for anyone seeking it for themselves or someone they know. The Devils are one of more than 10 teams in the NHL holding a night dedicated to mental health awareness.

Like Hockey Fights Cancer and Hockey Is For Everyone, the Hockey Talks partnership between the NHL and the NHLPA is another critically important initiative for the league and the future of the sport.

"My thing is we can't just care about people when it is convenient for you," Doerrie said. "People have to understand that you have no problem sending someone home if they're coughing up a lung, but if someone can barely focus because something is a trigger point, it's not taken the same. The response is, 'Aw, it's hockey. You've got to tough it out.'"

"We don't ask someone with a broken leg to go run steps. It's not going to go very well. So ask someone with a broken brain to react the way you want them to react or think the way you want, sometimes they don't have that capability. Patience is really important. You're willing to wait if someone has a torn ACL or a concussion. Why would you not be willing to wait for this?"

Doerrie on the ice with the Maple Leafs during a development camp in 2017. (Courtesy of Rachel Doerrie)

The first NHL team reached out to Doerrie about two hours after the news of her departure from the Devils landed on social media. Several others have followed suit, in addition to a few soccer clubs, but she is not in a hurry to take the next step in her career.

"I owe it to myself to take a break," she said. "I went from high school to university a year early. I finished university in three years, and I went right into working. Considering everything that has happened, I'm due for a reset. I'm really fortunate because I feel like this whole experience has broken me down to a point where I now get to choose the person I want to build to be. I like that. Am I happy that I've been broken down to this point? No. But I get to rebuild the person I want to be. I'm going to focus on that for the next couple months."

That means a trip to Germany to see family and her beloved Bayern Munich in action. It's going to mean some time at home with Peanut, the attention-seeking pup of the family. It's also going to mean more heated hockey debates with her stepfather.

"I played in juniors and had a fledgling NCAA career, but I'm 43 years old and I haven't studied this stuff," Richard said. "We're still in the world of plus-minus and save percentage and wins and losses. I'd come home from like a men's league game and she'd be like, 'Do you know that so and so's Corsi rating is ...' and I know that Corsi is almost out the window now, but I didn't know what that was at the time. She started talking about Corsi and shot suppression and these other things and I'd be like, 'I scored two goals today. Is that still good?'"

"We got into it about Morgan Rielly versus Jake Gardiner and why Rielly gets a different type of hall pass because I played kind of like Gardiner does. I was more of a risk-taker. I said, 'Well, he was a plus-24 last year' and she looked at me like I should be on a rotary phone in a black-and-white sitcom. Plus-minus eh, grandpa?"

Her father and stepfather bring a hockey-based perspective to their mentorship. Her mother, who is a National Channel Manager for Nutanix,

has plenty of experience with some of the situations Rachel could encounter.

"For me, I'm in an industry that's an old boys' club," Karen Doerrie said. "I'm in IT. There are a handful of women at the top. It's changing, but 20 years ago when I started we were secretaries and mailroom people. We weren't executives. I have a lot of experience from climbing the corporate ladder and breaking into the old boys' club."

"All of my children know there is a saying mom always says: 'There are a lot of things you can recover from, but when you sacrifice your integrity, it is very difficult. I can fix stupid. I can fix ugly. I can't fix it if you're no longer trusted.' I told her you don't have to wear a short skirt, but if you're the smartest person in the room, that might get you noticed."

Doerrie is also going to continue to be an advocate for people with mental illness, including for herself and her younger sister.

Her personal battle with mental illness continues. She's seen significant progress, and her desire to continue breaking down barriers in the sport of hockey remains.

"We've talked about this a number of times. The reality is she's only got 32 opportunities, with Seattle getting a team," Richard said. "Is it mathematically probable that she'll be a GM? No, but it's possible. If not, there are thousands of little girls who look up to the Hayley Wickenheisers of the world and say, 'I want to be the next Hayley Wickenheiser.' Maybe the first girl who becomes a GM is not Rachel, but maybe the first one says, 'Well, I met Rachel Doerrie when I was at Laurentian doing my internship and she really inspired me.'"

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The Athletic / Who is on the hot seat as the NHL trade deadline approaches?

By Scott Burnside

Feb 5, 2019

Ah, the hot seat. This time of the year there are lots of them around the NHL.

For many folks, whether they're general managers, coaches or players, the trade deadline is as stressful a time as there is during the season. Fortunes wax and wane but this is where the buck stops for many, where seasons are won and lost, careers take abrupt turns.

Who's under the glare of the spotlight? Which GMs, coaches and players are feeling some uncomfortable warmth on their nether regions as the hours tick by toward 3 p.m. EST on Feb. 25?

Jim Nill, GM, Dallas Stars

A year ago at the trade deadline, GM Jim Nill threw down the gauntlet to his team saying he felt the answer to a playoff berth was in the dressing room already. The Stars then went winless in eight straight in March and missed the playoffs for the eighth time in the past 10 years. This season, of course, team president Jim Lites made headlines by publicly blasting captain Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin for their lack of productivity. The public lambasting drew lots of criticism from around the league; whether you can connect A to B is undetermined, but the Stars have been pretty darned good since. They sit in third place in the Central Division and opened up an eight-point gap on ninth-place Colorado.

Behind stellar netminding from Ben Bishop and Anton Khudobin, the Stars rank second in the league in goals allowed per game. But if they're



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going to move from simply getting in the door to being a team that has a shot at making some noise in the postseason, it's hard to imagine another straight no-move trade deadline for Nill is going to cut it. The team is top heavy in scoring and through 50 games did not have a 20-goal scorer (Seguin now has 22 goals in 53 contests). After Benn, Seguin and Alexander Radulov, there isn't a player who has surpassed single digits in goals. The team currently ranks 29th in the league in goals per game. So, it doesn't take much of a stretch to suggest that goal scoring is a priority and ideally down the middle, although a source close to the team suggested that getting a true No. 2 center is likely an offseason task and a rental winger would be a priority at the deadline.

The Stars don't have a ton in the system to offer to acquire a top-end player, but defenseman Julius Honka should be attractive to lots of teams even though he hasn't quite found his footing in Dallas.

A year ago Nill won a battle of wills with former head coach Ken Hitchcock at the end of another disappointing season in Dallas, but having employed three coaches in the past three seasons (Lindy Ruff, Hitchcock and now rookie head coach Jim Montgomery), the pressure is as high as it's ever been for Nill, especially with the team hosting the 2020 Winter Classic at the Cotton Bowl.

Jason Botterill, GM Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres have missed the playoffs seven straight times and haven't won a playoff round since 2007. Long-suffering Sabre fans felt that maybe the playoff thaw would come this season when they reeled off 10 straight wins early in the season. But the team flattened out before rebounding slightly around the All-Star break. They still remain very much in the hunt in the Eastern Conference, but they definitely need some additional scoring up front to support the dynamic duo of Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner, who have a combined 48 goals and 101 points through 51 games. After that it's a pretty significant drop and coach Phil Housley has been doing some major revamping of the forward group in the hopes of generating more offense.

The biggest pressure GM Jason Botterill will likely feel is externally from antsy fans – and maybe from himself, especially if the team continues its zig-zag approach to the standings. Organizationally the team preached patience and waiting for its homegrown talent to coalesce into a Stanley Cup contender. That makes sense unless you think making a significant add sends the message to your dressing room that it's time to be a winner. Of course, there are no guarantees if you add an offensive piece like an Artemi Panarin (why not dream the big dream?) or Jakub Silfverberg or even a Mats Zuccarello, but if you don't add and you don't make the playoffs, well, it's a lot easier to second-guess being conservative.

The Sabres have lots of good prospects coming and the defense is young but able, led by rookie of the year candidate Rasmus Dahlin, so the future will look bright regardless. "I don't think (Botterill) is under much pressure internally," one former NHLer and longtime analyst said. "The fans will be wanting help at the deadline but the organization has a plan and I don't think they will steer away from that." Doesn't mean they shouldn't. Right?

Semyon Varlamov/Philipp Grubauer, goaltenders, Colorado Avalanche

Buoyed by arguably the NHL's best line of Mikko Rantanen, Nathan MacKinnon and Gabriel Landeskog, the Avs charged out of the gate and looked like they were going to build off last season with a second-straight playoff berth. Not so fast. In spite of adding Grubauer to help push veteran starter Semyon Varlamov, the Avs goaltending hasn't stabilized at all. In fact, it's destabilized has put GM Joe Sakic in a rather unpleasant bind. No doubt he'd like to add some offensive depth to help balance out the top line. But with the Avs sitting 24th in the league in goals allowed per game, an alarming 3.25 per game, and with neither Grubauer nor Varlamov able to show any consistency over the past 30 games or so, the Avs are suddenly life and death to make the playoffs. Varlamov hasn't won two straight since the end of November, and Grubauer, acquired at the draft and signed to a three-year deal, has been particularly disappointing with a 3.38 GAA and .891 save percentage.

The preparation of being the guy game after game is completely different, noted one longtime NHL netminder and analyst. "Some guys can do it and some guys can't," he said.

The Avs have committed to Grubauer and Varlamov is coming to the end of his contract, so the future in goal looks anything but defined, and by extension, Varlamov's future as an NHLer starter appears very much in doubt.

"I definitely wouldn't sign him," the netminder said of Varlamov. Now, the Avalanche still have lots to be excited about given they own Ottawa's first-round pick at June's draft, which might well turn into the first-overall pick and Jack Hughes. But in the here and now, not sure Sakic can justify sending assets out in the hopes that the goaltending rights itself and that it will be enough to get the Avs into the postseason.

Ken Hitchcock, coach, Edmonton Oilers

So, let's get this straight. The Oilers, a team with four No. 1 draft picks between 2010 and 2015, have made the playoffs just once since 2006 and this season fired both their coach (Todd McLellan) and GM (Peter Chiarelli), but they are all in for the playoffs. But they don't want to necessarily trade their first-round draft pick or any of the few top prospects in their system. Well, as long as they're not being unreasonable.

From the outside it might appear that the pressure lands squarely on assistant GM Keith Gretzky, who will handle the trade deadline for the beleaguered Oilers as they try and stay in the hunt in the sluggish Western Conference playoff race. But the real pressure is on veteran coach Hitchcock. One NHL coach said it's like Hockey 101 for the Oilers as they struggle to check consistently and deliver strong positional play.

And there's the no small matter of basically having two players, Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, deliver all of the team's offense. The two combined for 56 goals and 134 points coming out of the bye week. The rest of the Oiler roster chipped in 88 goals. Hitchcock recently split up his top three players – McDavid, Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins – but still saw his team blow leads.

Hitchcock is "up to his ass in alligators," the coach said. Hitchcock also has to find the right rhythm in his goaltender use now that the team placed their chips on newcomer Mikko Koskinen, bestowing a lavish three-year, \$13.5 million contract on the 6-foot-7, 30-year-old who's played just 33 NHL games, making incumbent Cam Talbot's days numbered in Edmonton – a departure that could be tied to the trade deadline.

The problem another NHL source familiar with the team said is that, it doesn't matter who is coaching, the dynamic is still the same. "They're slow. They're not skilled enough," the source said. "I don't think anybody can change around what's there."

Hitchcock came out of retirement to take what is essentially his dream job, coaching in the NHL in his hometown. If the team continues to stumble and misses the playoffs for the 12th time in 13 years, it may well be the last we see of one of the game's greatest coaches. If Hitchcock can push enough buttons to coax the Oilers into the postseason, well, he should earn a spot on the Jack Adams Trophy ballot as coach of the year. Like a lot of things with this team, not a lot of middle ground.

Jarmo Kekalainen, GM, Columbus Blue Jackets

You knew we'd get here eventually, didn't you? No NHL GM has more on his plate come deadline time than Kekalainen. His two top stars, Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, are set to become unrestricted free agents in the summer and have indicated they either won't be coming back under any circumstances or won't entertain that kind of discussion until the offseason. Panarin has been as advertised, collecting 59 points in his first 49 games. But Bobrovsky is another story, sitting with a pedestrian 3.01 GAA and .901 save percentage, hardly the kind of numbers that instill confidence that this is a team that could do some damage come playoff time, especially when you consider that Bobrovsky has been at best ordinary the past two springs for the Blue Jackets.



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The theory, if you're Kekalainen, is that if you keep both Bobrovsky and Panarin because you believe this is a team capable of at least winning the team's first playoff series it's like adding two rentals. But with the Blue Jackets reeling into February having lost five straight, this team looks like it is finally crumbling under all of the outside pressures. As one longtime NHL netminder said recently, it's hard for players to come to the rink every day and throw everything behind a goaltender that clearly doesn't want to be there. The fact Bobrovsky was suspended by the team for a game before the All-Star break for basically abandoning his teammates after being pulled from a game has done little to suggest he's a guy you want in your dressing room.

Another longtime netminder and analyst said it's pretty basic stuff in terms of dressing room chemistry. "You've got to like your goaltender," he said. Not sure that's the case with Bobrovsky, so Kekalainen needs to bite the bullet, accept whatever return he might get and hope for some addition by subtraction. Of course trading Bobrovsky, who has a limited no-trade deal, is easier said than done.

As for Panarin, another longtime NHL analyst said the sooner the Blue Jackets can make a deal to find a new home for Panarin, the sooner they can try and regroup. He suggested Boston where Jake Debrusk and a first-round pick might be a fair return for the talented winger.

Beyond that, the Blue Jackets have to ask themselves if they really are built for any kind of playoff run regardless of what happens with Panarin and Bobrovsky. They are very thin down the middle, the analyst said, and it's hard to imagine them having success against perennial Metropolitan Division powers Washington and Pittsburgh.

Don Waddell, GM, Carolina Hurricanes

It was roughly a year ago that new owner Tom Dundon persuaded longtime Atlanta Thrashers GM Waddell, who was the head of the business operations with the Hurricanes, to take on the GM duties. Waddell made a blockbuster move in the summer, bringing in Dougie Hamilton and Micheal Ferland, along with top defensive prospect Adam Fox from Calgary for Noah Hanifin and Elias Lindholm. Both Lindholm and Hanifin are thriving for a Calgary team that is first in the Pacific Division. Waddell also traded Jeff Skinner to Buffalo for a package of prospects and draft picks, and Skinner is one of the NHL's top goal-producers. Skinner had control over his fate with a no-trade clause, so Waddell's options were limited, but the cumulative effect of the deals has still been lamentable as the Hurricanes continue to struggle offensively.

They are currently 24th in the league in goals scored and 24th on the power play. Here's where it gets interesting and exponentially more difficult for Waddell. The Hurricanes are almost certainly going to move Ferland, who has been a positive add in spite of some injury issues but as a pending unrestricted free agent doesn't fit the team's long-term plans. And they at some point need to move one of their right-handed defensemen – Hamilton, Justin Faulk or Brett Pesce – in order to make room for Fox, who has been a standout at Harvard and could step right into an NHL lineup next season if he signs with the Hurricanes.

"I think Ferland's bags are already packed," one source familiar with the Hurricanes said. But the dilemma is whether you wait until the draft to move a right-handed defenseman or maintain the status quo and hope that the return for Ferland is enough to bump up the offense.

Waddell has already helped to prepare for the seemingly imminent departure of Ferland by adding big-bodied Nino Niederreiter from Minnesota. Niederreiter is already finding chemistry with All-Star Sebastian Aho and chipped in five goals in his first six games as a Hurricane. That makes the Ferland departure easier to take, the source said. But if the Hurricanes stay within a point or two of the playoffs heading into Feb. 25, does Waddell get the green light to add a rental player? What would adding Zuccarello or Matt Duchene do to help a sputtering power play down the middle? What would such a move mean to a fan base that is starting to connect with the youthful Hurricanes under rookie coach Rod Brind'Amour? What is the value of such goodwill even if the Canes miss again? Is it worth a pick or prospect or two? Easy questions to ask, not so easy to answer.

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Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Auston Matthews extension a game changer for NHL

Elliott Friedman

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Everyone in the NHL knew this was coming. Oh, teams hoped Toronto would somehow hold the line, stand up and say to its franchise player, "No, we're not going to change the way business is done."

But when Auston Matthews exploded out of the gate with 10 goals in the first six games, any hope of pushback was over. The Toronto Maple Leafs had one responsibility — to do the best deal for themselves. His \$11.634-million AAV is not as high as Connor McDavid's record \$12.5 million, but that contract buys four unrestricted seasons. Matthews's will be one. It's a massive tremor.

Today's young player is not afraid to demand a larger share of the pie — not afraid to say, "Just because you've done it that way before doesn't mean you're going to do it that way now."

For a few years, I've been saying offer sheets are coming, and, finally, people in the NHL believe it. (It is like predicting the housing bubble will burst. Eventually, you're going to be right.) It did not go unnoticed that Detroit GM Ken Holland did not brush off the idea of an offer sheet in at least two recent interviews. For someone of his stature to give the impression he'd consider it, that's big.

He can't be the only one.

The Maple Leafs knew that. And other teams trying to sign their own restricted free agents knew that. It was frustrating for those clubs, because the players (and agents) would say, "Let's see what happens with Nylander." When that was done, they'd say, "Nah, we'll wait." It was almost as if each player/agent was waiting for someone to go first.

Again, this was an easy decision for years. Offer sheets were (mostly) a dream. And who knows, maybe none will come. The difference this time is teams believe they might.

Maybe Toronto should have snared Matthews before the season at \$12 million/year. Matthews was willing to go the maximum term, and the Maple Leafs certainly didn't object, but when he busted out to that huge start, the number got too high — probably close to \$14 million. Toronto wants to make multiple runs at greatness, and that number would crush the roster.

"I don't really operate in a way where we're looking back and wondering what might have been," GM Kyle Dubas told Sportsnet's Caroline Cameron after the Matthews press conference. "We're at where we're at, and we're very comfortable with it."

Dubas, Matthews and agent Judd Moldaver had only one goal this week: put an end to this.

The extension smashes the previous cap-era record for this term. That was Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin, at \$8.7 million. As a percentage, however, Matthews's is actually lower. Assuming an \$83-million ceiling as projected for 2019-20, his chunk will be 14 per cent. Crosby and Malkin were at 15.3.



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The biggest percentage of the salary cap spent on four players by any Stanley Cup champion is 45.2, by the 2017 Pittsburgh Penguins (Malkin, Crosby, Kris Letang and Phil Kessel). Again, assuming the \$83-million number for next season, Toronto is at 36 per cent for Matthews, John Tavares and William Nylander — with Mitch Marner to come.

But Matthews is locked in, and this chapter is closed. For Toronto, that's a victory. For the all other high-level RFAs and their teams, those stories are just beginning.

31 THOUGHTS

1. Now watch the Maple Leafs take a run at signing Marner. His agent, Darren Ferris, has maintained there wouldn't be any negotiations during the season. But now they know the Matthews number, Marner wants to be a Leaf, and, most importantly, Toronto wants to end the contract circus.

2. I'm really uncomfortable being on the opposite side of Brent Seabrook, but here is all the information I can provide into his situation: At some point, there was a conversation between the player, the organization and his agent about the future. (Team and agent declined to comment.) According to an individual who reached out on Monday, the discrepancy might be timing. The discussion was during the darkest days of Chicago's season, probably around six weeks ago. Now that the team is making a charge at the playoffs, things could be different — and it should be noted multiple sources indicate the club's feelings on Seabrook's positive impact have not changed. What is true is the Blackhawks have checked the market to see what opportunities might be out there, they currently do not have permission to trade him, and Seabrook loves Chicago. If, somewhere in all of that, something I said was in error, that is totally my fault.

3. Artemi Panarin freezing all contract talks until after the season is another earthquake reminding teams that players are more willing than ever to maximize their leverage. Eight months after Tavares took one further step than 2016 Steven Stamkos, Panarin's preparing everyone for a similar meet-and-greet. Tampering rules prevent open statements of lust, but jockeying is underway for an audience.

This will force teams to make even earlier assessments about their star players. Trade them at the draft a year before they hit the market? One exec said his team, if unsure about ability to contend, could weigh doing it even earlier — two trade deadlines before unrestricted free agency. There were rumours New Jersey would consider that path with Taylor Hall, currently available in July 2020. But Devils GM Ray Shero said Saturday there was "zero chance" he would trade Hall this month. (Nor, from what I understand, is Hall looking to go anywhere.)

Not long ago, the idea of trading such a player 19 months before his contract was up wouldn't just fly in the face of normalcy. It would be like picking up conventional wisdom, slamming it to the ground and kicking dirt on its face. But, at the very least, that thinking is going to become part of every club's process.

4. Over the weekend, the feeling was Florida would not make trades for Panarin or Sergei Bobrovsky — feeling there was no need to spend assets when the Panthers liked their chances in free agency. Monday, the New York Post's Larry Brooks reported the Panthers are thinking about trading for Bobrovsky, so as to give him eight years. We will see where this goes, but don't be surprised to see Florida continue to try to clear room. Mike Hoffman, now in his fifth-straight 20-goal season, could be another to go. Teams are always looking for scorers.

5. Panarin's decision sent shockwaves through the Blue Jackets. Columbus lost three straight in regulation after agent Dan Milstein's announcement. A couple days off before a Colorado/Arizona/Vegas trip gives them a chance to breathe and re-set. Trading either player for something that can't help them now isn't an option. Doug MacLean was saying last week that he'd trade both players, and, if the assets were futures, flip them for immediate, impactful help. I think GM Jarmo Kekalainen is considering just that. If the Blue Jackets do deal Bobrovsky

(and remember, the goalie has control of the situation), do not be surprised if they take a run at Jonathan Quick.

6. There's a ton of interest in Panarin, but those teams indicate they aren't being allowed to talk contract with him. Then again, it probably doesn't matter anyway, since he's not interested in signing now.

7. I've tried to be very careful reporting on Ottawa's negotiations with Matt Duchene and Mark Stone. Experience teaches you that, without a definitive statement like Panarin's, it is a roller-coaster ride. Some days it sounds like they're going to sign. Other days, it is the opposite. With two important players, the whispers double. That's life during high-stakes negotiations, especially when Matthews signs with huge bonuses — something the Senators try very hard to avoid. There are peaks and valleys, people go through a lot of different emotions. We "should" have a pretty good idea if they are going to sign very soon. The Senators need to know, because it affects other decisions — like Ryan Dzingel's future.

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

8. Ottawa arena info is tight, but we're less than four weeks from the current deadline. I have been reminded, however, not to underestimate how much it means to Eugene Melnyk to own the Senators. While he's willing to add partners to the development plan, it won't be as easy to get him to add a partner in team ownership.

9. Montreal GM Marc Bergevin watched Anaheim in Winnipeg and Toronto. He doesn't tip his hand, but I think he's looking at forward depth. Bergevin has said he won't give up futures, which takes him away from the Ducks' prime assets. The Canadiens may also have checked out Dallas's Brett Ritchie.

10. Buffalo is like Montreal. The Sabres do not want to use their best assets on rentals. I could see them looking at someone like Carl Hagelin. He'd be a good fit.

11. Add Calgary to the list of teams that have checked in on Mats Zuccarello. But it is going to take a lot to pry Chris Kreider out of Manhattan. He's got another year remaining.

12. Nashville is being asked about its willingness to trade Eeli Tolvanen. As Nick Kypreos reported, with Austin Watson's return uncertain, the Predators could be looking for two forwards.

13. If the Ducks are optimistic about anything right now, it is their ability to re-sign Jakob Silfverberg. They are hopeful it can happen by the deadline, but there is a scenario where it might have to wait until later. Anaheim has a "tagging" issue. (The cap is \$79.5 million this season, and no one's 2019-20 commitments can be above that until July 1. The Ducks are tight to that number.) They could open room with further moves, sign him and risk a tighter squeeze, or make a verbal commitment and wait until the summer. Whatever the case, they are attempting to close this.

14. Anaheim held a team meeting on Sunday after the 9–3 loss in Winnipeg. It was blunt, but the players reminded each other that they were still only two points out of a playoff spot. Then came the 6–1 defeat to Toronto.

Head coach Randy Carlyle admitted he was concerned about John Gibson's workload, but they may also be worried about mental fatigue. He's been dynamite, carrying the Ducks for two years. You get to a point where that's a huge burden for anyone. Gibson was pulled against the Jets and Maple Leafs, leaving the bench in the latter game and not returning. Everyone who knows him believes he can handle the responsibility, but everyone has a limit.

15. Anaheim's got a few players that would be coveted by both contenders and clubs thinking long-term. GM Bob Murray is not on this trip. He's patient. But word is he is considering major surgery. Question is if he does it now or later.

16. Five Red Wings — Nicklas Lidstrom, Alex Delvecchio, Steve Yzerman, Henrik Zetterberg and Tomas Holmstrom — played 1,000



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games for that franchise and no one else. Niklas Kronwall is 76 games from becoming number six. Don't think they are unaware of that. The organization has great respect for Kronwall, which is why Holland will not trade him unless the defenceman asks for the opportunity to chase a Stanley Cup or they get an offer they absolutely must consider.

17. Detroit's got a few interesting choices. They already have 10 picks in June's draft and a group of talented youngsters pushing for NHL jobs. They want a few veterans around. They are trying to extend Nick Jensen, who quietly has had a strong season. The trade-a-guy-and-re-sign-him plan rarely works, but I can see the possibility with Jimmy Howard — although they could just as easily keep him. There's a path to a new contract there.

18. Red Wings head coach Jeff Blashill could get an extension, too. They believe he's pushed the right buttons with that group.

19. Besides Hall, New Jersey's got a few interesting pieces. Brian Boyle stands out, with the Athletic's Arthur Staple indicating the Islanders have interest. (Of course, now that this is out there, Lou Lamoriello will refuse to do it. True story: When the Cory Schneider–Bo Horvat trade went down, he told Vancouver that if he heard someone break it in the seconds before Commissioner Gary Bettman announced it at the draft podium, he'd cancel the deal.) You can see Marcus Johansson and Ben Lovejoy — both unrestricted — having an appeal. There's a decision to be made on Keith Kinkaid, too.

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20. Dallas, fresh off a wild 5-4 win over Arizona, will have extra room to add a player if Martin Hanzal is declared out for the season. That's not an impossibility.

21. That Arizona/Dallas game was one of the wildest of the season. The Coyotes were down to three defencemen early in the third period. Alex Goligoski was out after being hit into the boards by Ritchie late in the second period. Oliver Ekman-Larsson got a hooking penalty trying to stop a breakaway. (I thought he made a great play, but the referee disagreed.) Then, Niklas Hjalmarrsson put one over the glass. Dallas scored three times to go from down 2-1 to up 4-2. The Coyotes — who really have taken the personality of their coach — fought back to tie it, before the Stars scored again. Then, Esa Lindell made a great save off Derek Stepan to preserve it, before Ben Bishop made another terrific stop to close it.

22. One of the fourth-round picks that Florida acquired from Pittsburgh in the Bjugstad/McCann/Brassard trade is the Mike Sillinger of draft selections. Originally, it was Minnesota's, traded to Arizona in February 2017 for Martin Hanzal. Ten months later, it was Pittsburgh's, as Michael Leighton was sent to the Penguins, with Josh Archibald headed west. Now it belongs the Panthers — the fourth team to own it.

23. I think the KHL is going to fight hard to keep Pavel Datsyuk.

24. Alluded to this last week, but the NHL is indeed investigating a game in Russia as a possibility for the Pittsburgh Penguins. Just not sure of all the hurdles.

25. Most insane controversy: that Elias Pettersson is tough to deal with. No one at All-Star complained. He's done After Hours, and an in-studio sit-down with Nick Kypreos the day after he was injured in Montreal. English is not his first language, but he tries to do everything. This can't be serious.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

26. New England's Super Bowl win over the Rams made Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler victorious in the Jets' NFL playoff pool, edging goalies Laurent Brossoit and Connor Hellebuyck. It is a fitting triumph for the linemates, who have drank the Kool-Aid, all in on The Cult of Brady.

"I'm a huge Tom Brady fan," Scheifele said. "I've got a signed jersey in my condo.... [I] went and met his chef two summers ago."

He loves the Patriots, unlike Wheeler.

"For me, I'm born and bred a Vikings fan," the captain said. "So I'm not a big Patriots fan by any means. But when those Tom vs Time documentaries started coming out last year... once the calendar flips and you're on the wrong side of 30, you start thinking about those things. To see how he takes care of himself, how he invests in himself to compete at a high level... at 40 years old or whatever he is now, I mean, that is just... I want to try to keep getting better. What better guy to look up to?"

27. If you're familiar with Brady's TB12 method, you know that he has a very strict diet. In 2016, his chef, Allen Campbell, told the Boston Globe about it:

"No white sugar. No white flour. No MSG. I'll use raw olive oil, but I never cook with olive oil. I only cook with coconut oil. Fats like canola oil turn into trans fats. I use Himalayan pink salt as the sodium. I never use iodized salt. [Tom] doesn't eat nightshades, because they're not anti-inflammatory. So no tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, or eggplants. Tomatoes trickle in every now and then, but just maybe once a month. I'm very cautious about tomatoes. They cause inflammation. What else? No coffee. No caffeine. No fungus. No dairy."

Wheeler doesn't follow that exact path, focusing more on the philosophy.

"I would say that the thing I've taken is how specific his diet is for him. I don't have the same characteristics as him. I'm not built the same way, our insides aren't the same. If you can find the information that works for you, that's the most important thing."

Scheifele: "As athletes you've got to be optimal as much as you can. When you eat the right things, get the proper rest, get the right treatment, do the right stretches and do the proper workouts at certain times... it all goes towards the same things in becoming the best player you can be. He's mastered that. It shows in his play and that's what me and Blake and anyone else who wants to listen can learn about... every game being top-notch."

28. Finally on this topic, Wheeler's been seen skating while wearing a headset from time to time.

"It was built into our training program last summer. That's a voice giving you the rest-to-work ratio, when you should be pushing, when you should be resting. When we're not with our trainers in the gym in the summer, we're doing the same thing over FaceTime. It just goes into that same idea of, 'Why would I train the same way as [Scheifele]?' Why would I train the same way as really, anyone? Because I'm unique — I'm different than all those guys. I'm made up differently, so I want to do this to attack my deficiencies and my weaknesses, especially as I'm getting older to keep getting better."

The Jets have a unique and impressive culture. A sizeable group of them get together to work with Adam Oates in the summer, too.

29. During the 2012-13 lockout, Johnny Oduya ended up playing in Thailand. He spoke glowingly of the experience, telling the Bangkok Post he would consider doing it again after his NHL days. The 37-year-old, who played 850 games with New Jersey, Atlanta, Winnipeg, Chicago, Dallas, Ottawa and Philadelphia, is expected back in that country for games as early as Thursday. Known as the Siam Hockey League, it is for expats who live in Thailand and want to lace up the skates.

30. One of the SHL's founders, Christian Olofsson, reached out to say that the ex-NHLer donated a trophy that will go to the league's most valuable player. It is known simply as... "The Oduya."

31. Last week, Benoit Huot retired from competitive swimming. A 35-year-old from Longueuil, Que., Huot won 20 Paralympic medals (nine gold) and 32 World Championship medals during his phenomenal career. Most importantly, Huot, born with a club foot, continued to "move the line" for athletes with disabilities and the public's understanding of what can be done. Very, very impressive person.



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Sportsnet.ca / Historic Oilers collapse a tipping point for fan base

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

February 6, 2019, 1:09 AM

EDMONTON — It's unraveling now, the way it seems to every season in Edmonton, at some point or another. A six-game losing streak left the Oilers tied for the second-last spot in the Western Conference Tuesday night, left fans' jerseys on the ice and left the goalie throwing death stares at his coach.

In its brutal totality, it left their prized possession — Connor McDavid — in a place that has become all too familiar: staring at a trip to the world championships, while standing in front of a bank of cameras and microphones, answering for further failure in Edmonton.

"What does it feel like to be Connor McDavid right now?" he was asked.

"You know how I feel," he said. "It's frustrating."

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Leading 2-1 after 40 minutes, the Oilers surrendered five third-period goals to lose 6-2. It was a third-period collapse of some historic magnitude, not seen in a quarter century — since April 11, 1993, to be exact.

This was the third consecutive game in which Edmonton had led in the third period, only to lose. In weekend games at Philadelphia and Montreal, the Oilers dropped games in overtime, but on a freezing cold Tuesday at home, they rewarded a crowd that had ventured through minus-30 temperatures with a complete fold-down, giving up four goals in 2:48 of the third period.

Cam Talbot was pulled in favour of Mikko Koskinen, but not before he appeared to have some choice words for head coach Ken Hitchcock as he skated past en route to the dressing room.

"We hung Talbs out to dry. It wasn't good enough," said defenceman Darnell Nurse. "Then Kosk came in and we hung him out to dry, too. Not good enough.

"We go out there for the third and feel ready to go. Say all the right stuff. It's simple. We've got to be better."

In a scene not witnessed here in a couple of seasons, more than one disgruntled fan tossed their jersey onto the Rogers Place ice. Hats too. As much frustration and discord as is growing inside the walls of an organization that has fired both its head coach and GM this season, it boils at a much cooler temperature than the blood of its terminally under-served fan base.

"I saw some jerseys on the ice," said Chicago left-winger Drake Caggiula, who played on the Blackhawks top line with Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane, while Brandon Manning, the defenceman former Oilers GM Peter Chiarelli had acquired in a trade for Caggiula, was a healthy scratch for Edmonton.

It's a microcosm of Chiarelli's trading record, to be sure, while what remains on Edmonton's roster is a residue of his devilish work. He leaves

behind an Oilers club that does not have enough goaltending, does not have a proper NHL defence corps, and does not have more than one top-six winger.

And it is criminally capped out, needing to make a move soonest to make cap room for Andrej Sekera, a \$5.5-million, 32-year-old defenceman coming off of ACL and Achilles tears. Sekera is the cavalry, literally limping over the hill.

"We just collapsed," said Leon Draisaitl, who scored both Edmonton goals. "We turned the puck over and collapsed. That's it.

"We have to figure it out."

Credit the Blackhawks for their push-back. They walked in here, trailing after two, and brought the Oilers to their collective knees.

But how long does it take for this group to grow some character? How long to figure out to how to finish, when for 40 minutes you're good enough to gain a lead?

"We can talk all we want," said McDavid. "We've just got to find a way to grab (the game) when it's going like that. Have a strong shift, get some pucks in. Find a way to grind in the O-zone, and get some life back. It seems to build when stuff goes wrong, and we never grab it."

Or, perhaps a better word is "grasp."

Here in Edmonton, they never quite grasp it, do they?

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Sportsnet.ca / Leafs' Dubas will ultimately be judged on whether he delivers Cup to Toronto

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

February 5, 2019, 10:44 PM

TORONTO — Kyle Dubas is either the most fortunate or most doomed general manager in hockey, depending how you view these things.

He climbed a mountain to take control of the Toronto Maple Leafs before his 33rd birthday, then quickly realized that getting the job was the easy part. There can only be two possible outcomes from the position he occupies now: Either he shapes and molds this franchise into one capable of ending the longest Stanley Cup drought going, or he's eventually fired for falling short.

There is no in between.

The starkness of his task only becomes clearer on a good-news day like this one, when Dubas sat beside Auston Matthews and signed off on a \$58.17-million, five-year extension, because it reinforces how difficult it's going to be to keep one of the NHL's most promising rosters intact long enough to see it through.

"We're trying to build a team that can have sustained success. Not just contend once," said Dubas. "I think you look, there's [many] teams all across every professional sport, they're very good teams for a long time but they can't ever push it across the finish line. I think a lot of that is luck-related and luck-based, and I think we want to give ourselves the maximum number of chances we can to make a real good go at it."

He will ultimately be judged on how well he navigates both the bounces and bonuses. A hard salary cap is the enemy of every GM with oversized



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aspirations, especially when you're soon to be allocating nearly half of the available money to a core four: Matthews, John Tavares, William Nylander and eventually Mitch Marner, the only one of the elite Leafs still in need of a big contract.

Dubas became increasingly motivated to nail down the Matthews extension with the Feb. 25 trade deadline coming into view and felt secure enough about where the negotiations were headed to pull the trigger on acquiring defenceman Jake Muzzin last week. Moves like that become easier to make with a clearly defined salary picture.

The phrase you'll hear bandied about in NHL circles is "cost certainty," which translates roughly to, 'Do I have enough cap space to justify acquiring or keeping Player X at Salary Y?'

It's an equation they'll be running often in the Leafs front office moving forward. Every decision, big or small, will need to be filtered through it.

The only major missing piece to be filled in is the next Marner contract, which could prove trickiest of all. As much as Dubas might like to get that hammered out immediately, he seems content with honouring the request of agent Darren Ferris and waiting until after the season.

"There's going to be no pressure from us on that," said Dubas. "For us, if they want to talk, we're here. But we're respecting their wishes and I would expect everyone else would as well in terms of how they handle Mitch. When they're ready to sit down, we'll talk. He's going to be a Toronto Maple Leaf for a long time, regardless of how we had to come to that.

"So it's no issue at all."

It will take some creativity from the front office to get Marner signed at a manageable number. He's likely to lead the Leafs in points for the second straight season, and will seek a contract on par with Matthews — just as we once saw Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane take matching deals in Chicago coming out of entry-level, following Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin in Pittsburgh.

However, another \$11.634-million AAV looks like too much for Toronto to bear.

The team's entire salary structure would have been crippled had the Leafs even stretched to reach Matthews' desired \$14 million on a max eight-year deal, which is why management zeroed in on something shorter. Sure, it narrows the guaranteed window of Cup contention and will likely see the centre command an even larger piece of the pie at age 26, but it works in the immediate term.

"We're trying to balance obviously keeping this together while also contending and not having to delete parts from it," explained Dubas.

Talk about a challenging job.

Dubas has only been running the Leafs since May 11 — some 270 days — and already he's landed Tavares in free agency, engaged in a three-month contract stalemate with Nylander, traded for Muzzin and signed Matthews to one of the richest deals in franchise history.

Next up is his first trade deadline in a little more than two weeks and then the potential volatile Marner negotiation, plus some tough secondary challenges with promising wingers Kasper Kapanen and Andreas Johnsson set to become RFAs this summer.

With the cap ceiling projected to be at \$83 million next season, it's hard to imagine all of Patrick Marleau (who owns a full no-movement clause), Nikita Zaitsev and Connor Brown returning. There doesn't seem to be nearly enough room for negotiations with pending UFA Jake Gardiner, either.

So while Dubas was clearly fortunate to take over an Original Six franchise that had the makings of a top-flight contender, he also assumed a position with the potential to age him like a president. And even with Matthews signed, the tough work continues.

"I think the issue at hand here is one that we're very fortunate to have," said Dubas. "It creates some headaches at times, but we do have a very talented young team and we'd rather be trying to keep that together than probably where we were at the beginning, which was trying to build it up."

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Sportsnet.ca / Brendan Gallagher leads, Canadiens follow in win over Ducks

Eric Engels

February 6, 2019, 12:09 AM

MONTREAL — It's the third period of a game the Montreal Canadiens all but won in the first, and Brendan Gallagher's charging the net from the goal line with reckless abandon.

He puts his head down, takes three quick strides, brings the puck from his backhand to his forehand and tries to stuff it into the net with every ounce of force his 185-pound frame can muster.

By the time Ryan Getzlaf catches up to Gallagher, it's too late. A quality chance has been recorded.

But instead of a goal, Gallagher receives a choke-slam to the ice from Getzlaf that leaves him flat on his back. Then he bounces back up, heads to the bench, and readies himself for the next battle, because that's who he is. It's who he's always been.

It's the 26-year-old's seventh NHL season, and every minute of his career blends together. Whether it's driving the net, forechecking, backchecking, passing, shooting, blocking or hitting; whether it's pre-season, regular season, or post-season, the effort is always the same. And rare is a shift that has Gallagher returning to the bench with air in his lungs, which is something that is not only plain to see for all the spectators, it's also abundantly clear to his teammates.

"That's Gally," says Montreal's youngest player, Jesperi Kotkaniemi, who scored for a third-straight game in his team's 4-1 win over the Anaheim Ducks. "Practice, games — you learn a lot from him just watching him do what he does. He never gives up."

It's why Gallagher's importance to the Canadiens' success (now at 30-18-6 and in third place in the Atlantic Division) cannot be understated. In a lot of ways, he is the symbol of their style — a speedy, undersized, relentless, in-your-face player who out-wills you at every turn.

"He inspires a lot of guys on our team just by his work ethic and his commitment to competing hard every game, and I think every team needs a player like that," said Canadiens coach Claude Julien. "He does a great job of it... From the start right to the end, he was a really good player. Those kinds of players, the teams that have them really appreciate having them because they give you a spark every once in a while. Your team goes a little flat and then this guy comes in and gives you the kind of shift that you're looking for from a player. It's about work ethic, and it inspires and wakes people up. Those are important players on our team, and that's why he's wearing a letter."

Another reason? Gallagher scores key goals at key moments, like he did in the eighth minute of a first period the Canadiens were dominating, and again to make it 3-0 prior to intermission.

That was crucial. This game had trap written all over it for the Canadiens. Squaring off against an angry Ducks team begging to be underestimated.



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One that had come off 9-3 and 6-1 shellackings care of the Winnipeg Jets and Toronto Maple Leafs, respectively, to compound a run that saw them win just two of their last 18 games. A good start for Montreal would help them avoid falling into it.

And in the third period, after a lackadaisical second that saw the Canadiens sit on their heels and divert from the game plan, a spark was needed.

"We all understood the situation we were in," said Gallagher. "You get off to a 3-0 lead, it would've been nice to keep your foot on the gas but we didn't do that. It was nice to come in (the dressing room) and hit a quick reset, just have that chance to refocus. We knew what we had to do and we just went out there, and I thought we did a pretty good job in the third."

The 5:03 Gallagher played in the frame were a big part of that — from his net-driving shift to the assist he notched on Phillip Danault's goal to put the game out of reach.

"The fans really wanted me to get a hat trick," Gallagher said.

It would've been the first one of his NHL career, which is somewhat astounding when you consider the former fifth-round pick in the 2012 draft has scored 139 times in 460 games.

"It doesn't matter much to me," Gallagher said.

That he leads the Canadiens in goals with 21 and is on pace to at least match his career-high of 31 (set last season) is also of little consequence to him.

"I tell you guys the same thing every year," he said. "I don't really set goals like that for myself (because) it kind of takes away from the enjoyment of playing the game. You play the game for one reason — that's to win hockey games."

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Sportsnet.ca / Mitch Marner's agent: Leafs have been trying to lowball him

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

February 6, 2019, 12:26 AM

Toronto Maple Leafs GM Kyle Dubas navigated his way through one salary-cap maze Tuesday, but he's about to enter what might wind up being a far more difficult one.

With star centreman Auston Matthews inked to a newly-signed five-year, \$58.17-million extension, announced by the team Tuesday, Dubas' attention now turns to Mitch Marner, the last remaining unsigned piece of the club's core.

The rookie GM said Tuesday that there won't be any pressure from the team to re-engage negotiations before the end of the season, as per the Marner camp's request, but according to the star winger's agent, talks may be tense when the two sides do reconvene.

"So far they've been trying to lowball (Marner)," agent Darren Ferris told the Toronto Star's Dave Feschuk Tuesday. "That's the reason we've come to this point."

In the midst of a dominant campaign that's seen him amass 20 goals and 63 points in 52 games, leading the Leafs in scoring just as he did last

season, all eyes are on the team's front office to keep the band together despite Matthews, John Tavares and William Nylander already accounting for \$26.6 million in cap space next season.

With Matthews and Tavares both at or above the \$11-million plateau, Ferris seems uninterested in seeing Marner sign for a team-friendly sum.

"Nobody else is taking a discount. And now you're asking (Marner) to take one again? It's nonsense," Ferris told the Star. "Mitch already did them a favour on the entry-level deal."

The favour in question appears to involve the bonuses doled out to the team's young stars, according to Ferris. When former GM Lou Lamoriello signed Marner to his entry-level deal, included were the negotiated Schedule A bonuses — worth up to \$850,000 annually — but Ferris was told the club would not hand out Schedule B bonuses and their potential additional \$2 million, he told Feschuk. Soon after, Matthews was inked to his own entry-level deal, including both Schedule A and Schedule B bonuses.

As it currently stands, the Leafs have \$71.9 million in payroll accounted for next season, and a tough task ahead in terms of fitting Marner into the picture. Both sides have said they will resume talks after the season concludes.

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Sportsnet.ca / Bad bounces wreaking havoc on Canucks' playoff momentum

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

February 5, 2019, 9:55 PM

WASHINGTON — You didn't need to pay attention to the full 27 hours to understand how the Vancouver Canucks' back-to-back games in Philadelphia and Washington transpired. The 2.7 seconds halfway through the third period on Tuesday told everything.

Leaden at the start but superior over the final 40 minutes, the Canucks were chasing a tying goal against the Stanley Cup champions when Washington Capitals forward Jakub Vrana was stick-checked by Ben Hutton behind the Vancouver net.

The puck bounced up off Hutton's stick and landed on top of the Canuck netting, where it inexplicably picked up steam and began tumbling and spinning forward towards the crease. As Capitals star Evgeny Kuznetsov attacked the puck as if he were going after a mosquito with a swatter, the disc continued untouched until it leapt over the crossbar precipice and cascaded like good fortune down the back of Vancouver goalie Jacob Markstrom and into the net at 12:13 of the final period.

When Canucks rookie Elias Pettersson scored with 7.6 seconds remaining and Markstrom on the bench for an extra attacker, Vrana's physics trick turned into the game-winner in a 3-2 Vancouver loss.

At least no one was seriously injured, as Canucks defenceman Alex Edler was the previous night in Vancouver's 2-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, who got 41 saves from goalie Carter Hart and a questionable whistle that nullified a potential tying goal for the visitors.

Vrana's goal was the damndest thing since San Jose Shark Joe Thornton taught a puck to moonwalk and coaxed it to bounce off the baseboard, retreat up the back of the net and roll in behind former Canuck goalie Roberto Luongo during a game five years ago.



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"I remember that goal in San Jose," Canucks defenceman Chris Tanev said Tuesday. "Obviously the bounces didn't go our way the last day, but that's part of the game."

Markstrom was more graphic: "It's just a s***** bounce at a s***** time of the game and a s***** time of the year. It's tough. Most of the game today I thought we played good. And same in Philly, too, especially on the road. (But) come February, come March and April, we need points and we need them bad."

The Canucks got none of those, losing momentum in the NHL playoff race the way they are losing players.

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Elder is out indefinitely with a concussion after smashing his face on the ice in Philadelphia, and the Canucks are thankful his injuries are not more severe.

Backup goalie Thatcher Demko injured his knee in the warmup on Monday and was sent home to Vancouver for an MRI as junior goalie Mike DiPietro was summoned on an emergency callup. Demko is expected to be out a week or two.

And winger Sven Baertschi, who missed two months with a concussion before returning to the lineup on Dec. 27, has been forced out again and is undergoing more testing. No one on the Canucks is using the C-word – not even Markstrom – but the fear is Baertschi's latest issue may be concussion related.

"I thought we played some pretty good hockey over these last 24 hours and for them to get a game-winning goal like that, it's kind of a backhand across the face," Canucks centre Bo Horvat said. "We work that hard in back-to-back games, especially against good teams. . . I thought we deserved better."

But this is sports; sometimes you don't get what you deserve. But luck swings both ways, and the Canucks had the chance against the Capitals to take some of the luck out of it.

After coming to life in the second period – shots were 18-5 Washington in the first, 27-13 Vancouver the rest of the way – the Canucks outshot the Capitals 9-1 but couldn't get a puck past goalie Braden Holtby.

Holtby made his best two saves of the game a few seconds apart on point-blank scoring chances for Tyler Motte and Jay Beagle, then stuffed Horvat on a penalty shot at 12:53 of the middle frame. Three minutes after that, Canucks defenceman Troy Stecher hit the post, and Vancouver still trailed 1-0.

And the two goals they generated in the third period from Pettersson and Markus Granlund, who converted Antoine Roussel's beautiful pass after getting healthy-scratched in Philadelphia, merely matched what they gave up.

After starting their four-game trip with an impressive 5-1 win Saturday against the Colorado Avalanche, the Canucks are suddenly 1-2 despite continuing to play well, and now face a referendum on their playoff drive with Thursday's game against the Chicago Blackhawks.

They could use a little more luck.

"I guess the hockey gods were not on our side on that play," Hutton said of Vrana's winner. "It popped up, it was coming down right on top of the net and then it slid right off it. I was like, no way. It was a tough bounce. It hurts, especially because we know where we stand in the standings. It stings especially because we're in a playoff hunt."

They're trying to stay in one.

1129310 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Matthew Tkachuk weighs in on impact of Auston Matthews' new deal

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

February 5, 2019, 8:11 PM

CALGARY — After spending Monday night texting with Auston Matthews, Matthew Tkachuk was thrilled to hear after practice his good pal had consummated a new deal Tuesday.

"I'm happy for him — it's a lot of money," said the Calgary Flames forward of the five-year, \$58.17-million contract his former teammate from the U.S. National Team Development Program signed with the Maple Leafs.

"I'll text him here in a little bit and hopefully he'll pick up a nice little dinner next time I see him."

Tkachuk knows better than anyone else the Matthews deal will net him far more than just gratis grub. The contract raises the bar for the long list of other star-studded restricted free agents, like Tkachuk, who are champing at the bit over the lucrative possibilities that lie ahead this summer.

"I'm sure everybody is pretty happy with Matthews right now," beamed Tkachuk, who regularly texts with his junior linemate Mitch Marner as well. "I'm sure Marns is pretty happy too as well — that's a lot of money for a great player."

The debate will rage on in Toronto now over how the Leafs can possibly shoehorn Marner into their salary cap structure after GM Kyle Dubas opted to bend significantly in a deal that buys just one year of unrestricted free agency with no discount for the previous four years.

One respected Canadian team executive I reached out to referred to the "incompetence" of the deal interfering with the framework the rest of the league's executives will have to work with moving forward.

Another management-type sympathized with Dubas for having to bend considerably in the negotiations so he could lock up a cornerstone player and avoid the type of distractions and ugliness that came with the William Nylander contract fiasco.

Flames GM Brad Treliving respectfully declined to comment on the deal, as has long been his policy. But you can bet he was paying close attention.

"For Toronto's sake, they probably wanted it done before the trade deadline this year in case they wanted to move other guys or bring other guys in," said Tkachuk. "It seems like it's great for both Auston and the team."

What will be fascinating is whether Marner or Tkachuk will be one of the next guys doling out free meals to pals.

It was previously suggested that it will be the last RFAs to sign this summer who may be the biggest winners, piggy-backing on other deals and setting the table for more ugly, Nylander-like stalemates that drag into next winter.

"I don't know — that's probably what every player will talk with their agents about going in," said the six-foot-two, 212-pound left winger. "Maybe it's a little bit of a waiting game, but you just try to take care of what you can take care of within your deal. I've never been in this position, so I guess I'll find out this summer."



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Tkachuk isn't in line for more than \$11 million annually like Matthews. But you can bet the deal he'll likely ink with the Flames is now going to be healthier than whatever he might have signed before Matthews paved the way with even more gold. Should he and the Flames be able to prolong their relationship, he will undoubtedly be the highest-paid player in Flames lore, eclipsing the \$7 million Jarome Iginla pocketed for many seasons.

For a player who brings more intangibles than any other RFA this summer, not to mention the 20th-most points in the league this year, \$8 million isn't out of the question either. Fact is, it's a fool's errand to try pegging his AAV now given how much hockey is left in the season and, potentially, this spring.

With every goal, three-point night and playoff success will come more dollars for a star who has 24 goals and 57 points this season while also drawing more penalties than anyone in the NHL since he joined the league.

None of this is to mention the increased possibility of offer sheets being thrown around this summer, which was yet another concern motivating Dubas to ink his stud centre.

"(Offer sheets) haven't been in play a lot recently, but there's been a lot of talk, and a lot of people thinking this is the year it's going to happen," said Tkachuk, a tremendous student of the game, on and off the ice. "You can't predict that stuff, but you never know. Maybe."

Perhaps he'll be the target, as there isn't a GM in the league that wouldn't want a gifted agitator with his pedigree on their side.

Potential poachers may also be taking long looks at players like Mikko Rantanen, Brayden Point, Patrik Laine, Brock Boeser, Kyle Connor, William Karlsson, Sebastian Aho, Charlie McAvoy, Jacob Trouba and Manner as well.

They all need deals, and all likely did a jig over Matthews' pact.

"It seems like every summer, whether it's restricted or unrestricted guys, there's always a big fish that sets the bar for that summer," said Tkachuk, 21. "It doesn't seem like there's like one contract that sets it up forever."

"You have a guy like (Connor) McDavid's contract set it up for his guys that summer a couple years ago, (Jack) Eichel then came, and now it's Matthews."

"A lot of big guys — some of the best players in the league — are all coming off entry-level, so it kind of changed the perspective there a little."

Actually, it has changed it a lot.

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1129311 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Cap comparables: How does new Auston Matthews contract stack up in NHL?

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen

February 5, 2019, 3:35 PM

In December, we explored the potential cap hit of Auston Matthews' contract and made the point that he could end up making at least as much as Connor McDavid's \$12.5 million.

That assumed the Toronto Maple Leafs and Matthews would come together on an eight-year contract since that was the precedent set

around the league by many other star players, from Nikita Kucherov, Mark Scheifele and Jack Eichel to McDavid himself.

The most surprising takeaway of Matthews' new five-year deal with its \$11.634-million cap hit was the wrinkle of a shorter term, which was reported on Hockey Night in Canada's Headlines segment this past weekend as a likely outcome. Now that it's happened, we know Matthews will be UFA eligible in the summer of 2024 at the age of 26. This likely saved the Maple Leafs some money on Matthews' average annual value (AAV).

The Auston Matthews ask on an eight-year extension was in the range of Connor McDavid's 16.67% of cap hit. So a ~\$13.8M AAV based on projected \$83M cap.

Whenever we look at direct comparables for big deals like this, it's important to take into consideration the percentage of the AAV against the cap. That's because, as the ceiling rises, inflation brings up salaries so the AAV on a deal signed even three years ago has little direct bearing on an AAV in 2019. Position is of importance too — centres generally have a higher value than wingers and you can see it in league-wide contract trends. It's all about the percentages, relative cap impact and position.

The thing about Matthews' new deal, though, is how the term changes the equation a bit, and follows a trend we're starting to see around the league.

"It's a new day," Elliotte Friedman said on Sportsnet 590 The FAN's Good Show. "Things are changing in the National Hockey League. Players aren't afraid to use their leverage anymore. We're seeing that more and more. Tavares last year, Panarin this year, Matthews kind of turning the salary structure over a little bit. Star players are demanding a bigger share of the pie, they're demanding it earlier. I think there are teams who are going to look at it and say, 'Boy, this is going to really change the way that business gets done in hockey and we're not exactly happy with that.'"

Matthews' \$11.634-million cap hit is 14.63 per cent against today's \$79.5-million salary cap, but if that ceiling rises to \$83 million this summer, the AAV will drop to 14 per cent by the time it starts next season. With that in mind, here's how Matthews' deal compares to some other star centres in the league.

CONNOR MCDAVID, EDMONTON OILERS: 16.67 PER CENT

Signed July 5, 2017, a year before it came into place, McDavid's AAV of \$12.5 million counted for 16.67 per cent against a \$75-million cap hit the day it was signed, but it's worth noting that when the contract actually kicked in this season the cap had risen to \$79.5 million. So, technically, McDavid's cap hit was 15.7 per cent on the first day the contract was active.

It was hard to imagine Matthews approaching McDavid's cap percentage, but given the salary cap itself has gone up since McDavid signed, the direct AAV comparables could have been closer. However, since Matthews signed for five years instead of what was an industry standard eight for a player of his ilk, the AAV comes down at least a little.

JONATHAN TOEWS, CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS: 15.2 PER CENT

Chicago's captain signed this deal way back in July 2014 one year out from his old contract expiring. This, too, was an eight-year deal and Toews was 26 years old at the time he put pen to paper coming off a 68-point season.

As far as contracts that are currently on the books, Toews' AAV percentage against the cap is topped by only Alex Ovechkin and McDavid. Still one of the better two-way players in the game, Toews is recovering from a down season in 2017-18 and has 51 points in 53 games. Now 30 years old, Toews will be 34 when the contract comes to a close.



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It's also worth noting that this was Toews' second post-entry-level contract — the first one was a five-year pact worth 11.09 per cent against the cap.

EVGENI MALKIN, PITTSBURGH PENGUINS: 14.8 per cent

Another relatively old one, Malkin signed this deal in the summer of 2013, also one year before it officially kicked in. At the time, Malkin was 27 years old and one season removed from winning the Art Ross and Hart Trophies. Malkin has been better than a point per game producer for the Penguins in each year of this contract, which expires in 2021-22 when he'll be 35 years old.

Like most of the other deals on this list, this contract for Malkin was the second one after the expiration of his ELC. Like Matthews, Malkin's first post-ELC deal was a five-year pact that counted for 15.34 per cent against the cap.

ANZE KOPITAR, LOS ANGELES KINGS: 14 per cent

This is yet another case of a player who signed long-term in his second post-ELC deal — his first was a seven-year pact that counted for 11.99 per cent against the cap. Kopitar's current contract was signed in January 2016 and kicked in at the start of the 2016-17 season when he was 29 years old. Kopitar's performance that season wasn't up to expectations, but he bounced back last season to win his second Selke Trophy and was in the running for the Hart Trophy.

SIDNEY CROSBY, PITTSBURGH PENGUINS: 13.5 per cent

Crosby is married to an \$8.7-million AAV as that's what he landed on in both his first deal coming off his ELC and this contract signed in 2013. When his current deal was agreed to term limits were less strict so No. 87 signed a 12-year pact that expires in 2025. The percentage against the cap on his first deal was 17.30, but on this one that fell to 13.53 per cent on the day it was signed and continues to fall each year. Today, against a \$79.5-million ceiling, Crosby's deal counts for 10.9 per cent of the cap.

The Penguins captain got security in his deal, but it can be argued no player has a better value contract that has left his team the space to make other improvements in the roster.

JACK EICHEL, BUFFALO SABRES: 13.3 per cent

Aside from McDavid, this is the best recent comparable for Matthews. Eichel, of course, was chosen second overall in 2015 behind only McDavid and though Eichel hasn't put up the same eye-popping numbers through three years, some of that has to do with missing time due to injury. Since Eichel entered the league, he ranks 32nd in points per game (.90) and is on his way to a career season with 54 points in 48 games.

Those numbers are very good for Eichel — and he also signed a maximum eight-year contract — but considering Matthews is making just \$1.634 million more and is the sixth-highest goal scorer since coming into the league, the Leafs got good value on Matthews' AAV.

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1129312 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Don Cherry on slumping Jets star Laine: 'Somebody should give him a smack'

Mike Johnston | @MikeyJ_MMA

February 5, 2019, 7:45 PM

Auston Matthews and Patrik Laine have been compared to one another ever since they were selected first and second overall, respectively, in the 2016 NHL Draft.

The Toronto Maple Leafs star inked a contract extension Tuesday that will pay him an average of \$11.634 million annually over the next five seasons and the Winnipeg Jets star is also eligible to sign his first non-entry-level NHL contract. However, based on his recent inexplicable scoring slump it's tough to imagine he'd be rewarded with a salary cap hit as lucrative as the one Matthews received.

What's wild is back in November a cap hit around \$11 million for the Finnish winger would've seemed like a bargain.

Laine ended up scoring a whopping 18 goals in November, adding one assist along the way, to become the fifth player since 1989-90 to score 18 or more goals in a single month. The 20-year-old also hit the century mark, becoming the fourth-youngest player to record 100 regular-season NHL goals behind only Wayne Gretzky, Jimmy Carson and Brian Bellows.

Since that magnificent month, Laine's pace has slowed at a concerning rate and in the past 19 games he has just two goals and three assists.

"It doesn't look like he's interested," Don Cherry, who celebrated his 85th birthday Tuesday, said during an appearance on Prime Time Sports. "Somebody should give him a smack or something. He's the guy that I thought would really turn it on for a contract."

Laine, who has more goals than everyone not named Alex Ovechkin since debuting in the NHL in 2016-17, is joined by Kyle Connor, Andrew Copp, Nicolas Petan, Brendan Lemieux, Jacob Trouba, Joe Morrow and Laurent Brossoit as Winnipeg's pending restricted free agents.

"I don't know what's going on. When he was [within 20 feet from the net] nobody could shoot the puck like him," Cherry added. "I have no idea what's going on with the guy. ... I just thought he'd be one of the top scorers of all-time and [a top-paid player] but I don't know what they're going to do now."

Despite Laine's struggles, the Jets have maintained their spot atop the Central Division standings.

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1129313 Websites

TSN.CA / Five Takeaways: Canucks vs Capitals

Jeff Paterson

1) The Vancouver Canucks played five pretty good periods of hockey over a two-night span in Philadelphia and Washington and have absolutely nothing to show for it. Minus their best defenseman in Alex Edler and playing the second half of a back to back set on the heels of a 2-1 loss to the Flyers, the Canucks got off to a terrible start in Washington. They fell behind 1-0 just three minutes into the game and were outshot 18-5 in a one-sided first period. But somehow -- and perhaps against the odds -- the Canucks found their game, gained traction and had all kinds of scoring chances in the second period. Elias Pettersson had a good look from down low in the Washington zone, Tyler Motte was all alone with the puck in front of Braden Holtby, Ben Hutton rang a shot off the cross bar from left wing, Bo Horvat was stopped on a penalty shot and Troy Stecher rattled a shot off the post. The Canucks came close, but couldn't find a goal through 40 minutes. Each team



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scored twice in the final period and the Canucks suffered their second straight one-goal setback although the final Canuck goal of the night with seven seconds remaining made the final score appear closer than the game really was. The Capitals were pushed at times, but their lead was never really threatened. Overall, I thought the Canucks played better in Philadelphia than they did in Washington but that doesn't mean they played poorly against the Capitals.

2) The Canucks have to find a way to generate points on the road. They are 1-4 in their last five games away from home going back to a 2-0 loss in Montreal on January 3rd and 2-5 in their past seven as the visitors. Once they play in Chicago on Thursday, they'll finish with 16 of 27 on home ice, so the schedule starts to work in their favour. But they're in a stretch right now of 10 of 15 away from home (including three in four nights in California next week), and they won't stay in the playoff chase if they can't figure out a way to push some of these close games to overtime at the very least. They have been outscored 13-8 in their past five road games -- with five of those goals coming in Denver on Saturday night. On the season now, the Canucks are 13-13-3 through their first 29 game road games. They did a decent job of manufacturing points on a recent six-game homestand (3-1-2), but haven't been able to do the same thing as visitors.

3) Maybe breakaways just aren't Bo Horvat's thing. Horvat was stopped on a second period penalty shot that would have tied the game 1-1. He drew the call after a nice move to get around Capitals defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler who put the hook on the Canuck forward and prevented him from getting a quality scoring chance. Horvat tried to beat Braden Holtby on the forehand, but was unable to convert. Couple the missed penalty shot with three unsuccessful shootout attempts this season and Horvat has gone 0 for 4 in one on one showdowns with NHL netminders. There's some frustration creeping into Horvat's game. He was so effective in the first half of the season, but is mired in a slump that has seen him score just once in his last 16 hockey games. He played and played a lot Tuesday in Washington logging 22:51 and led the Canucks with five shots on goal. He spent the night on a line with offensive wingers in Brock Boeser and Nikolay Goldobin, but not even that was enough for Horvat to find his scoring touch. The Canucks will need that -- and need it again soon -- to maintain their perch above the playoff bar in the West.

4) Travis Green made a curious decision with his lines on Tuesday night. He gave Horvat the chance to play with gifted wingers, but stripped leading scorer Elias Pettersson of the chance to play with players who think the game the way he does. Pettersson spent most of the game in Washington on a line with Antoine Roussel on left wing and Josh Leivo on the right side. Obviously Roussel plays hard, battles for pucks and has an understated ability to make plays with the puck, but not at Pettersson's level. And Leivo has proven to be inconsistent and Tuesday wasn't one of his more prominent nights. Down 1-0 going to the third period and still very much in the game, Green had the chance to load up one line and play Pettersson with Horvat and Boeser. A coach who is usually quick to switch line combinations in search of a spark, instead elected to stay patient for most of the night. In fact, when the Canucks pulled Jacob Markstrom for an extra attacker with three minutes to play, Pettersson was not part of the first rotation of six skaters. After a late time out, Pettersson was paired with Horvat and Boeser and it led to his goal in the dying seconds. With Sven Baertschi out indefinitely, it leaves the Canucks with a hole in their top six and there just isn't enough firepower on the wings to give both Horvat and Pettersson scorers to play with.

5) Ben Hutton responded to the challenge of trying to fill the void left by Alex Edler's injury. Hutton logged a game-high 28:35 including a whopping 11:02 of the first period. He had an assist on Markus Granlund's goal and finished the night with a pair of shots on five attempts, two hits, three takeaways and three blocked shots. Hutton showed an ability to raise his game during Edler's 16-game absence with a knee injury earlier in the season. He and Troy Stecher (a season-high 25:45) were an effective duo for the Canucks and will have to find a way to keep their play at that level if Edler is out for any length of time. On Tuesday, that tandem had a very solid night handily winning the battle of shot attempts and scoring chances at even strength. The only blemish on

the Hutton-Stecher pairing was the Capitals strange game winner that hopped over the Canucks net from behind, climbed across the top of the net and rolled off the back of Jacob Markstrom and in. Hutton said it felt like things were in slow motion as he processed the play and watched helplessly as the puck rolled into the danger zone. If he had it to do over again, Hutton might have tried to swat the puck off the top of the net toward the back boards. Instead, he and Stecher looked mesmerized as the strange play unfolded and eventually wound up in the net.

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1129314 Websites

TSN.CA / Deadline War Room: Canucks' priorities start with re-signing Edler

Frank Seravalli

There were some scary moments for Alex Edler on Monday night, but that doesn't change the fact that he is the Vancouver Canucks' No. 1 priority as we approach the trade deadline.

The Canucks need to re-sign Edler -- they had talks last week and they've been engaged in negotiation. Not only is he their No. 1 defenceman and tough to replace, but they love the job that he's done mentoring fellow Swede and Calder Trophy candidate Elias Pettersson.

As TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button points out, Edler plays 20 minutes a game, has a big shot from the point and doesn't have to be a long-term contract.

He's going to be 33 this summer, but mentoring Pettersson -- as well as young incoming blueliner Quinn Hughes -- could also be important as Hughes could be in a Vancouver uniform as early as the end of his college season this spring. That said, Edler is still an important piece for the Canucks.

Lebrun: If Canucks make move, it would likely be to add player who sticks around

NHL insider Pierre Lebrun says re-signing Alex Edler makes sense on a number of levels, and says that if the Canucks make a move it's likely to add a player who sticks around, not for a rental

Up front, the Canucks are well-positioned down the middle with Pettersson and Bo Horvat, but they really need help on the wings -- their No. 2 priority. After Brock Boeser, they really fall off from there in terms of scoring.

Can they go out and find a guy at the deadline, as they now sit in a playoff spot, that could potentially help bolster this team on the wing without giving up a lot? I think of a guy like Patrick Maroon -- a castoff they could throw in to help this team now.

The key in making such a move is alleviating some of the burden on Pettersson, Horvat and Boeser, where most of their goals come from.

Looking at the Trade Bait Board, Button likes Gustav Nyquist. We've mentioned him in other places, but he's that good and he's that skilled. Jakob Silfverberg of the Anaheim Ducks is another player to consider. When you think about Vancouver, which really is a Swedish hockey city in Canada, why wouldn't Nyquist and Silfverberg fit in with the likes of Pettersson and Edler?

In the short-term, the Canucks' playoff chances may well rest on how much time Edler misses. The margin is just that thin in the Western Conference.



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The Canucks are two points in today, but they're also just four points away from 26th place and a lottery spot in the draft they're hosting in June.

There were some scary moment for Alex Edler on Monday night, but that doesn't change the fact that the Canucks' top priority is to re-sign their number one d-man before the deadline. TSN Hockey's Craig Button and Frank Seravalli discuss Edler's importance and the need to add scoring wingers.

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1129315 Websites

TSN.CA / Dorion tight-lipped as pressure mounts ahead of trade deadline

Ian Mendes

With less than three weeks to go until the NHL trade deadline, Pierre Dorion knows that time is running short.

In that condensed window, the Ottawa Senators general manager has to figure out how to sign his top three scorers – Mark Stone, Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel – to lucrative contract extensions. Failing that, Dorion may be forced to trade all three of the pending unrestricted free agents.

On Tuesday, Dorion admitted he probably can't take things right up to the 3 p.m. ET deadline on Feb. 25 when it comes to negotiations with his pending UFAs.

"I don't think it would be ideal to take it to 3 p.m. (on deadline day), but we have a good idea of what time frame we need to have contracts done by," Dorion told TSN 1200 on Tuesday.

Tuesday's interview was Dorion's first on-the-record conversation about the status of his UFAs and the upcoming trade deadline in several weeks. There has been a concerted effort from the Senators – both from the management and players involved – to lock down any chatter surrounding the status of the UFAs.

Stone, for example, has refused to give any detailed answers in the past month when asked about his situation by reporters.

Dorion is reading from the same tightly scripted playbook, doing his best to try put a cone of silence over negotiations that have clearly reached a critical juncture.

Duchene on negotiations: 'I've said everything I have to say'

Matt Duchene says he 'had a good talk' with Pierre Dorion on Monday regarding a new contract but he has nothing more to say about it. He admits that it's getting a little more difficult but he won't let the distraction take away from his game.

"Obviously, we're not going to deny that we've met with agents. Pat Brisson (Duchene's agent) was in town yesterday. When it comes to our UFAs and the three bigger guys, we've had conversations with all three agents. From there, we've done a good job keeping things private," Dorion said. "Negotiations are still going on and we hope to have them signed at some point in time. For now, we're going to keep things private between the players, the agents and ourselves."

Dorion was asked about the external perception that Stone and Duchene were prioritized ahead of Dzingel. The feeling from many observers is that the Senators will deal with Stone and Duchene first – then circle back to Dzingel after those first two situations are resolved.

Dorion, however, declined to give specifics on his approach to simultaneously negotiating with three key players.

"Internally, we have our opinions on the values of all three players. And we hope to keep all three players," he said.

One player who doesn't appear to be headed anywhere at the trade deadline is netminder Craig Anderson. There has been some low-level chatter about the potential of moving Anderson to a club that needs goaltending help at the deadline, but Dorion seemed to pour cold water on that notion when asked directly about Anderson's future with his club.

"Craig Anderson definitely fits in here," Dorion said. "He's had a great year. Unfortunately, he got hurt and we missed him a lot. Craig fits in our plans here. He's a cornerstone in nets for us and one of the key players here."

Dorion did indicate that he would reassess the goaltending situation in the off-season and that Marcus Hogberg and Filip Gustavsson could be ready to challenge for NHL jobs soon. Their future may hinge on the health of Mike Condon, who appears to still be part of the goaltending plan moving forward.

Condon – who is recovering from a hip injury and hasn't played an NHL game since October – has started taking shots and moving in his crease this week. The plan is to get him back into game action before the end of this regular season.

In what could be a franchise-defining moment for Pierre Dorion, TSN Hockey's Craig Button and Frank Seravalli explain the importance of the Senators maximizing their return for Matt Duchene and Mark Stone, and take a closer look at numerous forwards and defencemen that could be a good fit in Ottawa.

"We're hopeful that by March he'll be playing games," Dorion explained. "Obviously, he'll start off in Belleville. It's been a long and arduous process, but he's definitely progressing in the right direction."

The Senators are currently sitting in 31st place overall in the NHL standings – a tough pill to swallow since they don't own their own first-round pick by virtue of the Duchene trade with Colorado in November of 2017. Dorion had the option of giving the Avalanche their first-round pick in 2018, but opted to defer that until the 2019 draft, selecting Brady Tkachuk fourth overall last summer.

The rationale from the club at the time is that they finished in 30th place in 2017-18 and this season the club would improve in the standings. However, they have moved down a spot, placed in the precarious position of now having the best odds of selecting first overall in 2019 without actually holding that pick.

"There's no doubt that we feel very comfortable in the decision we made to draft Brady Tkachuk," Dorion said. "Brady Tkachuk has come in here and done everything we've wanted."

Unless they get a first-round pick via a trade, the earliest the Senators could be picking in the 2019 Draft is the 32nd pick overall. If that is the scenario for Dorion, he says he's comfortable with the type of player that might be available in that spot.

"It's a good draft. It's not the deepest draft in certain spots. But we feel that drafting early in the second round, we'll get a very similar player as you'd get somewhere in the first round," he said.

With the club sitting in last place, plenty of scrutiny has come in the direction of the coaching staff. Guy Boucher and his associates Marc Crawford and Martin Raymond are all in the final year of their contracts. Dorion didn't feel comfortable Tuesday giving a detailed assessment of his coaching staff with 30 games left in the regular season.

"I don't think it's the right thing to do – a public evaluation of a coach mid-season," Dorion said. "All we can tell you is that this coaching staff has come in and worked hard. They've developed our younger players and given our older players some direction. For me, I don't think it's fair to give Guy a public evaluation during the season."



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Trade Bait: Stone surges into Top 10

The future of Senators winger Mark Stone could be linked to teammate Matt Duchene's pending 'hockey decision' on a new contract. TSN Senior Hockey Reporter Frank Seravalli has more.

Dorion felt the club could compete for a playoff spot when the calendar flipped to December, but a barrage of injuries sidetracked the club. He said losing Thomas Chabot, Duchene and Anderson for one simultaneous stretch in December was catastrophic for the team, saying "the magnitude was higher than we expected."

The general manager believes that despite the poor showing in the standings, some of his younger players have progressed and will potentially benefit down the road from dealing with the adversity that comes along with being in last place.

"You look at how many young kids we've put in the lineup and how many young kids have progressed. Look at Thomas Chabot, Colin White, Brady Tkachuk," he said. "Of course people are going to point to the wins and losses and say,

'You haven't progressed,' but we feel that it might not show in the points. But our younger players are gaining valuable experience for when we're on the cusp of making the playoffs or in the playoffs because they've gone through tough times."

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1129316 Websites

TSN.CA / Deadline War Room: Sens need quality, not quantity

Frank Seravalli

After months of speculation, this is where the rubber meets the road for the Ottawa Senators. It's a critical juncture for this franchise.

General manager Pierre Dorion's only priority between now and the Feb. 25 trading deadline is to maximize the return for both Matt Duchene and Mark Stone.

You have to think that, over the next week or so, Dorion will put these guys out and have trade talks with teams because there's been very little meaningful progress made so far in terms of negotiations on an extension.

When you look back at the Erik Karlsson trade made last September, the Senators got a lot of quantity coming back with the quality still to be determined. In any return for Duchene and Stone, this team needs first-round draft picks if they're rebuilding.

If you look at the top contenders – Boston, Nashville, Vegas, Calgary and Winnipeg for example – who could the Sens consider?

McKenzie: More likely than not that Duchene and Stone get traded

TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie joins AJ Jakubec on The TSN 1200 Pregame Show to talk Sens-Red Wings, & NHL news

From Winnipeg? TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button suggests forward Jack Roslovic or Kristian Vesalainen. Or Eeli Tolvanen from Nashville. Perhaps Calgary's Dillon Dube. That's the type of quality Ottawa needs in a return for Duchene and Stone.

On defence, there's no question that Thomas Chabot is on top of the Senators' present and future depth chart. They also have prospects like Jacob Bernard-Docker coming, but they will need a few players to bridge

the gap and provide a cushion for guys like Max Lajoie. That's especially important if the Sens plan to move Cody Ceci before the deadline.

That said, Button maintains the need to keep quality in mind - perhaps someone like Vegas prospect Erik Brannstrom or regular Shea Theodore. Juuso Valimaki of the Flames, Dante Fabbro of the Predators and Boston's Urho Vaakanainen are other names to consider.

We'll see where Dorion ends up when it comes to first-round picks. This year they are one of the few rebuilding teams that don't have one - courtesy of their trade with the Avalanche to acquire...Matt Duchene. Colorado currently has an 18.1 per cent shot of winning the Jack Hughes sweepstakes in the Draft Lottery.

Button: Seems to me like the Duchene train is getting ready to roll out of the station

After losing their third straight game, the Senators sit last in the league and without a first round pick to provide a reason for optimism. With uncertainty surrounding the futures of top players Mark Stone and Matt Duchene, where do the Sens go from here? TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button examines Ottawa's tough situation.

TSN.CA LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129317 Websites

TSN.CA / Maurice reflects on rollercoaster career ahead of coaching milestone

Frank Seravalli

If a moment exists that captures the essence of Paul Maurice, it might be the morning of Game 7 in Nashville last May.

His Winnipeg Jets had just wrapped up their morning skate. Bag on his shoulder, Maurice was on his way out to the team bus when he struck up an impromptu conversation with a reporter.

"Walk with me," he said.

The conversation lasted only a couple minutes and there was no discernible message – mostly because Maurice couldn't contain his excitement for that night's game.

He had a wad of dip under his lip and launched a string of about 47 expletives in the 200-foot walk to the bus. It made zero sense. Maurice was amped up. He had the unbridled joy of a kid on Christmas morning, not a typical coach the morning of a do-or-die road game against the President's Trophy winner.

Reminded of that conversation on Monday, Maurice said: "Maybe that's the biggest tell of my appreciation for the game. There wasn't any negative pressure. I was just jacked up."

On Tuesday night, Maurice will become the sixth man in NHL history to coach 1,500 regular-season games when Winnipeg hosts the San Jose Sharks at Bell MTS Place. Only Barry Trotz (1,575) and Ken Hitchcock (1,568) have more games to their credit among active coaches.

If Maurice had coached an NHL game every night consecutively, he would have stood behind an NHL bench for more than four calendar years of his life.

Yet, Maurice just turned 52 last week, putting him squarely in the younger half (13th) of coaches in the NHL. He is six months younger than New York Rangers neophyte David Quinn.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 6, 2019

Maybe what gave Maurice such appreciation of the moment on that Seventh Heaven morning was that four years earlier he had accepted the fact he might never coach in the NHL again.

On New Year's Day in 2014, the Detroit Red Wings hosted the Toronto Maple Leafs in the Big House for the Winter Classic in Michigan. Maurice was among the more than 105,000 in attendance, but he was there working as a television analyst.

Maurice hadn't coached in the NHL since being fired by Carolina in 2011. He went to Russia to re-invigorate his coaching career in the KHL but that didn't lead to an NHL job. He was pulling studio shifts at TSN.

"I got home from that Winter Classic and I said to my wife, 'I'm okay now. I'm okay if I don't coach again,'" Maurice said. "I started to enjoy the TV thing. I thought, 'Okay, I've moved my family enough.' It was time to give them a place to live. We moved to Columbus, Ohio, to be closer to family and schools. We were good. We were settled."

Winnipeg general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff called to offer him the Jets job exactly 10 days later.

To say Maurice has loved his time in Winnipeg would be an understatement. Two years in, Jets fans were calling for his head on a spike. Now he is the toast of the town and his players can't understand why he isn't in the conversation for the Jack Adams Award.

"Right when he walked in the door, I became a different player," Jets captain Blake Wheeler said. "I think he definitely gets overlooked with the job he's done for us."

"I'm not going to lie, winning helps," Maurice said. "But it's more fun for me now than it's ever been."

Maurice has won more games (86) over the last two seasons than every coach in the league except Tampa Bay's Jon Cooper (93). His 682 career wins – earned over stops in Hartford, Carolina (twice), Toronto and Winnipeg – are the ninth-most in NHL history.

"I've passed a bunch of milestones and I honestly never thought twice of it," Maurice said. "Six hundred wins? I wasn't even aware of it. This is the first one [1,500 games] that's kind of given me pause."

Why?

"Because I keep thinking of how crazy Jim Rutherford must have been," he said of the then-Hartford Whalers GM who hired him in 1995. "I got a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. To get a team at 28-years-old, not get fired after your first tough year, to have a guy believe in you like that, it's an incredibly unusual story."

In 22 seasons, Maurice has seen some things. When he took over for Paul Holmgren in Hartford, 27-year-old Brendan Shanahan was the Whalers' leading scorer. Gary Bettman was two years on the job. There were 26 teams.

The average NHL salary was \$750,000 – which is what the minimum salary will be in 2021-22. There was no salary cap. It was practically the Wild West compared to now.

"I remember going into Philadelphia or Detroit when I was in Hartford," Maurice said. "We had low-payroll teams. I remember being truly afraid we were going to get beat by 10 goals. It was a legitimate fear. It wasn't even [bleeping] close."

Maurice has been forced to reinvent himself many times over. He was practically a kid then, now his three kids are almost grown.

"I would say that I've changed as much as the game has," Maurice said.

Maurice said the hardest part about coaching today's NHL player is that with handlers, agents, skills coaches, sports psychologists and nutritionists – the whole gamut available – the players can sometimes be their own teams. They can live on islands.

"They've got so many more people invested in them, it's easier for them to get constantly positive feedback," Maurice said. "That's not a bad thing. But there are more places to bitch, more people willing to listen. I don't think players need each other as much as they used to. Some of that 'team' part of the game is gone."

"I don't think players have the chance to be together as much as they used to. It's harder to really form a team and keep them connected."

Maurice has reached the Stanley Cup Final once and the Conference Finals a total of three times, including last year's run that felt short in Vegas. He savours this time in Winnipeg not just because of the unique connection the Jets have with that city, or because he's watched this crop of Jets grow before his eyes. It's also because these are the best teams he's ever coached.

Maurice has rarely had a top-flight roster at his disposal. He took the Hurricanes to the Cup Final in 2002 with the seventh best record in the East.

He says all of that has made him better equipped to handle the awesome responsibility he has in front of him.

"A lot of experience comes from hardship, from having to find a way to grind to win games when you don't have a tremendous amount of talent," Maurice said. "You have to work your group a lot harder. You get to use that experience now with a lot of talented guys in different circumstances."

"When I walk into a locker room now, I can understand the whole spectrum a player goes through. I can understand what it's like to be a rookie in the NHL. I can understand what it's like to be a dad and raising kids while you're in the NHL. I can understand what it's like to be 35. I've been through it all with players."

That relatability is what Mark Scheifele said allows Maurice to spark the Jets.

"He makes you want it more than you thought you wanted it," Scheifele said.

Maurice said he wants it more, wants the Stanley Cup, because winning the last game in the season is the only thing he hasn't lived in this rollercoaster NHL life.

"The pressure isn't off, I've just got a better perspective on it," Maurice said. "I can channel my energy and get more wired for games. Maybe you can't when you first get there [when] it's life and death; it's all about surviving and winning. I love the game more now. I appreciate all of it now."

TSN.CA LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129318 Websites

TSN.CA / First-round pick in play as Jets consider big-game hunting

Frank Seravalli

One year ago, the Winnipeg Jets traded their first-round pick – the same currency Kevin Cheveldayoff used to build Jets 2.0 from the ground up – for the most impactful acquisition of the deadline period in Paul Stastny.

It was one of seven first-round picks dealt last season, the most at any deadline in a decade.

Stastny helped get the Jets within three wins of the Stanley Cup Final.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 6, 2019

The Jets' first-round pick is indeed in play one year later, the latest asset to join the TSN Trade Bait board on Monday.

How valuable have those picks been to Winnipeg? Look at their roster: Mark Scheifele (2011), Jacob Trouba (2012), Josh Morrissey (2013), Nikolaj Ehlers (2014), Kyle Connor and Jack Roslovic (2015), Patrik Laine (2016) and Kristian Vesalainen (2017).

But the time is now for Winnipeg to make a run at a Stanley Cup. The Jets' window to win is wide open. Plus, if you're Cheveldayoff, you never know how many kicks at Lord Stanley's mug you'll get, considering the pending cap crunch in trying to re-sign Laine, Connor, Trouba and maybe even Tyler Myers this summer.

The Maple Leafs were the first team to move their first rounder this season, which they used to acquire defenceman Jake Muzzin from Los Angeles on Jan. 28. Cheveldayoff and the Jets are believed to be big-game hunting, doing their due diligence on a number of marquee names, including Mark Stone, Matt Duchene, Wayne Simmonds and Micheal Ferland, among others.

The Jets' No. 1 priority is a second-line centre, the same role Stastny played last year on their run.

Last year, nearly a quarter of the first-round picks traded hands just at the deadline, in deals for Ryan McDonagh (Tampa Bay), Evander Kane (San Jose), Tomas Tatar (Detroit), Ryan Hartman (Nashville), Rick Nash (Boston), Derick Brassard (Pittsburgh) and Stastny.

The Jets are one of a handful of teams with potential top picks in play, including Central Division rival Nashville, Tampa Bay, Calgary, Boston and Pittsburgh.

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1129319 Websites

USA TODAY / Alex Ovechkin sets NHL's Russian record: 'To pass those legends, it's pretty big'

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY

Published 7:21 p.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019 | Updated 10:47 p.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019

Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin logged another milestone in his spectacular last 12 months when he became the NHL's top-scoring Russian-born player on Tuesday night.

His first-period assist against the Vancouver Canucks was the 1,180th point of Ovechkin's career, breaking his tie with Sergei Fedorov.

Fedorov, who finished his Hall of Fame career as Ovechkin's teammate in Washington, played 1,248 NHL games. Ovechkin broke the Russian mark in Game 1055.

"It's hard work and lots of hockey, and I'm proud for my family and for my dad, who spent all that time with me," he told reporters after the 3-2 victory.

Ovechkin is also very proud of his heritage. When the NHL had yet to commit to the 2014 Sochi Olympics, he said he planned to go regardless. The league eventually did send its players.

The NHL has had plenty of high-scoring Russian stars, including the versatile Fedorov, the speedy Pavel Bure, the puck wizard Pavel Datsyuk, the cerebral Igor Larionov, Alexander Mogilny (76-goal season), Evgeni Malkin, Alexei Kovalev and Ilya Kovalchuk.

But Ovechkin has rocketed to the top with a combination of a wicked shot and bullish strength.

"To pass all those legends, it's pretty big," Ovechkin said. "When you come to the NHL, you just had a dream of scoring one goal or two. Now to be No. 1 on the all-time list, it's pretty amazing."

Fedorov, who won three Stanley Cups as part of the Detroit Red Wings' Russian Five, had to defect from a tournament in 1990 to join the NHL. Ovechkin was the No. 1 overall pick in 2004, well after Russians were a key part of the league.

Ovechkin quickly established himself as a force to be reckoned with, scoring 52 goals and 106 points to win rookie of the year.

Two years later, he broke the NHL record for goals by a left wing, with 65, the first of his seven goal-scoring titles. He also picked up the first of his three Hart trophies as league MVP.

Last March, he scored his 600th goal, becoming the fourth NHL player to do so in fewer than 1,000 games.

He followed up with the first Stanley Cup of his career in June. Often knocked for his playoff production, he scored a league-best 15 goals to win the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP. He brought the Stanley Cup to Russia.

Then in August, he and his wife, Anastasia Shubskaya, welcomed their first child, Sergei, named after his late brother.

Ovechkin continues to produce at a high level at 33, leading the league with 37 goals.

And he holds a significant lead on his countrymen. Malkin, who's a year younger, is nearly 200 points back. Tampa Bay Lightning star Nikita Kucherov, 25, is averaging about a point a game through his sixth season, but Ovechkin had 614 points through six seasons and Kucherov is at 415.

And with many younger players choosing to stay in the Kontinental Hockey League or older players leaving for there, Ovechkin could be the Russian standard-bearer for a long time.

USA TODAY LOADED: 02.06.2019

1129320 Websites

USA TODAY / Opinion: How Auston Matthews' shorter-term deal helps him and Maple Leafs

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

Published 3:19 p.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019 | Updated 6:15 p.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019

By accepting a five-year contract extension worth \$58.17 million Tuesday, Toronto Maple Leafs center Auston Matthews is betting on himself while still helping his team afford to surround him with talent.

The \$11.634 million salary-cap hit is presumed to be close to \$2 million less than he would have commanded had he insisted on an eight-year maximum deal.

But when the deal expires, the former No. 1 overall draft pick will be 26 and eligible for unrestricted free agency, setting himself up for another big payday. He could earn more than he is under today's contract, especially if the salary cap continues to increase.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 6, 2019

By taking the shorter deal with less money, Matthews gives the Maple Leafs more maneuvering room to sign forward Mitch Marner, who will become a restricted free agent this offseason. The Leafs already have center John Tavares making \$11 million per season and forward William Nylander with a \$6.9 million cap hit.

This likely means that for the next five seasons the Maple Leafs will have four players eating up about \$40 million of their salary cap.

Even though Matthews doesn't surpass Connor McDavid's leading \$12.5 million cap hit, he is helping himself and the team.

The bottom line is the Maple Leafs have an elite Matthews-Tavares combination locked up during the team's window for being Stanley Cup contenders.

The only potential headache for the Maple Leafs would be if a rival team sends an offer sheet to Marner if he reaches restricted free agency. While the Maple Leafs likely would match whatever came Marner's way, any extra dollars paid to Marner would undermine their effort to strengthen their roster.

Even with Matthews taking a little less and Marner coming in at an affordable price, the Maple Leafs might have to trade a desirable player like Kasperii Kapanen or even Nylander.

Defenseman Jake Gardiner and Ron Hainsey also will be unrestricted free agents this summer.

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1129321 Websites

USA TODAY / Ilya Kovalchuk helps Kings down Devils in return to New Jersey

Abbey Mastracco, NHL writer

Published 9:46 p.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019 | Updated 10:27 p.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019

NEWARK -- The Los Angeles Kings scored three times in the first two minutes of the third period but it was the fourth goal scored in the period that sent the crowd at The Rock heading for the turnstiles.

Ilya Kovalchuk scored with just 2:24 left to play, but as you know by now he doesn't score goals for the Devils anymore. He wasn't a big factor for the Kings up until that point, unless you count the crowd factor, but three goals by the road team in a span of 1:52 will take the home crowd out of the equation quickly.

More: 'They don't boo nobodies': NJ Devils welcome back Ilya Kovalchuk

Facing his old team for the first time since he decided he didn't want to be a part of that team anymore, Kovalchuk helped his new team down the Devils 5-1 on Tuesday at Prudential Center.

Feb 5, 2019; Newark, NJ, USA; Los Angeles Kings left wing Ilya Kovalchuk (17) looks on during the first period against the New Jersey Devils at Prudential Center.

"I was actually happy that I score," Kovalchuk said. "That's the best answer."

Before Kovalchuk's theatrics, it was two penalties in the second period that led to the undoing of the Devils.

Tied at 1 with the Kings after Pavel Zacha scored his career-high ninth early in the period, New Jersey had a good chance to take a lead with a power play at 17:06. But less than 30 seconds later Damon Severson slashed Tyler Toffoli and he ended up in the back of the New Jersey net. About a minute later, Kyle Palmieri caught Brendan Leipsic with his stick in the neutral zone and he was whistled for a trip.

The penalty kill did a solid job of killing off those penalties to get to the end of the period but the Kings still had power play time to start the third and they quickly cashed in.

Anze Kopitar set up Toffoli on the rush and Keith Kinkaid came way out of his net to give Toffoli a wide target. He potted it with seven seconds left on the power play to give the Kings a 2-1 lead.

Toffoli only needed another 35 seconds to score again and defenseman Dion Phaneuf soon followed with a point shot through traffic for his first goal of the season at 1:52.

Zacha finished off a spectacular feed from Jesper Bratt 3:31 into the second period. Set up below the goal line, Bratt sent a no-look, backhanded pass through his legs to Zacha, who beat Jack Campbell (30 saves) for the score.

Kempe scored his third in the last two nights at 6:21 in the first, prompting another round of boos from the Devils' faithful with Kovalchuk on the ice. The puck went off the stick of Drew Stafford and coach John Hynes felt they had a chance to make a play to prevent the goal and failed to do so.

"When you look at this game, three out of five goals the puck is on our stick and we can't execute," Hynes said. "And that's something that's hurt us all year. We've got to continue to work at that and help these guys understand they've got to move the puck and the execution has to be better."

The Devils outshot Los Angeles 22-15 through the second two periods and had two power plays to work with but Kovalchuk's goal was the dagger that forced his detractors out of the building completely.

"You never expect anything, but it's OK, you know?" Kovalchuk said. "It's their emotions, and it's how they react, so I was doing my thing."

With both of these teams at the bottom of their respective divisions, it was a meaningless game in the grand scheme of things, unless you count draft positioning. But in the rematch of the 2012 Stanley Cup Final, it was the Kings who came out on top once again, only this time they did it with the player who helped get the Devils to that Cup final.

Notes

Kinkaid made 20 saves in his first loss against Los Angeles and is now 4-1-0 in six games for his career.... Cory Schneider backed up Kinkaid for the first time since Dec. 15, marking his return from an abdominal strain. ... The Devils scratched Brett Seney and Eric Gryba.

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1129322 Websites

USA TODAY / For dominant Lightning, it's Stanley Cup or bust: 'It's our turn'

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

Published 6:28 a.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019 | Updated 6:52 a.m. ET Feb. 5, 2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 6, 2019

The Tampa Bay Lightning hope they completed their study of the psychology of winning the Stanley Cup when they suffered through more misery in the 2018 Eastern Conference final.

"We ran into a Washington team last year and it felt like once they got over that hump of beating Pittsburgh last year that they could feel that it was their time," Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said. "We saw that in Game 6 and Game 7 in the way they responded."

The Lightning were one win from reaching the Stanley Cup Final last May, but the Capitals won Game 6 at home and then won Game 7 in Tampa to take a giant step toward winning their first Stanley Cup in franchise history.

"With the expectations so high for our group, we came into this season thinking this is our year," Stamkos said. "It's our turn."

Could their solution be as simple as developing a more pronounced swagger?

It can be when a team has the Lightning's talent. At 39-11-2, the Lightning have a 13-point lead in the Atlantic Division and a seven-point lead for No. 1 in the NHL. They lead the league in offense, averaging 3.87 goals per game.

Nikita Kucherov leads the NHL with 80 points, and Brayden Point (currently day to day) is tied for sixth in goals with 30. Stamkos has 59 points in 52 games. It's easy to see why this team leads the NHL with a 29.4 percent power-play efficiency.

"For a team to have as much success in the playoffs, but not winning it all, we have a bit of chip on our shoulder," Stamkos said.

In one of Jon Cooper's first talks to his Lightning players in 2013 when he was hired as coach, he talked about his hope that the team would play with a swagger.

Their NHL-leading +59 goal-differential speaks to their dominance. The Toronto Maple Leafs (+39) are the only other Eastern Conference team within 30 of them.

"There is still unfinished business for us to start talking about what the difference is this season," Stamkos said.

The caution is understandable, but there is no denying that the Lightning are more polished and formidable than they were in the past. They're certainly more confident than they were when they reached the Stanley Cup Final in 2015 and lost to the Chicago Blackhawks.

Stamkos said everyone has grown on the job, even Cooper, who is one of the league's most personable coaches. It's a profession where gruffness is expected, but players find it easy to talk to Cooper.

"He's not a yeller or screamer, he gains respect in different ways," Stamkos said.

He gains respect because his teams are well-prepared and competitive. He is an excellent motivator.

"He has a lawyer background," Stamkos said, "so he knows how to work a crowd."

The big question surrounding the Lightning is whether general manager Julien BriseBois will make a move to strengthen their chances. The Maple Leafs have already added a top-four defenseman, and the Penguins made a trade for Nick Bjugstad.

"Everyone thinks you have to add someone to put yourself over the top," Cooper said. "I don't think necessarily that's true. In all of these years we have been together, we really haven't made big deals at the deadline, except last year."

The Lightning added Ryan McDonagh and J.T. Miller from the New York Rangers last February, and that deal is helping the team this season.