



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2020



Hurricanes Gameday Diary: Aces up edition

By Adam Gold

Aces Up

The Carolina Hurricanes took a few early punches Thursday night in Arizona. They dropped the first round and fell behind quickly in the second before getting up off the mat and throwing haymakers of their own. Andrei Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho, Jaccob Slavin, and James Reimer carried the Hurricanes to a win they sorely needed. The moment that turned the game in Carolina's direction was when Rod Brind'Amour — heeding the advice of assistant coach Jeff Daniels — loaded his top line with his best players.

Svechnikov, Aho and Teuvo Teravainen were the dominant trio over the final 35 minutes. Carolina's best players combined for four goals and three assists and it led to taking two points on the plane to Las Vegas. The only drawback to loading up one line with the three best offensive players — who, it should also be noted are also excellent players in all three zones — is that if you don't get support scoring you run the risk of becoming a one line team and one line is just too easy for good teams to hold down.

For now, the Canes will put their aces out together. But, the trick is getting others to contribute. The following is alarming, especially in light of the fact that Dougie Hamilton is gone for the season. Erik Haula scored seven goals in the first nine games. He's scored four times since. Haula is on a 13-game goal drought. And, unfortunately, he's not alone.

Ryan Dzingel hasn't scored in a dozen games. He's played well, especially on Thursday in Arizona. But, he's paid to score goals and eight is well off the pace of a 20+ goal scorer. Warren Foegele hasn't scored in 10 games. Lucas Wallmark in 9. Nino Niederreiter has one in his last right games. And, for all of his defensive qualities, Jordan Steal has one goal in his last 13 games and seven for the entire season.

These are the issues that complicate the decision as to whether or not to put 151 combined points on one line.

The look...

Svechnikov-Aho-Teravainen

Nino-Staal-Foegele

McGinn-Haula-Williams

Dzingel-Wallmark-Necas

Slavin-van Riemsdyk

Gardiner-Pesce

Fleury-Edmundson

Reimer

Mrazek

Extras: Jordan Martinook (upper body)

Take me to your leaders...

Hurricanes

Points: Teuvo Teravainen, 52; Andrei Svechnikov, 50; Sebastian Aho, 49.

Goals: Aho, 29 Svechnikov, 22; Dougie Hamilton, 14.

Power play points: Teravainen, 19; Svechnikov, 15, Aho, 12.

Hot: Aho, 4 game goal-scoring streak, points in 5 (5g,3a)

Not: Goal droughts...Erik Haula, 13 games; Dzingel, 12; Foegele, 10. Wallmark, 9.

Golden Knights

Points: Mark Stone, 53; Max Pacioretty, 51; Reilly Smith, 43.

Goals: Pacioretty, 23; Smith, 21; Stone, 20.

Power play points: Pacioretty, 15; Stone, 13; Shea Theodore, 12.

Hot: Paul Stastny, 4 goals, 9 points in last 7 games. Jonathan Marchessault has points in 6 straight (3g, 4a)

Not: Cody Eakin, 0 goals in 14 games.

The stakes....

The win over the Coyotes was important in many ways. It was a strong response to the loss in St Louis two nights before. It was a strong performance given the early 2-0 deficit. And, it was critical because it helped to reestablish Carolina's best players. Now, what happens next becomes the sole focus.

Toronto moved back in front of Florida in the Atlantic Division. The Blue Jackets shut out the Red Wings and have jumped over the Islanders into 3rd in the Metropolitan. New York's 68 points are holding down the 1st Wild Card spot. Carolina and Philadelphia start play today with 65 points, tied for the second spot, but the Hurricanes own the tiebreaker by virtue of having two more wins in regulation.

It's all still in front of the Hurricanes. The Leafs, Islanders, Panthers, Flyers and Jackets are all in action tonight, meaning what happens in Vegas doesn't stay in Vegas. It goes into the casino, or to Cirque du Soleil, or to the M&M Store and then it boards the plane and heads to Dallas with the Canes as the march to the post season continues on.

Storm Watch starring Alec Campbell begins at 9:30. Opening face off will follow at 10:08. Everything can be heard on 99.9 the Fan.



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Loaded Top Line Sparks Canes' Offense

Brind'Amour: 'They came to life'

by Michael Smith

LAS VEGAS - The Carolina Hurricanes needed a spark.

And what better way to ignite the offense than unite the team's three most skilled forwards?

Facing a 1-0 deficit heading into the second period on Thursday night in Arizona, head coach Rod Brind'Amour, on assistant coach Jeff Daniels' suggestion, tweaked the forward lines and loaded up with the trio of Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov and Teuvo Teravainen.

"They came to life," Brind'Amour said after practice on Friday. "It got us the win last night."

The line combined for four goals - two each for Svechnikov and Aho - and three assists, which fueled the Canes' run of four straight goals, including three in the second period.

"That line was pretty dynamic," Brind'Amour said after the game. "That was the difference in the game."

From the troika's first shift together in the second period, it seemed like the Canes had something brewing. Along with Brett Pesce and Jake Gardiner, they got pucks in behind the Coyotes' defense, controlled play in the offensive zone, hounded the puck when Arizona got possession and forced turnovers to swing play back the other way - all in about 50 seconds of game time.

"From the first shift, we got good momentum and a couple chances," Aho said.

After the Coyotes scored on the power play to take a 2-0 lead early in the second, Brind'Amour went back to Aho, Svechnikov and Teravainen on the bump-up shift. A minute later, they got the Canes on the board.

Aho had already rolled a change, and Teravainen was headed in that direction, too, as the Canes controlled the puck in the offensive zone. Haydn Fleury took a shot from the point, and Svechnikov chipped in the rebound on the doorstep.

"That gives you a little boost in confidence, and we kept building on that," Aho said.

About six minutes later, Svechnikov scored what was basically an identical goal.

"It's a little bit lucky, right?" Svechnikov said.

Maybe. But you don't create that sort of luck without going to the net.

"That's the whole key, right? Whether he's at the net or somebody else to create the seconds and thirds, that's what we need," Brind'Amour said. "That's today's game. You score on the power play, yeah, and you score on the rush, maybe, but in-zone, it's all getting to the net and getting pucks there."

On the line's first shift of the third period, though Svechnikov was denied his bid at a hat trick on a partial breakaway, he collected his own rebound and hit Aho for the follow-up tally.

Four straight goals for the Canes, sparked by the team's three best offensive players. Aho's empty-net goal in the final minute of the game sealed the 5-3 victory.

"We got some big plays," Brind'Amour said. "We definitely had a good push back when we got down."

It was no surprise, then, to see the line remain intact in practice on Friday afternoon in Las Vegas.

"They were good yesterday," Brind'Amour said.

Expect to see Svechnikov, Aho and Teravainen together when the puck drops against the Golden Knights on Saturday - but that could change by the second period, just as it did in Arizona.

"We've tried that [line] in the past quite a bit," Brind'Amour noted. "Every line like that kind of has a shelf life a little bit."

For now, though, the Canes will ride the dynamism of their three most threatening offensive talents.

"It's super exciting to play with those guys," Svechnikov said.

It's super exciting to watch, too.



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Preview: Hurricanes at Golden Knights

Carolina, Vegas meet for the second time in nine days

by Michael Smith

LAS VEGAS - For the second time in nine days, the Carolina Hurricanes square off against the Vegas Golden Knights.

Las Vegas marks the third stop on a four-game road swing for the Canes, who are coming off a 5-3 win in Arizona on Thursday night.

"We were pretty solid the whole way through and definitely had a good push back when we got down," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after practice on Friday.

The Big Three

Down a goal heading into the second period of Thursday's game, the Hurricanes rolled out a loaded forward line featuring Sebastian Aho flanked by Andrei Svechnikov and Teuvo Teravainen.

The trio combined for four goals - two each for Svechnikov and Aho - and three assists, igniting the Canes to tally four straight goals, including three in the second period.

"It certainly got us the win last night," Brind'Amour said on Friday. "You're putting your three best offensive guys together. We needed a little spark when we got behind there. Obviously, they came to life."

Aho has tallied points in five straight games (5g, 3a) and goals in four straight. With a team-leading 29 goals, Aho ranks tied for seventh in the NHL in that category. He's scored 16 of his 29 goals on the road, ranking tied for second in the league. Aho is a goal away from matching his season career high set in 2018-19.

Svechnikov has totaled 50 points (22g, 28a) in 54 games this season, surpassing numbers in every statistical category from his rookie season. This season, the Canes are 25-8-0 when Svechnikov records a point and 6-12-3 when he is held off the scoresheet.

Rhythm and Reim

James Reimer posted 30 saves on Thursday to improve to 13-6-1 on the season. In his last five starts, Reimer is 4-0-1 with a 1.73 goals-against average, a .948 save percentage and one shutout. In his last 15 starts, dating back to mid-November, Reimer is 11-2-1 with a 2.24 goals-against average, a .928 save percentage and three shutouts.

The Last Meeting

Both returning from an extended All-Star Break, the Hurricanes and Golden Knights last met just over a week ago in Raleigh. Despite erasing a two-goal deficit in a late third period comeback, the Canes surrendered a late power-play goal to the Golden Knights and fell, 4-3.

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

The Opposition

That game in Raleigh kicked off a four-game road trip for the Golden Knights, who then proceeded on to Nashville, Tampa Bay and South Florida. Vegas finished with a 3-1-0 record on the trip, capping their jaunt out east with an emphatic 7-2 win over the Panthers on Thursday night. Mark Stone led the way offensively with a five-point (2g, 3a) performance, and he now leads the team in scoring with 53 points (20g, 33a) in 56 games.

"They're a tough team, I think one of the best teams in hockey right now," Brind'Amour said. "They've got the talent. They've got the goaltending. Their special teams have really improved. That's a good team. It will be a tough match."



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The Hockey News

Svechnikov leading the way as the Hurricanes try to recreate last season's magical run

As the Carolina Hurricanes chase a playoff spot and try to meet the expectations they created last year, it's pretty clear this team is changing its complexion. A lot of that is thanks to Andrei Svechnikov.

By Ken Campbell

GLENDALE – Andrei Svechnikov walked into the Carolina Hurricanes dressing room, as he often does, with a smile on his face.

Svechnikov: "Hello, guys."

Reporter: "How are you?"

Svechnikov: "Unbelievable, you?"

Unbelievable indeed. Andrei Svechnikov won't reach his 20th birthday for another month, which means he could still be playing for the Barrie Colts right now and representing Russia in the World Junior Championship. But he's already 136 games into his NHL career and making a huge impact on the fortunes of the Carolina Hurricanes. Svechnikov scored two goals in the Hurricanes' 5-3 win over the Arizona Coyotes Thursday night, the one that got them back into the game after the Coyotes had taken a 2-0 lead and the one that put them ahead in the game for good. Important goals, both of them. But Svechnikov is used to doing that. Of his 22 goals this season, 12 of them have given the Hurricanes the lead at some point in the game and seven have put them ahead for good. That's the highest number on the team.

If the Carolina Hurricanes were in the Pacific Division, they'd be in first place. But they're in the Metro, where they happen to be the fifth-best team and the one hanging on by its fingernails to the final wildcard spot in the Eastern Conference. If the Hurricanes are going to replicate their run to the playoffs, where they knocked off the defending Stanley Cup champion and made it to the conference final, it's going to be with players such as Svechnikov and linemates Sebastien Aho and Teuvo Teravainen leading the way.

Check that, new linemates. Hurricanes' coach Rod Brind'Amour has been loath to play the three together because he's done so before and hasn't been crazy about the results. But at the urging of assistant coach Jeff Daniels, Brind'Amour put his three top scorers together and got immediate results. "We've had them together and it wasn't

great," Brind'Amour said. "The other about putting all your ducks in one corner is it sometimes it doesn't work. But if we can get other guys to contribute, that becomes a real dynamic line."

It certainly does make things a little top-heavy for the Hurricanes. Those three players account for more than one-third of all the Hurricanes goals this season, with Aho leading the way with 29. Teravainen leads all Hurricanes with 41 assists, which puts him among the league leaders, tied with Patrick Kane for eighth in the NHL. "Those two Finnish guys, I feel, are the best in the world at finishing," Svechnikov said. Yeah, he really said that. "It's really enjoyable to play with those guys. It's super exciting to play with those guys."

Thanks to one of the most feeble offer sheets ever, Aho is under contract for four more years after this one, as is Teravainen. In the second year of his entry-level deal, Svechnikov stands to make \$3.6 million this season if he meets his performance bonuses, something he's on pace to do easily. That will put the Hurricanes over the salary cap, but the excess can be carried over to next season. It's a burden the Hurricanes will be more than happy to bear if Svechnikov can keep putting up points and the Hurricanes keep winning games. With 50 points, Svechnikov is well ahead of the impressive production he had as a rookie and is on pace to post a 76-point season.

"The maturity level of him has been phenomenal and the growth of his game is off the charts," Brind'Amour said of Svechnikov. "Where he was (when he came into the league) and where he is at now...the learning curve coming into this league is tough and every day it gets better and better. I don't know where it ends, but I think there's still another level for him."

As the Hurricanes chase a playoff spot and try to meet the expectations they created last year, it's pretty clear this team is changing its complexion. No longer is its only strength its depth on defense. And while the return of Justin Williams has been a wonderful feel-good story, it seems the Hurricanes are no longer his team. Whatever the Hurricanes accomplish will be driven by their young stars, led by the likes of Svechnikov.

"That's what we have to do, score right now and play good 'D' and help the team win these games," he said.



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Projecting the Carolina Hurricanes' Contracts for the 2020-21 Season

How does the Canes' cap situation line up for next season?

By Justin Lape

The Carolina Hurricanes have some interesting decisions to make in the offseason as they look to expand cap space and allow flexibility to make additional moves to strengthen their current core.

Notable names are coming off the books before the 2020-21 season including Patrick Marleau's cap hit and the Hurricanes will face the last year of Alex Semin's buyout (!!!). Notable players like Jaccob Slavin, Dougie Hamilton & Teuvo Teravainen remain on team-friendly contracts. Sebastian Aho will lead all players with an \$8.454 million AAV but the team must take steps to prepare for Andrei Svechnikov's likely massive deal after the 2020-21 season.

Here's a look at how things could shake out. For convenience's sake, we are focusing on NHL players only; this list does not include any players who are in the AHL or other leagues:

Under Contract/Committed: \$62,400,666

- Sebastian Aho, \$8.454 million (UFA 2024)
- Jordan Staal, \$6 million (UFA 2023)
- Dougie Hamilton, \$5.75 million (UFA 2021)
- Teuvo Teravainen, \$5.45 million (UFA 2024)
- Jaccob Slavin, \$5.3 million (UFA 2025)
- Nino Niederreiter, \$5.25 million UFA (2022)
- Jake Gardiner, \$4.05 million (UFA 2023)
- Brett Pesce, \$4.025 million (UFA 2024)
- James Reimer, \$3.4 million (UFA 2021)
- Ryan Dzingel, \$3.375 million (UFA 2021)
- Petr Mrazek, \$3.125 million (UFA 2021)
- Brock McGinn, \$2.1 million (UFA 2021)
- Jordan Martinook, \$2 million (UFA 2021)
- Andrei Svechnikov, \$925,000 (RFA 2021)
- Martin Necas, \$863,333 (RFA 2022)
- Alexander Semin buyout, \$2,333,333 (2021)

Pending Free Agents

Joel Edmundson - UFA (current cap hit: \$3.1 million)

Coming over in the Justin Faulk trade, Edmundson has been a solid stay-at-home defenseman on the back end. Edmundson is just 26 years old but don't project his growth to go much higher than what it currently is. Edmundson will likely get re-signed this off-season and come in at around the same value. A three-year deal worth \$3.5 million AAV seems appropriate unless another team decides to swoop in and overpay.

Erik Haula - UFA (current cap hit: \$2.75 million)

This is the trickiest situation for the Hurricanes heading into the offseason. Haula has been streaky since arriving in Raleigh and has missed time due to injury, similar to the situation the Hurricanes were in with Micheal Ferland. When healthy, Haula is a welcome addition to the middle-six. Current contract comparables include Jean-Gabriel Pageau of the Senators (cap hit \$3.1 million) and the Canadiens' Philip Danault (cap hit just over \$3 million). In 32 games with the Canes this season, Haula has 19 points (11 goals, 8 assists). If the Hurricanes do re-sign him, it would likely be for at least a million dollars more than his current \$2.75 million cap hit. However, the risk likely outweighs the award and Haula will likely not be a member of the Hurricanes next season - but they will have to replace him.

Trevor van Riemsdyk - UFA (current cap hit: \$2.3 million)

Ah, the curious case of Trevor van Riemsdyk. In what initially seemed like a bargain has turned into a streaky asset. At varying points this season, van Riemsdyk has been the best and worst Hurricanes defenseman on the ice. Consistent efforts haven't been in his repertoire this year. It seems unlikely the Hurricanes pursue an extension with TVR, given the younger, cheaper assets under contract in Charlotte.

Haydn Fleury - RFA with arb rights (current cap hit: \$850,000)

Fleury has become the most interesting contract on the team with the constant movement over the past few seasons. He has shown flashes and the Hurricanes hold his rights again, although this time he is eligible for arbitration. Is it time for them to cut him loose or continue to try to make him part of the team? Logic would dictate the former, rather than the latter. That said, it's highly unlikely the Hurricanes wouldn't tender a qualifying offer to retain his RFA rights, so if he moves on it would likely be via a trade. That could keep Fleury around for another year, given his arbitration-eligible status. He still has three more seasons until he hits unrestricted free agency.

Warren Foegele - RFA with arb rights (current cap hit: \$746,667)

Foegele has become a heart & soul player on the team. He's put together a stronger performance than last year where he sputtered a bit after a strong start before finally returning to full force in the playoffs. Foegele is earning less than \$1 million and will require a contract likely double of what he earns. His



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value will likely come in at or around \$2 million, on a duration of 2-3 years.

Justin Williams - UFA (current cap hit: \$700,000)

This seems to be it for the three-time Stanley Cup winner. In what looks like a last effort to add one more ring to his finger, it's highly unlikely Williams returns to Carolina — or any team for that matter. A Williams contract will not be on the books next season.

Lucas Wallmark - RFA with arb rights (current cap hit: \$675,000)

Wallmark has been a valuable member of the bottom-six over the past two seasons and it's now time for the Hurricanes to reward him. The Swedish forward is earning less than the league minimum and will require a contract at least double of what he currently earns. Similar to Foegele, the Hurricanes will likely sign Wallmark to a 2-3 year bridge deal with a \$2 million AAV and he'll continue to add around 30-40 points per season from the bottom-six.

About Last Night: Unleash The Russian

Andrei Svechnikov took over the game and pushed his team to a 5-3 comeback win over Arizona.

By Cody Hagan

After the disaster of a game against St. Louis, the Carolina Hurricanes faced what felt like a must win game last night against the Arizona Coyotes. Things started off very poorly as the Canes found themselves down 2-0 and wondering where this season had gone wrong. But then Andrei Svechnikov took over the game and lead his team on their way to a come-from-behind 5-3 victory.

The Good - The Defense & Goaltending Showed Up

Ever since Dougie Hamilton got injured, the defense for the Canes has been abysmal. Everyone outside of Jaccob Slavin and Brett Pesce had struggled, and even the forwards had struggled to cover their own. But everyone came together last night, led by a stellar defensive performance by Pesce.

The penalty kill gave up one goal off a rebound, but overall they were a massive part of why the team won the game. Pesce blocked numerous shots and at one point he had a shift that lasted nearly two and a half minutes throughout a penalty kill.

Not only was the defensive side of the game there but the offense was there from the back end as well. Slavin scored a goal, Trevor van Riemsdyk has two assists, and both Joel Edmundson and Haydn Fleury has assists as well.

With Hamilton out, the rest of the defense has to continue to step up and last night they did just that. It also helped that their goaltender made big saves at big times.

James Reimer may have given up three goals, but he made multiple big saves throughout the game that held the lead for the Hurricanes. He's 5-0-1 in his last six games and he is finding a way to steal games for the Canes. This is the biggest difference between Reimer and Petr Mrazek currently. Mrazek hasn't been able to make the big saves at the big moments lately and that has led to some difficult losses over

The Final Total

Adding up all the players already under contract, and penciling in new contracts for Edmundson, Foegele and Wallmark (total \$7.5 million), the Hurricanes are right now looking at around \$70 million in committed salary for next season. In theory they will have plenty of money to spend, but a lot of that is going to go toward new contracts for Svechnikov and Hamilton, both of whom are eligible to sign new deals on July 1. Any extensions won't count against next year's cap, but the Hurricanes can't hamstring themselves by becoming spendthrifts next summer and leave themselves in danger of not being able to fit the new deals for Svechnikov and Hamilton under the cap in the future.

So the Hurricanes will have a bit of money left over, with which they're going to have to replace Haula (Julien Gauthier?), but it won't be much. The cap is projected to rise to around \$83 million, so it will be tight once again to make the Hurricanes fit under the cap.

the past few weeks. It should be Reimer's crease until further notice, similar to how Curtis McElhinney grabbed the reins for a couple of weeks around this time last season.

Everything came together for a great game on the defensive side of the puck last night. From the goalie out, everyone played their game, and that showed in the final result.

The Great - Svech the Beast

For the majority of his young career, Andrei Svechnikov has played on the second or third line. Many people has wanted to see what he could do with more consistent playing time and better line mates. Needing a massive spark, Rod Brind'Amour put him on a line with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen which created a dynamic top line.

The results were evident quickly.

Svechnikov scored two goals last night and had multiple breakaways where he could have had a hat trick. It was a game where he truly took over the contest and dominated the game. We have seen those games from Aho in years past but they have been fewer and further between this year despite his 44 goal pace. This was one of the first times we have seen Svechnikov truly take over a game, and it's no coincidence it came after he was put on a line with true scorers.

Not only did he score two great goals, but his play set up the game winning goal that Aho scored. He raced in on a breakaway looking for the hat trick but after the puck didn't go in, he stuck with the play and found a charging Aho who buried that puck.

Svechnikov's play-making ability has been his largest improvement over his rookie season which is why he now has 50 points on the year. That line with Svechnikov, Aho, and Teravainen can be one of the most dangerous lines in the entire NHL but Brind'Amour has to stick with it. He has sheltered Svechnikov for most of his career so far but it is time to let the beast out of the cage and reap the rewards.

In The End



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This was a great comeback win for the Hurricanes in a must-win game. They have successfully flushed the St. Louis game and can look ahead to Vegas. The Golden Knights haven't played at home since January 11th and had a long five hour flight back home after defeating the Florida Panthers last night in Sunrise. The Hurricanes must jump on them early and they need every guy going once again.

The defense has to play at the level it did last night, and Brind'Amour has to go back to the goaltender that is currently winning. If they do that and stick with the dangerous top line of Aho, Teravainen, and Svechnikov this road trip could literally save their season.



Checkers crush Hartford 6-0 to begin home stand

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers kicked off their home stand in fine fashion by walloping the division-leading Wolf Pack 6-0.

The offense came early and often for the home side, which found itself off and running after a three-goal first. The blue line chipped in their fair share, as Oliwier Kaski and Gustav Forsling each lit the lamp and added three more assists amongst them. Four other forwards pitched in multi-point efforts as the Checkers peppered Hartford netminder Adam Huska with 38 shots on the night.

After a quick barrage of pressure early, the Wolf Pack were stifled for much of the night and registered just 17 shots on net. Alex Nedeljkovic was up to the task on all of them, however, recording his fourth shutout of the season to move into a tie for second in the AHL.

QUOTES

Coach Ryan Warsofsky on the game

That was really good. One of our best of the year, for sure. Everyone was going. Ned made some big saves when it was 1-0 and even 2-0, and he just kept us in the hockey game. You could tell he was laser-focused from the start. It was good.

Warsofsky on getting the shutout

We worked on our d-zone coverage a lot this week. Guys were probably sick of it, but it needed to get better. We made a little tweak and adjustment with it systematically, but it was more of a buy-in factor. We did a lot of work on it this week and it paid off. We were really good. Second and third period in our d-zone - really good.

Warsofsky on not letting Hartford back in the game

I think the biggest thing, and we talked it after the second period, was just focusing on us. Let's not worry about what they're going to do. Let's focus on us and what we're going to do. That was a big key for us going into tonight. They're a good team, but so are we. When we play the right way, we're a really good team. I thought our guys did a really good job of not letting that stuff creep into their heads in the third period.

Warsofsky on how defensemen are getting involved offensively

Just get involved in the rush. We got Kaski in that trade, and one thing our scouts liked is that he can get up in the rush. Obviously he's got a great shot. I thought tonight was Priskie's best game of the year. Really good, really good.

Warsofsky on getting another win tomorrow

It's important. That's just the nature of the schedule that we have here in Charlotte is that teams come in for two and it's hard to sweep them. We've got a chance tomorrow to sweep them and make a really good dent in the standings.

Morgan Geekie on the game

It was big. We started well and I think we stuck to our game for 60 minutes. Things went our way and we ran with that and played our game for the whole thing.

Geekie on stepping up offensively

It's not just me. We've got guys like Sheppard coming in and playing forward for us, and it's guys like him that have that role and do the little thing that not everybody notices. It's guys like that that keep us together and keep us going strong.

NOTES

The Checkers have out-scored Hartford by a combined 19-4 margin in three home victories. They are now 3-2-0 against the division-leading Wolf Pack this season, with the home team winning each time ... Geekie extended his point streak to 12 games (9g, 7a), tying a franchise record set twice previously (Ryan Murphy, Greg McKegg) ... Nedeljkovic picked up the 14th shutout of his career. It was also his fourth of the season, tying him for second in the league ... Gauthier has five goals in his last six games and is now tied for fifth in the AHL with 23 on the season ... The Checkers have a power-play goal in 11 straight games in which they were awarded a power play. They are 15-for-40 (37.5 percent) during that time and now rank third in the league at 23.9 percent for the season ... Forsling has points in each of his last three games (1g, 3a) ... The Checkers' three shots allowed in the second period tied their fewest of the season ... Dave Gust's plus-4 rating tied the highest by a Checker this season ... Forwards Brian Gibbons, Colin Markison and Stelio Mattheos missed the game due to injury ... Forward Cedric Lacroix and defenseman Cavan Fitzgerald were healthy extras.



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<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/loaded-top-line-sparks-can-es-offense/c-314776662>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-carolina-hurricanes-vegas-golden-knights/c-314772474>

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SportScan

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

1175378 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes visit the Golden Knights after Aho's 2-goal game

Staff Writer

FEBRUARY 07, 2020 03:05 AM

BOTTOM LINE: Carolina visits the Vegas Golden Knights after Sebastian Aho scored two goals in the Hurricanes' 5-3 victory against the Coyotes.

The Golden Knights have gone 14-10-3 in home games. Vegas has surrendered 36 power-play goals, killing 79.7% of opponent chances.

The Hurricanes are 13-11-2 on the road. Carolina has converted on 21.3% of power-play opportunities, scoring 35 power-play goals.

In their last matchup on Jan. 31, Vegas won 4-3. Paul Stastny recorded a team-high 2 points for the Golden Knights.

TOP PERFORMERS: Chandler Stephenson leads the Golden Knights with a plus-16 in 27 games played this season. Mark Stone has scored four goals over the last 10 games for Vegas.

Aho leads the Hurricanes with 29 goals and has recorded 49 points. Andrei Svechnikov has scored four goals over the last 10 games for Carolina.

LAST 10 GAMES: Hurricanes: 5-4-1, averaging 2.4 goals, 4.3 assists, 3.9 penalties and 8.1 penalty minutes while allowing 2.5 goals per game with a .917 save percentage.

Golden Knights: 4-5-1, averaging three goals, 4.8 assists, three penalties and six penalty minutes while giving up 2.8 goals per game with a .892 save percentage.

INJURIES: Golden Knights: Cody Glass: day to day (lower body), William Karlsson: out (upper body).

Hurricanes: Jordan Martinook: day to day (upper body).

News Observer LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175497 Vegas Golden Knights

Golden Knights' new AHL team could be called Silver Knights

By Blake Apgar Las Vegas Review-Journal

A minor league hockey team coming to the Las Vegas Valley next season could be called the Silver Knights.

The Golden Knights announced Thursday that it would relocate San Antonio's American Hockey League team to Southern Nevada, but offered no details about the team's name.

That changed Friday afternoon when Knights majority owner Bill Foley confirmed his group submitted a trademark application to keep the Silver Knights name as an option for the team.

"It's right at the top of the list," Foley said.

The team is still working on finalizing the name, but Foley said it makes sense for the Silver Knights to co-exist with the Golden Knights. It would maintain what Foley, a graduate of West Point, considers the knights culture of protecting the unprotected.

"It's kind of a logical step," he said, adding that more news should be available within 30 days. The team currently is working on logos and color schemes.

Foley also confirmed the short-term plan for the AHL team to play at Orleans Arena. Despite reports that the parent club could build an arena for the minor league team in Henderson, he said no plan is finalized.

The AHL team will finish its season in San Antonio before relocating. The team then will be headquartered and will practice at the community ice arena being built in downtown Henderson.

As for the name, Silver Knights was one of the final three names Foley considered for his NHL franchise. Desert Knights also was considered.

A trail of public records discovered Friday connected the Silver Knights trademark application with the Golden Knights. Delaware-based company J. Jeans LLC submitted an application to the United States Patent and Trademark Office on Dec. 18 for the Silver Knights name.



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The filing says the entity would offer entertainment services, "namely, ice hockey exhibitions." The filing status shows the applicant has a real intention of using the name in the near future.

Records show J. Jeans LLC was formed by Marjorie Nemzura, whose LinkedIn profile lists her as vice president and assistant general counsel at Fidelity National Financial. Foley is chairman of the company's board of directors.

Foley said he also has considered team names based on local reptiles, as well as types of predatory birds.

"You know, hawks, falcons," he said.

Nevada Born

The Knights owner would not say if the team would be billed as from Nevada, Las Vegas or somewhere else.

"I can't say just yet," he said.

The Golden Knights' company, Black Knight Sports and Entertainment, has applied for multiple trademarks in recent months. Among them is "Nevada Born" for entertainment services, "namely, professional ice hockey exhibitions; providing a website featuring information in the field of professional ice hockey."

The Golden Knights have used "Vegas Born" as the team slogan and in Twitter hashtags.

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175498 Vegas Golden Knights

Peter DeBoer will win over Golden Knights fans by winning

By Ed Graney Las Vegas Review-Journal

February 7, 2020 - 5:22 PM

Peter DeBoer doesn't have a home in Las Vegas yet. He and his family are looking.

I assume they will eventually settle on one. Lots of inventory, this market.

But how cozy Golden Knights fans make him feel at T-Mobile Arena on Saturday and beyond is a different matter.

DeBoer has coached his share of games in T-Mobile, but he will stand behind the home bench for the first time when the Knights play the Carolina Hurricanes.

He was hired Jan. 16 to replace the fired Gerard Gallant, the Knights then at the front end of an eight-game road swing that would include the All-Star break and the team's midseason week off.

It certainly wasn't well-received news by a faithful and committed fan base, he who last coached rival San Jose being the one to replace a beloved figure throughout the community.

He who directed the Sharks to a seven-game playoff series win over Vegas last season suddenly in charge of all things Knights.

Well, that actually would be George McPhee, but you get the idea.

"(DeBoer) has been on the wrong side of things in Vegas too much," Knights forward Alex Tuch said. "I think he wants people to cheer for him, not against him. So I bet he's pretty excited about that.

"I think he sees potential in that building — how if we jump off to a good start, we can just swallow teams up."

Here's a thought: The more Vegas wins by a 7-2 count as it did Thursday at Florida — or at all — any lingering negative thoughts about DeBoer will quickly dissipate.

Because that's who fans are.

What was predictably lost in some being upset with the move: While the Knights fired a really good coach in Gallant, they hired a really good one in DeBoer. Had he not been their choice, you can be assured the guy fired by the Sharks in December would have landed another job in the offseason, if not before.

He coached New Jersey and San Jose to the Stanley Cup Final, but perhaps his most impressive trait is how he adapts to the rosters he inherits.

Vegas has its share of young talent, and in DeBoer you have a coach whose success in juniors was immeasurable. He won championships and medals, time and again working with and developing skill.

He knows how to get the most out of young players.

He also has been adept at mixing veterans into such an equation, and Vegas certainly has its share. Expectations also don't change under DeBoer, no matter your length of service. But he has excelled with star-type talent.

This part also could aid the Knights in their final 26 regular-season games: DeBoer arrived with no sense of loyalty to any player, only with the purpose of offering a lineup he believes can best compete each night.

He has no allegiances other than a desire to win.

Example: The Knights have scratched 37-year-old defenseman Deryk Engelland for three straight games in favor of 23-year-old Zach Whitecloud, whose resume now includes a grand total of four NHL games.

And the kid has responded by playing well, as have the Knights.

Just win, Peter

They are 4-2-1 under DeBoer and have outscored opponents 26-18. They are, but for a few lapses, playing far better on special teams than earlier this season. They're pretty good at an extremely critical time.

"It'll be nice to get to Vegas," DeBoer said. "It's seven in the row on the road (with him as coach). It's hard to believe. It has flown by, but I think we've played well. We've gotten better every day. We've gotten a chance to get to know each other, and you can feel a belief developing in what we're doing. We got to carry that over to our home rink, because there's a lot of work left to do.

"Whether I'm popular (with the fans) or not, it's the most electric building in the league that you walk into. I can't wait to get there."

He just needs to win, and yet if the Knights don't do so enough in these final 26 games, it's not like a coach hired in midseason after a controversial firing should receive much criticism.

Now, as for his bosses who made the move, that would be an entirely different story.

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175499 Vegas Golden Knights

Here's how the NHL concussion protocol works

By David Schoen Las Vegas Review-Journal



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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February 7, 2020 - 12:07 PM

The Golden Knights are tight-lipped when it comes to discussing injuries, especially suspected concussions.

But the club is required to follow the NHL/NHLPA Concussion Evaluation and Management Protocol, which details the procedures for concussion education, testing, identification, evaluation and management.

According to the protocol, players are required to be removed from games for concussion evaluation if any of the following visible signs occurs after a direct blow to the head or a blow to the body that causes acceleration/deceleration of the head:

- a) "Lying Motionless on the Ice;"
- b) "Motor Incoordination/Balance Problems:" A player staggers, struggles to get up or skate properly, appears to lose his balance, trips or falls, or stumbles while getting up, trying to get up, or skating;
- c) "Blank or Vacant Look;"
- d) "Slow to Get Up" or "Clutches his Head."

If a player reports feeling concussion symptoms, he also must be removed for evaluation.

Similar to the NFL, league spotters (in the arena and at a central league office) observe games and help clubs identify players exhibiting visible signs of a concussion after a direct or indirect blow to the head. A player is required to be removed and evaluated if a Central League Spotter determines that an evaluation is necessary.

For clubs that do not comply with the concussion protocol, a minimum fine of \$25,000 will be assessed. Subsequent violations in the same season will result in "substantially increased fine amounts."

Once a player is determined by the club physician to be free of concussion-related symptoms, the player must be cleared for on-ice activity by the club's consulting neuropsychologist.

A player may return to unrestricted play when:

- (1) "There is complete recovery of concussion-related symptoms at rest;"
- (2) "There is no emergence of concussion-related symptoms at exertion levels required for competitive play and a graded return-to-play progression has been completed;"
- (3) "The player has been judged by the club's physician to have returned to his neurological baseline and neurocognitive baseline following an evaluation by the club consulting neuropsychologist."

Club physicians are responsible for diagnosing a concussion and determining when a player may return.

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175500 Vegas Golden Knights

Peter DeBoer pulls off impressive balancing act with Golden Knights

By Ben Gotz Las Vegas Review-Journal

February 7, 2020 - 5:20 am

Peter DeBoer is proving to be an adept tightrope walker early in his Golden Knights' tenure.

The coach is achieving the delicate balance of implementing long-term changes while prioritizing short-term results. The Knights are starting to play a different brand of hockey, but more important for them, it's good hockey.

The team, which went 3-1 on a trip that ended Thursday and is 4-2-1 under DeBoer, returns to T-Mobile Arena to face the Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday in its first home game since Jan. 11.

"You guys can see how fast and intense we're playing," left wing Max Pacioretty said. "Especially in our own end. It leads to a lot of great offense but also a lot less time spent in our own end. It's very important for winning hockey games, especially as the games get tighter and the season goes on. That's how you got to play in the playoffs to have success."

Tough spot to start

DeBoer wasn't put in an easy position when he took the Knights' job. The team was 24-19-6, fifth in the Pacific Division and clearly underachieving.

The coaching change signaled the Knights still believed in their group, but time was of the essence. There were 33 games left in the season, and the team needed to make changes quickly.

They have, and the transition has been smooth. DeBoer has made tweaks. The penalty kill is different. Breakouts have been altered. Defensive zone assignments have been adjusted.

Despite all that, the Knights rarely have shown growing pains under their new coach. They've altered aspects of their game without looking hesitant or unsure on the ice.

"Every game there's going to be mistakes, but every game you're going to minimize those mistakes the more you're used to doing certain things," center Paul Stastny said. "It seems like the last couple games we've been playing a good team game, a good 60 minutes, kind of all three zones, special teams, and now it's about putting it together."

The Knights appear well on their way.

They capped their trip with a season-high seven goals in a 7-2 rout of the Florida Panthers. The trip was a big test for DeBoer's modifications. The Knights played the Hurricanes, Nashville Predators, Tampa Bay Lightning and Panthers — teams with a combined .609 points percentage.

Against those four playoff hopefuls, the team had a 16-9 edge in goals and 90-49 advantage in scoring chances.

Home after eight games

Now they get to show off that improvement to their fans. When the Knights left for eight consecutive road games, they were downtrodden. They're soaring upon their return and are two points behind the Vancouver Canucks for first place in the Pacific Division.

It took an impressive balancing act to pull that off. DeBoer was up to the task.

"I'm a big believer that if we're playing the right way, then the points in the standings and the playoff spots will take care of themselves," DeBoer said Wednesday. "I know the clock's ticking, and the games are winding down, but we got enough time that if our game's in the right place, which it has been the last three nights, then I'm comfortable that'll take care of itself."

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175395 Dallas Stars



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Stars strike first, but can't hold on as goalie Ben Bishop struggles vs. Wild

While Joe Pavelski and Denis Gurianov continued their hot goal streaks, it wasn't enough.

Chuck Carlton

12:03 AM on Feb 8, 2020

Maybe first goals are overrated.

After eight games without striking first, the Stars broke through in the first period Friday against Minnesota. Then they watched a two-goal lead disappear in a 3-2 loss at American Airlines Center.

Joel Eriksson Ek scored a wraparound goal with 26.7 seconds remaining in regulation. Stars goalie Ben Bishop uncharacteristically struggled, allowing three iffy goals on 30 shots.

Earlier in the third period, Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk had denied Radek Faksa from the slot during a Stars power play.

"They got a couple of lucky goals," Stars forward Denis Gurianov said about losing the two-goal lead. "Just looking forward and getting ready for tomorrow."

The Stars (30-19-5) had hoped to move past idle Colorado in the Central and close to within five points of division leading St. Louis, who they face Saturday.

Nope and nope.

While Joe Pavelski and Gurianov continued their hot goal streaks, it wasn't enough.

The Stars failed to capitalize on home ice during a stretch that will see them play seven of nine games on the road.

The Stars did get the rarity of rarities this season — an opening goal on a first-period power play.

With Jared Sturgeon off for hooking, the Stars capitalized. A Tyler Seguin shot caromed off a Wild skate and directly to Pavelski, who had an easy chance directly in front.

After scoring just one goal in January, Pavelski has four goals in his last four games, giving him 12 goals this season.

Thanks to four power plays, the Stars carved out a 16-12 shot advantage, including 10 of the final 11 in the period. The lead could have been bigger. Early in the first period, Dubnyk denied Jamie Benn on a point-blank rebound.

The last time the Stars had led after one period was Jan. 9 in Anaheim en route to a 3-0 win.

"We had a great start," Stars coach Rick Bowness said. "We worked very hard. We had some real good looks we didn't score on. ... We didn't put the puck in the net at the right times. Give their goalie credit."

"I thought our first two periods were pretty good. They were better in the third," center Andrew Cogliano said. "Those are tough points to give up at this time. ..."

"That one, not good. That's just the bottom line. Not good enough. You got to win that game or get to overtime."

The Stars made it 2-0 in the second period on Gurianov's goal just after a Wild penalty expired. His one-timer beat Dubnyk high on the glove side. For Gurianov, it was his fourth goal in six games and gives him 15 for the season, tied for the team lead with Roope Hintz.

Minnesota tied the score later in the second period. Eriksson Ek, who entered the game with just four goals, scored in close, and then a Ryan Donato wrist shot beat Bishop on the short side.

Stars forward Alexander Radulov was not on the bench the third period after suffering what the team said was an "upper body injury" when he collided with Gurianov in the second period.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175396 Dallas Stars

Multiple healthy defensemen are a luxury for the Stars, but managing them poses a challenge for Rick Bowness

'It's a tough situation but a lot of team would love to have this situation,' Bowness said.

Chuck Carlton

9:12 PM on Feb 7, 2020

Having eight healthy NHL caliber defensemen on the roster can be a luxury this time of year, Stars interim coach Rick Bowness understands.

It also poses a significant coaching challenge with deciding who plays and who doesn't while avoiding any grumbling.

So far, Bowness has been managing through a compact February schedule that includes 15 games in 29 days. The Stars were facing another back-to-back this weekend, traveling to St. Louis on Saturday after Friday's home game against the Minnesota Wild.

"We're fortunate," Bowness said at Friday's morning skate. "It's a tough situation, but a lot of team would love to have this situation."

Friday's healthy scratches were Andrej Sekera and Tyler Fedun.

Stephen Johns, who missed a year and a half with post-traumatic headaches, was back in the lineup after sitting out Tuesday's overtime loss to the New York Islanders — part of the plan to bring him along carefully.

"With Stephen you take it one game at a time and we see how he's doing. It's as simple as that," Bowness said. "Again, we're rushing him. A year and a half off, it's tough. We can't throw too much at him too quickly. We have to help him feel his way through it, and that's what he's doing."

Fedun hasn't played since Jan. 11 against San Jose, although Bowness would like to get him game action soon.

"He's handled a very tough situation very well so we give him full marks for that," Bowness said. "He's anxious to play. The longer you go without playing, it becomes a concern, no doubt about that."

As an assistant, Bowness has handled the defense throughout his coaching career. While that experience has given him some insight into managing the current situation, he acknowledged that everybody on the roster wants to play.

Sitting out is not fun for anyone.

"I think any coach tells you you're not playing, it's hard to sugarcoat that one. ... You have to look them in the eye," Bowness said. "You've got to deal with it."

Maximizing home games: Friday's game at American Airlines Center was part of a stretch that will see the Stars play seven of their first nine games this month on the road.



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Bowness has emphasized the importance of taking care of home ice with his players.

"You'd rather take full advantage of your home games while you can," Bowness said. "Home ice is very, very important in a month like today because there's just not very many home games."

Ready to lead: Forward Blake Comeau is now wearing an "A" as an alternate captain, a decision that Bowness made during the Stars recent three-game road trip.

"For me to be added to the rotation, it's a great honor, but it's not going to change who I am or how I play," Comeau told reporters Thursday after practice. "We have a great locker room and I think there are several players who lead whether they have a one [a letter] or not."

Hitting 1,000 games: Minnesota forward Zach Parise played in his 1,000th game Friday. His late father, J.P., played for the Minnesota North Stars from 1967-74. Stars legend Mike Modano sent congratulations via Twitter.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175397 Dallas Stars

Stars 20/20: Goaltending proves the difference — but not to the Stars' benefit this time

Sean Shapiro

Feb 7, 2020

DALLAS — The Dallas Stars returned home and dropped a 3-2 decision to the Minnesota Wild on Friday.

1. Goaltending was the difference — and not in the typical way for the Stars.

Devan Dubnyk was the best player on the ice and made timely, important saves for the Wild.

Ben Bishop slumped at the worst moments, allowing three bad goals from bad angles and effectively canceling all the fine work he did on the other 27 shots he stopped.

2. The most frustrating thing for the Stars, that none would acknowledge publicly, is they were the better team for most of the game.

They should have won. They know that, and they also know not to publicly bury one of the team MVPs who had an off night.

3. Before the winning goal, both teams seemed content with letting the clock run out and engaged in a rugby scrum behind the Stars net.

The puck went up against the boards with 57.2 seconds remaining, and it didn't get moved until 36.6 seconds remained. That 21-second stretch could have been enough inactivity for the officials to blow the play dead. They didn't, and Minnesota capitalized on the scenario.

Tyler Seguin's stick broke while he battled with Joel Eriksson Ek, putting the Stars short, and when Jonas Brodin had a point shot that went wide, Bishop got caught with all of his weight near the right post, as seen here.

Bishop was too compromised to recover, and Eriksen Ek was able to stuff in the wraparound before the goalie could get his left pad over to the post.

4. Eriksen Ek scored Minnesota's first goal in a similar fashion.

It was another play where Bishop got overloaded on one post, this time with all of his weight on the left post, as seen here.

Attempting to get an early recovery in case Eriksen Ek circled the net, as he would later in the game, Bishop opened up too early and created a backboard for the Wild forward to score off of.

The other Minnesota goal, the one that tied the score at 2-2, was a harmless-looking turnaround shot from Ryan Donato. Bishop should have easily sealed the post, but he left open a tiny gap and didn't get a full lean into the iron with his left hip.

RYAN DONATO 2-2 PIC.TWITTER.COM/6OYNBQCN1B

— HERE'S YOUR REPLAY (@HERESYOURREPLAY)
FEBRUARY 8, 2020

That's the cruelty of the position. Three minor moments and minor details turned what might have been a shutout into a loss for the Stars.

5. Those who have followed the Stars for a while remember when goaltending issues were common.

So on a positive note, it's not often that we've had a reason to pick apart the work of either goalie in the past two seasons.

6. The Stars scored first. That's remarkable.

Dallas hadn't scored the first goal in eight consecutive games, and of their 54 games this season, they've trailed 1-0 in 30. When the Stars do score first, they typically win. Friday, though, they dropped to 18-4-2 in games where they've taken a 1-0 lead.

It was also just the 16th time this season the Stars have led after the first period; they are now 13-2-1 when that happens.

And it was No. 16 who gave the Stars the 1-0 lead before the intermission, with Joe Pavelski scoring on the power play on a rebound from a Seguin shot.

It was Pavelski's fourth goal in the past four games and the third consecutive game where he's had a point in conjunction with John Klingberg.

As I wrote Friday morning, the Klingberg-Pavelski connection is finally starting to materialize.

7. There was a time this season when Denis Gurianov was a healthy scratch and was sent to the AHL because he had lost his confidence.

Now he's tied with Alexander Radulov and Roope Hintz for the team lead in goals, with 15.

This goal, which came right after a power play expired, was another rocket of a one-timer by the Russian.

Miro Heiskanen did the difficult work to protect the puck and escape a Wild defender before teeing up Gurianov for the blast.

DENIS GURIANOV PP 2-0 #GOSTARS
PIC.TWITTER.COM/ZGP5MPBLXW

— HERE'S YOUR REPLAY (@HERESYOURREPLAY)
FEBRUARY 8, 2020

Gurianov has been trusting his shot more, and so have the Stars. It's created a frequent power-play weapon they've lacked all season while other big-name scorers have gone cold.

8. We mentioned Dubnyk earlier, and we'd be remiss if we didn't bring up some of his stops before the Wild scored the clinching goal in the final minute.



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With 4:28 remaining, his lateral save right to left on Radek Faksa was the highlight of the evening. Even later in the game, he thwarted a rush by Hintz, also showing strength to not get shoved into the net when the Finn blew by the defense.

9. Radulov left in the second period after colliding with Gurianov and didn't return.

#GOSTARS DENIS GURIANOV WITH A SOLID OPEN ICE HIT ON HIS TEAMMATE ALEXANDER RADULOV
PIC.TWITTER.COM/EPVE9GKKVZ

— HERE'S YOUR REPLAY [1](#) (@HERESYOURREPLAY)
FEBRUARY 8, 2020

After the game, Stars interim head coach Rick Bowness said he didn't have an update and said only "upper body" when talking about Radulov. He also said he didn't know if Radulov would be on the trip to St. Louis for the second game of the back-to-back set with the Blues.

10. Seguin has reached 15 consecutive games without a goal. It was already a career-long goal drought, and you can start to see some of the frustration creeping into his overall game.

11. The Stars power play was officially 1-for-6, but it should be classified as 2-for-6 since the windup of Gurianov's goal came while Minnesota was still short-handed.

In total, the Stars had 11 shots on the power play. The Stars penalty kill was a perfect 2-for-2 and limited Minnesota to four shots.

12. The defensive shuffle continued for the Stars as Stephen Johns returned to the lineup after sitting out Tuesday against the New York Islanders.

Andrej Sekera came out of the lineup while Roman Polak stayed in as the Stars continue to shuffle that trio of players in and out.

Taylor Fedun was scratched for the ninth consecutive game. Bowness indicated at the morning skate that the Stars need to get Fedun into a game soon, but there's yet to be action on that statement.

The Stars forward group remained unchanged from the previous game, with Joel Kiviranta serving as the healthy scratch for the third game in a row. If Radulov isn't going to St. Louis, Kiviranta could play Saturday.

13. The Stars rolled out this lineup:

Jamie Benn – Roope Hintz – Tyler Seguin

Mattias Janmark – Joe Pavelski – Alexander Radulov

Andrew Cogliano – Radek Faksa – Blake Comeau

Denis Gurianov – Jason Dickinson – Corey Perry

Esa Lindell – John Klingberg

Miro Heiskanen – Stephen Johns

Jamie Oleksiak – Roman Polak

The Wild countered like this:

Zach Parise – Eric Staal – Mats Zuccarello

Jason Zucker – Luke Kunin – Kevin Fiala

Marcus Foligno – Joel Eriksson Ek – Jordan Greenway

Ryan Donato – Mikko Koivu – Ryan Hartman

Ryan Suter – Jared Spurgeon

Jonas Brodin – Matt Dumba

Brad Hunt – Greg Pateryn

14. Zach Parise played his 1,000th NHL game and was honored by the Stars crowd when he was shown on the screen during the first period. Parise's father, J.P., is a former North Star, so there is a bit of a fitting connection to the locale of Zach's 1,000th game.

He's actually the second Wild player to play his 1,000th game against the Stars. Back on Dec. 1, Minnesota captain Mikko Koivu played in his 1,000th game against the Stars and scored the shootout winner in St. Paul.

15. Johns quietly had a strong game. He doesn't kill penalties or play on the power play, so his role is still minimal, but it was another nice building block after that game in New York on Monday.

16. Polak and Oleksiak are a pairing with flaws, as neither player is adept at moving the puck out of the defensive zone.

Oleksiak has the skill to be a puck mover but is used to deferring to his partner, while Polak's ability to move the puck out of the zone is limited. While that duo did have 11 hits — the same number as the entire Minnesota team combined — the lack of the ability to skate out of trouble was noticeable.

17. Disclaimer: You shouldn't read too much into scout lists.

But since people like to know these things, there were scouts from Seattle, the Detroit Red Wings, the Nashville Predators, the Los Angeles Kings, the Anaheim Ducks, the Buffalo Sabres and the New York Rangers in attendance.

There were two scouts from Detroit, which was interesting.

18. Speaking of the trade deadline, I asked Stars general manager Jim Nill before the game about the Stars and the upcoming deadline.

"We're talking to teams, but it's been quiet," Nill said. "There are so many teams in it, it's quiet. There is talk, but nothing more right now. It could change in the next two weeks."

As to whether the Stars will be a buyer at the deadline, Nill said the market will determine that when it comes to cost.

19. I also asked Nill about the AHL shakeup that came down Thursday when the San Antonio Rampage were purchased by the Vegas Golden Knights with plans of moving the team to Nevada.

"I was surprised," Nill said. "We knew Vegas was looking at teams, and I didn't know it was San Antonio. Good for (the Golden Knights) San Antonio was owned by the Spurs basketball team, they are in the basketball business, and I don't know what the exact reason was, but they saw a chance to sell."

San Antonio is Texas' closest rival and the AHL team's only bus trip on the schedule. The teams also play 14 times a season between the regular season and the preseason, so a significant chunk of the schedule will change. It's even more jarring when you think about this: In the past decade, Texas has lost three regional rivals in the Houston Aeros, the Oklahoma City Barons and the Rampage.

"We lose six to seven road games, so there is an impact there," Nill said. "But other than that, it'll just be one or two trips somewhere else."

With Texas being an island in the league now, have the Stars gotten any answers about how things might shape up for Texas' schedule next season?

"Really haven't talked to the league yet, (first) this has to be approved by the board of governors," Nill said. "Is there going to be a major realignment? We are going to have to see."

20. For the Stars, this game has to get thrown out quickly. They had to be at Love Field at 11:05 p.m. for a flight to St. Louis, where they'll face the division-leading Blues.



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The Stars and Blues play three times this month. If the Stars are going to have any chance of catching the Central Division leaders, positive results in those matchups will be crucial.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175398 Dallas Stars

Have Joe Pavelski and John Klingberg hit the tip of the iceberg for power-play chemistry?

Sean Shapiro

Feb 7, 2020

Joe Pavelski's signing was supposed to be a tipping point for the Dallas Stars, both figuratively and literally.

Long known as one of the NHL's best net-front presences thanks to his ability to tip pucks better than just about anyone else, Pavelski was expected to be a finisher – particularly on the power play – who would create a dynamic tandem with John Klingberg, a player with an extremely tippable shot who's quite adept at floating pucks through traffic.

It was supposed to be an instant fit for an offense that needed a spark, and it was a connection that both Klingberg and Pavelski mentioned in the preseason as something that could be a key, frequent weapon.

It hasn't worked out that way.

Pavelski's first season in Dallas has netted just 11 goals and 23 points. He's likely going to have a career-low for points in a full 82-game season. Klingberg, meanwhile, has just 22 points, and barring an unforeseen hot streak at the end of the season, he'll end up with fewer than 40 points for the first time in his career.

It looks even worse when you examine their potential connection that went awry.

Pavelski and Klingberg didn't combine for a single point in the Stars' first 51 games. That finally changed this week in New York when Pavelski picked up his first goal on an assist from Klingberg against the Rangers. One night later, the roles were reversed against the Islanders.

The hope for the Stars is those moments are a sign of things to come. While it's rather unlikely either player will escape a career-low stat ledger, there is enough time in the final 29 games and the playoffs for Klingberg and Pavelski to make an impact.

So what went wrong, and what could be fixed to turn the trip to New York into foreshadowing as opposed to an aberration?

For starters, Klingberg isn't Brent Burns.

Leaving the San Jose Sharks after 13 seasons didn't just mean leaving a place Pavelski had called home. It also meant losing a connection with a defenseman who played a crucial role in his offensive production over the past six seasons. Of Pavelski's 38 goals last season, 23 of them came off an assist from Burns, while Pavelski also helped on three of Burns' goals.

In his final six seasons in San Jose, Pavelski scored 205 goals. 70 of them were assisted on by Burns.

Pavelski and Burns would often spend extended time before practice working together on tips and shots from the point. The two knew where and when the other would be, particularly on the power play,

and it was one of the reasons San Jose was so dangerous with the man advantage.

Pavelski still puts in that time in Dallas: If you show up to practice in Frisco, he's often working on finishing and shooting drills before others get on the ice. But he is rarely joined by Klingberg in these exercises. On Thursday, for example, Andrej Sekera was shooting pucks for Pavelski to tip before practice.

Even if they were working together before every practice, though, it would be hard to replicate six seasons of chemistry in less than six months in Dallas, especially when Klingberg has missed time with injury this season.

The other major issue for Pavelski is that he isn't getting to the front of the net often enough on the power play, which is where he scored a dozen times last season.

Here is Pavelski's power-play spray chart from his final season in San Jose.

Here it is this season with Dallas.

This is a two-pronged issue. First, the Stars' power-play entries have been sub-optimal this season, so having possession where Pavelski can get established in front of the net has been more limited. Instead, there have been many power plays when Pavelski is forced to cycle out and help create a bit more simply for the Stars to maintain possession.

The other issue is that when the Stars have possession, they haven't been shooting enough. I'm often not a member of the "shooottt!!!" lobby, but in this case, the Stars need their player at the point to think simpler.

When we look back at San Jose, for example, Burns has taken at least 300 shots in the past four seasons. Klingberg, on the other hand, is much more selective with his shot and has never taken more than 204 in a season.

Recently, though, Klingberg has been shooting more. It has led to both Pavelski's goal against the Rangers and Klingberg's own against the Islanders. It's something the Stars coaches have spoken with Klingberg about, and the defenseman said he's intentionally played a simpler game lately. He's shooting and not overthinking in a way that might force the more difficult play.

Klingberg has 10 combined shots in his past four games. He only had 11 over his prior nine games.

"More poise with the puck," said Stars interim head coach Rick Bowness. "He's got a good quick shot; he's got to use it more. Saw the benefit of the other night. Sometimes, as you know, he hangs onto it one or two seconds too long, and in this league you lose that lane ... just more of a shooting mentality."

Once Klingberg started shooting more, it became easier for Pavelski to actually tip pucks, something he's only done twice this season for goals. They've also had more conversations about what each is trying to do, and there seems to be a bit of a two-man game that started to develop in New York.

"It still has a little ways to go from where we were (with Burns)," Pavelski said. "But overall, (our) game has gotten better. I've found myself in better spots and made some good plays along the way. And it's nice when you get a stick on a puck and it goes in because there is definitely a little chance there, and so overall I think it's trending in the right direction ... He's read some better spots, and we are seeing him getting more chances. So as a forward, all you can ask for is a chance to get that tip at the net."

"John is looking for him," Bowness added. "Pavs is very good at getting the opening and getting his stick; he's used to playing with Burns and (Erik) Karlsson back there, and he knows how to get his stick in an open lane. And John is looking for it. As a penalty killer, those are tough to defend. When you are looking for sticks and you



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hit him and there is a deflection, all bets are off. You don't know where it's going, and the scramble is on."

It's a weapon the Stars were supposed to have since the summer, and now they've finally shown it. Now it needs to be the tipping point for a stronger power play.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.08.2020

1175430 New Jersey Devils

Ice hockey: N.J. Devils announce Players of the Month for January

Feb 07, 2020

Andrew Koob

The New Jersey Devils High School Player of the Month program continues this season for the 28th year, and the second of three monthly picks for the 2019-2020 season have been announced.

Each month of the season from December through February, eight players from around the state are picked for Player of the Month honors. The winners are based on nominations from the media from around the state, and the chosen recipients receive tickets to a Devils game, a plaque presented by a Devils player, as well as dinner which is compliments of the team.

Here are the picks for January:

Gordon Conference: Kyle Contessa, Christian Brothers

Big North Conference: Justin Hughes, St. Joseph (Mont.)

Colonial Valley Conference: Aidan and Colm Trainor, Princeton

Essex/Union: Chris Kostas, Verona-Glen Ridge

Morris County: Connor McDonough, Mendham

GMC/Skyland: Gleb Veremyev, Monroe

Shore Conference: Dan McEvoy, Howell-Matawan

Girls: Noelle Turek, Trinity Hall

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1175431 New Jersey Devils

NHL trade rumors: Canucks targeting Devils' Wayne Simmonds?

Feb 07, 2020

Chris Ryan

Forward Wayne Simmonds is one of the Devils' pending free agents who will be at the center of trade rumors leading up to the Feb. 24 NHL trade deadline, and at least one team has interest.

According to Pierre LeBrun of The Athletic, the Vancouver Canucks could be targeting the veteran winger in a deadline deal as they continue to make a push for the postseason in the Western Conference.

Per LeBrun, the Canucks' desire to make a deal could come down to the health of forward Micheal Ferland. Ferland, like Simmonds, is a big, physical winger capable of chipping in some offense. Ferland is expected to return to the Canucks' lineup soon, but injuries have limited him to 14 games this season.

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So if there's a setback in Ferland's return, Simmonds would serve as a logical replacement. But according to LeBrun, the Devils aren't committed to dealing Simmonds in the coming weeks:

"It should be noted, interim Devils GM Tom Fitzgerald hasn't totally committed to trading Simmonds, a pending UFA. As one source described it Thursday, that's still a decision that is in limbo. Simmonds is so respected in the Devils dressing room and his leadership impact so real that it's not out of the question New Jersey wants to keep him around."

Simmonds was traded at last season's deadline, going from the Flyers to the Nashville Predators for a fourth-round pick. He signed with the Devils as a free agent during the summer, though LeBrun said the Canucks expressed interest in Simmonds back on July 1.

There isn't a clear market for Simmonds yet, but LeBrun also speculated on one other possible destination:

"Another team that I think would entertain the idea of maybe reaching out to New Jersey on Simmonds is Pittsburgh. They could face a gritty, first-round series with the Blue Jackets or the Islanders and if they can get through them, perhaps a dazzling second-round matchup with a skilled and physically imposing Capitals squad. The idea of being able to keep Tom Wilson a little more honest in a playoff series with Simmonds in your lineup isn't the dumbest thing in the world if you're Pittsburgh."

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1175432 New Jersey Devils

3 observations from Devils' shutout over Flyers: Mackenzie Blackwood nearly tied a Martin Brodeur record

Feb 07, 2020

Chris Ryan

PHILADELPHIA -- A highly efficient night from the offense and a 46-save shutout from Mackenzie Blackwood powered the Devils to a 5-0 win over the Flyers on Thursday at Wells Fargo Center, giving them their most lopsided victory of the season.

With the win, the Devils now have a season-high five-game point streak coming out of the bye week and the NHL All-Star break, going 2-0-3 in that stretch.

Here are three observations from the game, including Blackwood's historic outing and a textbook night from the penalty kill.

Any time your name is in the same sentence as Martin Brodeur, you're probably doing something right.

Blackwood's 46 saves ranked as the second-highest ever by a Devils goalie in a shutout, trailing only the 51 saves made by the Hall-of-Fame goaltender in a game on Jan. 12, 2010.



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Blackwood was busy all night, and the barrage increased while the game progressed as the Flyers attempted to spark any sort of comeback attempt.

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But for the most part, Blackwood never felt overwhelmed. The Flyers' 74 shot attempts were the fourth-highest total the Devils allowed in a single game this season, yet 14 other games saw opponents rack up more scoring chances than the 33 generated by the Flyers on Thursday.

"There's a big difference in every shot that you can face in the NHL. A shot can be from the red line or it can be from the slot. So number saves isn't necessarily always the, the end all and be all," Blackwood said. "I think quality of shots, odd-man rushes, chances like that, that's more of the thing that lends itself to scoring a lot of goals. We didn't have that many shots tonight per se, but we had quality and when we did, we buried on them. So I don't think they had tons and tons down the slot. I think that was a testament to our team playing a solid defensive game and pushing stuff to the outside."

The Flyers made their most dangerous push toward the end of the second period, where they hemmed the Devils in their own zone for a significant stretch during a 2-0 game.

The Devils escaped that period with the lead intact before pouring on three more goals to pull away in the third period.

"What I really liked, we didn't give up an easy offense. There was no odd-man rushes. We kept a lot of the stuff to the outside," Devils interim coach Alain Nasreddine said. "The one area, they got a lot of tips either around our net or high in the slot, which are tough to defend at times, but Blacky was there to make those big saves, but I like our compete down low. We were aggressive on our puck battles, bringing numbers, and it was a complete team effort. Guys are taking pride now in our defensive game."

Blackwood also picked up his first career point in the game, tallying the primary assist on Damon Severson's second-period power-play goal. The goalie didn't have to do much to earn, dropping a pass behind the net before Severson skated the length of the ice and snapped a shot into net from the right circle.

"I'll get credit with an assist, but that was all his play," Blackwood laughed.

The penalty kill made the difference

Each time the Flyers went on a power play, it seemed to turn into an advantage for the Devils.

The penalty kill set the tone on its first shift late in the first period when they created three dangerous scoring chances while allowing zero shot attempts, and Pavel Zacha eventually cashed in on a shorthanded goal during the third period to open the three-goal final frame.

"Last game we go the other way. (The Canadiens) get a shorty and they get life and they build on it," forward Blake Coleman said. "For us, we had chances all night. I think we had four opportunities on the first PK that could have had a couple early, and then obviously Pav took advantage there. That's the kind of killers we've been the last few months. We've been pretty dangerous and shorthanded goals are big-time momentum shifter for a game. Obviously they're pressing, they're pushing at 2-0 nothing and that's a big one for us."

The Devils now have nine shorthanded goals this season, which is tied for second most in the NHL. Only the Ottawa Senators have more this season with 12.

Blake Coleman hits 20-goal mark for second straight season

Coleman is continuing to show his current contract is one of the best values in hockey.

After signing a three-year deal that carried a \$1.8 million AAV prior to the 2018-19 season, Coleman now has two straight 20-goal seasons after netting the opening goal 13 seconds into Thursday's game.

On a night where the Devils had just 32 shot attempts total, Coleman still produced his usual output. He led the team with seven attempts and four shots.

Speaking of those total shot attempts, 32 was the lowest total for a single game for the Devils this season by a significant margin — they finished with 38 on two different occasions prior to Thursday.

They also nearly finished the third period with a shooting percentage of 100. Their first three shots went in, with Zacha and Wood providing the scoring. Jack Hughes had a tight shot saved in the closing minute, leaving them with a 75 shooting percentage for the final frame.

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1175433 New Jersey Devils

Why Devils' Miles Wood believes he has a lot more scoring to give | 'I absolutely know I can do more'

Feb 07, 2020

Chris Ryan

PHILADELPHIA -- Miles Wood gave the Devils exactly what they needed during the 2017-18 season. His 19 goals playing in a bottom-six role provided crucial depth scoring for a team that eventually reached the postseason.

In his two seasons since then, the speedy forward is still trying to get back to that level of production.

He's shown that capability this week, scoring two goals during Thursday's 5-0 win over the Flyers after netting one on Tuesday in a loss to the Montreal Canadiens, giving him 10 goals on the season. Thursday was his first two-goal game since Dec. 18, 2017, and he now has 20 goals total over the past two seasons.

"I absolutely know I can do more than that," Wood told NJ Advance Media on Wednesday. "I've gone through some pains here and there on trying to score, trying to get back to that 20-goal mark. That's my goal each year, to try to hit that mark, and I feel like with the chances that I get, I should be there very consistently."

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Of Wood's 19 goals in 2017-18, 16 came at even strength. He has gotten some power-play time over the course of his career, including recently this season, but the majority of his damage has been done at 5-on-5 — all 10 of his goals this season are in that game state.

Wood's ability to generate shots hasn't changed much at any point over the last three seasons. He averaged 10.99 shots per 60 minutes at 5-on-5 in 2017-18, and that number jumped to 11.33 last season before settling at 10.09 this season.

"Certainly at times it's been frustrating. I do get a lot of grade-A chances, but that next step for me is just trying to score as many as possible," Wood said. "But as of late it just hasn't been that way. But



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I just keep trying to get those grade-A chances and good things will happen.”

A bulk of those scoring chances have always been generated from Wood’s speed. His ability to fly down the ice and beat defenders to scoring areas has allowed him to consistently rack up scoring chances. It was on display on Thursday, setting up a breakaway on one goal before using a quick deke and a burst to beat two defenders.

But even with that raw speed, other teams have been able to make it a little bit tougher on Wood to get clean breakaways.

“He’s known around the league now. I remember his first year, he’d get one or two breakaways in a game because teams didn’t know him,” Devils interim coach Alain Nasreddine said. “So now they’re aware of them. He still manages to create offense with his speed. But for him, there’s one area where he’s got to go: it’s to the net front. It’s one thing to use his speed wide, but then when we’re in the offensive zone, it’s finding guys that can complement him, but he’s been doing a good job going to the net front.”

Wood’s net-front play factored into his move to the power play. Nasreddine plugged him right into that spot to help create some havoc at the net while being able to motor to retrieve loose pucks in the corner.

When Wood gets away from his game, it’s because he’s not getting to the net enough, both with and without the puck. That’s the one point Nasreddine and the coaching staff continue to emphasize.

“That’s what we expect from him. Sometimes when Miles gets in trouble, he’s tries to do too much with the puck,” Nasreddine said. “His game should be pretty simple. Get behind the D and get it back, and usually he gets it back first.”

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1175434 New Jersey Devils

Trending up and down: Evaluating how the Devils forwards have fared since the coaching change

Corey Masisak

Feb 7, 2020

The Devils have reached the point in the 2019-20 season where they have played as many games for interim coach Alain Nasreddine as they did for John Hynes, who was fired Dec. 3 after four-plus years in charge.

It’s a good time to take stock of the team and the players, with two sets of data to compare. We started with the defensemen and goaltenders in Part I and will focus on the forwards in Part II.

Here’s the snapshot of how the team has performed for Hynes and for Nasreddine:

CF% – Corsi For percentage; SCF% – Scoring Chances for percentage; xGF% – Expected Goals For percentage; GF% – Goals For percentage; PDO – on-ice shooting percentage + on-ice save percentage

All of the data is from Natural Stat Trick and NHL.com. It does not include the game Thursday night at Wells Fargo Center against the Flyers.

Trending up

Travis Zajac

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	26 44.81	26 47.97	16:21 45.16	3	9	46.87
Alain Nasreddine	26 47.18	26 50.31	18:07 35.14	3	10	50.82

Blake Coleman

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	26 46.22	26 49.14	15:26 53.13	9	14	46.51
Alain Nasreddine	26 49.42	26 51.62	18:14 36.84	10	15	52.45

Nikita Gusev

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	23 45.05	23 43.85	13:19 48.0	5	12	44.3
Alain Nasreddine	26 50.78	26 51.14	15:24 39.47	4	19	54.19

Let’s group Zajac, Coleman and Gusev together because they have played every game of Nasreddine’s tenure as a line. Hynes put them together, and they became a constant in an otherwise oft-shuffled lineup. Coleman and Zajac have played well together for three seasons now, but putting Gusev with them helped the talented Russian find his way in his first NHL season.

Coleman had a breakout offensive season last year, and is on pace for 30 goals after scoring his 20th on Thursday night in Philadelphia. He was playing well for Hynes, but has found another level since the coaching change. Here are the NHL leaders in shots on goal since the Devils changed coaches, through Wednesday night:

Coleman had 50 shots on goal in the first 26 games, but has morphed into a shooting machine. Gusev went from having some of the worst underlying numbers in the league to being a plus-possession player next to Zajac and Coleman.

The offense has been a boon, and this has been the club’s top line many nights based on production or ice time. It’s not all great, though. The line’s goals against number has ballooned.

Gusev’s on-ice goals against per 60 minutes (4.33) since the coaching change is worse than any forward from the 2018-19 season who played at least 200 minutes at 5-on-5. Zajac and Coleman are the team’s top defensive forwards, but they’ve been on the ice for 24 goals against at 5v5 in 26 games.

The on-ice save percentage for each player is between .857 and .872 since the change. All of this feels out of the ordinary, and the Devils need to figure out if it’s a result of bad goaltending luck or if it’s time to try something else. Fans have been campaigning for Gusev to play with other teammates, but it’s also possible that his defensive issues are driving the high goals against in concert with goaltending misfortune.

If the high goals against totals continue, it might be a good excuse to try Gusev with Nico Hischier or Jack Hughes and see how his game has evolved since the beginning of the year when that did not work. Coleman has had the chance to play on the top-power play unit the past two games with Hischier and Sami Vatanen missing, and sticking on one of the PP units for a while could increase his chances of reaching the 30-goal plateau.



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Zajac is not producing at the same rate as his wings, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that his teammates play and produce better when next to him.

Nico Hischier

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	24 50.0	17:14 51.4	4 41.94	15	49.64	
Alain Nasreddine	22 42.19	18:56 50.37	9 57.69	17	48.8	

Hischier has produced more like a No. 1 center, but what stands out is the difference between the team's top lines. The Devils are both shooting significantly better and getting significantly more saves when Hischier, Jesper Bratt and Kyle Palmieri are on the ice than when the Zajac line is. That could, in part, be the result of a surge (or slump) in the relatively small sample size of 26 games. Both lines will likely regress toward the middle as the season goes on (positively for Zajac's line, negatively for Hischier's trio).

Jesper Bratt

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	21 44.91	13:05 44.86	4 40.74	7	47.03	
Alain Nasreddine	23 45.83	14:31 56.44	6 57.69	15	48.87	

Bratt has certainly produced better and more consistently since the coaching change. A big part of that is he's moved to the Hischier line since Taylor Hall was traded. He's benefitting from better than average goaltending, but not quite to the extent the other two on his line are. The big question leading into next season with Bratt is if he can be productive anywhere else in the lineup. He's had a strong stretch of games in each of his three seasons, especially when he was playing on the top line. When he's been shuffled throughout the other lines, he's been less effective and hasn't produced. It's possible Bratt matures into a Palmieri type, who fits as a capable first-line wing; but at this point, he seems more dependent on linemates than a typical player would be. He's a restricted free agent this summer and it could be an interesting negotiation process. The Devils really need him to solidify the gains he has made in the past 20 games or so and become a consistent top-six forward if they hope to become a playoff team in the next couple of seasons.

Miles Wood

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	26 43.95	12:11 45.45	3 33.33	7	45.67	
Alain Nasreddine	26 41.11	12:54 44.49	5 40.74	10	44.67	

These numbers do not include Wood's two-goal game against the Flyers, but he now has 10 for the season and is tied for fourth on the team (with Bratt). Certainly a divisive player for the fan base, Wood has played every game this season while others like Bratt, Gusev, Pavel Zacha and Jesper Boqvist have been healthy scratches at times.

The Devils were in Denver when Wayne Simmonds lit into Wood near the end of practice. It was a tension-filled time for the club — Hynes had recently been fired, the Hall trade speculation was swirling, they were on a losing streak — and it led to a fiery practice that culminated with Simmonds publicly admonishing Wood for not battling hard enough in a drill designed to elicit that.

A lot has changed since that day. The team has played slightly better. They traded Hall to Arizona. And it's certainly possible that Simmonds' outburst was just a coincidence, but Wood has seven goals, 12 points and 54 shots on goal in 23 games since that practice. He had three goals, seven points and 54 shots in the 30 games before that.

Wood has produced like an above-average third-line/fringe second-line wing for about half of this season. Even assuming he cools off, Wood could still get to 15-17 goals. If that happens, he will have a three-year run of high scoring, save for an unlucky 30-game stretch at the start of last season (he finished with eight goals in 34 games).

Holding steady

Kyle Palmieri

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	26 52.87	16:56 55.65	9 54.17	16	50.69	
Alain Nasreddine	22 45.45	17:31 50.58	10 61.54	19	47.09	

The Devils are shooting better than 11 percent with Palmieri on the ice since the coaching change, but that will likely dip some over the final 30 games. He's the only forward who has benefitted from strong goaltending with both coaches, which also seems like an outlier. He's been a consistent goal-scorer for years now, and whether it's a bunch in a few games or spread out more consistently, he's going to find his way to more than 25 like clockwork.

Pavel Zacha

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	23 43.41	14:50 48.16	2 34.21	10	45.9	
Alain Nasreddine	25 38.46	16:56 40.64	3 36.0	12	41.07	

Zacha has played more for Nasreddine, adding his fourth goal since the coaching change against the Flyers on a shorthanded breakaway. He can still feel like an enigma sometimes, but he's also young enough to find another level or two. He's been holding steady for a couple of years now as a useful player with more upside. The Devils are hoping their patience holds long enough for him to unlock it.

Kevin Rooney

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	15 43.0	12:09 44.08	0 50.0	1	43.92	
Alain Nasreddine	17 43.2	10:29 36.48	3 37.5	4	43.08	

John Hayden

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	11 42.03	10:14 44.33	0 45.45	1	42.33	
Alain Nasreddine	18 37.68	9:02 32.07	2 42.86	2	38.11	

Rooney collected his fourth point in five games against the Flyers and Hayden earned the team's "player/unsung hero of the game" jacket, in large part for his huge open-ice hit on Philadelphia



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defenseman Philippe Myers. They have both played more regularly with Hall gone and Jesper Boqvist in the minors, but Nasreddine is also playing them slightly less per game. The underlying numbers aren't great and their line got caved in by the Flyers. Rooney is an unrestricted free agent this summer, while Hayden is an RFA with arbitration rights. The Devils likely won't have room for both on the NHL roster next season.

Trending down

Wayne Simmonds

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	26 49.4	15:54 55.9	30.43	4	11	50.18
Alain Nasreddine	26 41.8	14:29 43.05	42.86	1	8	45.3

Simmonds, even more than P.K. Subban, was a victim of bad fortune earlier in the season. The gulf between his expected goals percentage and actual goals percentage is comical. He should have had a few more goals and points by late November, which would make this look more like a temporary slump. Still, Simmonds has now played 80 regular-season games (plus two playoff games) since scoring his last goal with the Flyers last year. He has six since and could use a mini-surge at the end of this season to ease concerns about his future.

Jack Hughes

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	24 51.11	16:02 53.94	38.1	4	11	49.9
Alain Nasreddine	20 44.4	15:30 43.79	37.5	2	7	45.34

Putting Hughes in trending down vs. holding steady was difficult. The production isn't that far off, considering the time he's missed, and he seems to have hit the proverbial rookie wall. Just since the All-Star break, Hughes has been really impactful at the offensive end but hasn't been rewarded for it. Then there are games in which he's struggled to create much.

He needs time and physical maturity. The hands, the skating and the vision are obvious, but he needs more strength and experience to help those assets impact the game more. In the interim, Nasreddine could help his own case if the Devils find a way to help Hughes show more tangible progress in the final stretch of this season.

Jesper Boqvist

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	13 43.48	12:03 49.9	40	2	2	50
Alain Nasreddine	21 36.53	10:07 35.33	42.86	2	2	43.26

Boqvist found regular playing time after spending half of Hynes' tenure as a healthy scratch. His impact on games has faded and some time in the AHL should help. Boqvist has had an unusual path so far, but even if he comes back for a few games at the end of the year, he should be better equipped to find a consistent middle-six role next season.

Trending out

Taylor Hall

Coach	GP xGF%	TOI/G GF%	Goals	Points	CF%	SCF%
John Hynes	26 49.06	19:12 49.41	37.5	4	21	48.82
Alain Nasreddine	4 44.07	19:07 45.75	60	2	4	47.75

Hall didn't play for Nasreddine for very long, but he was in the process of shaking an early-season slump when the trade happened. It didn't end the way anyone on either side wanted, but the return for Hall (particularly the lottery protected 2020 first-round pick) could look even better if the Coyotes continue to scuffle in a crowded, mediocre Pacific Division.

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The Athletic / Duhatschek Notebook: Seattle GM Ron Francis finds his rhythm, the added value draft picks carry this deadline

By Eric Duhatschek Feb 7, 2020 15

Even though his team is still almost two years away from beginning play, it's been an extremely busy fortnight for Ron Francis, general manager of the new Seattle NHL expansion team.

It started with a week of activities on-site in Seattle, where his pro scouting staff met and interacted with the ticket-buying public, and toured the new facility. It also included their first pass at doing a couple of mock drafts, something we at The Athletic find endlessly fascinating.

From there, Francis went to Palm Springs, California for an update on the construction of the new building there, which will house Seattle's minor-league team. (Internally, the joke within the Professional Hockey Writers' Association is that the job covering Seattle's minor-league team might be as coveted as the one covering their NHL squad). Francis laughed and said based on the resumes crossing his desk, something similar may be unfolding on his side as well.

But let's start with Seattle's mock drafts — coinciding nicely with our latest attempts to flesh out a roster — a process they will undertake many times before eventually cobbling together their team with players from 30 existing NHL teams (with the Vegas Golden Knights exempt from the process).

Vegas conducted monthly mock drafts in the eight months preceding their actual roster reveal, and even in that short timeline, the number of players that were on the first list, compared to the ones on the final team, amounted to only four or five, according to George McPhee, the Golden Knights' first GM.

Francis sees something similar unfolding with Seattle. It's mostly designed as a learning experience — to narrow down which players they should focus their scouting attempts on, while also affording the scouting staff to get to know one another.

In addition to bringing in Rick Olczyk as his assistant general manager, Francis had hired five pro scouts: Stu Barnes is based in Dallas; Dave Hunter in Boston; John Goodwin in Toronto, Cammi Granato in Vancouver and Ulf Samuelsson in Southern California (more on Samuelsson in a bit). All of them have crossed paths with Francis at some previous point in his hockey life, but not all of them knew each other. So that was part of the plan, according to Francis.



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"It gave them a chance to spend time with each other and get to know each other, which will make it more comfortable for them moving forward – so if they have a question, they can call each other," Francis said. "From my standpoint, while I know them all, I don't know them necessarily know them in a scouting role. So getting them in a room and listening to what they have to say and hearing them voice what they see was important for me – to get a read on what's important to them when analyzing players.

"Also, I think we left those meetings with a clearer picture. It helped us zero in on, 'Team X has maybe these three players that we should pay more attention to.' Or think, 'They may go 7-3-1 or they may go 8-1 and so we have to look at either scenario.'"

Understandably, Francis didn't want to reveal publicly the results of their mock drafts, or how it compared to our project, but acknowledged that they did "a couple over the course of the week" and called it a "valuable" experience.

"Now we understand, this was January of 2020 and we don't pick until June of 2021," Francis said. "Did we pick the team we're going to eventually see? Absolutely not. It's going to change dramatically in the next three weeks, as we get to the trade deadline. It's going to change dramatically when we get into July and free agency. And it's going to change again next year as we get into the (2021) trade deadline. We understand that. But I think it was valuable to go through the process and learn from it as a group."

Until Vegas came along, traditional expansion teams tended to play a more defensively-oriented style because they were outmanned and outgunned and thus felt compelled to take a kitty-bar-the-door approach to team building. And while the Florida Panthers under Roger Neilson, the Minnesota Wild under Jacques Lemaire and the Columbus Blue Jackets under Dave King were a tough out almost from the get-go, however, their style of hockey tended to not be very aesthetically pleasing.

By contrast, Vegas played a far more appealing push-the-pace style. In the absence of a coach, Francis wasn't prepared to say what Seattle's playing philosophy might be, although logically, you suspect that they too will adopt an up-tempo approach.

"Everybody agrees the perfect player has great hockey sense, with a high skill set, who can fly and is competitive as hell," Francis said. "But there are very few perfect players in the game. So, what you're trying to do is piece together a lineup where maybe if a guy doesn't have great skating, he can compensate with great hockey sense.

"At the end of the day, we are – most likely – picking the eighth-best forward or the fourth-best defenceman or the second-best goaltender from each team. So, you try to evaluate who you think is available and where that person slots in your lineup and try to piece it together, so you have the best team possible. Certainly, what Vegas did was pretty impressive – getting to the Stanley Cup final in their first year. They set the bar fairly high."

Beyond playing style, the introduction of the salary cap is one of the more significant changes between the NHL expansions in 1998, 1999 and 2000 to when Vegas entered the league in 2017. The other: The protection formulas were far more generous to Vegas and thus a little more onerous on the existing teams.

In 2000, when Columbus and Minnesota entered the league together, the Atlanta Thrashers and the Nashville Predators were both exempt from the process. The remaining 26 teams were allowed to protect either nine forwards, five defensemen plus a goaltender; or seven forwards, three defensemen and two goaltenders.

The net effect of the changes created something of a perfect storm for the Golden Knights. How it was all going to unfold carried with it some uncertainty, something Vegas was able to exploit on several occasions.

"Nobody had really gone through it for a while, and for some of the GMs, ever," Francis said. "I think the runway was shorter for Vegas, but it was also shorter for other GMs to maneuver and maybe protect their lineups a little differently. Vegas had nobody sitting on the outside. We have Vegas sitting on the outside – they don't participate. So, there are certainly some differences – and we'll tackle it the best we can."

Back in the summer, Francis suggested he might relocate to Seattle at some point early in 2020. Instead, he's decided to stay put in Carolina for the time being, just because it makes it easier to scout NHL teams. He's in Seattle about seven-to-10 days per month. The rest of the time, he can catch teams coming through Raleigh or watch AHL games in nearby Charlotte.

But in his travels, Francis says whenever he's wearing clothing with the Seattle NHL logo on it, people are constantly stopping him to ask about the progress of the team.

Francis estimated that he could hire an additional 20 to 30 people between now and the summer.

A priority is getting an amateur scouting staff in place before the summer Hlinka-Gretzky Cup, which showcases the top under-18 players in the world.

He's also planning to hire his training and equipment staff, so they have enough time to purchase the necessary gear for when the team starts playing.

The resumes, he says, continue to pour in.

"I just answered three this morning before our conversation," Francis said. "The interest has been incredible. A lot of that is a tribute to the city of Seattle and the fans there. They have a reputation for being passionate sports fans. Everybody loves that. The city itself is fantastic – with the water, the trees, the mountains. Our ownership is going about it the right way. Little things. Like our practice rink. They could have put in one or two sheets for us. Instead, they put in multiple sheets so the community can use it. All their decisions are based on what's best for the city and the fans, not just the ownership group."

I wondered if Francis has found a rhythm to the job – just because when there are so many possible items on your daily to-do list, you could theoretically be consumed by it every waking moment of every single day.

"It's been a lot of travel this year," Francis answered. "I've been to Europe a couple of times. I've been on the road 23 of the last 40 days.

"I find it interesting, when I'm on the East Coast, I start to work early – so six-thirty, seven in the morning. But for the people I'm working with on the West Coast, sometimes you're doing a conference call at four in their afternoon their time, so you're working at seven at night in the East. When I get out to Seattle, it's a little different. I still find it weird I can watch a hockey game at four in the afternoon, versus having to wait until seven on the East Coast. So, there's a lot going on, but you have to find that balance. It's scouting the right amount of games."

Update on Ulfie

This past week, or shortly after their pro scouting meetings ended, Samuelsson – a former teammate of Francis's with the Hartford Whalers – took a slight career detour. Samuelsson had a chance to coach Leksands of the Swedish Elite League; and took the job (for now, on an interim basis until the end of the season).

According to Francis, when Samuelsson called him and told him about the opportunity, "Ulfie was kind of torn. But I think coming back into scouting with us ignited that passion for him in the game. This is a city that his wife is from; where he played his hockey in Sweden; his oldest boy is on the team currently. It was an opportunity to get



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back into coaching and they're fighting for their lives to stay in the top division.

"So, he asked what, 'what do you think?'" And I said, 'absolutely, if that's something you want to do, go do it.' He was primarily, along with Cammi, scouting the Pacific and after two months of scouting, we kind of have that nailed down. He's going to go do that and we'll see where it goes from there. But he wanted to make sure he wasn't precluding himself from any further possible work with Seattle down the road – and I assured him that wasn't the case."

A Kings' ransom

Maybe it's because I've been immersed in reporting the Seattle story lately, but my first thought following Wednesday's trade between the Maple Leafs and the Los Angeles Kings focused on the conditional 2021 draft choice involved in the deal.

Officially, Toronto received forward Kyle Clifford and goalie Jack Campbell from Los Angeles for Trevor Moore, a 2020 third-rounder and that conditional 2021 third-rounder that upgrades to a second-rounder, if a couple of reasonably manageable events unfold. Either Campbell needs to play six regular-season games for Toronto, while the Leafs qualify for the playoffs; or Clifford, a pending UFA, needs to sign with Toronto next season.

With starter Frederik Andersen injured (and probably being overplayed a little this year), the Leafs needed a reliable second option in goal. Among goaltenders with a minimum of 21 games played last year, Campbell finished fifth in goals-against average (2.30) and third in save percentage (.928). And while his numbers have fallen off this year, Campbell represents a clear upgrade over Michael Hutchinson.

In my mind, therefore, I'm already upgrading that 2021 draft choice to a second-rounder and what makes any extra 2021 draft choices valuable is they can potentially be utilized as trade chips when teams try to negotiate possible side deals with Seattle. Remember, the Seattle expansion draft will take place just a couple of days before the 2021 NHL Draft.

The last time out, the teams that wanted to extricate themselves from salary-cap purgatory gave up future draft choices to the Golden Knights as compensation. The same may occur with Seattle. As much as possible, its goal will be to stockpile future draft choices because they'll have literally zero prospects in their system.

Hypothetically, if you are the Kings in June of 2021 and you are reasonably certain that Cal Petersen is your goaltender of the future, maybe you're prepared to move on from Jonathan Quick (and the \$5.8-million salary-cap charge he'll carry until the end of the 2022-23 season). But that's the sort of move that will likely cost you something.

Pittsburgh gave up a second-rounder to have the Golden Knights select Marc-Andre Fleury in 2017. It follows then that if the cost of moving on from Quick is a second-rounder, well the Kings may have an extra one to use as a bargaining chip. Accordingly, if you start to see 2021 draft choices change hands at this year's trade deadline, remember every single one could have expansion-draft implications.

Mark Giordano, Shea Weber on the limp

This past week, two teams – the Calgary Flames and the Montreal Canadiens – were forced to play without their best defensemen because of injuries, with their possible return dates undisclosed.

The Flames originally feared that Mark Giordano's hamstring injury might be a tear, which may have meant the end of his season. As it is, Giordano is listed as week-to-week. It's better news than they anticipated, but still not great overall. They'll have to muddle along for the foreseeable future without their ice-time leader and a critical piece of their leadership puzzle.

Meanwhile, the Canadiens placed Weber on injured reserve on Thursday, meaning he will be out for at least a week. Tough news for a team desperately trying to keep their slim playoff hopes alive.

Now, key players get injured all the time in the NHL.

Sometimes, teams adjust and survive.

Other times, they fall off the cliff.

The Pittsburgh Penguins are the poster children for overcoming, at different times this season, the absences of significant contributors: Evgeni Malkin, Sidney Crosby, Kris Letang and currently Jake Guentzel (not to mention important support players such as Brian Dumoulin) – and they keep humming along.

In the last fortnight, we've seen San Jose lose Tomas Hertl for the season, after previously losing Logan Couture to a fractured ankle. Florida has played without Aleksander Barkov for a bit here. Toronto, at different times, played without John Tavares and Mitch Marner and now Morgan Rielly is out. Carolina lost its highest-scoring defenseman, Dougie Hamilton, to a leg fracture. The defending champion St. Louis Blues have been playing without last year's regular-season goal-scoring leader, Vladimir Tarasenko, since Game 11.

I have a handful of people I turn to whenever I want to gain insight into a philosophical question and one of them is King, the former Columbus and Calgary coach, whose broad resume includes stops in junior, college, Europe as well as three turns behind the bench of Canada's men's Olympic hockey team, back when it was considered an underdog in games against the powerful Soviet Union "amateur" squads.

Considering he also coached an NHL expansion team, King has long understood the importance of making the whole greater than the sum of a team's individual parts. How do you do that exactly?

"Good question," King answered, "because you're always trying to get to that point because when you do, you're no longer dependent upon just one or two people. It becomes a collective and collaborative effort. How you achieve that? A lot of it has to do with the people in your lineup. It's not just their skill levels. It's their commitment to team goals and cohesiveness. Who are they really playing for? Everybody's always after their next contracts – and your numbers elevate you obviously in terms of making a better living. But I will tell you, the best teams in terms of performing to their potential are always teams where the guys are playing for you, not themselves.

"I believe all players are role players. There's a connotation in the game that suggests a role player is strictly a defensive player. That is incorrect. Offensive players are role players too. Their role is to score. Their role allows them to cheat a little bit to the offensive side of the game and take gambles other players can't. The best teams I've ever had were the ones where we were lucky enough to get a balance between players playing to their strengths and also playing for the team – where everybody's skill levels served the team's overall goals. Sometimes, your top players, even with all their skills and talents, don't serve the team as much – and then, you're collectively not as good."

King makes an important distinction – that a team's most talented players are not always a team's most influential players, in terms of the leadership roles they may play.

"Players always talk about next-man-up and there is something to that concept of next-man-up," King said. "The difficulty is, sometimes, when your best player gets hurt, or one of your top players get hurt, if they are also your most influential player, that makes a difference. And by influential, I mean behind-the-scenes influence. If they're one of the most influential players in the room, that can make a big difference.



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"Because sometimes your best players are not your most influential, so if you lose one of them and your team doesn't skip a beat, you think, 'Hmm, that's pretty interesting.' One of the reasons is, yes, they lost a good player, but they clearly didn't lose one of their most influential players in the dressing room. So, the sphere of influence is a factor in terms of who you lose. Pittsburgh did a pretty good job without their top guys – of staying above water and keeping afloat."

King singled out Crosby as a player who could have a positive influence on a team, even as an injured player. That doesn't always happen, said King.

"Some players can only think of themselves when they're hurt because all their thoughts are internal – 'I've got to get better,'" King said. "So, they lose their ability to be a positive influence on your team when they're not playing. Then there are others, like Crosby. They're around the dressing room, before games, after games and sometimes, they even come on trips with you because of their leadership value. They can still be an influence on a team, even when they're hurt."

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The Athletic / Analysis: How close is every NHL team to being a contender?

By Shayna Goldman and Alison Lukan Feb 7, 2020 172

Every team is always assessing just how close or far they are from contending for the Stanley Cup, especially as the trade deadline nears. Where a team stands relative to "contenders" may determine how they proceed: should they be buyers, sellers or just stay on their current path? And if you do need to take action, the question becomes just how much to buy or sell.

With those questions in mind, we sought out to project each team's expected lineup down the stretch and then explore how it stacks up to the average contender.

For our evaluations, we collaborated with The Athletic's team of NHL beat writers to identify 12 forwards, six defenders, and two or three netminders depending on that team's goaltending rotation who are likely to be in the lineup for the balance of the season. We allowed for the consideration of players who will likely return from injury, while also explicitly not trying to figure out what trades may come. This was about how the team stacks up now, and where there may be needs that could be replenished via trade down the line.

Then we applied game score value added (GSVA) to each projected roster.

GSVA projections, created by The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn, are based on game score, which combines box score and advanced statistics to measure a player's value. It features three seasons worth of data that are weighed by recency, adjusted for age and usage, and then turned into a win value above replacement level. You can read more about GSVA here and recent adjustments made to the model here.

For our purposes, each player's average time on ice and GSVA are noted, as well as a team's collective value by position and a point projection. Players who were considered replacement level are marked with an asterisk (*) and have a GSVA of zero. Each team is measured against an average contender, which consists of the average values of (in no particular order) Boston, Tampa Bay, Washington, Pittsburgh, Colorado and St. Louis. You'll see those

comparisons by position under each team's totals in the visuals below.

Let's dive in in order of projected standings points.

Unsurprisingly, the Lightning, which are led by an elite first line, rate as one of the strongest teams in the league. Although they had a rougher start to the season than anticipated, they've found their footing and once again look like the contender that they were expected to be. Right now, their 115.3 point projection actually exceeds their preseason projection of 108.3 points, with Brayden Point's and Victor Hedman's performances being better than originally projected, as well as growth from younger players like Anthony Cirelli and Mikhail Sergachev. Defender Jan Ruuta, who brings 0.4 wins to the third pair, is week-to-week and has been replaced by Braydon Coburn, which weakens the third pair and could put the Lightning in the market for another defenseman. But Kevin Shattenkirk, who has boosted his GSVA with a bounce back season, helps keep that third pair afloat.

Yep, Boston looks to be in good shape, which should be no surprise for a team currently holding down the top spot in the league. There have been some tweaks to this lineup for sure, with Sean Kuraly in and out, but these are the most frequently used lines by Bruce Cassidy so we went with those. It's worth noting that Jeremy Lauzon, who has seen some ice time, would come in at replacement level (0 wins) for a defenseman.

The Maple Leafs' forward group ranks third in the league in GSVA and is ahead of the average contenders' collective forward value. Ian Tulloch noted that Ilya Mikheyev is progressing after suffering a wrist injury and should be back for a postseason run. If not, that likely means an expanded role for Pierre Engvall in the middle-six and a place in the lineup on the fourth line for Jason Spezza (0.3 wins). Where Toronto falls short is in its own zone, both on defense and in net. Morgan Rielly should return from injury in the spring, but the Leafs now have to juggle the lineup with Cody Ceci out with an ankle injury. Upgrading on defense likely means paying for it with a forward. They've addressed their backup situation by acquiring Jack Campbell from the Kings, so now the question is whether Campbell can provide enough support in net for Frederik Andersen moving forward.

The Avalanche were projected to have a 93.9 season and have exceeded that with a 106.6 projection more than midway through the season after dealing with injuries to some of their top players earlier this season. Colorado was known as a one-line team – and its top trio still leads the way, especially Nathan MacKinnon. But the Avs have improved their forward depth, which brings them just shy of the average contender ranking. Cale Makar's strong rookie season mitigates the loss of their former leading defender, Tyson Barrie, and they're right on target in net compared to the average contender. Tweaks at the deadline could help them elevate to contender status.

Pittsburgh is a team that has impressively performed in spite of a rash of injuries this season, and when it came to considering who may return for the stretch run, Jesse Marshall expects Dominik Kahun and Nick Bjugstad to return, so we've slotted them in here. There isn't as good of news for Jake Guentzel, who is anticipated to be out well into the postseason. But even with all these moving parts, the Penguins are right in line with how a contender measures out. Interestingly, only goaltending is below that bar. Don't count Pittsburgh out this year.

Stop us if you've heard this before, but the Stars got off to a slower start this season. Their goaltending ranks highly once again, thanks to the play of Ben Bishop and Anton Khudobin. But the forward group is closer to league average than the average contender because their leading players – Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin, Alex Radulov and Joe Pavelski – all have fallen short of their preseason projections. They do, however, have a few bright spots up front in Roope Hintz and Denis Gurianov. Sean Shapiro noted that the forward lines change frequently, and there could be a tweak on



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defense with Stephen Johns becoming more of a mainstay. Because he's played so little this season, we note Johns as a replacement-level defender at 0 wins for now. Even that would improve the third pair.

The Blues are one of our top six contender teams and rightly so. There is some disparity right now between the skaters' performance and contender status, but Vladimir Tarasenko skated Thursday. As Jeremy Rutherford has reported, the original timetable for his return was the last week of the regular season, and if he can be ready for the postseason, the forwards' GSVAs total jumps from 14.5 to 17.5, just .8 points off a contender pace.

The Capitals qualify as a current contender, but still have some question marks on depth up front. Those could be addressed at the deadline if needed, though. As they showed in 2018 on their way to a Stanley Cup, they don't need to make a splash at the deadline to have success. They already have game-breaking talent in Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom and John Carlson. Moving forward, goaltending is worth keeping an eye on. Ilya Samsonov is on pace for 27 starts but has been pushing for more. A more even split would improve their goaltending value.

We checked in with Arpon Basu to ensure we got this lineup right in terms of what to expect as far as if and when Jonathan Drouin and Paul Byron might return to the ice. He expects them both to return, and that can help the Habs, though it may already be too late given where this team falls in the standings. And this was before Shea Weber was placed on IR Thursday – he's been their best player this year. It's worth noting the lack of goaltending has had this year – it's not been at a level that a contender needs to stay in the fight.

The Blue Jackets have certainly exceeded expectations as a team thus far this season. What stands out is how strong all three parts of the team's game are right now. Defense was expected to be competitive, but the forward group is also showing well, as is the goaltending. However, to become a true contender, they do need to beef up their forward corps and hope that the goaltending can sustain over time. It's worth noting that Josh Anderson is still out with an injury, as is Alexandre Texier. We've got Anderson here, but should Texier also be able to return, he could be a boost offensively.

With Justin Williams' return, the Hurricanes got a slight boost up front. Now, some lineup tweaks, which Sara Civan recently explored, could help maximize the forward talent they currently have, too. But what stands out more than anything is Carolina's blue line. The group had one of the stronger defenses earlier this season, but without Dougie Hamilton (3.3 wins), Carolina's defense is on pace for 3.6 fewer wins than the average contender and 96.7 points. With Hamilton back on the first pair and Joel Edmundson shifting back to the left on the third pair, the Hurricanes' defense would be in the mix with other contenders at 6.6 wins, which would also add 6.3 standing points to the team's total.

There's been a lot of movement within the Flyers' lineup this year, so we checked with our own Charlie O'Connor to see what he'd project as the Philadelphia squad down the stretch. The defense seems pretty settled to him, although he could see the bottom two getting swapped at some point to make it Travis Sanheim-Justin Braun and Shayne Ghostisbehere- Philippe Myers. As for the forwards, O'Connor leaned toward a scenario where Claude Giroux returns to wing (from center) but still imagines there will be a lot of jumbling among the trios – which have struggled as a group this year. Overall, it's goaltending that has pulled the Flyers through in terms of contender status.

Through this project's lens, the Taylor Hall trade was a good decision for Arizona, as was the Phil Kessel move. Those two are the highest contributing skaters for the Coyotes right now. Goaltending has been exceptional – even as the team has battled injuries at the position, and we've adjusted starts accordingly – rising well above true contender status. As for improving the rest of the team? Outside of trades, our Craig Morgan noted, the wild card is

Barrett Hayton, who is currently in the AHL on a rehab stint. Arizona needs better play through the middle of the ice and he is their future there. Will he be ready for a regular role after his world juniors experience? We'll see.

The Golden Knights' defense and goaltending isn't too far off from that of contenders. It's their forwards that stand out at just 12.7 wins. Having William Karlsson, who is worth 2.1 wins, back in the lineup soon should help strengthen Vegas down the middle, though Jesse Granger noted that it's unclear where he'll slot exactly because the center has been out since Peter DeBoer replaced Gerard Gallant. As long as he's down the middle of the top nine, it should deepen the Golden Knights' depth as him or Paul Stastny (1.6 wins) would be an improvement over Cody Eakin's 0.1 in that role.

The Wild often change their lines, Michael Russo explained, but we can still piece together four lines that may be leaned on until the trade deadline. With Mikko Koivu on the fourth line and Victor Rask on the outside looking in, Luke Kunin recently shifted from wing to center to pivot the second line. Still, as a whole, their forward group is lesser than that of a contender, and it may only get worse next month if pieces are flipped at the deadline. Another reason they're on the outside looking in (which is pushing them to sell), is that goaltending has been a major weakness despite benefitting from playing behind a top-notch defense that ranks second in the league.

The Predators were projected to contend this season, but they are currently on the outside looking in when it comes to the playoff picture. Even with struggles in net earlier, the tandem of Pekka Rinne and Juuse Saros is on par with the average contender. Nashville's problems aren't in the crease, they are in front of it. Ryan Ellis has been sorely missed while out with an upper-body injury, and all five defenders in the current lineup – excluding Roman Josi – don't total the 2.7 wins Ellis brings to Nashville when he's healthy. With Ellis back in the mix, the blue line is comparable to some of the league's best. The good news is that Ellis is on the current road trip and skating. The bad is that his absence isn't its only weakness; underperforming forwards have set the group back to a total 13.5 wins, which is 4.8 below the average contender.

In the eyes of our exercise, the Canucks aren't a true contender yet, but they've got a lot of good things to talk about in their lineup. The top-six is strong, as is the top pairing and goaltending falls right in line with what a contender would need. This gives a good roadmap of where Vancouver can continue to tweak and improve its roster going forward.

Even though Aleksander Barkov is out right now, George Richards expects him to return down the stretch, so we've got him in our lineup projections. And that's a good thing given how powerful that top line is with him there. Overall, the forward group is quite good, but the fourth line draws them down a bit and keeps them from being closer to contender status. The defense is also a bit away from our key measure, but that's not how this team is expected to play. What is worrisome is the goaltending score. Two-time Vezina winner Sergei Bobrovsky was brought in to provide enough of a boost to balance out those other parts of the team, but he's had to adjust to quite a bit in his first year. The good news is his game seems to be coming now and he could help balance out this team as a whole.

The goaltending has been as advertised this season for Chicago, in fact, it's better than the average contender, but the other parts of the lineup just aren't there. We went with the group Mark Lazarus advised for this exercise as this has been the lineup regularly since the Blackhawks' recent surge, and one they likely maintain down the stretch. But even with Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and Brandon Saad, there's a lot of ground to make up to be in the postseason conversation compared to contenders. The defense fares better but can still improve, and Lazarus advised that Slater Koekkoek's had a couple bad games in a row, so seeing Nick Seeler sooner rather than later, is something to watch for.



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The Flames face a hurdle of vying for the playoffs without leading defender Mark Giordano, who is week-to-week; he's worth 2.8 wins, which is more than half of their defensive value. It's worth noting that no one element of their game has been particularly close to contender status this year. Before Giordano's injury, the Flames were actually trending in the right direction. Now, the task is keeping up that momentum in a very close Pacific Division while they're without their only elite performer this season.

Adam Pelech's out with a ruptured Achilles, which weakens the Islanders' defense by one win. But they have the support from their shared net to help lessen the blow of being a defenseman down. Where the Islanders fall short is their forward group, which is 7.9 wins behind the average contender. Internal tweaks could slightly elevate their projection. Cal Clutterbuck returning and replacing Leo Komarov would add 0.2 wins. Keeping Kieffer Bellows in, who netted two goals in his second NHL game, over Tom Kuhnhackl would also be an improvement. Until Bellows hits the 15-game mark, we'll use a replacement level value of 0 wins for him, but that's already an improvement of 0.9 over Kuhnhackl, which brings the forwards up to 11.6 wins and 91.7 projected standing points. Those changes, plus a forward addition at the deadline, should give the Islanders the boost they need.

Even though the Oilers are led by two elite forwards in Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, their forward depth leaves them 5.6 wins behind the average contender. It doesn't help that their best defender rates out to second pair territory either. Their goaltending is the only component that is at least in the range of other contenders. The Pacific Division is close, but the Oilers have been in the playoff bubble through much of the season. Kailer Yamamoto's play helps better their chances of maintaining that, as could some additions at the deadline as long as the Oilers have the assets to move.

An 88.3 point pace is progress for the rebuilding Rangers, but just how much that is unraveled after the trade deadline remains to be seen. New York is bound to move some of its pending free agents at the end of the month, but the question is how much it sells. On the higher end, it could lose upward of five wins after the deadline. The most impactful player who could move is Chris Kreider, but that may depend on when the Rangers envision themselves contending again, since his departure leaves a hole of two wins they'll have to fill when they're already struggling with forward depth.

Goaltending is the Ducks' saving grace as they retool this season. John Gibson's elite 4.1 wins and their combined 5.2 wins as a tandem lead the league. Everything else ... not so much – especially not their blue line, which combines for just 0.5 wins, which is second to last in the league.

There are a lot of moving pieces in Winnipeg because of injuries. The lineup today is different from what it could be in two weeks, and that lineup is different from what could be deployed two weeks later, Murat Ates explained. The forward depth is much weaker than it should be, but much of the attention this season has been on the defense. Not only did the Jets trade Jacob Trouba last summer, but they also don't have Dustin Byfuglien, who would have added two wins. Once that situation is resolved, clearing Byfuglien's cap hit, Ates says the Jets will likely be in the market for a defender. That should help ease Connor Hellebuyck's workload, as he's been the highlight of Winnipeg's season so far.

It's no secret that it's been a challenging season in Buffalo, and it was a challenge to nail down a lineup for this exercise with all the different combinations (and injuries) that have impacted the Sabres. Joe Yeardon helped us out here with what to consider as the lineup down the stretch, but it's obvious to see that Buffalo is a team that is struggling to compete in all areas of the game, even with such a powerful top line.

You may disagree with the lineup we have here, but there hasn't been a ton of consistency for San Jose as they've searched for answers in what has been a disappointing season. The good news

is that our tool accounts accurately for actual time on ice, and value added, so even if the lineup is wrong, the impact isn't. And that's unfortunate because there's no one part of the team that's performing well. The forwards have been the biggest disappointment overall when it comes to pushing to complete, and ironically, for a team where netminding was off-maligned in the past, the goaltending has stayed the closest to what you'd want to have as a contender. In checking with Kevin Kurz, Logan Couture and Joel Kellman are expected to return to the ice so we've included them here.

A strong offseason led to a 93-point projection for the Devils and 53 percent chance of reaching the playoffs. But little went according to plan in New Jersey this season, as they find themselves on a 77.1 point pace, far behind the average contender in each category. Joey Anderson's promotion may lead to bottom-six lineup changes. Corey Masiasak said, which is just a preview of the line shuffling that may come after the deadline when some of this season's mainstays are flipped at the deadline.

The Kings are one of the few teams that can say they are fully healthy right now. At least there's something to celebrate for this group that lacks consistent talent in all three facets of the game. A note on the goaltending situation: while Jack Campbell was traded Wednesday, we included him here and distributed his expected remaining starts to fall between Jonathan Quick and Cal Petersen, who was recalled in the wake of the transaction with the Toronto Maple Leafs and has the chance to show he's the future of the Kings' goaltending.

The Senators do have some bright spots in their lineup. Brady Tkachuk has been as advertised. Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Tyler Ennis and Anthony Duclair have produced. But on the whole, the forward group isn't strong enough to contend. And other than Thomas Chabot, there's no help on the back end either. We didn't put Bobby Ryan (0.5 wins) in this lineup. Hailey Salvain noted that while he is back skating, he's going to need some time to get back to game speed. The question – as it has been in Ottawa – is do you hold on to the parts worth holding or move them to build up currency for the future?

The Red Wings have struggled through one of the worst seasons in NHL history, but perhaps it's a small comfort their fans shouldn't expect much more than what this lineup is producing? Using GSVA, this team has two top talents at best. The hope is that Steve Yzerman knows what he's doing to trigger an upswing. But for those who will fight through this year, the challenge will also be to not let this feeling become the norm in the organization.

In Summary

Let's take a look at the overall change each team has seen since Luszczyszyn's preseason projections. Some teams, like Florida, Detroit, Washington and Buffalo, have been exactly what we thought they'd be. While other teams, such as San Jose, Colorado, New Jersey and Columbus, have seen a significant swing in where they stand now versus what was projected.

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The Athletic / DGB Grab Bag: Identifying the greatest goal-scorer ever, a weird playoff drought and Darryl Sittler's 10-point night

By Sean McIndoe Feb 7, 2020 119

From the headlines



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Alexander Ovechkin is good. I ran the numbers, checked in with some pro scouts and even watched a few games on my own. I'm feeling pretty confident about this one. He's good at hockey.

But is he the best? Specifically, is he the best goal-scorer in NHL history? That's the debate that's been percolating for years now and has fired up again thanks to Ovechkin's recent record-breaking hot streak. He doesn't have the most goals in NHL history, although he might by the time he's done. But even now, when you take era and historical scoring rates into consideration, a strong case can be made that he is already the best we've ever seen.

Then again, he's not the only one. So while everyone is weighing the pros and cons of Ovechkin's claim to the throne, let's look back on a dozen other names that are at least in the conversation.

Wayne Gretzky – Had unparalleled vision that allowed him to see things that a guy like Ovechkin just never could, like four square feet of open net over the goaltender's glove hand.

Mario Lemieux – Should probably have his numbers discounted because defensive systems weren't as good in the 80s and 90s, so says two of the three Patrick Division defensemen who are still hanging off of his limbs to this day out of force of habit.

Mike Bossy – Was on pace to become the sport's all-time leading goal scorer before tragically having his career cut short by the Islanders Fans Can't Have Nice Things Law of 1986.

Rocket Richard – Was an over-rated goal scorer who occasionally put up solid numbers but went his entire 18-season career without winning so much as one single Rocket Richard trophy.

Mike Gartner – Scored 700 goals despite often facing the sort of defensive attention you come to expect when you're the second or third best winger on your team.

Gordie Howe – Was the greatest goal scorer ever according to everyone he ever played against, we think, although it was hard to hear them through all the trembling, sobbing and muttering "now please help me find what's left of my teeth before he comes back".

Phil Esposito – Once broke the all-time single-season goals record by 18 and the points record by 26 in the same year and finished second in MVP voting on his own team, in case you were wondering whether the 1970s were completely insane.

Pavel Bure – Had plenty of talent but just confirmed the old stereotype that Russians don't have the heart to put up big numbers for the long haul, assuming "heart" is the Russian word for "knee ligaments."

Steven Stamkos – Years from now, those of us who were lucky enough to see Stamkos play will tell our grandkids that he was one of the very best goal-scorers of the Alexander Ovechkin Era.

Cy Denneny – Was the greatest goal scorer of his era, but that was a very different time in the NHL back when the forward pass wasn't allowed, goalies had to remain upright at all times and Joe Thornton's beard was slightly shorter.

Jaromir Jagr – Compiled an amazing total of 766 goals despite losing big chunks of his NHL career to lockouts, overseas play and the early 2000s Washington Capitals.

Brett Hull – It would probably be worth reconsidering his place among the all-time greats with the benefit of hindsight, but unfortunately taking another look at Brett Hull scoring a goal has been against NHL policy since 1999.

The week's three stars of comedy

The third star: Fans cheering for referees – This is deeply weird and I think I'm good with it.

THERE IS AN ENTIRE SECTION OF ZEBRAS AT THIS ISLANDERS GAME AND THEY ARE CHANTING "LET'S GO

REFS" AND GOING NUTS FOR EVERY ICING AND OFFSIDE CALL. PIC.TWITTER.COM/LPFY0BX5J9

&MDASH; BARRY PETCHESKY (@BARRY) FEBRUARY 1, 2020

The second star: Evgeny Kuznetsov – It didn't work, but you have to give him credit for creativity when it came to trying to avoid a too-many-men penalty.

TO TRY AND AVOID A TOO MANY MEN ON THE ICE PENALTY, EVGENY KUZNETSOV TRIED TO HIDE IN THE PENGUIN BENCH. 🤔🤔🤔 PIC.TWITTER.COM/FQNEYYPKBW

&MDASH; NHL ON NBC (@NHLONNBCSPORTS) FEBRUARY 2, 2020

The first star: Ryan McDonagh and oh no ... – I'm sorry and I realize I'm five years old, but any guy who isn't me getting hit in the wee-knee will always be funny and you already knew that about me.

RYAN MCDONAGH TAKES A KEVIN LABANC SHOT DIRECTLY TO THE BEANS PIC.TWITTER.COM/IK3JM4J9WZ

&MDASH; CJ FOGLER (@CJZERO) FEBRUARY 2, 2020

Writing down the unwritten rules

One of the great underrated playoff rivalries of the late 80s and early 90s was the Flames versus the Kings. While most of the Smythe Division attention was justifiably focused on Oilers-Flames and (after the Gretzky trade) Oilers-Kings, Calgary and L.A. could always be counted on for some fireworks.

They met in the playoffs for three straight years from 1988 through 1990, with the Flames winning the first two and the Kings finally getting revenge in 1990 on Mike Krushelnyski's memorable chip shot overtime winner. They'd face each other again in 1993, in a ridiculously high-scoring series that saw the winning team score nine goals in three of the six games. The Kings won that one too, starting their string of eliminating three straight Canadian teams on the way to their first Cup final.

And then ... that's it. The two teams haven't met again in the playoffs since 1993. That seems weird. But here's the crazy part: They haven't even come close. In fact, the Kings and Flames haven't even made the playoffs in the same season since that 1993 series.

That feels like it shouldn't be mathematically possible, especially for two teams who've rarely been all that bad. When somebody pointed it to me on Twitter a few weeks ago, I was pretty sure it couldn't be right. But it is, and it's the longest such active streak in the NHL.

Maybe even more amazing, if we go back to 2003, when both teams missed the playoffs, we start a streak of nearly two decades where one and only one of the two teams makes the postseason every single year. The Kings take the first few spots, then fall off right as the Flames get good in the years around the lockout. Then Calgary misses for five straight years right as the Kings start contending for Cups. Since 2014, they've been alternating every year.

That back-and-forth will end this year because the Kings aren't making it. But now I'm pretty sure the Flames will because apparently, they have to. At some point, we hit a glitch in the matrix, and we're now destined to do this forever. One team has to make it, and one team has to miss, and it's up to Calgary to keep the streak alive.

Kings or Flames in the playoffs. Pick one. Because for some reason, we can never again have both. This means something. I have no idea what. But congratulations in advance to the Flames.

Obscure former player of the week

It's kind of a weird era for NHL coaches. As we've seen this year, it's easier to get fired than ever, for pretty much any reason ranging from player abuse to a poor record to nobody's quite sure. But teams



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still love to recycle coaches, so even the ones who get fired often land on their feet quickly. In fact, if Paul Maurice makes it through the season in Winnipeg, he'll move into fourth place on the all-time games coached list, behind two other active coaches in Barry Trotz and Joel Quenneville. But they've all got a long way to go to catch the greatest coach in NHL history, Scotty Bowman.

Therefore, this week, our obscure player is Scotty Bowman. No, the other one.

That would actually be Ralph "Scotty" Bowman, a defenseman from the 1930s. No, I have no idea how you get "Scotty" as your nickname when your given name is Ralph. I'm just glad he had an actual nickname and wasn't called Ralpher or Bowmie or whatever else. This Scotty Bowman doesn't hold any coaching records, but he does have a pretty cool place in NHL history. We'll get to that.

Bowman played junior in the OHA and then broke into the NHL as a 22-year-old with the 1933-34 Ottawa Senators, playing 46 games and managing two assists. That was the last year for that old Senators franchise, and Bowman went with them when the team moved to St. Louis to become the Eagles. He played half a season there, then was traded to the Red Wings along with Syd Howe for Teddy Graham and cash. Yes, Teddy Graham. Look, 1930s names were weird, OK?

Bowman would spend five full seasons in Detroit and would be part of the franchise's first two Stanley Cups in 1936 and 1937. He'd spend a few more years in the AHL before retiring, and his final NHL stat line includes seven seasons, 281 games, eight goals and 25 points.

One of those goals is where the history comes in. In 1934, the NHL introduced the penalty shot, and the first one in league history came on Nov. 10, when Montreal's Armand Mondou was stopped by Toronto's George Hainsworth. Three days later, Bowman was awarded a penalty shot against the Maroons. He scored, making him the first player in league history with a penalty shot goal.

Classic YouTube clip breakdown

Tonight marks the 44th anniversary of one of the most famous nights in hockey history. It was back on Feb. 7, 1976, that fans at Maple Leaf Gardens got to witness something that hasn't happened again to this day: The Leafs beating the Bruins.

Wait, I'm being told it was something even rarer: Darryl Sittler recording the only 10-point game the NHL has ever seen. Today, let's look back on that famous night through the eyes of the man who had the game of his life. And also, the coach who let it all happen.

It's a Saturday night at the Gardens, and the Leafs are hosting the Bruins. Boston is a really good team, having only lost one game since Christmas. Toronto, it will not shock you to learn, is not all that good. But they're not awful, hovering around .500 for most of the season, which back then was considered about as good as it gets.

Our clip is courtesy of Sportsline, the classic show from Global TV that you got your highlights from when your parents were too cheap to unscramble TSN. It's the show that gave us "Yes guy" and the Hebsys, and tonight it gives us a disturbingly young Gene Principe. It's 1996, and the show has put together a pretty cool look back at Sittler's night to mark the game's 20th anniversary.

We start with the two stars of our clip: Sittler himself, and our old friend Don Cherry. It takes him 12 seconds to mention that he was coach of the year, which is longer than usual, and also introduces us to a key character in what's about to happen: Bruins' goalie Dave Reece. More on him in a bit.

We move onto the highlights. Sittler's first point comes on a Lanny McDonald goal, which we get in slow motion from a cool camera angle where Errol Thompson skates right in front of Reece just as

the camera pans by and makes it look like the Bruins are playing without a goaltender. Which on this night, they kind of will be.

"A very disconsolate Dave Reece ..." Uh, Dave? Might want to pace yourself, it's going to get a whole lot worse.

Cherry tells a weird story about Reece being a nervous kid. I have no idea what the deal is with "time factor," and before we can wonder about it we're already on to another shot from the faceoff circle blowing by him. Those look like terrible goals to today's eyes, but you have to remember that back then every goaltender was three feet tall and afraid of the puck.

The third point comes as Sittler bats a puck out of the air and leads to a story about Harold Ballard being an idiot. Honestly, how much better would today's league be if every terrible owner had to sit in a little bunker down in the stands with the common rabble? If NHL All-Stars are going to get to try to hit 10-point targets from the upper deck, I say fans should get to try the same thing by sailing their \$18 beers into the owner's open window.

Goals four and five are two more long-distance slapshots, the latter of which causes Reece to fall over because goalies didn't learn how to skate until the 1990s. That leads to Sittler telling the Swiss Chalet story, which leads to me really wanting some Swiss Chalet.

Point number six is another clapper, which gives us a chance to admire Scott Garland's epic sideburns. We skip over the seventh Leaf goal, which is the only one of the night that Sittler isn't in on – George Ferguson from Inge Hammarstrom and Garland, in case you're wondering – and then onto Sittler's seventh point. This one comes on a secondary assist, which every analytics guy could tell you shouldn't count.

Sittler tells us that he found out he was closing in on the record during the second intermission, and he gets it just seconds into the third period. Somewhat weirdly, this is probably the goal that you're used to seeing from that night, not the record-breaker, partly because Sittler ends up doing the cool looking leap against the end boards. He then appears to say something to Reece on the way by. I'm guessing it's "Why the hell are you still here?"

You might be wondering the same thing, and Cherry finally explains ... kind of. The Bruins' backup that night was Gerry Cheevers, who'd just returned from the WHA. Cherry later tells us that he wanted Cheevers to start the following night in Boston. That's true, but it wasn't really about being rested; he just wanted Cheevers' first game back to be in front of the hometown fans, so he left Reece in to get humiliated in a nationally televised game. What can I tell you, he was a player's coach, as long as the player wasn't a goaltender.

Sittler breaks the record with his ninth point, and we get one of those great Maple Leaf Gardens moments where the entire camera view of the ice is blocked by a fan standing up. Man, did I ever love that place.

He gets one more to make it an even ten, this time by banking one off a Bruin's defenseman from behind the net as Reece tries to dig a hole in the crease and tunnel his way to freedom.

And after Gene makes a weirdly bitter aside about a salad, that's it for our clip. The record still stands to this day, somewhat amazingly given the kind of crazy offensive numbers we'd see in the 1980s. Nobody's even made it to nine points since, although we have seen eight-point nights from legends like Bryan Trottier, Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux and, uh, Sam Gagner, the only one to do it in the last 30 years. Sure, why not.

As for Reece, this is the part of the story where I'd like to end by reassuring you that he recovered just fine from his nightmare game, and went on to a solid career. I'd like to, but I can't, because Dave Reece never played in the NHL again after this game. But Cheevers got a shutout the next night in Boston, so it was all worth it.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs still seeking confidence of contenders after critical OT win

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris February 7, 2020, 10:05 PM

TORONTO — It was two big points and a leap back into playoff position.

And for the Toronto Maple Leafs it was a night that underscored just how much of a struggle it is for them to stay on the right side of the line between good and bad.

"Disappointed," was the word Sheldon Keefe used after his team's 5-4 victory over the Anaheim Ducks that required overtime after Toronto squandered leads of 3-1 and 4-3 in the third period.

"It seems like we're just lacking some confidence in those situations," said Keefe. "Like, almost like we were waiting or expecting something bad to happen. That's not what we want to be about. Clearly when we play like that we're not a very good team. So we need to get on our toes and get our swagger and get our confidence, I think.

"It's crazy how quickly things turn here, right?"

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It's simply been that kind of week for an organization hoping to harness the excitement of a Wednesday night trade aimed at addressing two needs: Grit and goaltending.

The deal to bring in Kyle Clifford and Jack Campbell was made in the wake of a blown 3-1 lead in the third period to the Florida Panthers on Monday and mere minutes after the buzzer sounded on a 5-3 loss against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

The newcomers each had some nice moments against Anaheim, although Campbell was disappointed with the three pucks that got past him during a third period where the Ducks brought a big push and out-attempted the Leafs 24-14.

"I know I have the ability to make a couple of those saves and that's pretty much it," said Campbell. "To be an elite goalie you've got to shut the door, especially in the third. It's that simple."

His new teammates made the final 25 minutes anything but simple.

"I just don't think we skated well enough. We just didn't initiate the play," said captain John Tavares, who scored the overtime winner. "They came out with good energy, good legs and generated some momentum. We just didn't kind of have the rhythm or the mojo that we had the first two periods, where we did so many good things in creating opportunities and putting them on their heels.

"Obviously something we have to get back to and find a way to execute better."

With the playoff race kicking into high gear, it's imperative.

Keefe is trying to focus on positives — pointing to consecutive wins over Nashville, Dallas and Ottawa coming out of the all-star break and the fact the first two periods against Florida were the most

complete the Leafs have played since he replaced Mike Babcock on Nov. 20.

But a couple of warning lights on the dashboard of this high-priced sports car are also blinking.

"We've got to get through this," said Keefe. "As I said, it just goes all the way back to Monday and I think it's quickly how things turn. Right now you have a team that can't protect a third-period lead, I think before this week started we were 15-1 going into the third period in my time here. So it wasn't really an issue.

"We had the one game in Calgary [on Dec. 12], I think, that got away on us but other than that we were a team that was doing a really good job in the third period. So we're not that far removed from it, we're also not that far removed from great efforts in Nashville, a great effort in Dallas, battling and finding a way against a gritty Ottawa team, two great periods against our rival in Florida.

"We're not that far removed from it, it turns quickly."

However, they're also facing a schedule that basically sees them play every other night for the rest of the season and takes them to Montreal on Saturday.

The Leafs weren't sure if William Nylander would be able to play against the Habs after missing Friday's game due to an illness. They know they won't have No. 1 goaltender Frederik Andersen before next week because of a neck injury, and that they'll be icing the NHL's most green defence pair of Rasmus Sandin and Timothy Liljegren with Morgan Rielly (broken foot) and Cody Ceci (ankle) both on the shelf.

But they remain a team that is dangerous at each end of the ice.

Auston Matthews had a four-point game against Anaheim and pulled alongside Alex Ovechkin for the NHL's goal-scoring lead with his 40th. Tavares scored twice, Mitch Marner had three assists, a reborn Jason Spezza had a beautiful end-to-end goal ... and yet they were touch-and-go to secure the two points needed to jump past Florida in the standings (albeit with two more games played).

"I think you just take the good and bad," said Matthews. "We don't want to get in that position and it's been a position that we've been kind of falling into quite a bit so we kind of want to snap out of that. Obviously we're happy to take the two points and move forward but I think it's something that we've got to keep in the back of our minds that we don't want to let it happen anymore."

Even in a win, the questions remain.

We're still trying to figure out what this group is and how good it can be.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers struggling to match their own standards in recent skid

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec February 7, 2020, 5:38 PM

EDMONTON — The coach was grumpy on Friday, the day after the San Jose Sharks had embarrassed his Edmonton Oilers by outworking them in every corner of a 6-3 loss, the Oilers' second straight.

Dave Tippett was P.O.'ed at practice, and he wasn't much happier with the media after that.



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"What was the message at practice?" he was asked, after closing the workout with a pointed, one-way conversation with his players.

"Don't turn the puck over in our own end," Tippett said in as few words as possible. Then he paused.

"Probably not as nice as that though," he added.

So, here's the problem in Edmonton, where they finished off a stellar three-game run against Calgary (twice) and St. Louis with five of six points and a renewed belief in themselves: They've shown everyone how good a team this can be.

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There were times when that San Jose effort was expected; when you looked down the Oilers roster and didn't expect much.

But this team, they haven't spent 54 games in or near first place in their division by mistake. They're not doing this with mirrors, or with two players carrying the entire load every night.

It's actually a pretty decent team that new GM Ken Holland has put together here, and one that should only get better as he builds it up. But a roster that can spend two-thirds of a season at this level has run out of excuses for two games as poor as the last two the Oilers have trotted out.

"There are games that you play where you set a standard for your team," Tippett explained. "Against St. Louis, against Calgary, you set standards. You set new heights for your team. Those are standards you've got to try to get to every night, and when you don't get there it's frustrating."

All teams lose two in a row. Good teams don't lose three, or so the saying goes.

"We said that in October. We said it in November. We said it in December," said Tippett, whose charges face Nashville on Hockey Day in Canada Saturday. "It's always the time (to stop a losing streak). This time isn't different than any other time. It's always the time. I understand what you're saying — it's the playoff race and everything. But when we had the losing streak in December we were saying the same things then."

How good a team are the Oilers, really?

Well, good enough that the players won't grab at excuses, like when Leon Draisaitl was told that Connor McDavid blamed the loss to the Sharks on a lack of emotion in Edmonton's play.

"I don't know if it's emotions," said Draisaitl, whose team blew an early 2-0 lead. "We had emotions in the first five minutes, so, I don't think it had anything to do with that. We were just not good. We weren't hard enough; we didn't compete hard enough. You're not going to win very many games when you play like that."

This Oilers team isn't the Oilers circa 2010, 2014, or even 2019. This is a better team, with more legit NHL players, better goaltending, two maturing superstars and a dressing room that is much better equipped to handle some mid-season adversity.

But how good are they, really? Well, that's the million dollar question, isn't it?

We thought the Toronto Maple Leafs were finally good, but after a rebuild that began a decade or so ago the Leafs have yet to win a playoff round. They could legitimately miss the post-season this year, which seemed unthinkable back in October.

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

The Calgary Flames? They've had some good teams over the years — many better than their provincial rivals — but the Flames have won one playoff series since 2004.

How about the poor Winnipeg Jets, where the slow build seemed to come to fruition two springs ago when the Jets went all the way to the Western Conference Final? Well, for everything the Jets have done right, they have won playoff series in just one of the eight springs since coming over from Atlanta, and sit perilously outside a wild-card spot as we write this.

Sure, this Oilers team looks a lot better than so many editions that have preceded it this century. But how do you really know?

"There are going to be highs and lows throughout the year," reasoned veteran winger Zack Kassian. "We just came off an (8-1-2) record, then we lay down a dud in Arizona, get some penalty trouble (versus San Jose), and we can't find our game. It's frustrating.

"This game tomorrow is very important. As far as the standings go, we haven't lost any ground. But we haven't gained any ground either, so we have to turn this around here."

"It's all about tomorrow now," promised Draisaitl. "Be a tight team to play against. Play the way we can."

Play the way we can.

In Edmonton, that hasn't always been a good thing.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Ilya Kovalchuk drawing interest from Bruins, Flames, Oilers

Eric Engels | @EricEngels February 7, 2020, 12:34 PM

MONTREAL — They are the words Ilya Kovalchuk keeps repeating, with the trade deadline looming and with his Montreal Canadiens continuing on their improbable push to the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"Right now, let's see what happens over the next two-to-three weeks. That's what I'm focused on," the 36-year-old has responded over and over again to questions about his affinity for Montreal and whether or not it would drive him to consider staying with the Canadiens for next season.

Kovalchuk knows the reality. He knows that the team is five points behind the Florida Panthers — who have three games in-hand — for third place in the Atlantic Division. He also knows the Canadiens are six points back of the Carolina Hurricanes — who have two games in-hand and occupy the second wild card spot in the Eastern Conference.

He knows GM Marc Bergevin won't start unloading assets until they've slipped further back, but he's certainly not oblivious to the fact that the Canadiens, who have won eight of their last 11 games, still have two non-playoff teams ahead of them in the standings.

And you know what else Kovalchuk knows? He knows that he's got five goals and 11 points in 14 games since signing a prorated \$700,000-contract with Montreal and that several other teams are interested in his services.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Here's what we know: The Canadiens, who are hoping to win at least six of their eight games leading into the Feb. 24 deadline, aren't likely to accept less than a second-round pick or, at worst, a conditional third-round pick that turns into a second for Kovalchuk's services should they fall further back in the race.

And here's what we found out on Tuesday as we were watching the Canadiens pull off a 5-4 comeback win over the New Jersey Devils: The Boston Bruins might be the most likely team to offer up that kind of compensation for the Russian sniper.

The Bruins intend on loading up for a second consecutive run to the Stanley Cup Final. Kovalchuk is a player they're watching closely.

He's not the only one, obviously. New York Rangers forward Chris Kreider is on their radar, and they're also doing due diligence on San Jose Sharks icon Joe Thornton and, to a lesser extent, his teammate, Patrick Marleau.

But after the Bruins weren't convinced Kovalchuk could help them when his three-year, \$18.75-million deal with the Los Angeles Kings was terminated in December, they've been very impressed with what he's done in Montreal and they understand the value of adding a player who's shown he can fill a top-six role if they suffer an injury to a key player between now and the end of the season. It only helps that he's competed extremely hard at both ends of the rink and that the buzz about his leadership, his energy and his sheer passion for the game make it likely he would fit well with their group.

The fact that the Bruins own a second-round pick in each of the next three drafts could give them an edge over say, the Columbus Blue Jackets, who don't have one in either of the next two.

The Calgary Flames and Edmonton Oilers, however, are two teams that also have varying degrees of interest in Kovalchuk, I've been told. They both have the picks to swing it, but Edmonton is cap-strapped, which means adding Kovalchuk could make more sense to them than taking on someone else at a higher salary.

Just my own personal thought here, which is not based on anything I've heard, the Panthers could be another team that gets in the mix for Kovalchuk — especially if they trade Mike Hoffman for some help on the blue line.

On Max Domi's situation

The 24-year-old's name hasn't necessarily hit the rumour mill as much as it's been speculated about by several people around Montreal.

He was hoping to sign a long-term deal with the Canadiens out of his 28-goal, 72-point 2018-19 campaign, but he understood that management was going to want to see if he could repeat that kind of production this year.

Obviously, the results haven't been what Domi hoped for, as he has just 13 goals and 36 points in his 56 games. Jonathan Drouin's three-month absence with a wrist injury has been an undeniable factor in that—with the two showing great chemistry at points last season — but Domi has taken responsibility for games where he just hasn't lived up to his own standards.

"There have been some games where I've looked at myself and know I can do better," he said on Thursday. "But there have also been a lot of them where I've played really well. All I want is to continue to get better and be a guy who's consistently trusted to play against top guys every night."

According to another source, Domi and the Canadiens haven't talked contract in "a while." And he's staying mum on the situation.

But that's not to say both parties won't resume talks soon.

On the one hand, the Canadiens need to understand what Domi's value is to them as a winger, because Nick Suzuki is trending towards becoming an excellent centre and the hope is that Jesperi

Kotkaniemi will develop into one in short order. It's the kind of thing that could make for a shorter-term deal between both parties or have the Canadiens explore the trade market.

On the other hand, the Canadiens need to take into account that Domi's a versatile forward and he can step into the middle if both Suzuki and Kotkaniemi if one of them suffers an injury. He also wants to be in Montreal and plays with the kind of passion that will undoubtedly pay off for the Canadiens in the playoffs (if they make it there at some point in the near future).

On Domi's end, he holds some leverage on a long-term deal that buys up some UFA years from him. He wants to be here, and the Canadiens have had a difficult time convincing free agents to come in recent years.

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

On Tomas Tatar

As our own Elliotte Friedman reported earlier this week, the Edmonton Oilers and Pittsburgh Penguins have looked into potentially poaching Tatar, and we can add the Calgary Flames to that list.

The thing is, Tatar set a career high with 58 points in 80 games last season after he was traded from the Vegas Golden Knights with Suzuki and a second-round pick for Max Pacioretty, and he's on pace to shatter that number this season.

On Thursday, suffering from the stomach flu, Tatar recorded his 31st assist of the season in a 3-2 win over the Anaheim Ducks. It was his 51st point in his 56th game.

So, of the Oilers, the Penguins and the Flames, which team do you think has the biggest incentive to add him — Tatar has one season left at a \$5.3-million cap hit, with Vegas retaining \$500,000 of it on their cap — and which team has the assets to actually get it done? I'm pretty sure the answer to both questions is Pittsburgh.

But it's going to take a lot to pry Tatar away from the Canadiens. They want to make next year's playoffs and he's their leading scorer.

"Ghost"

It's a nickname some scouts have for Carolina Hurricanes senior vice-president of hockey operations Rick Dudley.

When we saw Dudley's name on the attendance list for Thursday's game at the Bell Centre but didn't see him, one scout said, "That's why we call him 'Ghost'."

If Dudley was camped out somewhere in the building, it would have been for a third or fourth time over the last few weeks.

The buzz is that Carolina wants some defensive depth. Brett Kulak and Marco Scandella could be players in their sights.

Uncle Nate

The New York Islanders are a vault with Lou Lamoriello in charge of hockey operations, but consider them a team that might have interest in adding Nate Thompson to their mix.

The 35-year-old has three goals and 11 points in 56 games — playing exclusively as a fourth-line centre — and he's won 55 per cent of his faceoffs this season.

There are only 25 players who have taken more faceoffs than Thompson's 659 this season.

Coach Barry Trotz has a history of coveting players like this. Think Paul Gaustad going to Nashville in 2012.



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Was speaking with an NHL exec at the NJ game the other night and he was very impressed by Nate Thompson's skating. The guy moves exceptionally well for 35.

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) February 7, 2020

Note: The executive cited in this tweet does not work for the Islanders.

The Islanders obviously love what they have on their fourth line, with Casey Cizikas centring Matt Martin and Leo Komarov, but that doesn't mean they wouldn't have interest in the depth Thompson can offer them.

Thompson's reputation as a mentor and high-character guy won't hurt either, whether it's the Islanders or some other team interested in adding a faceoff specialist who can kill penalties and chip in on the scoresheet here or there.

The pending UFA is the most likely asset to move off Montreal's roster between now and the deadline.

On Dale Weise

List the Winnipeg Jets as a potential suitor for Weise.

They're one point out of the playoffs right now and pushing as hard as they can. Provided they continue to go in the right direction — and that their situation with Dustin Byfuglien gets cleared up in the coming days — they have to see Weise as an upgrade on Logan Shaw, the former Canadien who's currently occupying a spot as a fourth-line right wing.

Here's what Canadiens coach Claude Julien said about what Weise has done since being called up from AHL Laval 15 games ago:

"When Dale came last year I didn't see much. I don't know if it was because he was in the minors for a long time and whatever the case was. But he didn't bring what he's bringing right now. And when you're honest and you look at a player... training camp (this season) he wasn't a bad player, but we had no room for him. But he's come back and we've put him in the lineup and he's doing exactly what we need him to do — and that's not fighting. I know he's fought a couple of times, but he's playing his role. I've had to use him on the penalty-kill whenever one of our penalty-killers is in the box and he just does his role. He's not trying to do too much and he's not trying to do more. He's just doing a good job at what he's supposed to do."

Weise, a Winnipeg native, is also very highly regarded by his teammates. Devils forward and former Philadelphia Flyers teammate Wayne Simmonds recently said Weise is "the ultimate team guy."

Perhaps the Canadiens would have to retain a bit of salary in a trade — he's on an expiring deal that has a \$2.35 million cap hit — but they should have no problem doing that if it means redeeming a draft pick for his services.

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Sportsnet.ca / Strengths and weaknesses of NHL's top five trade candidates

Andrew Berkshire

As we draw nearer to the NHL's trade deadline on Feb. 24, the list of names that will be available is becoming clearer. So today we're going to look at five of the top players available, their strengths, their weaknesses, and what they're worth on the market.

Let's get right to it.

Chris Kreider

Likely the hottest name on the rental market this season, Kreider has been in the rumour mills for a few years now with the Rangers in rebuild mode, but this season with an expiring contract and an extremely digestible cap hit, it's unlikely the Rangers decide to keep the hulking speedster. Kreider has taken a slight step back this year in a couple areas, but he's still a very good player.

Strengths

Any team looking to acquire Kreider is going to be looking for specific attributes on top of just filling a hole in their top-six forward group. Like I mentioned in a recent Truth by Numbers column, Kreider has seen his net front presence at even strength drop a bit, but he's still in the top 25 per cent of forwards in inner slot shots, and the top five per cent in slot pass receptions, so he's no stranger to going to dangerous areas.

His impact in tight is even stronger on the powerplay, where he ranks in the top five per cent in inner slot shots, offensive zone rebound recoveries and deflections on net. He also takes a whopping 89.6 per cent of his powerplay shots from the slot. Despite rarely if ever playing with Artemi Panarin, his on-ice differentials remain pretty strong at even strength aside from the inner slot on the defensive side where wingers don't have a huge impact. So he's a powerplay force and a positive even strength performer on top of it.

Weaknesses

While Kreider is a monster in front of the net, if a team is looking for other assets on the powerplay, they may want to look elsewhere. Gaining the offensive zone on the powerplay is a huge weakness — he ranks in the bottom 10 per cent of all forwards — and the same goes for playmaking with the man advantage both in slot passes and in passes that create one-timers.

To be fair, it's tough to make many great passes when your primary role is the net front, but Kreider struggles to complete passes for one-timers at even strength as well. A high-end playmaker he isn't, but a net front scorer with a unique blend of size and speed has tons of value.

Trade value

That aforementioned unique blend makes Kreider a special commodity that should generate a lot of interest. Despite being a pure rental, I'd be shocked he didn't garner at least a second-round pick and a good prospect. It might not be likely, but a first-round pick isn't out of the question.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau

Primarily a defensive player, Pageau is riding a career high in shooting percentage to his first ever 20-goal season, and he's got almost 30 games left to add to the total. The scoring isn't sustainable, but Pageau has tons of value beyond that.

Strengths

Pageau does his best work in the defensive zone, where he ranks in the top two per cent of all forwards in blocked passes, the top five per cent of all players in defensive zone plays that strip opponents of the puck. On top of removing possession from opponents, Pageau ranks in the top 25 per cent of all forwards at recovering loose pucks in the defensive zone. Without the puck, he's one of the most reliable defensive players in the league.

Weaknesses

What limits Pageau's value a bit is that once he's stripped opponents of the puck, he struggles to exit the defensive zone with control, so he needs someone else on his line to turn his strong play without the puck into transitioning play forward.



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And despite the excellent shooting percentage this season, Pageau ranks in the bottom 20 per cent of all forwards in scoring chances at 5-vs-5, and bottom 15 per cent in completed slot passes. On top of that he doesn't create much offence through possessions, he's bottom five per cent in the league there, or through forechecking, where he's also bottom five per cent. Pageau has finishing ability, but he doesn't create much offence, and the teams after him shouldn't expect him to.

Trade value

Some team out there is probably going to get sucked in by the career high numbers, but as good as Pageau is defensively, I don't think he's worth more than a second-round draft pick with his other limitations.

Tyler Toffoli

Back when Toffoli followed up his first 20-goal season with a career-high 31, his stock was sky high at 23-years-old. A possession driving power forward who could put pucks in the net on the regular is a big deal, but the decline of the Kings has hit Toffoli hard, and his perceived value is a little low these days despite his play recovering in a big way this season.

Strengths

On a team that sticks mostly to the perimeter, Toffoli stakes out a sniper's position in the high slot, ripping scoring chances on net more often than all but five per cent of forwards. He's not afraid of the net front either, putting shots on net from the inner slot more often than all but 15 per cent of forwards.

On top of the scoring ability, Toffoli is an underrated defensive player. He ranks in the top 25 per cent of all forwards in recovering rebounds in the defensive zone to prevent dangerous chances while his goaltenders are recovering, and he's a disruptive defender by getting in the way of passes in the defensive and neutral zone. Toffoli also ranks in the top 15 per cent of all forwards at blocking those passes. Once he gets the puck, Toffoli is a smart puck manager as well, with one of the lowest defensive zone turnover rates in the NHL.

Weaknesses

Toffoli brings a lot as a shooter, but if a team is looking to add some playmaking, he's not the player to add. Toffoli is bottom 30 per cent in slot passes and one-timer passes, and on the powerplay that drops down to bottom 15 per cent. He's also strangely poor at blocking shots, but as a winger I'm not sure that's a huge deal on the defensive side.

Trade value

His reputation isn't anywhere as strong, but in terms of overall value there isn't much to suggest that Toffoli is worth any less than Kreider. There's probably no way he fetches the same return, which sucks for the Kings, but means whoever acquires him should probably be pretty happy.

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

Sami Vatanen

Vatanen has been a strange player to evaluate over the years, with his numbers jumping around pretty wildly after he was traded two years ago and then struggled with injuries last season. This year though, he's provided great value that's been hidden by the car wreck of a season the Devils are having.

Strengths

While Vatanen's on-ice differentials at 5-vs-5 are decent on a team it's hard to stand out on, most of his big strengths are on special

teams. On the powerplay he takes lots of shots, more than all but 15 per cent of all defencemen. But more important than that is his ability to make passes. Vatanen connects on passes to the slot on the powerplay like a top five per cent defenceman, which is huge for any powerplay that needs a quarterback.

While shorthanded, Vatanen is top five per cent in loose puck recoveries and top 10 per cent in defensive plays that remove pucks from opponents, which fits with his aggressive style of play.

Weaknesses

Despite his aggressiveness on the penalty kill, Vatanen doesn't carry that over to even strength, where he's a bottom 25 per cent defenceman at recovering loose pucks in the defensive zone, and slightly below that in winning contested puck battles. He's also in the bottom 20 per cent of controlled exits out of the defensive zone at even strength, so it's clear that he needs some help from a defence partner in his own zone at 5-vs-5 hockey.

Trade value

When the Devils acquired Vatanen two seasons ago it required a top-six forward in Adam Henrique, along with a young depth player in Joseph Blandisi and a third round pick. Even though Henrique has fallen off since, at the time he was a No. 2 centre, so that was quite a haul the Ducks pulled off. I doubt Vatanen has that much value these days, but due to the scarcity of right handed defencemen who can run a powerplay, it wouldn't be surprising to see a similar package that was more futures focused. A highly regarded prospect on top of a package of picks wouldn't surprise me.

Ilya Kovalchuk

Who would have thought that Ilya Kovalchuk joining a team built around speed and quick strike transitions would lead to his best hockey in years? I'm only including his differentials since he signed with the Canadiens here, because it's clear that he's been a different player since he joined the team, and these games are what teams will be thinking of at the trade deadline.

Strengths

Kovalchuk isn't the offensive weapon he was in his prime, but the man can still fire the puck and he can set up some great shots too. At even strength he's top 10 per cent among all forwards at putting one-timers on net, and top 15 per cent in completing passes off the rush. He's also surprisingly excellent winning battles in the neutral zone and top 10 per cent among all forwards at recovering loose pucks there.

On the powerplay, Kovalchuk is all about one-timers again and he puts them on net like a top-15 per cent player but creates even more with his teammates by hitting passes for one-timers at a top 10 per cent rate.

Weaknesses

A symptom of being 36-years-old and going on 37, Kovalchuk doesn't have the speed in short bursts he used to in order to complete dekes in the offensive zone, and as a result he's bottom five per cent in both completed dekes and deke success rate, so once he has the puck, that's likely where he's going to make his play from.

Without the puck Kovalchuk isn't the highest impact player either. He's in the bottom 10 per cent in defensive plays that remove possession from the opponent, and the same goes for blocking passes.

As much as he's a deadshot on one-timers on the powerplay, he can be too willing to shoot from the perimeter. But with the success he's had in his career, maybe he's earned the trust to shoot from where he wants to.

Trade value



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There's a lot of wishing in Montreal that teams might be willing to give up a first-round pick after how well Kovalchuk has played for the Canadiens, but the uncertainty of him being as great of a fit elsewhere after his extremely underwhelming stint in Los Angeles makes me doubt it. The age and the uncertainty screams second-round pick to me.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames remain plagued by nightly search for stable line combinations

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis February 7, 2020, 2:12 PM

CALGARY – The coach punctuated the Calgary Flames' latest loss by ripping into his team for its lack of grit, desperation and compete-level.

The players spoke of their confidence issues on offence.

What no one mentioned is the fact that many of the aforementioned problems plaguing the Flames right now stem from the fact this team still doesn't have set lines.

A stunning 55 games into a National Hockey League season and interim coach Geoff Ward is still tinkering with line combinations on a nightly basis.

Not ideal.

"You're 100 per cent right – we need to get consistent combinations," said Ward, prior to the team's third-consecutive loss.

"That's a priority for us, to get down to those set combinations. I think we're really close to that. I think we've got the foundation of what those are, but when things aren't going, and you're going more than half a period and not much is happening on the offensive side for you, then you feel like sometimes you may need to change one or two guys to see if it can work."

He's referencing one of the biggest issues the team has been dealing with the bulk of the last five years: Who to play alongside Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan?

Outside of Jiri Hudler four years ago and Elias Lindholm last season, the Flames have struggled to find someone compatible with the team's marquee duo.

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In Thursday's 3-2 loss to the Nashville Predators, the top line started the night with AHL call-up Buddy Robinson, and finished with PTO signing Tobias Rieder.

The two have combined for two NHL goals over the last two seasons. The idea behind using them there is that the two workhorses provide energy, speed and the ability to retrieve pucks for the duo that is well off the offensive pace set last season.

A long list of others have auditioned for the gig, without call-backs.

The coach's belief is that if they can just find the right fit alongside Gaudreau and Monahan, the other lines can flow from there.

"I think that's the key – what's working there," said Ward, whose club has two wins (via shootout) in its last eight outings.

"It kind of sets everything else up. [Lindholm] has been able to play with them. Jiri Hudler had some success with them, but there's been different guys in and out of there to try to make it go.

"Johnny is a dynamic talent and Monny can finish tremendously, so that guy on the other side has to be potentially a lot of things. He has to have a lot of tools in order to fill in everything that needs to happen for those other guys to exercise their strengths. That's why it made sense to try [Mikael Backlund] there – good hands, can see the ice, defensive presence... there were a lot of things we liked about it. It was good early."

And then it wasn't.

Lindholm started the season with Gaudreau and Monahan but the trio wasn't having anywhere near the impact it had last season. So, when Ward took over in late November he moved Lindholm from the wing to centre a line alongside Matthew Tkachuk.

It had some success early, leading the team to a seven-game winning streak that got the Flames back into a playoff spot that is now just one point away from disappearing.

When the Flames are pressing hard for a late goal Ward will still occasionally reunite Lindholm with Gaudreau and Monahan, as he did in Tuesday's 3-1 loss to the San Jose Sharks.

"The last couple games we went dead, flat," said Ward, explaining his second and third-period line-tinkering.

"Buddy has shown himself well where he is, but we talked about it during the first and second periods [Tuesday], thinking, 'maybe if we put Elias back it might spark those guys a bit and drive a little energy.'"

It didn't.

Suffice it to say, very few teams in the playoff hunt are dealing with similar line issues.

On most nights this season it's been tough to identify the Flames' top line.

Early on in Ward's tenure it appeared Tkachuk, Lindholm and Andrew Mangiapane were poised to take over as the club's top unit.

However, they too have been unable to produce offensively with any sort of consistency.

Fact is, the Flames don't have an obvious top line, which helps explain how the team sits 23rd in scoring, with a goal differential of minus-20.

Ward insists he's happy with the basic framework of his lines, which focuses on compatible duos such as: Monahan and Gaudreau; Lindholm and Tkachuk; Milan Lucic and Derek Ryan; Sam Bennett and Backlund.

The rest of the players have been used to try filling in the blanks – a good word to describe how they've been shooting of late.

"You're always trying to assess stuff and see what's there," said Ward, whose club opens a four-game road trip in Vancouver Saturday that winds its way through all three California stops.

"But we've got to get down to the consistent lineup for sure."

By the playoffs?

"I'd like it in the next week to be honest with you," he chuckled.

"We're getting there."

Not quickly enough.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Jacob Markstrom's season has been more impressive than you think

Andrew Berkshire

Despite a couple of losses in a row, the Vancouver Canucks have ridden a surge to the top of the Pacific Division, and a big reason for that is our Spotlight performer of the week.

SPOTLIGHT PERFORMANCE

For years we were told Jacob Markstrom was the next great goaltending prospect, but he floundered in Florida and struggled to keep his spot in the league. Eventually the Canucks acquired him, but even with the confidence many hockey people had in him, it took a long time for Markstrom to establish himself.

For the past three seasons now he's been a high quality starting goaltender for the Canucks, and at the age of 30 he's having the best statistical season of his career on the surface. Digging a little deeper, his performance is even more impressive than his .916 save percentage — which is way above the league average of .909 — shows.

While the Canucks are a much-improved team this season in many areas, they still struggle to defend a lot of the time, especially off the rush. The Canucks give up more rush chances than any other team in the league this year, which should give some added context to Markstrom's numbers.

From the most dangerous area of the ice, Markstrom has been incredible this season, posting the fourth-highest save percentage from the inner slot in all situations in the league. Only Tuukka Rask, Jake Allen, and Henrik Lundqvist have been better in tight.

From the high slot Markstrom is similarly dominant, exerting his influence on the slot overall to give the Canucks a breather when they have defensive breakdowns. Only Connor Hellebuyck, Carey Price, David Rittich, and Sergei Bobrovsky have faced more scoring chances on net overall than Markstrom, and of that group he holds the highest overall save percentage from the slot at .854, which says a lot.

It's a lot easier to build a team when you have a goaltender you can rely on night in and night out, and Markstrom has been that for the Canucks.

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THE QUESTION

Steve Dangle was busy this week, so I'm going to do an impression of him and imagine what he would have asked if he had a chance.

"Clifford! Not the big red dog, but Kyle! Is he good? What can we expect?"

Kyle Clifford has been a depth guy who a lot of teams have coveted for a long time, although that happens a lot with depth guys who are on Cup-winning teams regardless of whether they're actually good or not.

Clifford was the first person to downplay his offence upon meeting with Toronto media, but with 14 points this season and 21 last year, that's actually solid offence from a fourth line type, and it's not like he's shooting the lights out either with a 6.7 shooting percentage this season, just a hair below his career average.

What Clifford does bring is a surprisingly strong possession game.

A rough and tumble type, Clifford has a strong defensive impact. He limits high danger chances against at the same rate as Anze Kopitar and stays above team average in all shot-based differentials.

Now, he's not facing the same level of competition Kopitar does, but when you can have a depth line controlling over 56 per cent of shots from the inner slot, you're probably pretty happy.

Despite downplaying his offence, Clifford was actually generating the fourth-most scoring chances on the Kings before the trade, outpaced by only Austin Wagner, Tyler Toffoli, and Jeff Carter. So despite his claim about not being the second coming of Auston Matthews, don't be surprised if he chips in with the odd goal and can even play up in the lineup for short bursts to add some net front presence or cover for an injury.

Clifford's a big fan of the heavy game, something most people would agree the Leafs are lacking a little bit. He plays with fire and uses his body to win puck battles at a rate higher than 80 per cent of other forwards in the league.

He exerts that influence most effectively on the forecheck, where he creates turnovers for his teammates to take advantage of and cuts off opponents trying to take the puck. He's not going to single-handedly fix the Leafs on defence, but there appears to be a lot of areas where he can help out overall.

QUICK HITS

- One of the main reasons the Minnesota Wild have been so disappointing this season has been Devan Dubnyk. No goaltender who plays regularly has a worse inner slot save percentage at 5-on-5 than Dubnyk's .635, and no one is worse than him in all situations either at .675. Those shots are more dangerous, but at a certain point you do need a goaltender to make some tough stops.
- Another goaltender holding his team back is Marc-Andre Fleury, who faces the least pre-shot movement of any goalie in the NHL this year with just 11.7 slot passes against per 60 minutes.
- Contrast Fleury's numbers with Robin Lehner, who the Blackhawks leave out to dry to an embarrassing degree. He faces a league-high 17.4 slot passes against every 60 minutes in all situations, and a league-high 8.3 inner slot shots.
- The most familiar name possible has taken over the NHL's goal scoring lead. Alex Ovechkin already has 40 goals with 29 games left to go, and he leads the league in scoring chances with 245. Next after him in both goals and chances is Matthews with 39 and 226 respectively.

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Sportsnet.ca / 5 reasons to believe the Jets have turned their season around

Sean Reynolds February 7, 2020, 2:19 PM

If the idea is that failure is a teacher, the Winnipeg Jets had plenty of lessons in this season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2020

Fans have watched this team plummet below the playoff line from a comfortable perch over the better part of two months now as it's looked like an off-season of roster upheaval has finally caught up with the team.

And yet suddenly, the Jets are on the move. A 2-1-1 record since the all-star break may not be enough proof that Winnipeg is back to being a contender, but it's enough to ask the question.

Scoring first

The Jets have now scored the first goal in five straight games.

That's huge considering they haven't won a game in which they've trailed since way back in November. Slow starts have crippled the Jets and the team is near the bottom of the league in both first period goals and shots.

Scoring first has meant the Jets have trailed for just 22:31 over their last five games. Not having to chase the game has given them a real shot at winning each of those nights.

Defence

Over the past five games the Jets have faced four top 11 offences in the Bruins (6th), Predators (11th) and the Blues twice (8th), allowing just nine regulation goals.

Things got out of hand in the month of January when the Jets racked up a minus-14 goal differential. At one time this team was able to outscore its defensive woes but that ability has dried up, meaning any turn around will be lead from the net out. In that regard this team is getting results. For now.

Effort

On too many nights through January and December the Jets were no shows leading to demoralizing losses. But Winnipeg has run a streak of games recently where they've been engaged in the fight from start to finish.

That effort is the starting point of a turnaround according to Jets head coach Paul Maurice. He pointed to the St. Louis Blues' Stanley Cup winning season as an example.

"They got to the point where hard compete on every shift was all they had left, that's the only place you could go," said Maurice. "Then your confidence grows, now you're feeling it."

Maurice had said before his team's recent success that they were playing a winning brand of hockey. Now the team believes its outcome is finally matching its input.

Depth scoring

Losing Adam Lowry to injury was a blow this team did not look capable of overcoming. Instead it's created a spark on the third line that has been leading the charge during this resurgence.

The combination of Andrew Copp, Jack Roslovic and Jansen Harkins has been critical as of late, combing for nine points over the last three games including two game winning goals. The Jets third line has been a black hole of offensive production for most of the season, but recently they've been the difference between winning and losing for this club.

Clarity on Dustin Byfuglien

As of this writing the Jets and Dustin Byfuglien have yet to finalize a divorce but the way the players are openly talking in the media, the man is long gone.

The players can say all they want about his absence being something they haven't thought about but a conclusion would truly put this situation in the rear view mirror, allowing players to keep their eyes forward. If they look in that direction, they may see a glimmer of hope.

The departure of Byfuglien will open massive cap space, giving general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff plenty of money to address the Jets' patchwork defence. With a dangerous offensive unit and a Vezina-candidate in the crease, a revamped blue line before the trade deadline could make this group a dark horse come playoff time in a season that looked lost not long ago.

Even with these factors now working in the Jets' favour, the climb to the playoffs remains steep. The Jets free fall has brought them into the middle of the fray of fringe playoff teams, many of them with games in hand on Winnipeg.

And critical issues remain. The Jets' underlying numbers still need work and their special teams continue to struggle. Maurice has said his team isn't going anywhere if the power play doesn't wake up.

But the Jets look to have found a game that will buy themselves time to address those issues. Having rebounded from a five-game losing streak, sometimes staying in the fight is the best you can do, until things get better.

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Sportsnet.ca / Geoff Ward calls out Flames after loss: 'We have to be more desperate'

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis February 7, 2020, 1:14 AM

CALGARY – Geoff Ward spoke earlier this week about the importance of bringing more anger to the rink.

On Thursday night he was one of the only ones who practised what he preached.

Following yet another evening full of uninspiring hockey from his club, Ward unleashed seven minutes of fury directed at a team that has lost three in a row at the most inopportune of times.

"It's about compete and how hard you want to compete," said Ward following a 3-2 Calgary Flames loss to the Nashville Predators after which he dished on his team's engagement of late. "At the end of the day, if there is a loose puck, are they getting it or we getting it? Right now, we're not getting it enough. Say what you want but we need to be way, way more desperate."

Asked about the team's identity, he scoffed.

"I think we've gotta find it," he said of a squad that has now won just twice in its last eight – both in shootouts.

"I thought we had it for a while. We've gotta find it again. We tried to be a scoring team last year. You saw what happened during playoff time. We've got to check in now and make sure we get back to our identity because we're not there now. Collectively, we have to be better, we have to be more desperate, we have to compete harder, and we have to understand what our identity is and we have to start playing to it."

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Earlier in the day he spoke of the importance of the players taking over the room at this time of year – showing initiative, heart and a hatred for losing.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2020

"Everybody understands how they've gotta play," said Ward of the structure in place. "At the end of the day, you've gotta go out and play. So, right now, if we're having issues with how we need to play, if we don't understand how we need to play, then we're in trouble. You look at good teams at this time of the year. Veteran players on the teams drive them, in a lot of cases."

Not here, he suggests. Not for awhile. And, he adds, it isn't a malaise that came about just because captain Mark Giordano missed his first game with his hamstring injury.

"This isn't something that just happened tonight," said Ward, whose team is now just one point ahead of Nashville and Winnipeg for the final wild-card spot.

"I mean, we've played stretches where we've been good. But, consistently, these are the things at playoff time that you have to pay attention to all of the time. You guys tell me. Look at teams that go on long playoff runs. What stands out about them? We have a decision to make as a team — are we prepared to do it? Because if we keep doing what we're doing, we're going to get more of the same. That's the bottom line."

Part of the frustration around the room afterwards was that a Travis Hamonic pass buried by Sam Bennett put the hosts up 1-0 just 33 seconds in.

Alas, 76 seconds later the Predators tied it and soon thereafter went up 2-1. A common turnaround.

From there the Flames did well to make Juuse Saros look like Vladislav Tretiak, sending the bulk of their 39 shots on him from the perimeter — a theme of late.

"The dirty jobs, we have to pay attention to those jobs," Ward said.

"There's a lot of things in a hockey game that need to be done. But just do things that make a difference. You want to be an uncommon player at this time of the year? Do the things that everybody can do, but a lot of people don't want to do. Block a shot. Take a hit to make a play. Get to the front of the net. Get greasy in the dirty areas of the game. I think structure-wise, we're all fine with the structure, but there's a lot more that goes into building a house than the structure. Once you've got the foundation up, you've got the joists up and everything else, you've got to fill the house out. So for us, we've got to make sure that we're doing a lot more in those gritty areas that make differences in games."

The surging Predators went up 3-1 midway through a second period, followed by a seeing-eye shot from Rasmus Andersson from the point that closed the gap to 3-2 with 30 minutes remaining.

From there, the Flames opened the third period with a stretch of futility that saw them take 12 minutes to record their first shot.

You read that right.

"When you come out in the third period and you don't get a shot for the first 10 minutes and you're in a one goal game..." shrugged Ward, demonstrating a frustration level befitting of the team's first three-game slide under his guidance.

"We're making a lot of goalies look good right now because we're not getting traffic there. You look at our goals tonight? Traffic. The other one's a net drive. We talk about playing inside all the time. Want to score in this league? You've got to play inside. You've got to be prepared to play inside. Tonight, we didn't play inside enough, again."

No argument here.

"Even before our first shot in the third we missed the net a bunch of times — they were doing a good job filling the lanes," added Milan Lucic. "We've just got to find our confidence again in the scoring areas. I think we're letting the goalie be a star too many nights

against us. Just bear down when we get our chances because I thought we created enough of them tonight.

"A good game, we just didn't get the result."

The coach disagreed.

"We can be better in a lot of areas, but at the end of the day, at this time of year, it comes down to compete," said Ward, whose club now hits the road for games in tough barns in Vancouver and all three California stops.

"How bad do you want it? I can't say it any more plainer than that."

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Sportsnet.ca / How Senators' Mark Borowiecki went from die-hard fan to franchise stalwart

Sonny Sachdeva | @sachdevasonny February 7, 2020, 11:14 AM

The name 'Mark Borowiecki' is tossed around with familiar regularity inside the walls of Ottawa's Canadian Tire Centre these days.

After nearly 400 games as a Senator — complete with his fair share of hard-fought bouts and, more recently, an offensive awakening — the 30-year-old defenceman's earned his place among the pantheon of Ottawa fan favourites.

A decade and a half ago, he'd have probably taken a shine to the type of player he's become. Either way, he'd be in the building to make the assessment with his own two eyes, no doubt. Because long before Borowiecki was a respected veteran manning the Senators' blue line, the Ottawa native was simply one among the crowd of locals stuffed into their replica jerseys, cheering on from the stands.

"I was a die-hard fan," says Borowiecki, who grew up in Kanata, the same Ottawa suburb in which the team's rink currently sits. "My dad had season tickets for quite a while. We've been going to games since '92, the inaugural year — back in the Civic Centre at Landsdowne there, my dad would take me to games. So I remember watching games in the old building back at the inception of the team. And we followed them all the way through."

It was more than just the games, though. The Borowieckis would also make the trek over to catch practices. They'd mosey up to the equipment staff to score sticks and chances to mingle with players. And it was the weight of that relationship with the team that made Borowiecki's supremely unique draft day a memorable one for the family.

The 2008 event was held in a familiar locale, with the Senators hosting the draft in Ottawa — the site of this weekend's Rogers Hometown Hockey festivities. Despite the short commute, and the hefty pile of hours he'd spent in the rink leading up to that day, Borowiecki wasn't in the house to hear his name called on the draft floor.

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"My parents, I think looking out for my well-being, didn't want me to go to the draft," he says. "There's always that kind of thinking that I might not get picked. And looking back on it, I'm very thankful for them looking out for me — the last thing that they wanted is me sitting in the stands all day and not getting picked. I can't imagine how that feels for a young man."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Though he didn't interview with the Senators before the draft — speaking instead to the Blue Jackets, Panthers and Stars — it was his hometown team that stirred up his weekend plans.

"I was at home," Borowiecki recalls. "We were kind of following along on the computer, watching the rounds go by. I was getting ready to go out fishing with my buddies. I was in the garage and I heard my parents screaming and yelling and I came running in. They were in tears, and I saw that Ottawa had picked me."

The euphoria of getting drafted to the club he'd grown up worshipping was, of course, quickly replaced by the chaos of getting over to the rink to meet his new general manager on the draft floor. But the tight-knit nature of Ottawa's hockey community granted him a bit of luck to speed up the process.

"There was actually a lot of 'six degrees of separation' going on. They called me and told me to throw on some nice clothes. We raced down to the rink, and the security guard working the door was actually my babysitter growing up," he recalls with a chuckle. "Went down to the floor and Bryan Murray was there. I remember kind of a fond memory of him — I put my hat on and he looked at me and he took my hat and slammed it down on my head a little lower. And he said, 'You're going to wear your hat properly here.' So that was kind of a 'Welcome to the NHL' moment for me."

"You know, it was a bit of a whirlwind day."

While the Borowieckis might be more well-known in the community now, they've always been a big part of it. It's just the nature of the city — while Ottawa has capital status and an image as one of the country's marquee spots, its character conveys precisely the opposite.

"We do really have that kind of small-town vibe, that small-town community-focused feel," the Senators blue-liner says. Same goes for the hockey crowd in town. "The minor hockey programs here are very close-knit. It's on a much smaller scale than something like the GTA and I think you're able to form relationships with kids who are in a lot of different associations. I have a lot of close friends that are guys who I grew up playing against."

It's no surprise, then, that his earliest memories of the game come with a quintessential small-town tinge — a backyard rink built by his dad each winter, with four-year-old Mark taking his first spins around the outdoor sheet. His foray into the sport got off the ground right around the same time the nearby Sens were doing the same, in fact.

When the team and player crossed paths a decade and a half later, Borowiecki became the first Ottawa-born player ever drafted by the club, the serendipity of that reunion meaning more for Mark and his wife, Tara, as his career reaches its twilight.

"I think back then, it didn't really resonate as much as it does now that I'm getting older. It's something cool that Tara and I and our families will hang on to forever," he says. "This organization has meant a lot to me and I'd like to think I've done my best to help this organization in any way I can. Wherever my career ends up taking me, whether it's this year, next year, whenever it may be, Ottawa's always going to have a special place in our hearts. It's our home. It's where we grew up."

Few can say they grew up on as wild a ride as No. 74 in red and white. Those first few games in the big leagues exemplified the strangeness of it all, with Borowiecki suddenly thrust onto the ice with the very Senators mainstays he'd idolized as a fan.

"Early in my career I had some issues, just being kind of star-struck," he says. "Those players out on the ice — you know, Alfie (Daniel Alfredsson), Neiler (Chris Neil), (Chris) Phillips, (Jason) Spezza, (Chris) Kelly. All these guys who I'd grown up watching and worshipping. To be on the ice with them, I think it was nerve-racking for me."

For Phillips, a stalwart in Ottawa for nearly 20 years, one thing sticks out above the rest when remembering a young Borowiecki.

"I remember hearing what a hard worker he was, and then saw it firsthand for myself," Phillips says. "It was cool to have a local kid that had grown up a fan of us on the team. It was a great story of perseverance, because of how hard he had worked and the path he took to get there."

Over time, as things naturally progressed, the novelty eventually gave way to familiarity.

"As I kind of matured as a man and as an adult and felt a little more comfortable in my role, I think that nervousness turned into a kind of gratitude," Borowiecki says. "It's special to be able to pull on the jersey of your hometown team — a lot of guys think about it and talk about how cool it would be. And I've been able to live it for almost 400 games. It's something I try not to take for granted."

Ottawa Senators' Mark Borowiecki bows his head during a moment of silence for the Humboldt Broncos bus crash victims in 2018. (Michael Dwyer/CP)

Each passing year has seen Borowiecki's Sens tenure take on new life. Once a name associated only with rugged, bone-clattering checks and heavy-haymaker bouts, he's grown into a cult classic in Senators lore. Incidentally, much of that has more to do with who Borowiecki is off the ice than his proficiency on it — though he is in the midst of a career year under new coach D.J. Smith.

His old mates couldn't be happier seeing Borowiecki grow into a beloved leader for the young Sens.

"It has been so great to see. His game has not changed — he leaves it all out there every game he plays, and does whatever he can to help the team win," says Phillips. "His leadership is exactly what every team needs — a heart-and-soul guy that wants to win, has fun doing it and has the character to know the right things to do both on the ice and in the community."

That off-ice aura around the hometown boy grew exponentially over the past year, specifically in December when the defender affectionately known as 'BoroCop' staved off a robbery in downtown Vancouver.

It's been a wild ride made even more odd by incidents such as that one. But for Borowiecki, if his reputation as a person precedes who he is as a player, so be it.

"It's a little bit more viral than I anticipated this year, I think. But it's definitely a source of pride for me," he says of the praise he's gotten for his character away from the rink. "You know, I used to sit in the back of the plane with Chris Kelly and he impressed that upon me — 'What do you want your legacy to be after you play? Is it just on-ice accomplishments, or is it how you're known as a human being?' And I think this year, especially, Tara and I are lucky enough to be having our first child here soon, and it's kind of changed my outlook on life. You know, what can I do on a daily basis to be a good person, and help someone else, to try to make this community and — not to get too abstract — but make this world a better place for my son to live in?"

"I think that's a lesson you can pass on to a lot of young guys, too: Treat people with respect. I'm very proud that people know me as being a respectful guy and a good person, and that's what's important to me. It's not just the on-ice hockey stuff. It's how I'm viewed around the community."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2020

TSN.CA / Frederik Andersen progressing but remains out this weekend

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The team (optional) skated at Scotiabank Arena on Friday.

Frederik Andersen skated for the second straight day on Friday, working closely with goalie coach Steve Briere, but will remain sidelined this weekend with a neck injury.

"It was very positive, obviously, the fact he went out again today," said coach Sheldon Keefe. "The fact that he's skating every day is very positive."

However, there is still no specific timeline for the all-star's return.

"Just day-to-day, because of the nature of it," Keefe explained. "It's really just a matter of when the medical staff and, most importantly, Fred, of course, feel comfortable with him getting into game action. But it's been, from what I'm told, very positive. The fact that he's wanted to get in the net and he's getting through all the drills and Steve's been pushing him hard and he's responding well."

Leafs Ice Chips: 'Very positive' progress, but Andersen will miss weekend games

After Frederik Andersen skated for the second straight day, Sheldon Keefe revealed that Freddy won't return this weekend, paving the way for newly acquired Jack Campbell to make back-to-back starts, but he is trending in the right direction. Mark Masters has more.

With Andersen out, Keefe confirmed that newly acquired goalie Jack Campbell may start both tonight against Anaheim and tomorrow in Montreal. The 28-year-old isn't expecting a big adjustment period with his new team.

"Honestly, our job is pretty simple: just stopping the puck. I was thinking about that during the meeting and going over the X's and O's and I just have to stop the puck," Campbell said.

Campbell and winger Kyle Clifford, the other player traded to Toronto, met up with Jake Muzzin, who played with them in Los Angeles, and Mitch Marner last night for dinner.

"Mitchy was nice enough to pick up that tab," Clifford said with his trademark toothless grin. "Hell of a guy."

Campbell digested the free food and some new information on what life as a Leaf will be like.

"I talked to Muzz a little bit about their system and playing the puck behind the net and stuff like that, so got that figured out and time to have some fun and get it done," Campbell with a big smile.

"I think the greatest challenge would be just overthinking it," Keefe said. "You're excited and all those types of things and you want to impress and then you kind of get away from yourself a little bit. So I think just finding a way to get comfortable, I think as a goaltender that's really important ... When it comes to stopping the puck, the jerseys are different colours and all that kind of stuff, but the puck remains the same."

So do his pads. Although Campbell has a new mask ready to go, the Michigan native will stick with the other equipment he wore with the Kings.

"I'm probably the worst in the league at breaking in gear so I'm just going to rock my old stuff for a little bit," Campbell explained. "I just

like soft, older-school-style stuff and the only way to get it to the way I like it is practice."

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) February 7, 2020

Picked 11th overall by the Dallas Stars in 2010, Campbell took a while to find his footing in the NHL. He said Thursday that he needed to learn how to better process the pressure. Campbell played a career-high 31 games last season with an impressive .928 save percentage in Los Angeles.

"He's the hardest-working guy I've ever seen in hockey," Muzzin said. "I've trained with him in the summer the last two years down in L.A. and just his preparation, coming to the rink and throughout the summers and throughout practice, battling on every puck, extra work, early on the ice, all that kind of stuff."

Jack Campbell credited @Dusty70 for helping get his career on track when he played for the Ontario Reign

"He transformed my character & made me take a step back a little bit & enjoy life a little more" <https://t.co/D5JRUI8ph7>

— Mark Masters (@markmasters) February 6, 2020

Campbell, who is 8-10-2 with a .900 save percentage this season, comes by his work ethic honestly crediting his dad, who runs an electrical distribution company in Port Huron, Mich.

"My dad led the way with that one," Campbell said. "Just watching him go to work at four or five in the morning and him coming home at seven or eight at night, you know, he's still doing it to this day."

Campbell not expecting big adjustment with Leafs: 'Job's simple: stopping the puck'

Jack Campbell explains that he isn't expecting there to be a big adjustment joining the Maple Leafs, reiterating that his job is pretty simple and that's to stop the puck. Mark Masters has more on Campbell's debut with Toronto.

What message did GM Kyle Dubas send with Wednesday's move?

"He's committed to us and we have to respond," said Muzzin.

No one in the Leafs room knows Clifford and Campbell better than Muzzin who played his first eight seasons in Los Angeles.

"Their work ethic and how hard they work will rub off on guys," the defenceman said. "Sometimes, because we have a really talented group, we rely on that too much (when) we need that work ethic to come in and take over games."

After two dispiriting losses to Florida and the New York Rangers, the hope is the trade will send a jolt of energy through Toronto's dressing room.

"It's a disruption, but we're at a point where we think a disruption is healthy," Keefe said. "That's what we talked about this morning is we're just moving on from what we've been through here the last couple games giving up points and it's a chance for new blood and new energy in the room and a new opportunity for us to have a good weekend."

'He's committed to us, we have to respond': Leafs believe Dubas' trade will create spark

With Kyle Dubas bolstering the roster by addressing areas of need with the acquisitions of Kyle Clifford and Jack Campbell, the Leafs explain how motivating it is to have a GM that believes in making the necessary changes and why they're hoping the move creates a spark.

Clifford will start in the bottom six, but Keefe still hadn't settled on the exact lineup when he met the media. The hard-nosed 29-year-old adds a physical element to the forward group.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 8, 2020

"He's going to bring toughness," noted Muzzin. "He's going to bring grit, hard-working guy and that sandpaper that can go a long way in games."

"It's something that we don't have very much of," observed captain John Tavares, "and his strong suits can really apply to a lot of things we want to do just in a different way so it'll be a good addition."

Like Campbell, Clifford isn't expecting too many growing pains.

"It's just adapting to a little different style of play, but it's going to come over time," he said. "I sat down with the coaching staff today just went over some system stuff and I think over time I will just adapt naturally."

After getting traded from L.A. to Toronto last year, Muzzin observed that switching conferences can take a bit of time to get used to, but Friday's opponent should provide the Kings-turned-Leafs some comfort.

"I'd like to see us have a little more jam," said Ducks coach Dallas Eakins. "It's weird, like, you come out East and it seems like everyone is small and fast, but we want to play with jam. We want to be in your face too, and I thought we could have brought more of that last night."

Playing with jam is Clifford's speciality and the native of nearby Ayr, Ont., should be fired up to make his debut.

"I've always wanted to put a Leafs sweater on and win in a Leafs sweater and that's the main goal," he said. "I'm really excited to be here."

The Ducks lost last night in Montreal with John Gibson in net, so Ryan Miller gets the start tonight.

"Even though we got the great NHL excuse of back-to-back (games) we do want to come in here and take another step forward on this trip," Eakins said.

Muzzin: Clifford's grit will boost Leafs, who rely on talent too much at times

Jake Muzzin, who was teammates with Kyle Clifford in Los Angeles, explains how valuable Clifford's grit will be for the Maple Leafs who rely too much on talent at times. Muzzin also praises former teammate Jack Campbell's work ethic, calling him the hardest working guy he's ever seen in hockey.

Right-shot defenceman Josh Manson is No. 15 on TSN's trade bait list, but it doesn't sound like the Ducks are in any mood to move him.

"Just a fabulous human being, team-first, great leader in our room," raved Eakins. "He brings that grit and wee bit of nastiness that we enjoy in our organization. A lot of nights he's tasked with playing against the top players. He's just a guy who's hard to play against and those guys are extremely hard to find and my boss, (GM) Bob Murray, is just excellent at drafting defencemen. That's one there that's homegrown and a guy we highly value."

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) February 7, 2020

Projected Leafs lineup tonight:

Hyman - Matthews - Marner

Kerfoot - Tavares - Nylander

Johnsson - Engvall - Kapanen

Clifford - Spezza - Timashov

Scratch: Gauthier

Muzzin - Holl

Dermott - Barrie

Sandin - Liljegren

Scratch: Marincin

Campbell starts

Hutchinson

Injured: Rielly (broken foot), Mikheyev (wrist), Ceci (ankle sprain), Andersen (neck)

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1175533 Websites

TSN.CA / Toronto Maple Leafs need Jack Campbell, Kyle Clifford to make immediate impact

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – As desperation mounts for the Maple Leafs to get back into the playoff picture, the team is counting on the newly acquired Jack Campbell and Kyle Clifford to make an immediate impact.

"It's a disruption, but we're in a place where we think a disruption is healthy," said head coach Sheldon Keefe on Friday of adding new players to the mix. "That's what we talked about this morning. We're moving on from what we've been through here the last couple games, giving up points. It's a chance for new blood, new energy in the room and a new opportunity for us to have a good weekend."

Campbell, who will start Friday night against the visiting Anaheim Ducks, and Clifford were brought in via trade with the Los Angeles Kings on Wednesday, in exchange for winger Trevor Moore and a pair of third-round draft picks.

The move was announced less than an hour after Toronto suffered its second consecutive loss, this one a 5-3 decision to the New York Rangers, just two nights after the Leafs blew a 3-1 lead and fell 5-3 to the Florida Panthers.

Toronto has now dropped one point back of Florida for third place in the Atlantic Division and is two points shy of a wild-card berth, but a strong showing in this weekend's back-to-back could do wonders for the Leafs, and that's where Campbell and Clifford come in.

"We hope that it just brings a greater energy and enthusiasm amongst our team. I think that's a thing," said Keefe. "I don't think you can ignore the fact that players who have energy, passion and enthusiasm can bleed through the rest of the team. The number of phone calls and text messages that I've received from people that have worked with these guys, that's exactly what they're going to bring."

Keefe demurred on saying where exactly Clifford will play in the lineup, admitting there are still game-time decisions to be worked out, but Campbell will take over the net from Michael Hutchinson.

Toronto is currently without its starter Frederik Andersen and will be until at least next week as he rehabs a neck injury suffered in Monday's defeat. While Andersen skated for the second straight day with goalie coach Steve Briere and Keefe said everything was "positive" on the ice, his status remains day-to-day.

With Andersen sidelined, Hutchinson made 30 saves in a losing effort on Wednesday and is now 1-4-0 in his last five appearances, opening the door for Toronto to slide Campbell directly into the action. Keefe said he hasn't ruled out playing him against Montreal the day after, either.



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Holding an 8-10-2 record with a .900 save percentage and 2.85 goals-against average this season, the 28-year-old isn't sweating the quick turnaround of his first start with a new team.

"Honestly, our job is pretty simple: just stopping in the puck," Campbell said. "I was thinking about that during the meeting [this morning] when they were going over the X's and O's. I just have to stop the puck. I talked to [former Kings' teammate Jake Muzzin] a little bit about their system playing the puck behind the net and got that figured out. Just time to have some fun and get it done."

Muzzin had plenty of praise to heap on Campbell, a teammate for three seasons in L.A. before the defenceman was traded to Toronto last January.

"He's the hardest-working guy I've ever seen in hockey," Muzzin said. "I've trained with him in the summer the last two years down in L.A., and just his preparation, coming to the rink and throughout the summers and throughout practice, battling on every puck, extra work, early on the ice, all that kind of stuff."

Clifford also insisted the Leafs are in good hands with Campbell, who last played on Jan. 30 against Arizona.

"The thing with Soupy, he never gives up on any puck," the veteran said. "He'll fight right to the bitter end. You look at some of his highlight-reel clips, you can see that. He's always trying to find an extra edge to get better so it's good to have him here and I think the guys will appreciate what he'll bring to the table. He's just got this edge to him that's exciting."

As the Leafs navigate a change in net, they'll also make adjustments on the backend. Cody Ceci has been ruled out for at least a month with a high-ankle sprain suffered on Wednesday, so rookie Timothy Liljegren has been recalled from the American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies to take Ceci's third-pairing spot beside Rasmus Sandin.

Liljegren played 10:40 and was minus-1 in his NHL debut for Toronto on Jan. 18, a disappointing 6-2 loss to Chicago heading into the All-Star break.

"[Ceci's] a guy who's very consistent with how he plays, with his competitiveness and his ability to help us on the penalty kill," said Keefe. "Below the dots and in our zone, he's as competitive a guy as we have there. That said, you get a real opportunity for a young player [in Liljegren] to get some experience and that'll help us as well."

If it's up to Muzzin, all the Leafs will look to Clifford and Campbell to help set a new tone for the group, and end an otherwise difficult week on a high note.

"How hard they work will rub off on guys, and [how they're] doing everything the right way," Muzzin said. "Sometimes, because we have a really talented group, we rely on that too much, where I think we need that work ethic to come in and take over games."

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TSN.CA / Friday Five: Could Leafs use the 'Kane Loophole'?

Frank Seravalli

It's time for another edition of the Friday Five, where we point out quirks and quips and raise questions that pop up throughout the week in the NHL season.

1. Could the Leafs use the Patrick Kane Loophole?

Toronto GM Kyle Dubas was able to keep his powder dry for TradeCentre while trying to fix the Leafs' backup goaltending woes. The trade for Jack Campbell and Kyle Clifford was dollars-in, dollars-out on the salary cap and he hung onto all of his major trade chips in forwards Andreas Johnsson, Kasperii Kapanen and Alex Kerfoot.

But Dubas may have even more flexibility than previously imagined.

The Maple Leafs GM's comments about the injury timeline of defenceman Morgan Rielly on Thursday raised speculation that Toronto might be able to steal a page from the Chicago Blackhawks' playbook.

Rielly fractured his foot on Jan. 13 and was initially projected to be out for eight weeks.

"We'll get more updates on him in the coming weeks in terms of how long he'll be out," Dubas told reporters. "That'll dictate how much cap space we have going into the deadline in terms of whether we'll have his full amount of room with regards to LTI for the rest of the season."

Translation: Dubas hinted at the possibility Rielly may miss the remainder of the regular season.

That's significant because if Rielly, Cody Ceci and Ilya Mikheyev are all out for the rest of the regular season, the Leafs would be able to absorb a full \$9 million salary cap hit before the Feb. 24 trade deadline without having to move out any other salary.

All three of those players, plus any new acquisition(s), could then return for the Stanley Cup playoffs without any cap consequences because there is no salary cap in the playoffs. Even knowing just one of those players will be out through the regular season would be a huge boost.

It's a cap loophole or workaround that's only been used once. Patrick Kane was injured on Feb. 24, 2015 and returned for the opening night of the playoffs on April 15. The Hawks used his long-term injury space to exceed the cap and acquire Kimmo Timonen (\$2 million) and Antoine Vermette (\$3.75 million). They all helped Chicago win the Stanley Cup with a payroll that wouldn't have been cap-compliant in the regular season.

Does that break any rules? No, but there's no doubt that rivals would argue it's not within the spirit of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Teams are already unhappy with the Leafs creatively bending the spirit of the LTIR accommodation by acquiring David Clarkson's dead-weight contract, on top of Nathan Horton's, to create more space. The Leafs are spending \$95 million in real salary this season on an \$81.5 million cap, \$10 million more than any other team.

The risk with Rielly and Ceci remaining on the shelf until April, of course, is that the Leafs fail to make the playoffs entirely.

2. Third-line centre market

We know that the Edmonton Oilers are in the market for a third-line centre. The Philadelphia Flyers, the Winnipeg Jets (depending on Adam Lowry's injury status) and maybe the Washington Capitals are also looking for centre depth.

Outside of Ottawa's Jean-Gabriel Pageau, who was No. 4 on the latest TSN Trade Bait board, the next centre available is an expensive Kyle Turris, way down at No. 26.

So who else might be available? Let's take a look Beyond the Board:

- Chris Tierney, Ottawa: 25 years old, 10 goals, 27 points in 52 games. \$2.94 million cap hit and pending RFA.

- Barclay Goodrow, San Jose: 26 years old, 8 goals and 21 points in 53 games. One season left at \$925,000.



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- Derek Grant, Anaheim: 29 years old, 11 goals and 16 points in 40 games. \$700,000 cap hit and pending UFA.

- Patrick Marleau, San Jose: 40 years old, 10 goals and 19 points in 40 games. \$700,000 cap hit and pending UFA.

- Nate Thompson, Montreal: 35 years old, 2 goals and 10 points in 54 games. \$1 million cap hit and pending UFA.

Insider Trading: Flames taking deadline detour; Dubas eyeing defence

TSN Hockey Insiders Pierre LeBrun and Darren Dreger join James Duthie to discuss the Flames' trade deadline plans after losing their captain Mark Giordano to injury, the Maple Leafs' search for an upgrade on the blueline, how Michael Ferland's status affects Vancouver's deadline direction, the latest on Chris Kreider, and more.

3. Record playoff pace in East

With Carolina occupying the Eastern Conference's final wild-card spot on Friday morning, it might take a record number of points to make the Stanley Cup playoffs in the East this year.

The current pace to get in is 99 points. On Thursday, it was 101 points. Wowza.

That's up from last year's record of 97 points, and the average of 95 points it took to get in over the past six seasons, since the NHL went to the wild-card standings format. It's way up from the 91-point pace currently set in the West by the Nashville Predators, which is right around the West average (90) from the past six years.

That leaves us with two thoughts: A) Has the torrid pace in the East caused some teams that might otherwise be closer to the hunt, like Montreal, to become sellers earlier? The Habs are on pace for 86 points.

And B) It really is easier to make the playoffs in the West. That was the gripe from the NHLPA when the new format was agreed upon in 2013, with 16 teams in the East and one or two fewer in the West (before Vegas joined). Last year, the bar was 10 points lower in the West. Fewer points have been required in the West every year since the format was changed. The last time you need more points in the West than the East was 2011-12, when the conferences were balanced, with Winnipeg temporarily playing in the Southeast division.

4. Ovechkin's other record chase

All eyes have been focused on Alex Ovechkin's chase on Wayne Gretzky's record 894 goals. But as Ovechkin nears No. 700, there is another lesser-known NHL record within his grasp this season.

That would be the record nine empty-net goals that Pavel Bure scored with the Florida Panthers in 1999-00. Ovechkin has six this season with 27 games to play.

Gretzky holds the career record with 56 empty-net goals, 16 more than second-place Marian Hossa (40) and third-place Ovechkin (39). But Gretzky never had more than six in a year; only four players have ever done that – one being Michael Grabner, who has the most empty-net goals (seven in 2017-18) scored in one season in the salary cap era.

You never know. Ovechkin's empty-net strikes may well be the x-factor in this year's three-headed Rocket Richard race. Just one of David Pastrnak's 38 goals came with the cage empty; Auston Matthews has two on 39 goals, but those two came in the past eight games. Matthews had just one empty-netter in the first 258 games of his career.

Some observers rag on empty-net goals, but you have to be trusted to be on the ice late in tight games to score them.

By the Numbers: Ovi's goal-scoring tear

With Alex Ovechkin reaching the 40-goal plateau for the 11th time in his career, SportsCentre goes by the numbers to examine the tear 'The Great 8' has been on this season.

5. Retiring Wick's No. 22

Back in November, when Haley Wickenheiser was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame, we raised the idea on the Friday Five of Hockey Canada retiring her No. 22 from the women's program.

Hockey Canada CEO Tom Renney said then that the idea was "certainly worthy of discussion."

An update of sorts: Renney said Thursday that discussion will indeed occur at Hockey Canada's next board meeting in April.

Wickenheiser is deserving of that one final honour as Canada's all-time leader in games played (276), goals (168), assists (211) and points (379). Her number hasn't been available to a women's national team player, but it should not be worn again.

Stay tuned.

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