



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes goalie Scott Darling taking personal leave of absence

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Scott Darling (33) eyes the puck against the Columbus Blue Jackets during the first period of an NHL hockey game, Saturday, Nov. 17, 2018, in Raleigh. Karl B. DeBlaker AP

In another twist to the Scott Darling saga, the Carolina Hurricanes goalie has been granted a personal leave of absence, general manager Don Waddell said Sunday.

Darling, who sought to be the Canes' No. 1 goalie this season, has played much of the year with the Charlotte Checkers, Carolina's American Hockey League affiliate. He did not accompany the Checkers on their road trip this past weekend to face the Hershey Bears after Charlotte called up goalie Callum Booth from the Reading Royals of the ECHL.

"Since he's been down there he's had some good games and some bad games," Waddell said in an interview. "He had a tough game the other night and his agent called me and said he would like to take a personal leave of absence and would we allow that to get his mind back together. That night he got rocked for about five (goals) and before he had a shutout (in regulation) before we lost in overtime 1-0. So we gave him the leave of absence."

Darling's agent, Matt Keator, confirmed Sunday that the request for a leave of absence was made but provided no other information on Darling, saying, "It's a personal thing."

Waddell said there was no set time limit to the leave, that the time frame for a return was open-ended.

"I'll touch base with him," Waddell said. "I told him to take a week and touch base with me in a week or so and we'll go from there."

Asked if it was a performance-based decision made by Darling because of his play, Waddell said, "No, I think it's him trying to get his mind around it. He's obviously has had a tough year on the ice and he needs, from a mental standpoint, needs to regroup basically."

The Canes obtained Darling in a trade with the Chicago Blackhawks and quickly signed him in May 2017 to a four-year, \$16.6 million contract. A backup goalie in Chicago, Darling appeared ready to supplant Cam Ward as the Canes' No. 1 goalie in 2017-18 but had a rocky first season.

Darling went through strenuous offseason conditioning, shedding 25 pounds. He was putting together a strong preseason in training camp when he was injured in the final preseason game, Sept. 30 against the Nashville Predators and placed on injured reserve on Oct. 3. He spent time with the Checkers on a conditioning stint later in October.

The Hurricanes claimed veteran goalie Curtis McElhinney off waivers from the Toronto Maple Leafs before the season opener, and McElhinney and Petr Mrazek have handled nearly all of the workload in net. Darling was placed on waivers Nov. 29, then assigned to the Checkers after clearing.

Darling has a 2-4-1 record with a 3.14 goals-against average and .892 save percentage in seven games with the Hurricanes this season. He's 5-6-2, with a 3.40 GAA and .882 save percentage in 14 games with the Checkers.

In January, needing a callup, the Canes brought up Checkers goalie Alex Nedeljkovic, who won his first NHL start against Vancouver.

Waddell said the Hurricanes would continue to support Darling "100 percent."

"We all know he's had ups and downs in his career, and we'll be supportive," Waddell said. "He's still under contract for two more years and we've got to try and see if we can get this thing back together."

By that, Waddell meant get things back on the right track and get Darling back to playing with the confidence he had in preseason.



Canes goalie Scott Darling on 'leave of absence'

Raleigh, N.C. — Scott Darling, the Carolina Hurricanes goalie, is on a leave of absence, the team said Sunday. Darling was playing with the Charlotte Checkers, Carolina's American Hockey League affiliate.

The 29-year-old was placed on waivers on Nov. 29 by the Canes - since he was only brought up for a game in December.

The Hurricanes did not say why Darling was taking a leave.

In 2017, Darling agreed to a four-year contract with the Canes for \$16.6 million.



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THE ATHLETIC

LeBrun: The buyers, sellers, and TBD teams ahead of the trade deadline

By Pierre LeBrun

Two weeks to go until the trade deadline and still, there's a whole whack of teams that aren't sure if they're buyers or sellers.

Such is at the morass of the Western Conference wild-card race and suddenly some teams in the East with fringe hope.

One GM said Sunday he thinks this week is huge in terms of determining if some teams decide they're out. If that happens, some trades may start to trickle in this week. On the flip side, he said, if some of those teams hang in, it could mean a last-minute actual Deadline Day bonanza.

My TSN colleague James Duthie would love that.

Here's my best attempt at handicapping the buyers, sellers and "to be determined" gang ahead of the Feb. 25 deadline:

Buyers

Tampa Bay Lightning: On the surface what you'll hear is the Lightning gave up a ton of futures to acquire Ryan McDonagh and J.T. Miller last season and can't really keep doing that every year. Hogwash, I say. You want to win the Stanley Cup? Be aggressive again. This is a team with very few holes, if any, but as I've consistently said for more than a month, it screams a little more top-nine muscle and Wayne Simmonds (whom they've checked on) would be completely perfect as a rental. I also think GM Julien BriseBois should look to add some blueline depth and I think he will. If you're planning to go four rounds, you have to protect against the inevitability of injuries. Tampa is loaded in prospects throughout the organization. The Bolts have the currency to add. And I think they will.

Nashville Predators: I love the addition of bottom-six rock Brian Boyle. He's a special teams demon and oozes character. The Preds also added some fourth-line toughness in Cody McLeod, which I'm not convinced they really needed. But I'm telling you this: The Preds, right now, probably aren't good enough to win the Stanley Cup. I don't think they get by Winnipeg without making another move. And to me, that move screams Artemi Panarin even if it costs the kind of pieces that won't let David Poile sleep at night. The time is now for Nashville. Sources confirm they are looking at the big boys on the market, including Panarin, but do they end up paying the price?

Winnipeg Jets: It is fine to say you won't force it or overpay just for the sake of saying you did something. I get it. But this is one heck of a hockey team which because of the salary cap won't be as deep again for several years. They'll be a good team for many more years. But not this deep. So just like they did a year ago in spending a first-round pick on rental Paul Stastny, they need to dive all the way in again. And if either Matt Duchene or Mark Stone get sprung loose in Ottawa this week, that's where the Jets will look first. Duchene is the best fit at centre but Stone is one hell of a Manitoba stud who would be a monumental addition. But if neither Ottawa guy materializes, what about Eric Staal in

Minnesota if the Wild fall out of it over the next 14 days? I'm pretty sure the Jets have given that an internal thought. The Jets have their first-round pick to spend again plus young NHL roster players and/or AHL prospects teams covet. They're in great shape to add.

Calgary Flames: No question GM Brad Treliving has done his homework and phoned around on a long list of potentially available players. The Flames, I'm told, are still in the mode of sizing up the market. I think depending on the cost, the Flames could add a top-nine forward and also a third-pair defenceman. I've always liked the idea of Micheal Ferland returning to Calgary but I think once the Flames found out a few weeks ago from Carolina a first-first-round pick was part of the ask, that was a pass until further notice. The Flames don't have their second-round pick for June so while I wouldn't say their first-round pick is off the table, the Flames certainly aren't going out of their way to flaunt it. Now if it could get them Stone, well, that's a different story. On a more medium scale, two rentals I think Calgary should look at: Gustav Nyquist in Detroit or Marcus Johansson in New Jersey. Both pending UFAs would add more versatility and scoring depth to the Flames' lineup.

Vegas Golden Knights: If there's one thing we've learned from Knights owner Bill Foley it's that it's been go time from the get-go with these guys. The Golden Knights brass, led by GM George McPhee, no question has looked carefully at the crop of rental players. It's long been speculated that Stone would be a main target if he became available, due to his relationship with Knights assistant GM Kelly McCrimmon dating back to their WHL days in Brandon. And really, why not? Vegas is a contender again and he'd be a superstar addition with perhaps the chance to sign him long-term, too. Either way, McPhee was aggressive a year ago at the deadline, nearly acquiring Erik Karlsson which would have been insane, before settling for Tomas Tatar which didn't work out. Doesn't mean he won't try again to make a splash.

Boston Bruins: It might be the worst-kept secret in the NHL that the Bruins would love to add a top-six or at least a top-nine forward who preferably can play on the right side. It's believed they've shown interest in Panarin, Simmonds, Ferland and Jakob Silfverberg among others (the Ducks are hopeful to re-sign Silfverberg and take him off the market). Panarin would make an already very good Bruins team downright scary. Simmonds? Wow. His beef would rock in Beantown. Either way, the Bruins are adding up front before Feb. 25.

Toronto Maple Leafs: They made their big move in adding Jake Muzzin but they may not be done. Some grit/toughness up front and/or a right-handed blueliner are both areas of interest. Leafs AGM Laurence Gilman scouted Carolina again last week — despite the Muzzin acquisition. Was he looking at Ferland or those talented Canes blueliners? Any move the Leafs make now must be dollar in, dollar out with them being at the cap. But I wouldn't sleep on GM Kyle Dubas. The Muzzin acquisition, which was sublime, takes the heat off but I don't think he's done.



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Washington Capitals: I would term the Caps as careful buyers, which worked well for them a year ago when they picked up Michal Kempny and nobody blinked an eye. You know the rest of the story. This past weekend, the Caps played their first game all season with their full lineup from last year. So there's that. A source Sunday indicated that they're looking to add a middle six forward. They would, as long ago rumored, move Andre Burakovsky once they find a team willing to pay their price on him. I don't sense anything major but GM Brian MacLellan is willing to tinker.

New York Islanders: I can't actually say that I know for sure what GM Lou Lamoriello is up to, because nobody does. But the surprising Isles have oodles of cap room and like others have suggested, why not take a run at Panarin? Might make more sense to wait until July 1 but the team has its passionate fan base excited, and I think Papa Lou will add a piece before all is said and done.

Poking around

San Jose Sharks: I traditionally would put them in the serious buyers' category given their Cup contender status but the reality is they made their biggest trade deadline acquisition already in getting Karlsson in September. That's how the Sharks are looking at it internally. Now, GM Doug Wilson always has his antennae out. If there's an opportunity to add a medium piece, he'll look at it. But the futures he gave up for Evander Kane a year ago plus Karlsson before this season suggests there shouldn't be any fireworks this time around at the deadline for San Jose. The Sharks really like their team and their depth, as they should.

Pittsburgh Penguins: GM Jim Rutherford as busy way before the deadline, the recent acquisitions of Nick Bjugstad and Jared McCann coming a few months after also adding Tanner Pearson. Justin Schultz will be back from his long injury and that's like adding at top-four defensemen at the deadline. Now, I will never, ever, write that Rutherford is "done" because I think he can't resist adding when he's got the chance. It just so happens he still has his first-round pick.

Montreal Canadiens: It wasn't a headline-grabber but the weekend trade which saw the return of fourth-line winger Dale Weise and depth blueliner Christian Folin fulfilled two check marks GM Marc Bergevin had on his shopping list. Now, there are those around the league who believe the Habs might be willing to stand pat now. Bergevin seems adamant, regardless of his team's surprising season, to not lose sight of his "reset" game plan. I have no problem with that. The Habs have some promising prospects coming. But I would also say two things: The Habs have cap room which they can use to lure a player like they did for Joel Armia last summer, and that Bergevin is among the more surprising GMs in the league who likes to pull off the out-of-left-field trade. He doesn't have to do anything else, but I would never sleep on him.

Vancouver Canucks: A source suggested Sunday that the Canucks are sticking to their plan ahead of the deadline. Which means if GM Jim Benning can make some hockey deals, not rental deals, he'll dive in. The Canucks host the draft in June so they're not interested in moving high picks for rentals. But in a hockey deal, they would be interested in

adding some scoring up front and that's the focus right now as Benning scours the market.

Dallas Stars: They view themselves as careful buyers and that makes sense. They're third in the Central as the week begins but just two points ahead of the hard-charging Blues. And the memory of last year's late-season collapse no doubt is still fresh. Still, if the Stars keep up the pace, I could see GM Jim Nill looking to add a second- or third-line forward closer to Feb. 25, that would be the primary need. I like Mats Zuccarello as the type of rental that would make sense.

Buy and sell?

Columbus Blue Jackets: What an awful position the Jackets find themselves in. Panarin is publicly committed to testing the July 1 market. Sergei Bobrovsky wanted out last summer. The Jackets are in a playoff spot. GM Jarmo Kekalainen continues to solicit and evaluate offers for Panarin, who doesn't have a no-trade clause and can be dealt anywhere if the Jackets indeed decide to do that. I think they have no choice, quite frankly. I'd feel differently perhaps if they were 10 points ahead in first place of the Metro but they're not even assured to make the postseason. Panarin should net the biggest asset haul of any rental. Important here is whether Columbus can net a roster player as part of the package or whether they have to make a separate deal to bring in, preferably, a center. I've wondered whether the likes of Artem Anisimov (under contract past this season) or pending UFAs such as Kevin Hayes or Derick Brassard make sense for the Jackets. Bobrovsky is a tougher case to figure out because he's got a full no-move. Florida wants him and they've called Columbus but they're not paying a high price to Columbus when they can wait until July 1 and bid on him for free.

Carolina Hurricanes: The push for a playoff spot has muddied the Ferland waters. They would have dealt him 10 days ago had a team offered a first-round pick. Now the sense is Canes management feels they might not be able to move him during a playoff race. Which makes me think they'll reach out to his camp if they haven't already to see one more time if there's any interest in an extension. I don't think there is. I think Ferland wants to go to July 1 and why not. He'll never again have this shot to cash in. So what does Carolina do? I think it will depend on the kind of offers they get. As we've reported all year long, they would also move one of their right-handed defensemen for a top-six, offensive forward. But that deal can also wait until the offseason if need be. Either way, the Canes could do a bit of buying and selling all at once.

Philadelphia Flyers: Yes, GM Chuck Fletcher hopes to be both a buyer and seller depending on the opportunities at hand. It is still more likely than not that he will trade Simmonds, however, word over the weekend is what seemed like a slam dunk a week ago is no longer 100 percent. According to a source, there are circumstances where the Flyers would keep Simmonds. But in the end, the same source believes Simmonds likely gets moved. My read on that is either there's suddenly a chance they could sign him, or it really comes down to the idea that unless a team pays the price Fletcher has established for Simmonds, he's just as happy keeping him for a playoff push. Fletcher added veteran defenseman David Schlemko over the weekend, a



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guy that definitely needed a change of scenery. Fletcher is open to hockey deals if they're the type of thing he'd look at in June anyway. The Flyers could be a real wild-card ahead of Feb. 25.

To be determined

St. Louis Blues: Another big weekend for the resurgent Blues. Two months ago, GM Doug Armstrong was listening on some big names on his roster. He never pulled the trigger. Now his team is back in a playoff spot. Crazy. Perhaps after all the massive changes last summer it took that long for this team to find chemistry. So what now? Not yet determined — that's essentially the answer I got from a league source. Which makes sense. Ride it for now and see what another two weeks brings.

Minnesota Wild: A two-point playoff cushion for a Wild team that doesn't inspire confidence. A source suggested Sunday they are very much in the "TBD" category. GM Paul Fenton made a hockey deal for Victor Rask last month which so far doesn't look like a great deal. But it's early. The real question is what he ends up doing with Eric Staal. There was mutual interest expressed earlier this season to sign an extension but if the Wild falls out over the next 14 days, does that still make sense? Staal has a 10-team no-trade clause so he has some say in his future. As I wrote in the Jets section, Winnipeg could be interesting. The bottom line here though is what does Fenton want to do with this team in his first year? Does owner Craig Leopold want a playoff push or will he accept Fenton wanting to start to re-tool? Consider this exchange between the great Michael Russo and Fenton in a Q&A late last month:

Russo: When the decision was made last spring to move on from Chuck Fletcher despite six straight playoff berths, Craig Leopold made clear that he didn't feel this team needed to be torn down, that a few tweaks could help it take the next step. That became the popular word around here: Tweak, tweak, tweak. He didn't want a rebuild. Do you think that he might be more open right now to letting you trade significant pieces if you feel it's time to move on from certain core players?

Fenton: I talk to Craig all the time and we have an open conversation. There's not anything mysterious about it and I've talked to him about everything, whether it's continuing forward or going the other way. And he'll be in agreement, whichever way I want to take this team.

Buffalo Sabres: They most definitely won't be buyers, according to a source, and the next two weeks will determine whether or not they end up sellers. They're in great shape no matter what with four total first-round picks over the next two drafts (their own plus one each from St. Louis and San Jose). The real question now is what happens with Jeff Skinner. But unlike Stone and Duchene in Ottawa, Skinner has a full no-move, no-trade. Remember that he waived it specifically for the trade to Buffalo last summer. So I mean, while it would be nice for the organization and probably the player to have the extension done before Feb. 25, unless Skinner wants a change of scenery, which we doubt, then there's not as much urgency surrounding the deadline as far as whether Skinner signs or not.

Colorado Avalanche: They're only four points out of a playoff spot but it feels like 14 for an Avs team in freefall. They were

poking around earlier this season looking at secondary scoring on the trade market but now the question is whether there's any point in making that kind of trade. I love the idea of getting Burakovsky from Washington because he's under control as an RFA past this season. That way even if the Avs miss the playoffs they've invested in an asset for next season and beyond. The Avs have not only Ottawa's sure lottery first-round pick but they're own first-rounder could be high as well.

Chicago Blackhawks: Seven wins in a row. Go figure. Really, it changes next to nothing as far as the trade deadline. The win streak isn't going to make GM Stan Bowman a buyer. My sense is whatever game plan he's had for weeks doesn't change. But the reality is he really doesn't have that much selling to do, either, hence I didn't really know where to slot the Hawks. As I reported last week, the Hawks have taken calls on Anisimov, who has two more years on his deal at a \$4.55 million AAV. His role has diminished this season, especially after the acquisition and emergence of Dylan Strome. Columbus and Carolina, I'm told, are among the teams that have called Chicago on Anisimov but so far that feels more like tire-kicking. Now, there's also the matter of that conversation I reported a few weeks ago that was slated to happen closer to Feb. 25 between Hawks management and Duncan Keith and his agent. With the Hawks in the playoff race, I'm not sure there's any point in having that conversation. No way Keith would ever dream of leaving with his team having a chance to get in. Unless the Hawks fall out of it soon, I'm guessing that conversation is likely delayed until the offseason thanks to this playoff push. But we'll see.

Arizona Coyotes: Here's what GM John Chayka told me less than two weeks ago when I asked him about the trade deadline for the never-say-die Coyotes, who have battled crazy injuries all year but are alive in the turtle derby:

"We're not losing sight of our long-term plan here. Having said that, a big part of our plan is to put these guys in an environment where they can grow and learn and obviously play in meaningful games down the stretch and making a playoff push is a big part of that and is hugely valuable. My view is, the nice part about the injuries is, I can do nothing (at the deadline) and we're still going to add players to our roster that are impact guys as we get some guys back here hopefully. We're also in a position where we've got a lot of future assets and a lot of assets that we value but I also know the league values. If there's an opportunity that makes sense and into the future, I don't think we're looking at pure rentals ... I'd like to add to our group and continue to add to improve our group. This group has done a nice job, if they continue doing what they're doing, it would be nice to make an addition."

Their best additions might be in getting some of their injured players back such as Brad Richardson, Christian Dvorak and Jason Demers. In the end, I think the Coyotes only add before the deadline if makes sense not just for now but for the future.

If the Coyotes fall out of it, pending UFA rental options include Richard Panik, Jordan Weal and Jordan Oesterle.

Edmonton Oilers: I should put them in sellers now because I think that's where it's headed. But the fact they could still



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make the playoffs, and how desperate they are to do so, would mean holding on selling more than any other of the teams in the Western wild-card race. I think they end up moving pending UFA Cam Talbot if they can find a fit. If they're 7-8 points out come Feb. 24, my guess is they auction off pending UFA Alex Chiasson who has had a nice year. Without a new GM to run things, I'm not sure the Oilers can really afford to be that active either way. Unless they're simply able to move out salary. They need cap room big time ahead of the offseason.

Florida Panthers: They made a big deal with Pittsburgh two weeks ago which in the big picture was about clearing some cap space to re-tool this summer, including what sources confirm is a planned attempt to sign both Panarin and Bobrovsky. I'm told the Panthers did check with Columbus about Bobrovsky but why pay a high price now when they can get him July 1? Still, I bet you Florida checks in again with Columbus closer to Feb. 25. Pending UFAs Derick Brassard and Riley Sheahan were acquired in that Pittsburgh deal and people figured they'd be flipped immediately but GM Dale Tallon first wanted to give his group a chance at a late-season run like a year ago. But if Florida isn't close enough to a playoff spot come Feb. 24-25, they would obviously become sellers so that's when Brassard, in particular, could be sold off. Other pending UFAs include Jamie McGinn and Troy Brouwer.

Sellers

New York Rangers: Step right up, the Rangers knew from Day 1 in October this was their trade deadline destiny, fulfilling a plan that started a year ago with a very public rebuild plan. The pending UFAs for sale include Kevin Hayes and Mats Zuccarello as the more promising items. Hayes would be a beast of an add for a contender looking for size and enough skill to play in a top-six role. Hard-hitting blueliner Adam McQuaid is also a pending UFA and will likely be moved. After that, the Rangers are listening on signed players, a guy like Vladislav Namestnikov, 26, as an example. He's signed for another year at \$4 million. He's yours for the right price. Having the necessary cap room for July 1 and a possible run at the likes of Panarin and/or Erik Karlsson (unless he stays in San Jose) are possibilities.

Anaheim Ducks: Randy Carlyle was mercifully fired and now a disgruntled GM is behind the bench. Two weeks before the

trade deadline no less. Talk about some theatre. The Ducks, for a while now, have been listening on a lot of their players but unless they can't re-sign pending UFA Jakob Silfverberg, there are no real rentals of note. If they move players out it's guys that have term. With GM Bob Murray getting a close-up look on the bench, it could be fascinating to see how he reacts before the deadline. But in reality, I think the offseason offers him a better window to make bigger roster changes.

Ottawa Senators: This is the week where there should be clarity on Duchene and Stone, as far as whether they sign extensions or whether talks end and they get put not the trade market. I think there's a better chance of Duchene signing than Stone but they both could be gone anyway. Pending UFA winger Ryan Dzingel would also have sizeable interest but do the Sens throw money at him if they strike out on Stone and Duchene? Ottawa, of course, doesn't have its first-round pick this year. They could get two first-round picks back (albeit low ones) as part of the trade packages for Duchene and/or Stone. Also, defenseman Cody Ceci, RFA July 1, is on the market. The Sens would like to duplicate what the Kings got for Jake Muzzin but I don't know they'll be able to.

Detroit Red Wings: The Wings have some pending UFAs to see off in Gustav Nyquist (who has a NTC), Jimmy Howard, Thomas Vanek and Nick Jensen. The Wings have also debated the merits of re-signing Howard so I think it will come down to the wire in his case in terms of balancing what's being offered for him in a trade versus the idea of just signing him now or trying to bring him back July 1.

New Jersey Devils: The selling off began with respected veteran forward Brian Boyle last week. Another attractive pending UFA is Marcus Johansson. Once the bigger rental forwards go, the Devils should get more action on him. Defenceman Ben Lovejoy and forward Drew Stafford are also pending UFAs who are available.

Los Angeles Kings: The Kings will try to move pending UFA forwards Carl Hagelin and Nate Thompson. As I reported last week, veteran winger Ilya Kovalchuk would waive his no-move for the right fit to a contender. Otherwise after dealing Muzzin to Toronto, the roster shaping will continue in full earnest come the offseason



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Recap: Canes Topped by Devils

Canes' winning streak snapped in New Jersey

by Michael Smith

NEWARK - The Carolina Hurricanes had their three-game winning streak snapped in a 3-2 loss to the New Jersey Devils on Sunday afternoon.

Marcus Johnsson scored a pair of goals, while Keith Kinkaid made 32 saves in the Devils' second straight win against the Canes this season.

Here are five takeaways from this afternoon's game.

One

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour was admittedly concerned about how the start of the game would play out.

"The start is going to be crucial. Whenever you come off a pretty emotional game and then take a day off and don't get the chance to refocus in the morning is obviously a concern," he said before the game. "We'll talk about it and hopefully the guys will do what they have to do to be ready for the start."

As it turned out, the team that played the day prior was sharper from the start than the team that hadn't touched the ice since Friday.

The Devils built a 2-0 lead in what was a flat first period for the Hurricanes.

"It wasn't good enough," Sebastian Aho said. "I think we all know that."

Former Canes defenseman Ryan Murphy, playing in his first game with the Devils since being traded from Minnesota on Jan. 30, gained the zone on the power play and dished a backhand pass to Pavel Zacha, who scored on a one-timer.

In the last minute of the period, Marcus Johansson deposited a near-side rebound to double the Devils' lead.

"We just weren't very good in the first period as a group," Brind'Amour said. "They score a power-play goal, and then we're behind 2-0 and chasing the game."

Two

While the Devils connected on their lone power play in the first period, the Canes failed to convert on three of their own in the opening frame, a chance for the man advantage to spark the club.

"I didn't like the power play and the way it started because it sucked the life out of this group," Brind'Amour said.

"We have to work harder than the defensemen to work on getting the pucks and making some good plays," Teuvo Teravainen said. "You've got to handle the pressure."

The Canes did finally break through on the power play in the third period in what was a 6-on-4 advantage, as Nino Niederreiter fed Teravainen for a one-timer down low.

Perhaps that's something the man advantage can build off of moving forward.

"We had good pressure. It was a long shift in their end. We had some chances, and we kept going after them," Teravainen said. "Nino made a good play. We made one, but we couldn't score [another]. It wasn't enough."

Three

For as flat as the first period was, the Canes were much better in the second. They controlled possession, limited the Devils to just two shots on goal and halved the deficit.

"We just started working harder and playing our game," Aho said. "It's just that simple."

Dougie Hamilton scored his 10th goal of the season when he fired off a shot on a delayed penalty sequence that beat Keith Kinkaid through traffic from Niederreiter in front.

"We didn't like our start. We just focused to get better. We talked about just playing our game," Teravainen said. "We just couldn't come back today."

"I like that we finally got playing, but the problem with this group is that the margins are so tight that you can't afford a bad period," Brind'Amour said. "We got going and played pretty good after that, but you've got to play 60 minutes or you're not going to have success."

Four

The Canes appeared to have tied the game in the third period, only to have the goal waved off.

Sound familiar?

It happened in December, as well, in what was a much more egregious ruling. This was an understandable call, though the accompanying penalty was somewhat odd considering the circumstances.

As Aho shot a puck that found the back of the net, Niederreiter was jockeying in and around the blue paint with Damon Severson. Niederreiter overpowered Severson, and he went down, taking Kinkaid with him. The call on the ice was interference by Niederreiter on Severson - not goaltender interference, which could have been challenged but certainly not overturned - and the whistle would have



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blown with Aho's possession of the puck had it not snapped off his stick and into the net in virtually the same instance.

"I think they're both battling. The one guy who's a little stronger got a little more leverage," Brind'Amour said. "It's a battle in front. That's the thing. I understand why they called it no goal, but I certainly wouldn't think that would be a penalty."

It was an unfortunate set of events that took valuable even-strength time off the clock in the third period, but had it not been for a languid start, the Hurricanes might not have needed that anyway.

Five

Putting on the rosy/Hurricanes red glasses for this one, because it's important when considering the bigger picture.

This loss stings, for sure. They all do.

But.

One, the Hurricanes didn't give away points to a team they're chasing in the standings, and they still have an opportunity ahead of them to collect eight of a possible 10 points on this road trip. Looking at this stretch from afar, that's a good week of hockey.

"It's a sour taste. We should have won that game. We needed it. They don't. That's the part that frustrates me," Brind'Amour said. "Now we have to focus on the next game and find a way to get that one."

Up Next

The Hurricanes wrap up their longest road trip of the season in Ottawa on Tuesday.



Johansson, Devils end Hurricanes' three-game winning streak

Scores two goals, Hischier has three assists to help New Jersey stop skid

by Mike G. Morreale

NEWARK, N.J. -- Marcus Johansson scored two goals, and the New Jersey Devils ended a three-game losing streak with a 3-2 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at Prudential Center on Sunday.

Pavel Zacha scored, Nico Hischier had three assists and Keith Kinkaid made 32 saves for New Jersey (21-26-8).

"I think I've played pretty well most of this year, but I've gotten better these last few weeks," Johansson said. "I've created a lot of chances, and sometimes it helps to see a few pucks go in. That kind of takes the weight off your shoulders sometimes because you need to score to win hockey games, so I've been feeling better and better."

Dougie Hamilton and Teuvo Teravainen scored, and Petr Mrazek made 18 saves for Carolina (28-22-6), which went 1-for-5 on the power play and had a three-game winning streak end.

Johansson, who could become an unrestricted free agent July 1, scored his first game-winner as a member of the Devils in two seasons at 15:56 of the third period when he converted a pass from Jesper Bratt to make it 3-1.

"I think it was impressive to see how fast [Bratt] was there, but once he beat his guy I kind of knew the puck was coming

so I just tried to get in position," Johansson said. "I think that goal was all [Bratt]; that's what he can do. He's so fast and he sees the game so well. That was a heck of a play."

Teravainen scored a power-play goal with 1:27 remaining in the third to make it 3-2.

Johansson scored his first of the game when he swept in a rebound from the slot at 19:03 of the first period to give the Devils a 2-0 lead.

"No excuse; we had the power plays," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We came out pretty good 5-on-5 and then they sucked the life out of us and they scored on the power play, and then we were behind 2-0 (in the first period) chasing the game.

"We weren't very good in the first period as a group, but really it was the power play for me."

Hamilton scored off a snap shot through a screen on a delayed penalty call 7:22 into the second period to pull the Hurricanes within 2-1. Hurricanes forward Nino Niederreiter interfered with Kinkaid to negate a goal by Sebastian Aho that would have tied the game 7:06 into the third.

Zacha scored his 10th goal off a one-timer from the right face-off circle on the power play at 11:35 of the first period to give the Devils a 1-0 lead.

"That was a great play and I went right to [Ryan Murphy] and told him it was a great play," Hischier said. "It's not easy to



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make that backhand pass through the middle, especially when there's sticks in the way, so it was a great play and a great finish."

They said it

"Every game is big. Right now, every game is the biggest game of the year, so we have to get ready for the next one. It's just a big game after a big game." -- Hurricanes forward Teuvo Teravainen

"[Johansson] is a really smart player and so calm with the puck. He makes great decisions and sees passing lanes that not everybody sees, so when you give him the puck he's going to have that extra poise and make a great play." -- Devils center Nico Hischier

Need to know

Aho got his 100th NHL assist. He has 12 points (three goals, nine assists) in his past nine games. ... Teravainen has 11

points (five goals, six assists) in his past nine games and needs one point for 200 in the NHL. ... Niederreiter has nine points (six goals, three assists) in his past nine games. ... Murphy, who was chosen No. 12 in the 2011 NHL Draft and played five seasons for the Hurricanes, made his Devils debut after being acquired in a trade with the Minnesota Wild for defenseman Michael Kapla on Jan. 30. ... Bratt has one goal and three assists in a four-game point streak. ... Hischier has seven points (three goals, four assists) in his past six games.

What's next

Hurricanes: At the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday (7:30 p.m. ET; TSN5, RDS, FS-CR, NHL.TV)

Devils: At the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday (8 p.m. ET; FS-MW, MSG+, NHL.TV)



Johansson scores twice, Devils beat Hurricanes 3-2

By TOM CANAVAN

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — The only role the New Jersey Devils are likely going to have in the playoffs this season is being a spoiler, something the Carolina Hurricanes discovered.

Marcus Johansson scored twice, a battered Keith Kinkaid made 32 saves and the Devils prevented the Hurricanes from moving into a playoff spot with a 3-2 victory Sunday.

"In the end, it's the win that counts," said center Nico Hischier, who had assists on all three goals. "Everyone who is in the lineup has energy and wants to play well and wants to battle hard. Today everybody was ready to play and just play the game plan and in the end we earned the win."

Pavel Zacha also scored as the Devils snapped the Hurricanes' three-game winning streak and handed them their fifth loss (13-5-1) in 19 games.

Kinkaid certainly was the difference, stopping 23 of 25 shots over the final 40 minutes.

"It's never going to be easy but definitely a huge game for me," said Kinkaid, who had lost six of his last seven decisions. "I felt really sharp and guys did a good job battling even when there was no second chances. If there was a second chance, I just had to battle to give us the extra save. We gave a good effort, everyone was hustling back and not giving them easy outlets."

Dougie Hamilton and Teuvo Teravainen scored for Carolina, and Petr Mrazek made 18 saves. The Hurricanes have missed the playoffs the last nine seasons.

The Hurricanes would have moved into the second wild-card spot ahead of idle Pittsburgh with a win.

"Right now there is a sour taste because this game; we should have won that game," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We needed it and they don't, so that frustrates me."

The Devils are 13 points out of a playoff spot with 27 games to go.

This was a tough game for Kinkaid in more ways than stopping shots. He took a stick in the face from Jordan Martinook with 7:23 left in the second period, was bowled over by Justin Williams later in the period and was knocked over again in the third when Nino Niederreiter interfered with Devils defenseman Damon Severson.

Not only was Niederreiter penalized, the call nullified what would have been a tying goal by Sebastian Aho with 12:54 left.

"It kept me engaged," Kinkaid said. "I don't mind the physicality as long as it doesn't interfere with me stopping the puck."

Aho said the Hurricanes can't dwell on this one.

"This is one game," he said. "We just keep playing the same way we played lately we can get to the playoffs."

Zacha and Johansson gave the Devils a 2-0 first-period lead.

Hamilton cut the gap to 2-1 in the second, but Johansson restored the two-goal margin at 15:56 of the third period after being set up by Jesper Bratt. Teravainen scored on a power-play with 1:27 to play after Carolina pulled Mrazek.

"Once he beat his guy I kind of knew the puck was coming and I just tried to get in position," said Johansson of Bratt. "It was a great play by him and I think that goal was all Bratter,



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that's what he can do. He's so fast and he's sees the game so well. That was a heck of a play."

NOTES: NHL MVP Taylor Hall of New Jersey missed his 19th straight game with a lower-body issue. Devils D Sami Vatanen missed fifth straight because of a concussion. ... Hurricanes held New Jersey without a shot for the opening 13:56 of second period.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Finish five-game trip on Tuesday night at Ottawa.

Devils: Start three-game trip on Tuesday night at St. Louis.



Canes G Darling takes leave of absence

TSN.ca Staff

Carolina Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell says goalie Scott Darling is taking a personal leave of absence.

Since signing a four-year contract with the Hurricanes in 2017, Darling has struggled. This season, Darling has appeared in just eight games with the Hurricanes, going 2-4-2 with a 3.33 GAA and an .884 save percentage. He was waived in November and assigned to the AHL's Charlotte Checkers. Darling's struggles have continued there as well,

registering a 3.40 GAA and an .882 save percentage with a 5-6-2 record.

In 2017-18, he appeared in 43 games with the Hurricanes, going 13-21-7 with a 3.18 GAA and an .888 save percentage.

He was originally drafted by the Arizona Coyotes in the sixth round (153rd overall) of the 2007 NHL Entry Draft. Darling established himself as the backup to Corey Crawford with the Chicago Blackhawks for two full seasons, winning the Stanley Cup in 2015 before signing in Carolina.



Former Blackhawks goaltender Scott Darling to take leave of absence from Hurricanes

By Tim Stebbins

Former Blackhawks goaltender Scott Darling is taking a personal leave of absence from the Carolina Hurricanes.

Don Waddell, the Hurricanes general manager, announced the move on Sunday.

Darling has played in just eight games with the Hurricanes this season, holding a 3.33 GAA and .884 save percentage. He has spent much of the season in the AHL; in 14 games with the Charlotte Checkers, Darling has a 3.40 GAA and .882 save percentage.

"Since he's been down there he's had some good games and some bad games," Waddell said to the Charlotte Observer. "He had a tough game the other night and his agent called me and said he would like to take a personal

leave of absence and would we allow that to get his mind back together.

Waddell told Darling to "take a week" and said that Darling's decision is not performance-based.

"No, I think it's him trying to get his mind around it," he said. "He's obviously has had a tough year on the ice and he needs, from a mental standpoint, needs to regroup basically.

"We all know he's had ups and downs in his career, and we'll be supportive. He's still under contract for two more years and we've got to see if we can get this thing back together."

Darling played for the Blackhawks from 2014-17 before being traded to the Hurricanes on April 28, 2017. He signed a four-year, \$16.6 million contract with the Hurricanes a week later.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap: Carolina Hurricanes Lose Crucial Game to Struggling New Jersey Devils 3-2

Canes dropped their first game of their five-game road trip to the second worst team in the league.

By Zeke Lukow

The Carolina Hurricanes' power play woes continued on Sunday, losing 3-2 to the struggling New Jersey Devils. The Canes went 1-5 on power plays including missing on a 23 second two-man advantage. Throughout the game the Hurricanes would grab momentum via penalty kills or sustained pressure, but constantly gave it away with bad power plays. The Canes continue to stand still and rely on points from the shot as soon as they are set up as opposed to cycling and creating confusion or any kind of decision making from the defense. The only time that they were able to convert was at the end of the game with the goalie pulled.

The game started with a bang when Micheal Ferland dropped his gloves with Kurtis Gabriel just one minute into the game. The fight wasn't an overwhelming win one way or the other but it was a great way to set the tone early for a team playing their fourth straight road game.

The Hurricanes were the benefit of two early penalties by the Devils which also led to a brief two-man advantage, but they could not convert. The Canes' five on three was stationary and did not force the Devils to move or shift their coverage which led to no real chances.

That's where the good news ended for the Canes in the first. The Devils were able to grab momentum after killing off three minutes of penalties. They forced the play in the Canes zone which caused Brett Pesce to take a holding penalty. On the ensuing power play, Ryan Murphy found Pavel Zacha with a great pass, and Zacha was able to beat a sliding Mrazek glove-side to open scoring.

New Jersey extended their lead with a minute left with a goal by Marcus Johansson. Johansson outworked Pesce on the back post, and was able to tap in a rebound from Kyle Palmieri.

Rod Brind'Amour had one heck of a speech during the intermission. The Hurricanes came out fast in the second

with energy to grab momentum early. It continued when the Canes killed off an untimely penalty by Justin Faulk just four minutes in.

They then followed it up with a goal by Dougie Hamilton, his 10th of the season. After a sustained pressure in the offensive zone, Hamilton fired the puck towards the net and beat Keith Kinkaid who struggled to track the puck through traffic.

Though the Canes weren't able to tie the game in the second, they did outshoot the Devils 9-2. They took momentum, confidence, and a power play heading into the second intermission.

Carolina continued the strong energy in the third and pressed too hard at times. They took three straight penalties which led to a 4-on-3 and cancelled a potential tying goal. With 13 minutes left in the third it appeared that Sebastian Aho had tied the game. However, Nino Niederreiter took a penalty for interference in front of the net which washed the goal out.

With four minutes left Marcus Johansson beat Mrazek on an odd man rush to make the game 3-1. The chance came after Justin Faulk was indecisive on a pinch which allowed Jesper Bratt to grab the puck and drive down the ice with Johansson.

Niederreiter closed the gap to one goal on a late power play goal. The goal came after Mrazek was pulled for a sixth attacker. It was the first time all game that the Canes had pressure and chances on the power play and they were able to convert.

Despite the late rush and a long period with the extra attacker, the Canes were not able to tie the game. They now look to rebound against the league worst Ottawa Senators on Tuesday night in Ottawa. This will conclude their five-game road trip, and might also serve as their most important game of the season.



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Checkers Drop 2-1 Contest To Streaking Bears

Written by Carlin Kennedy

Despite an abundance of chances throughout the night by the Checkers it was the Bears who found the net twice, handing Charlotte another loss.

While the game stood at 1-1 late in the second, the Bears took advantage of a five-on-three power play, breaking the tie that ultimately lifted the Bears over Charlotte.

A turnover in the slot gave the home team their first tally late in the first period. Although the Bears rookie netminder Ilya Samsonov was relentless, Nicolas Roy was able to tap one in during the middle frame, tying the game at one.

While the Checkers saw many opportunities to score, including a shot clinking off the crossbar by Patrick Brown on one of five unsuccessful power plays on the night, the Bears were able to keep Charlotte at bay and seal the 2-1 victory.

NOTES

The Checkers are now winless in eight of their last 10 games, logging a 2-4-3-1 record over that stretch ... This is the first time that the Checkers have gone winless in consecutive road games since Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 in Providence ... Hershey joins Toronto as the only teams to have winning records against the Checkers this season ... The Checkers now have a points percentage below .700 for the first time this season ... The Checkers have scored one third-period goal in their last five games ... Alex Nedeljkovic suffered his first regulation loss tonight since Dec. 2 ... Spencer Smallman missed the game due to injury ... Zack Stortini, Roland McKeown and Steven Lorentz were healthy extras

UP NEXT

The Checkers are back to work next weekend for a three-in-three road series where they will face Springfield, Providence, and Bridgeport.

Chicago Tribune

Former Blackhawks goalie Scott Darling requests leave of absence from Hurricanes

Jimmy Greenfield

Former Blackhawks goalie Scott Darling requested and was granted a leave of absence from professional hockey, Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell told the Charlotte News & Observer on Sunday.

No reason was given for the request. Darling's agent, Matt Keator, described the leave of absence as "a personal thing."

Darling, who grew up in Lemont, signed a four-year, \$16.6 million contract with the Hurricanes shortly after they obtained him from the Hawks after the 2016-17 season. Darling never permanently locked down the starting job in his first season with the Hurricanes, finishing with an .888 save percentage and 3.18 goals-against-average in 43 games.

This season was even worse for Darling. He got off to a poor start with the Hurricanes and has spent the majority of the season with their AHL affiliate in Charlotte. He has an .882 save percentage and 3.34 GAA in 14 games with the Checkers.

Waddell said he didn't believe Darling's request was based on his on-ice performance.

"We all know he's had ups and downs in his career, and we'll be supportive," Waddell said. "He's still under contract for two more years and we've got to see if we can get this thing back together."

A healthy scratch: Hawks coach Jeremy Colliton is sticking with his plan to rotate defensemen Carl Dahlstrom, Slater Koekkoek and Gustav Forsling in and out of the lineup. Dahlstrom sat out Thursday's win over the Canucks but returned against the Red Wings.

"We're developing them," Colliton said. "We're not just thinking about, 'How are they going to play now?' It's how are they going to play in 10 games, 30 games, next season. That's something we're going to continue to balance."

Typically, a scratched player watches the game near the press box above the highest section in the arena. No player prefers to watch from there, but Colliton said they can benefit from watching from a different perspective.



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"When you go up top, the game looks a little different and it's a reminder of what's there and what's not," Colliton said. "Maybe get some ideas about what might help you when you get back in."

One-timers: Alex DeBrincat's three assists gave him an eight-game point streak, the longest of his career. ... Patrick Kane's 14-game point streak is the second-longest of his career, trailing only the 26-game streak he had in 2015.



Scott Darling granted leave of absence from Hurricanes for personal issue

By Satchel Price

Hurricanes goaltender Scott Darling has taken an indefinite "personal leave of absence," according to the News & Observer. He had been playing for the Hurricanes' AHL affiliate in Charlotte for the majority of this season, but did not travel with the Checkers to Hershey for their most recent game after the team promoted Callum Booth from the ECHL.

Carolina general manager Don Waddell confirmed Sunday that the team granted the leave of absence.

"Since he's been down there he's had some good games and some bad games," Waddell told the News & Observer. "He had a tough game the other night and his agent called me and said he would like to take a personal leave of absence and would we allow that to get his mind back together. That night he got rocked for about five (goals) and before he had a shutout (in regulation) before we lost in overtime 1-0. So we gave him the leave of absence."

Cam Ward, who played with Darling last season, said after the Hawks' 5-2 win over the Red Wings that he had not heard about the leave of absence (because it was announced in the middle of the game), and he plans to check in on his former teammate.

Darling's story of reaching the NHL in his mid-20s is one of the most inspiring in hockey. He overcame alcoholism and anxiety issues that almost derailed his hockey dreams to become the Blackhawks' backup goaltender behind Corey Crawford in 2015. Over the next three years, he was popular in Chicago, and emerged as a potential starting netminder option in the NHL.

The Hurricanes traded for Darling in the spring of 2017 and quickly signed him to a lucrative four-year contract extension. Upon leaving the Hawks, the goalie wrote a heartfelt article for The Players' Tribune detailing some of his struggles while saying farewell to the city.

Darling performed poorly in his first season in Carolina, with his save percentage dropping from .924 to an ugly .888. The Hurricanes added Curtis McElhinney and Petr Mrazek to compete with Darling this season, and those two have ended up beating him out for NHL playing time most of the season. Darling's only played eight NHL games this season (with a .884 save percentage), the last coming against the Capitals in mid-December.

As Waddell noted, Darling's ineffectiveness on the ice haven't gone away in the AHL. His save percentage (.882) in 14 games with the Checkers this season is even worse than his numbers with the Hurricanes. He stopped more than 87 percent of the shots he faced in just one of his last six appearances.

Darling's agent confirmed to the News & Observer that his absence is for a "personal thing." Waddell said the team would take it week-to-week with the goalie to determine when he's ready to come back. The GM also denied that this was a performance-based decision.

"We all know he's had ups and downs in his career, and we'll be supportive," Waddell said. "He's still under contract for two more years and we've got to see if we can get this thing back together."



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Hurricanes' Darling taking personal leave of absence

Matt Teague

Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Scott Darling is taking a personal leave of absence, general manager Don Waddell announced Sunday.

"He's obviously had a tough year on the ice and he needs, from a mental standpoint, needs to regroup basically," Waddell told Chip Alexander of the Raleigh News & Observer.

After struggling throughout the 2017-18 campaign, Darling has played just eight games for the Hurricanes this season, posting a 3.34 goals-against average and a .884 save percentage. He was placed on waivers Nov. 29 and has spent the majority of the campaign with the AHL's Charlotte Checkers.

"He had a tough game the other night and his agent called me and said he would like to take a personal leave of

absence and would we allow that to get his mind back together," Waddell said. "That night he got rocked for about five (goals) and before he had a shutout (in regulation) before we lost in overtime 1-0. So we gave him the leave of absence."

Waddell added there is no set timetable for the 30-year-old's return.

"I'll touch base with him," he said. "I told him to take a week and touch base with me in a week or so and we'll go from there."

Carolina acquired the rights to the 6-foot-5 netminder in 2017 after his impressive three-year run as the Chicago Blackhawks' backup goaltender. Darling signed a four-year, \$16.6-million deal to be the Hurricanes' starting goalie a week later.

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1130126 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes goalie Scott Darling taking personal leave of absence

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

FEBRUARY 10, 2019 05:00 PM

In another twist to the Scott Darling saga, the Carolina Hurricanes goalie has been granted a personal leave of absence, general manager Don Waddell said Sunday.

Darling, who sought to be the Canes' No. 1 goalie this season, has played much of the year with the Charlotte Checkers, Carolina's American Hockey League affiliate. He did not accompany the Checkers on their road trip this past weekend to face the Hershey Bears after Charlotte called up goalie Callum Booth from the Reading Royals of the ECHL.

"Since he's been down there he's had some good games and some bad games," Waddell said in an interview. "He had a tough game the other night and his agent called me and said he would like to take a personal leave of absence and would we allow that to get his mind back together. That night he got rocked for about five (goals) and before he had a shutout (in regulation) before we lost in overtime 1-0. So we gave him the leave of absence."

Darling's agent, Matt Keator, confirmed Sunday that the request for a leave of absence was made but provided no other information on Darling, saying, "It's a personal thing."

Waddell said there was no set time limit to the leave.

"I'll touch base with him," Waddell said. "I told him to take a week and touch base with me in a week or so and we'll go from there."

Asked if it was a performance-based decision made by Darling because of his play, Waddell said, "No, I think it's him trying to get his mind around it. He's obviously had a tough year on the ice and he needs, from a mental standpoint, needs to regroup basically."

The Canes obtained Darling in a trade with the Chicago Blackhawks and quickly signed him in May 2017 to a four-year, \$16.6 million contract. A backup goalie in Chicago, Darling appeared ready to supplant Cam Ward as the Canes' No. 1 goalie in 2017-18 but had a rocky first season.

Darling went through strenuous offseason conditioning, shedding 25 pounds. He was putting together a strong preseason in training camp when he was injured in the final preseason game, Sept. 30 against the Nashville Predators and placed on injured reserve on Oct. 3. He spent time with the Checkers on a conditioning stint later in October.

The Hurricanes claimed veteran goalie Curtis McElhinney off waivers from the Toronto Maple Leafs before the season opener, and McElhinney and Petr Mrazek have handled nearly all of the workload in net. Darling was placed on waivers Nov. 29, then assigned to the Checkers after clearing.

Darling has a 2-4-1 record with a 3.14 goals-against average and .892 save percentage in seven games with the Hurricanes this season. He's 5-6-2, with a 3.40 GAA and .882 save percentage in 14 games with the Checkers.

In January, needing a callup, the Canes brought up Checkers goalie Alex Nedeljkovic, who won his first NHL start against Vancouver.

Waddell said the Hurricanes would continue to support Darling "100 percent."

"We all know he's had ups and downs in his career, and we'll be supportive," Waddell said. "He's still under contract for two more years and we've got to see if we can get this thing back together."

News Observer LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130195 Ottawa Senators

SNAPSHOTS: Anders Nilsson has stepped up for Senators

Bruce Garrioch

Published:February 10, 2019

Updated:February 10, 2019 6:35 PM EST

The goaltending decision for the Ottawa Senators Tuesday night will suddenly be interesting.

Most times this season, Craig Anderson would have been the automatic choice to face the Carolina Hurricanes as the Senators close out a three-game homestand at the Canadian Tire Centre.

After Monday's skate, coach Guy Boucher and goalie coach Pierre Groulx will have to mull over the decision on who will start because the last two times backup Anders Nilsson has played he's secured victories and has stopped 89 of the 91 shots he's faced in those wins.

Nilsson's latest effort was 44 stops in a 5-2 victory over the Winnipeg Jets Saturday at home and he was excellent. Boucher said after posting a 45-save shutout in a 4-0 victory over the Anaheim Ducks Thursday he didn't see any reason to take Nilsson out of the net against the Jets.

"He had won five of his last seven starts before the (Winnipeg) game and now it's six of eight," Boucher said after the victory. "He's been practising solid, playing solid and when you've got solid goaltending you can win any game – and we're winning games."

"That's what we're getting."

Dealt to Ottawa from the Vancouver Canucks last month, Nilsson said it was nice to get the two straight starts.

"It's always (good) to know that they feel comfortable enough to put me in again," Nilsson said. "But I don't take anything for granted. I'm just trying to do my job when I get the chance, no matter whether it's back-to-back starts or if it goes five games in between."



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"My job is always the same, I just try to stop the puck."

The decision by general manager Pierre Dorion to deal for Nilsson was a good one. He arrived at a time the club was struggling with Anderson on the shelf with a concussion and backup Mike Condon still sidelined with a hip injury that has kept him out of action since November.

While journeyman Mike McKenna did his best during his short stretch in the net, he wasn't able to carry the load to help the club get wins. Belleville call-up Marcus Högberg needed more time in the AHL.

Nilsson is a proven NHL goalie and that has given his teammates a boost.

"He has a terrific attitude, but we knew that because we did our homework on him, and we knew he was a great person," Boucher said. "He's a giant man (at 6-foot-6) and I like that, but he's extremely in shape and very attentive to the details.

"He and (Groulx) have had a good relationship right from the beginning. He's an NHL goalie and we've known our situation since the beginning with what happened with (Condon) and (Nilsson) coming in has been great."

Let's see who starts Tuesday.

BUSY DROPPING THE GLOVES

Ben Harpur has made his presence felt this season.

The 6-foot-6 blueliner has never been afraid to use his size in the past, but this year he's added another element by dropping the gloves.

Harpur fought Brendan Lemieux of the Jets Saturday in the first period of the club's victory and won easily. According to hockeyfights.com, it was Harpur's sixth straight win in the six fights he's had this year.

That's impressive, however, as this hasn't exactly been a big part of Harpur's game in the past and he certainly didn't play that role when he earned a job down the stretch run to the Eastern Conference final in 2017.

Boucher said Harpur is just trying to stay in the league.

"He wants to be in the NHL and he knows that he's a big body that's fought in the American league that's making his presence felt," Boucher said. "And, he wants to be there for his buddies on the team.

"Once you get to the NHL, you've got to find a way to stick for whatever reason. You stick because you're fast or because you're skilled or you're smart defensively or big. There's got to be an expertise of some kind to stay in the NHL.

"Before you're able to get the minutes because you deserve minutes over a long period of time, you want to stick. Not just (fighting), but him being physical, hitting and he needs to continue using his reach a bit more. You're talking about fighting, but to me there's a thousand other things you can do to stick in the NHL, but find a way to stick in the NHL."

Harpur did have five fights in 2015-16 with Binghamton.

THE LAST WORDS

After the victory over the Jets, the staff and players got suited up to attend the annual Ferguslea Properties Ltd Senators Soiree at Westin Hotel. The party, which was in a Saturday Night Fever theme, raised \$271,835 in support of children and youth through the Senators' Foundation. More than 650 were on hand for the event ...

The Senators returned for Darren Archibald to Belleville after the win over the Jets. He was called up to be the extra forward Saturday. Belleville faced the Toronto Marlies on the road Sunday ...

The other shoe finally dropped Sunday when Anaheim coach Randy Carlyle was fired after disastrous road trip that included a 4-0 loss here. The decision by general manager Bob Murray to go behind the bench will be interesting. He'll be able to get a first-hand look at what's going on

with the team he built and will have a better idea of what's happening in the dressing room. Murray is a former player, but has no coaching experience.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130196 Ottawa Senators

WHAT WILL DORION DO? Trade deadline looms large for Ottawa Senators

Bruce Garrioch

Published:February 10, 2019

Updated:February 10, 2019 6:25 PM EST

The calm before the storm?

All was quiet Sunday as the Ottawa Senators enjoyed a day off after a 5-2 victory over the Winnipeg Jets at Canadian Tire Centre Saturday afternoon with a performance led by goals from unrestricted free agents Mark Stone, Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel.

With the NHL trade deadline set for Feb. 25 at 3 p.m. EST now only two weeks away, there will be clarity this week on whether the Senators are going to sign any or all three players or if general manager Pierre Dorion will begin listening to offers to see what he can get in return.

A fan base is waiting with bated breath to see what's going to happen with Stone, Duchene and Dzingel. However, if they're not going to sign with Ottawa then the Senators can't lose them for nothing. The organization has to get assets in return.

While the Senators have put their best foot forward to try to keep Stone and Duchene as building blocks during this rebuild, their optimism surrounding the duo is tempered. More discussions are planned before the players and the club make a final decision on what the next move will be.

As for Dzingel, the Senators may decide to try to keep him after learning what Stone and Duchene are going to do, but there's a good chance the 26-year-old winger will be moved, especially if he's looking for a long-term deal in the \$5.5-to-\$6 million range as has been speculated.

At this point, it's anybody's guess what may happen and don't forget anything can change.

But if the Senators do decide to move any of the trio before the deadline then Dorion may want to charge up his cellphone and buy an extra battery or two because there is going to be no shortage of interest from the contenders who want to bulk up for a run to the Stanley Cup in the spring.

"Pretty much any playoff team could use them," a league executive said Sunday. "The cost (in return) and signing potential will be the (determining factor) for most teams."

The asking price for Stone and Duchene is going to be big if the Senators get to that point. Both could be difference-makers for a team looking to go a long way this spring and there's going to be a bidding war as teams try to prevent each other from loading up for the stretch drive.

The Winnipeg Jets, Nashville Predators, Calgary Flames, New York Islanders, Vegas Golden Knights, Minnesota Wild, Boston Bruins and Pittsburgh Penguins are among the teams that are going to be shopping.

Actually, just about put all the playoff contenders on this list because they're all going to make a pitch. The Senators will likely want three



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pieces in return in separate deals for Stone and Duchene – including a first-round pick.

The asking price for Dzingel is believed to be a first-round selection.

Though Stone has been tight-lipped about his negotiations and Duchene has maintained he hasn't made a decision whether he wants to stay or not, if they go to the market it won't take long before word leaks out Dorion and the hockey department are listening to offers.

"There are guys they're trying to sign and we have no idea what's going to happen with that," said winger Zack Smith, who scored his sixth of the season against the Jets. "It will be interesting to see (what happens) and it's always a tough time because we've got a good group of guys.

"Some of the guys whose names are being thrown around are big parts of the team to say the least. It's tough, but we've just got to wait and see. It's the nature of the beast when you're not winning and you're not in the playoffs. There's not much we can do, but try to get better each day."

Take Our Poll

The Senators will skate Monday morning to prepare to face the Carolina Hurricanes at home before leaving for a lengthy four-game road trip and coach Guy Boucher continued to say the players are trying to tune out all the speculation.

"We don't manage it. We don't talk about it. That's outside stuff. We talk about how we're going to play," Boucher said Saturday. "We talk about who's going to play with who, who's on the power play, who's on the penalty kill? All that stuff here is stuff that doesn't help a player play well.

"I know it's your jobs (to ask) and it's normal, but my job is the complete opposite. It's about managing what we control on the ice and the players have been extremely professional and very focused. I haven't seen any change in their approach so we definitely don't want to change that."

That doesn't mean changes won't be made.

THE DEADLINE APPROACHES

Unrestricted free agents

RW Mark Stone

C Matt Duchene

LW Ryan Dzingel

G Anders Nilsson

LW Magnus Paajarvi

Restricted free agents

D Cody Ceci

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130197 Ottawa Senators

'Walk the walk': The Senators' Nilsson, Borowiecki will take part in WinterPride

By Chris Stevenson Feb 10, 2019

After three games in four nights, the couch would be an appealing place to be for an NHL player on an off day Sunday.

But Ottawa Senators goaltender Anders Nilsson and defenceman Mark Borowiecki will not recline. They will bundle up on a brisk Ottawa winter afternoon, along with their wives, head for Parliament Hill and stand up.

They will participate in WinterPride 2019, a walk presented by Capital Pride and Canadian Heritage to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalization of homosexuality in Canada.

The march will depart from the Centennial Flame on Parliament Hill at noon Sunday. The Senators involvement, the first by the organization in a Pride event that I can recall, is part of the NHL's league-wide Hockey Is For Everyone initiative, which will also include the Senators "Love is Love," night on Tuesday at Canadian Tire Centre. The game Tuesday is hosted in conjunction with You Can Play, a nonprofit organization "committed to supporting the LGBTQ community and fighting homophobia in sports."

"I'm excited. I won't lie," Borowiecki said in an empty Senators dressing room after their 5-2 win against the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday. He and his wife, Tara, are embracing the chance to show their support.

"There's sometimes after you put in a bit of a shift at the rink and you get an off day you just want to lie on your couch and marinate, but this is one Tara and I have been excited for," he said.

"I just hope it's a good turnout and people are accepting of it. The parade marks the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalization and again, it's so foreign and sad to me that 50 years ago you were discriminated against because of your sexual orientation. It's so wrong.

"To be there to kind of commemorate that and mark that, I think, is really important. I take a lot of pride in being a progressive guy and a progressive Canadian and my wife does, too. Now it's kind of time to, pardon the pun for (Sunday), but to walk the walk. You can talk about it all you want, but now it's time to show up and support it."

Nilsson, somewhat unintentionally, it seems, has become the leader in making hockey more welcoming and inclusive and is looking forward to participating, for the first time, in an event like this.

He has served to open the door with the small wedge of a Pride flag on the back of his mask for the past few seasons, a show of support for gay friends of his and his family.

"Honestly, when I put it on, I wasn't expecting it to get so much attention," Nilsson told The Athletic in the minutes after he made 44 saves in the Senators win on Saturday. "I think that it's great that it's been getting a lot of attention and a lot of people have reached out to me and have been thankful for the support. It's just a special thing that having a flag on my helmet can mean so much to so many people.

"It also shows that it's still a problem. I think it's a mindset that needs to change. It's just a matter if you want to play hockey, you can play hockey. You should be able to play no matter who you like.

"I was also surprised to see how big of a problem it is. I wasn't aware of that until I put it on the helmet. You could see how much it actually means to people and how big of a problem in this world small things can be for them."

Nilsson said he hopes things like him wearing a Pride flag on his mask or walking in an event like the one that will take place Sunday will continue to change the conversation about inclusion in team sports regardless of sexual orientation.

"We're taking small steps ahead. You see people are more comfortable talking about it. When people are more comfortable talking about it, you know you are making some progress," he said. "I hope that the other main sports can follow, basketball, baseball, football. I think they still have a long way to go.

"I think for us, it's important to especially reach out to younger kids who are going into teenage years, that age, because if we can change the mindset of them, keep the people if you're a boy and you like a boy or you're a girl and you like a girl, I think unfortunately what has happened is they stop playing team sports because they don't feel comfortable in a team environment. I think it's important to keep them in a team environment. It should be OK, whoever you like."



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Borowiecki expressed a touch of regret it has taken this long for him and the Senators to make a public display of their support.

"It almost saddens me a little bit. That's on me, too. You have something I believe in and Tara and I kind of hold close to our hearts and have never outwardly shown support for, I don't know why that is, but this year we are putting an end to that. I think it is really important," he said.

"I like talking about it. Tara and I have some very fundamental core values and beliefs and ways that we try and live our lives. One of those values for us is everyone deserves the opportunity to be in a loving, healthy relationship, your sexual orientation aside."

Borowiecki said he is inspired to walk along with Nilsson and show his support.

"That's kind of a fundamental right for me. It's really important for us to be there and support the LGBTQ community in Ottawa," he said. "It's something that I take a lot of pride in that as Canadians we're a little more progressive with that issue. To be able to show our support, I'm truly grateful and proud and to have a guy like Anders here who has been behind that for a long time, is really inspiring. I think he is a great role model for a lot of guys in here.

"People are people and love really is love. Tara and I truly believe that deeply. Like Anders said, just small little gestures like that can help kind of raise awareness and break down those sort of strange stigmas and stereotypes. I'm all for that. The problem is, I think, too big of a problem. If this is kind of the first step in the right direction for us as an organization and as a group and Anders and I and our wives can help with that, I'm 100 percent on board."

Nilsson said he is still marvels at how the big the attention is for his small Pride flag.

"I put it on because me and my family have some friends who are gay and I thought it was a small gesture I could do for them. I never thought it was going to get this much attention. That wasn't the cause why I did it. Honestly, my first season I was kind of shocked how big an impact it had, how much attention it got from media and people around," he said.

"I'm going to have it until the problem isn't a problem anymore. We still have a long way to go."

The distance will be reduced with each step they take Sunday.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130149 Dallas Stars

How GM Jim Nill is responsible for the key fix to the lineup that got the Stars on track

By , Matthew DeFranks

Across the last three weeks, each Stars practice or morning skate has lacked suspense. There was no more line-juggling to watch or no seventh defenseman to wonder about, and instead coach Jim Montgomery settled into a consistent mix of players.

It's been something that's been missing for most of the season, as Montgomery tinkered and tweaked the lines to try to maximize performance and account for injuries. At one point, Montgomery used a different mix of forwards in 18 straight games. In the last seven games, he's made one change to his lines, and that was due to an injury to Jason Dickinson.

In those seven games, the Stars are 5-1-1.

The main switch for Montgomery was moving Jamie Benn onto a line with Radek Faksa and Blake Comeau, taking Benn away from Tyler Seguin and Alexander Radulov and replacing him with Mattias Janmark. The first game with the new lines was Jan. 19 against Winnipeg, when the Stars were trying to snap a four-game losing streak.

"I was talking with Jim Nill, and we were struggling at that time," Montgomery said last week. "Jim said, 'Why don't we try Jamie Benn at left wing with Faksy?' I wanted to move Jamie somewhere, I just didn't know where. It was great because it gave a purpose to all those three to shut down the [Mark] Scheifele line."

Benn became a winger on a shutdown line, one that is fed defensive zone starts and the other team's best lines. Janmark-Seguin-Radulov became an offensive line with speed. Montgomery assembled two more lines with speed by putting Jason Dickinson with Andrew Cogliano and Jason Spezza, plus Roope Hintz with Denis Gurianov and Brett Ritchie.

"There is more balance," Montgomery said. "The third and fourth line, usually against the other team's third and fourth line, it's just who's fresher and who's playing better is going to get the extra one or two minutes a game."

While the Stars have begun games with the same lines consistently in recent games, Montgomery has often switched lines during the games. In the last three games, he has reunited Benn, Seguin and Radulov at certain points, and used them to close games in search of late-game offense.

Even against Arizona on Saturday, Benn-Seguin-Radulov played 8:01 together at 5 on 5.

"I didn't think that we were generating all that much," Montgomery said of reuniting the line. "Sometimes, it's that. Sometimes, it's just an offensive zone faceoff. Whether we win or lose, those three seem to create more of offensive zone faceoffs than other lines do."

Montgomery said he would again start with Benn-Seguin-Radulov at some point because of matchups. Maybe that happens as soon as Tuesday against Florida, or maybe Montgomery decides to roll with the same lines for a season-high fourth straight game.

Benn, Seguin or Radulov have scored in six of the last seven games. Radulov's goal Saturday in Arizona snapped a 11-game goal drought.

"I think Rads' details, and how good he's been without the puck is the best we've ever seen, and it coincides with the rest of our team doing it," Montgomery said. "We're worried about winning games right now and making the playoffs, and Rads is helping us in every game."

-- The Stars were off Sunday. They practice Monday at 11 a.m. in Frisco before flying to South Florida for their game Tuesday night against the Panthers.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130188 New York Rangers

Alexandar Georgiev has 55 saves on his birthday in Rangers' win over Toronto

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS |

FEB 10, 2019 | 9:55 PM

After his team allowed 56 shots on goal, Rangers coach David Quinn thought the defense was pretty good.

He had Alexandar Georgiev to thank for that.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Georgiev made a career-high 55 saves to lead the Blueshirts over the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-1 on Sunday night. It was the second-most saves in a regular-season game in franchise history. Mike Richter holds the record with 59 on Jan. 31, 1991.

"He played outstanding. He's getting better and better," Quinn said of his second-year goalie on his 23rd birthday.

"It was a special birthday," Georgiev said. "I tried not to concentrate on the birthday wishes. I knew I had an important game in front of me. I'm very happy it ended the way it ended."

Mika Zibanejad, Jimmy Vesey and Adam McQuaid scored for the Rangers, who finished their five-game homestand at 2-2-1.

"Sometimes you need a performance like this and he came up big for us, gave us a chance," Zibanejad said of Georgiev.

Kevin Hayes added an empty-netter, and Mats Zuccarello and Chris Kreider each had two assists.

Kasperii Kapanen scored for the Maple Leafs, who had their four-game winning streak snapped.

"We played a pretty good game," Kapanen said. "Their goalie made 55 saves. He played a tremendous game. That's just hockey."

Toronto had a season-high 56 shots, forcing Georgiev to be at his best throughout. He is the seventh goalie in franchise history with 50 or more saves in a game. The previous goalie to do it was Henrik Lundqvist last year — also on his birthday.

The Rangers penalty killers also helped to slow down the Maple Leafs. Toronto went 0 for 4 on the power play despite managing 23 shots.

"I actually thought we defended pretty well," Quinn said. "That's a scary, scary team. I mean they have high-end talent. They can beat you 1-on-1, but boy I thought we did a good job clearing the net front out. They didn't have many second chances."

Leading 2-1 in the third period, McQuaid gave the Rangers some insurance when he scored from the point at 11:59 for his second goal of the season.

The Rangers, who were blanked by Carolina on Friday, got off to a fast start against the Leafs.

Kreider sent a pass from behind the net to Zuccarello, who was alone in front. Toronto backup goalie Garret Sparks stopped Zuccarello twice, but the loose puck went to Zibanejad, who scored his 23rd of the season just 28 seconds into the game.

Given the early lead, Georgiev was sharp in making several stellar saves on the Maple Leafs' power play a couple of minutes later.

"It was incredibly important to keep it 1-0 at that point," Georgiev said. "The boys did a great job. We killed that penalty and it was a bit easier after that."

The Maple Leafs kept up the pressure and tied the game halfway through the period. Defenseman Tony DeAngelo had his pass intercepted by Kapanen, who skated in on a breakaway and scored his 16th of the season at 10:35.

Despite being badly outshot, the Rangers took a 2-1 lead after killing off another penalty. Ryan Strome entered the zone and sent a pass to Kreider. Kreider sent a cross-ice pass to Vesey, who wristed it past Sparks for his 12th of the season at 14:05.

"Big-time goal by Vesey," Quinn said.

New York Daily News LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130189 New York Rangers

Rangers can exhale after prospect's scary crash into boards

By Larry Brooks February 10, 2019 | 11:22PM

You could excuse the Rangers if they had flashbacks to Hugh Jessiman, the 12th-overall selection of the 2003 entry draft who tore a left ankle ligament in his second game of his junior season at Dartmouth, never was the same following surgery and never played a game for the Blueshirts.

For on Saturday night in Madison, Wis., 22nd-overall selection K'Andre Miller crashed into the end boards after wiping out on an end-to-end rush and was unable to put much, if any, weight on his left leg as the freshman defenseman left the ice late in Wisconsin's 4-1 loss to Ohio State.

But though there was no official update Sunday from the Badgers' athletic department, the injury may not be as ominous as immediately feared.

Wisconsin assistant SID Paul Capobianco told The Post in an email the 19-year-old, who won a silver medal for Team USA in the World Junior tournament and has 22 points (five goals, 17 assists) in 26 games for the Badgers, is "sore" with a "lower body injury" and will be evaluated on Monday.

The Blueshirts went with seven defensemen and 11 forwards for the second time on the homestand and the fourth time this season for the Rangers' 4-1 win over the Maple Leafs, with Neal Pionk returning to the lineup following Friday's scratch while Vinni Lettieri sat.

"I'm getting more comfortable with that, for sure," David Quinn said. "You've just got to put your best lineup out there, regardless of positions. I'd prefer not to do it, but I'm getting more comfortable with it and I think our guys are, too."

"You've got to find a balance with ice time and a balance with your 11 forwards, too, you're mixing and matching up there, but at the end of the day, real players can play with anybody"

The approaching Feb. 25 trade deadline may have contributed to the decision to go with seven defensemen. Not only has Brendan Smith played well enough through the five-game homestand to merit a lineup spot, it is in the Blueshirts' best interests to continue to showcase No. 42.

Lettieri, recalled on Wednesday in the wake of Cody McLeod's trade to Nashville, played eight shifts for 5:51 in Friday's 3-0 defeat to Carolina after getting eight shifts for 7:12 in Wednesday's shootout victory over the Bruins.

New York Post LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130190 New York Rangers

Georgiev turns back Maple Leafs in birthday masterpiece for Rangers

By Larry Brooks February 10, 2019 | 9:54PM

This is becoming a ritual for the Rangers.

When Henrik Lundqvist turned 36 last March 2, the King faced 51 shots and stopped 50 of them in the Rangers' 3-1 victory in Calgary.

So naturally, when Alexandar Georgiev turned 23 on Sunday, the Bulgarian faced 56 shots and stopped 55 of them in the Blueshirts' 4-1 victory over the high-octane Maple Leafs at the Garden.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Who's got the presents for the goalie with the presence to have turned away all 23 of Toronto's power-play shots during its eight minutes with the man-advantage?

"I tried to have a special birthday," said Georgiev, at his best early in making rapid-fire close-in stops on John Tavares and Auston Matthews on Toronto's first power play. "I tried not to concentrate on the birthday wishes because I had an important game in front of me.

"I'm very happy it ended the way it ended."

As stout as the netminder was in holding his ground on repeated close-in put-backs, the 56-28 final tally in shots was not indicative of the way the match evolved. Yes, the Maple Leafs did have considerable zone time through swatches of the match, but it never seemed as if Georgiev was under siege the way he — or Lundqvist — has been at different times.

"Five-on-five, I think we were the better team," Mats Zuccarello, who had two assists, said. "They have a lot of skilled, strong players, but I thought we did a good job against them. Georgie was fantastic, but I don't think the shots really tell the story of the game."

Indeed, neither did David Quinn, who used the seven defensemen he dressed to his advantage, sliding Neal Pionk in on Marc Staal's right for a series of shifts early and late in the third when Tony DeAngelo struggled.

"This is going to sound insane, but I thought we defended well," the coach said. "They're a scary, scary team. They have high-end talent, they can beat you one-on-one, but boy, I thought we did a good job clearing the net front out, they didn't have many chances five-on-five.

"You look at the shot total, and I felt like a complete idiot walking off the ice [thinking], 'Yeah, we defended pretty well.' But we did."

Nazem Kadri was credited with 12 shots on 16 attempts. Tavares had eight shots. Matthews had five shots on 11 attempts. Thing is, though, Quinn is correct. The Rangers guarded well against odd-man rushes and they did a reasonably good job of taking away the slot. Toronto's only goal came on a Kasperii Kapanen breakaway at 10:35 of the first period after the speedy winger intercepted DeAngelo's unwise attempt at a rink-wide pass at the Maple Leaf line and blasted one in off the post.

That tied the score 1-1 after the Blueshirts had scored on the game's first shift, Mika Zibanejad drilling one home from the left circle at 0:38 after Garret Sparks had stopped Zuccarello twice from in front. Yes, another backup goaltender against the Blueshirts, this one night after Frederik Andersen was in nets for Toronto's emotional overtime victory in Montreal.

But the identity of the visiting goaltender should not detract from this victory over a league powerhouse. You can only score on and beat the goalies they put in front of you. It just provides a matter of context — as does recognizing how often upper-echelon teams look past clubs like the Rangers — in evaluating the team and the season.

"Do we want our goalies facing 50, 60 shots? No, but sometimes you need a performance like this and [Georgiev] came up big," said Zibanejad, who has recorded 11 goals with eight assists in the past 12 matches. "But I thought we played well. We scored on our chances and that was enough."

The Rangers don't convert their opportunities nearly enough, so this was a good night for the shooters. Jimmy Vesey, restored to top-six duty on the wing and absent from the scoring column since Jan. 13, rang one up by ripping a right-wing drive off a nifty Chris Kreider feed past Sparks for a 2-1 lead at 14:05 of the first. Tertiary scorer Adam McQuaid got his second in four games for a 3-1 lead at 11:59 of the third before Hayes salted it with an empty-netter.

Still, even if the Rangers did defend well, even if most of the shots weren't necessarily high-danger tries, there were a lot of them and only one went in.

"The guy never wavers. He's getting better and better," Quinn said of Georgiev. "If you're with him every day, you see his approach and how committed he is.

"I haven't gotten anything for him yet [for his birthday] but there's going to be a big gift, soon."

New York Post LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130191 New York Rangers

Alexandar Georgiev makes 55 saves as Rangers beat Maple Leafs at Garden

By Colin Stephenson

Updated February 10, 2019 11:59 PM

On his 23rd birthday, Rangers goalie Alexandar Georgiev gave himself the present he wanted most on Sunday: A 4-1 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs at Madison Square Garden.

The Bulgarian-born goalie made a career-high 55 saves, the second-most saves in a regular-season game in franchise history. Mike Richter made 59 on Jan. 31, 1991, but that was in a 3-3 overtime tie with the Canucks in Vancouver, so Georgiev owns the record for most saves by a Rangers goalie in regulation and most saves by a Rangers goalie in a game at the Garden.

Asked if he could have had a better birthday, Georgiev deadpanned, "A shutout?"

But seriously, folks . . .

According to the Rangers' stats and information Twitter account, Georgiev is the seventh Rangers goalie who has made at least 50 saves in a game since the NHL began tracking the statistic in 1955-56 (Gump Worsley, Jacques Plante, Gilles Villemure, Glen Hanlon, Richter and Henrik Lundqvist are the others).

"What did I get him for his birthday? Nothing yet, but there's going to be a big gift, soon," coach David Quinn said. "Listen, he played outstanding. He's gotten better and better."

"He was on his game," defenseman Adam McQuaid said. "He made a ton of saves in tight, and he was really quick down low and he bailed us out on a number of occasions, so he deserves a lot of credit."

McQuaid played a bit part in the win, which allowed the Rangers to close out their season-high five-game homestand with a 2-2-1 record. The stay-at-home defenseman scored his second goal of the season — and second in four games — to give the Rangers a 3-1 lead at 11:59 of the third period after the Leafs spent much of the period throwing the kitchen sink at Georgiev.

Kevin Hayes added an empty-net goal at 19:40 for the Rangers (24-23-8), who were outshot 56-30. The Leafs had 86 shot attempts and the Rangers had 46, according to the league's official scoresheet.

First-period goals by Mika Zibanejad (at 28 seconds) and Jimmy Vesey (at 14:05) were sandwiched around Kasperii Kapanen's goal at 10:35 as the Rangers took a 2-1 lead.

Now they will go on the road with a good feeling, thanks to Georgiev, who was born in Bulgaria but grew up in Russia and signed with the Rangers after a tryout in the summer of 2017.

Georgiev, whose previous career high in saves was 43 in a 5-1 win over Buffalo in March 2018, was asked if he had ever played a game like this. "Not in pro hockey, no, I don't think so," he said.



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He said he likes to get a lot of shots ("it's more fun for a goalie," he said), though he conceded maybe not this many.

Asked if this might have been his best game ever, he said, "I'm not sure. I need to check this one later [on video] to see what happened. But it was one of the nicest performances."

The Rangers played with seven defensemen. Neal Pionk returned to the lineup after two games as a healthy scratch. Fourth-line forward Vinni Lettieri was scratched as Quinn decided to go with an 11-forward, seven-defenseman alignment.

It was the fifth time this season that the Rangers have played with 11 forwards and seven defensemen, and the previous two times they did it — against the Flyers Jan. 29 (1-0 loss) and the Kings Feb. 4 (4-3 overtime loss) — they didn't look terribly out of sync. Said Quinn, "I'm getting more comfortable with it, for sure."

Notes & quotes: K'Andre Miller, one of the Rangers' three first-round draft picks last summer, injured his left leg or knee in a crash into the boards Saturday night for Wisconsin against Ohio State. A Rangers spokesman said the team had no report on the injury's severity.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130192 New York Rangers

Alexandar Georgiev gets the start in net on his 23rd birthday

By Colin Stephenson

Updated February 10, 2019 10:07 PM

Alexandar Georgiev got the start in goal on his 23rd birthday.

"Georgie played well last game," David Quinn said when asked why Georgiev, and not Henrik Lundqvist, got the start. "I thought Hank played real well the other night [in the 3-0 loss to Carolina] . . . Hank will play in Winnipeg [on Tuesday]."

Georgiev said he hasn't been able to truly celebrate his birthday for the past few years. "I don't think I've had a proper birthday for four or five years in a row now," he said. "It's always a game day."

Last year he got called up from AHL Hartford on his birthday. The Wolf Pack were in Syracuse at the time, and Georgiev had to fly to Winnipeg to meet the Rangers. He missed his connecting flight, had to wait for another and spent most of the day in the airport.

No 'home vacations'

Quinn was asked if any thought was given to bringing 20-year-old rookie Brett Howden — out with a sprained MCL in his right knee — with the team on the trip to Winnipeg so he could get a chance to go home. The answer was most likely not.

"Well, day to day, you kind of evaluate the player, and if we think bringing him with us to continue to skate is going to be beneficial for him . . . but it's such a short trip, I highly doubt it," Quinn said. Then, after a pause: "We're not in the business of giving home vacations."

Prospect injured

Defenseman K'Andre Miller, one of the Rangers' three first-round draft picks last summer, suffered an apparent injury to his left knee/leg when he crashed into the end boards in his game for the University of Wisconsin against Ohio State on Saturday night. A team spokesman said Sunday that the Rangers had heard "nothing yet" regarding the severity of Miller's injury.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130193 New York Rangers

Why only one Stanley Cup? 1994 Rangers championship team wasn't built to last

By Colin Stephenson

Updated February 10, 2019 7:10 PM

By the 1990s, after 50-plus seasons without the Stanley Cup, Rangers fans would have done just about anything to win the Cup, just once. When it finally happened, in 1994, it was like a dream come true. The images of Stephane Matteau scoring in double overtime to beat the Devils in the Eastern Conference Final; of Craig MacTavish winning the last faceoff in the Cup Final against Vancouver at the Garden; of Mark Messier grabbing the Cup, with that big grin, and hoisting it over his head, live and on video, are burned into fans' memories forever. And there was the one fan who made that iconic sign that said, "Now I can die in peace."

On Friday, before the current team's 3-0 loss to Carolina, the Garden brought back the '94 team for a celebration of that Cup, their only one in the last 79 years. They certainly won't win another one this year, and most likely won't win one next year, either. So, who knows when they might win another one?

But here's the real question: Why didn't that '94 team, as great as it was, with that nucleus of Messier, goaltender Mike Richter, Brian Leetch, Adam Graves, et al, win more than one Cup? The Devils, whom they beat in '94, won the Cup the next year, in 1995, and followed with titles in 2000 and 2003 — three Cups in eight years. The Colorado Avalanche won twice in five years, 1996 and 2001. The Detroit Red Wings three times in five years — back-to-back in 1997 and '98, and again in 2002.

Yet the Rangers won just that one time. How come?

Essentially, they were not built to last, according to the man who built the team, GM Neil Smith.

"It's like, if we were building a building, it was, 'Level the space, put up the building within a month,' " Smith said Friday, before the reunion celebration. "Whereas the other guys sort of went slowly, building, building, building, and had a good team, we were like, 'OK, [we'll trade] you for you; you for you; you for you — I think we've got it right! Let's go! Hurry up! And that's not the way to build it to last. But they didn't care about sustaining it here. They just wanted one!"

Despite being in first place overall at the time, Smith, at the urging of coach Mike Keenan, made five trades at the trade deadline in '94, trading away skill and speed for veteran grit and toughness. The principal players exchanged were speedy forward Mike Gartner shipped to Toronto for Glenn Anderson; Tony Amonte to Chicago for Matteau and Brian Noonan, and 20-year-old Todd Marchant to Edmonton for the 35-year-old MacTavish, the last player to play in the NHL without wearing a helmet. The players who came in would all play important roles in helping to win the Cup. But the Rangers had given up a good chunk of their future. Marchant went on to play 1,195 games in the NHL, and Amonte scored 416 goals and 900 points in a 15-year career. MacTavish and Anderson left as free agents in the summer.

But, bigger than that, Keenan left, too. He and Smith never saw eye-to-eye, and, barely a month after the Cup victory, Keenan abruptly forced his way out of New York to take the GM/coach job in St. Louis. The '94 Rangers were effectively broken up, and that, Messier said, was a shame.



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"I would have really loved the opportunity keep the team together that was at the end of that [1994] year, with Mike, and given ourselves the opportunity to [repeat]," Messier said. "We never got that opportunity. One, we got the lockout, so we had half a season; Mike had left, and we made some other changes and we never really got back there. We got to the [Eastern] conference finals in '97, but it was a different team, and we got up against Philly, 'Leetchie' with a broken wrist, so we had too many injuries.

"But I would have loved nothing better than to come back the next year, for the full season, with the same team, with Mike coaching, Neil managing and taken another shot at it," Messier said. "Because our core was still very young, with Leetchie and Ricky [Mike Richter] and Alex [Kovalev] and Zubie [Sergei Zubov] and Adam [Graves], so we had a great core and we had a lot of depth. To this day, it's actually disappointing we never did."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 02.11.2019

1130194 New York Rangers

How Rangers goalie Alexandar Georgiev celebrated his birthday in 55 ways

By Rick Carpiello Feb 10, 2019

NEW YORK — I've said this before, but the Rangers are going to have some decisions to make about Alexandar Georgiev.

It's foolish to jump the gun and declare that he's going to be a legit No. 1 NHL goalie based on his still-young career. It's just as foolish to think he won't be.

But Henrik Lundqvist isn't going anywhere for 2019-20 or 2020-21, and next year it's likely that Lundqvist's heir apparent, KHL superstar Igor Shesterkin, is going to be here, playing in North America, either at the NHL or AHL level. Not to mention the plethora of goalies the Rangers have stockpiled in their system.

There are nights, though, when Georgiev shows you some brilliance, like on his 23rd birthday, which happened to be Sunday. He blew out 55 candles, or at least 55 Toronto shots, in an unlikely 4-1 Garden victory over the Leafs.

The Bulgarian-born kid likes special days, apparently. On Thanksgiving Eve, he got his first NHL shutout, 5-0 over the Islanders, as a special "thank you" to his parents, who were in attendance.

He was asked if he could have had a better birthday present.

"A shutout would have been nice," Georgiev said. "I won't ask for a shutout. I'm happy with the (win)."

Rangers coach David Quinn generally opens his meetings with the press with a "how's everyone doing?"

Sunday night, he said, "How's everyone doing? Not as good as Georgiev."

"He played outstanding," Quinn went on. "He's gotten better and better. The game against the Bruins (a 4-3 shootout win Wednesday) he played really well, and obviously tonight he was our best penalty killer."

He sure was. On the official stat sheet, he made 23 saves on 23 shots during Toronto's four power plays. It was seven for seven on the Leafs' first power play, with the Rangers staked to an early 1-0 lead.

"It makes my heart race and it makes you say, 'Don't take another penalty,'" Quinn said. "But that didn't happen. But it also gives Georgie — I think Georgie was feeling it right from the get-go — we forced him to

feel it with that first penalty and how they were tic-tac-toe-ing that puck around."

"It was incredibly important to keep it 1-0 at that point," said Georgiev, who's been working with goalie guru Benoit Allaire on staying patient and calm. "The boys did a great job. We killed that penalty, and it was easier than that."

Quinn has taken to Georgiev right from training camp.

"Listen, when you're that young, and playing in the National Hockey League at that position, there's a lot of room for growth," the coach said. "And this is a guy that keeps getting better. If you're with him every day, you just see his approach, how committed he is on and off the ice. I love what he does during practice. I love how he prepares before practice. Never gets down.

"We've played some of our worst games in front of him, unfortunately, so he's had some crooked numbers that really weren't his fault. And the guy never wavers. He turns 23 today, and that's very young — and our league's young — but in this position, that's not a position where a young guy is able to succeed. And he just keeps getting better and better."

So a decision is due.

It might also be better for the Rangers not to put their goalies through this type of game very often. And of course it would be better for their draft position not to steal such games. But that's another story. Some of the teams below the Rangers had slooooooowwwwwly been creeping up on them, yet the Rangers are now 7-4-1 (15 points) in their past 12. That's not going to get them a top-top pick.

"Are we going to just sit back and let them, both our goalies, take on 50, 60 shots a night?" asked Mika Zibanejad, who scored 28 seconds after the anthems. "No. But sometimes you need a performance like this, and he came up big for us and gave us a chance."

Georgiev wasn't worried about the number of shots.

"It feels good," he said, smiling. "I like a lot of shots. More fun for a goalie.

"Maybe not that many."

Thoughts

1) Henrik Lundqvist made 50 saves on his last birthday (part of his NHL record back-to-back 50-save wins, which helped cost the Rangers draft slots, immediately after the trade deadline last season). Georgiev's 55 are the most by any Rangers goalie in history (since saves began being tracked in 1955-56) in a regulation game, the most in a victory and the most in a home game. Mike Richter holds the franchise record with 59 saves in a tie in Vancouver on Jan. 31, 1991. Gump Worsley, Jacques Plante, Gilles Villemure, Glen Hanlon and Lundqvist are the only other Rangers goalies who have had games of 50 or more saves.

2) Something goofy: Some of us in the press box noted that the Leafs' shot total went from eight to 20 very quickly. And one media member noted that though Georgiev was credited with seven saves on the first power play, the NHL.com play-by-play sheet had him making 13 saves on that power play. Not very likely.

3) Quinn-sanity?: "This is going to sound insane," the coach said. "I actually thought we defended pretty well tonight. I mean, you look at the shot total and I feel like a complete idiot walking off the ice, 'We defended pretty well.' There were almost 55 shots. But I actually thought we defended pretty well. That's a scary, scary team. They have high-end talent, they can beat you one-on-one. But boy, I thought we did a good job clearing that net front off. They didn't have many second chances. You get that discrepancy on power plays, 4 to 1, I know that's not a lot, but in a game like this, with that power play, that can make a big difference. ... But I don't remember (at 5 on 5) a lot of second chances. I thought a lot of chances were perimeter. We kind of contested them. I may feel different when I watch the film. But I thought our D corps did a really good job supporting and protecting the net front."



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4) Daily Zucc-O-Meter: Every game now could be the last as a Ranger for Mats Zuccarello (and Kevin Hayes and Adam McQuaid — who both scored goals). This might have been the final home game for any of them, as the Rangers head out for a four-game trip. They have two more home games before the Feb. 25 trade deadline. If this is going to be it for Zuccarello — with the door left slightly ajar for a return as a free agent, depending on how much money the Rangers spend elsewhere on July 1 — he's going out with a bang. The guy was on the puck all night, again, and as creative as he's ever been. Playing some terrific hockey, and going to be a good get for a contender's stretch drive and playoffs.

5) As for McQuaid, well, the Leafs, from what I've seen, can surely use another defenseman. I mean, if they intend to play into May.

6) There were a ton of Leafs fans at the Garden (the Raptors were in town to play the Knicks the night before, I hear). When they started up a loud "Go Leafs Go" chant in the third, it sounded like when Camden Yards is overrun by Yankees fans.

7) First shift of the game, Chris Kreider stole from John Tavares in the defensive zone. The Rangers went the other way, and Zuccarello hit Morgan Rielly and knocked him off the puck. Kreider centered for Zuccarello, who was stopped twice by (yet another backup goalie) Garret Sparks. Zibanejad got to the second rebound and beat Sparks for his 23rd. 1-0.

GEORGIE SAVING FOR HIS BIRTHDAY THIS YEAR!
PIC.TWITTER.COM/LZI1LCGXDB

— NEW YORK RANGERS (@NYRANGERS) FEBRUARY 11, 2019

8) Georgiev immediately robbed Auston Matthews to start a power play created by Brendan Smith's tripping penalty, then stopped John Tavares point-blank. Georgiev was under siege, somehow made seven saves during the Leafs man-advantage, including a lunging glove save on Tavares outside the right post, on which Georgiev lost his stick, and the Rangers survived the fire drill. After the penalty expired, he stuffed Zach Hyman on a right-wing break-in.

9) More than halfway through the period, the Rangers had just three shots, all of them on the game's lone goal, until this: Tony DeAngelo telegraphed a cross-ice pass just inside the offensive blue line, and Kasperi Kapanen had time to say "thank you" and break away from the field. He beat Georgiev with a nasty wrist shot inside the left post. 1-1. DeAngelo had a rough night. Took a penalty, whiffed on a slapper, deflected a pass from Kreider over the glass somehow.

.@KASPERIKAPANEN1 TIES IT UP. PIC.TWITTER.COM/OXIX9SOX22

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10) By the way, when Toronto scored, it meant the Rangers had just one shutout in their past 100 games (Georgiev vs. the Islanders on Nov. 21). The last one before that was by Ondrej Pavelec in the middle of last season.

11) Kreider took a needless offensive-zone penalty (aka a Pouliot), crosschecking Jake Muzzin into his own net, and by the time it expired, the Leafs were outshooting the Rangers 21-4 (officially, at least). Lo and behold, the Rangers got a jack-in-the-box goal, Kreider leaping out to join a rush started by Jimmy Vesey, then taking a Ryan Strome pass on the left wing. Kreider sent it cross-ice to Vesey, who beat Sparks. At that point, the Rangers were shooting 40 percent (2 for 5). 2-1.

12) In the previous eight games, only five Rangers forwards had scored goals — Zibanejad (8), Zuccarello (2), Kreider (3), Hayes (2) and Filip Chytil (3). That includes two shutout losses.

PASSING PERFECTION AS @19VESEY PUTS HIS TEAM BACK ON TOP. PIC.TWITTER.COM/10X4N3WK31

— NHL GIFS (@NHLGIFS) FEBRUARY 11, 2019

13) Zuccarello drew a penalty to Jake Gardiner, and on the power play he set up Hayes in front, but his redirection — while falling — floated over the crossbar. Then Sparks smothered a Zibanejad one-timer.

14) So DeAngelo took a tripping penalty, and with the Leafs on another power play, the Rangers continued to let Tavares set up five feet behind his nearest defender (Marc Staal), forcing Georgiev to stop him mano-a-mano again. Really, it was an easy play for Tavares to simply accept a pass, then step to the front with nobody near him. The Leafs obviously have scouted the Rangers, who always allow that man to remain unchallenged around the net front on the PK. To be fair, most teams front the player around the crease, but the Rangers' D-men seem to drift farther away from the net front player than other teams do. Shots were (officially) 28-18 after that kill.

15) Back to the kill the Rangers went, as Strome was called for slashing. This time it was an uneventful Leafs power play, for a loud 0 for 4 (on 23 power-play shots).

16) Must have been some special Original Six Sunday rulebook because cross-checking was not a penalty in this game. And we're not just talking borderline cross-checking. We're talking two-handed, intent-to-break-the-stick cross-checking (Hayes repeatedly on Nikita Zaitsev with the ref watching, Zach Hyman on Neal Pionk with the ref watching). Play on. Actually, Hyman's hatchet job followed Pionk colliding with Mitch Mamer. Hyman clearly instigated the fight that followed. But the referees have erased that rule from the book (even though the league has not).

17) The Leafs were up to 49 official shots on goal when the Zibanejad line had a remarkable shift in the Toronto end — so much so that they were exhausted. Finally, McQuaid kept one in at the right point and sent a long wrister through Matthews' screen and over Sparks' glove. It looked as if Zuccarello may have tipped it. 3-1.

COME GET YOUR SUNDAY #HOCKEYHUGS.
PIC.TWITTER.COM/DKI7OGXKQV

— NHL (@NHL) FEBRUARY 11, 2019

18) Georgiev's 52nd save was another close-range shot by Tavares, off a Vesey turnover in front. It brought a "Georgie, Georgie" chant from the crowd. He was up to 55 when Hayes scored into an empty net with 19.4 seconds left. 4-1.

19) Quinn Bin: Vinni Lettieri got the hook. Again, the Rangers went with 11 forwards, seven defensemen. Not sure why.

20) Rangers first-rounder K'Andre Miller was injured in a game Saturday and had to be helped off the ice, not putting weight on one of his knees, according to reports. No official update is available, but I spoke with Wisconsin coach Tony Granato, who said Miller was sore, but there was no ligament damage. He'll continue to be evaluated.

21) Was talking to some of the '94 players, and others who were around, about how the current advanced-stats people probably would have hated that team with all its guts and character and leadership and toughness. Would have hated the trade deadline deals. Probably would have hated first-pair defenseman Jeff Beukeboom, though I imagine his CF% would have been really good given that he was on the ice with guys named Messier, Graves, Amonte and Leetch almost every shift.

My Three Rangers Stars

1. Alexandar Georgiev
2. Mika Zibanejad
3. Chris Kreider

The Athletic LOADED: 02.11.2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 11, 2019

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' highly touted power play sinking further into abyss

Luke Fox

February 10, 2019, 9:56 PM

NEW YORK – David Quinn's heart rate accelerated every time one of the guilty players glided to the penalty box, and the Toronto Maple Leafs' superstar-stacked power-play unit hopped the boards to pepper the rookie head coach's inexperienced second-string goalie with cold, black rubber.

Of the season-high 56 shots the visitors fired toward Alexandar Georgiev's net, 23 arrived on the Leafs' four action-packed man-advantages. The rebuilding Rangers, who slipped out the back door with a 4-1 victory Sunday, only had one power play of their own.

"In a game like this, with that power play, that can make a big difference," Quinn said. "It makes my heart race. It makes you say, 'Don't take another penalty,' but that didn't happen. I think Georgie was feelin' it right from the get-go."

Georgiev celebrated his 23rd birthday with the busiest regulation victory (55 saves) by a goaltender in Rangers history.

It should've been a b-day spanking for the Bulgarian backup.

"That's a scary, scary team. They have high-end talent, they can beat you one-on-one, but, boy, I thought we did a good job clearing the net-front out," Quinn said.

"This is going to sound insane: I thought we actually defended real well tonight. You look at that shot total [56-30], and I look like a complete idiot."

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Sportsnet NOW gives you access to over 500 NHL games this season, blackout-free, including Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the entire 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs and more.

We all feel like idiots trying to make sense of the ineffectiveness of Toronto's stacked-up power play. Three 30-goal centremen, a winger who's putting up primary assists like Magic Johnson in his prime, and the NHL's second-highest-scoring defenceman keep drawing blanks.

A quintet that looks so good on paper ends up crumpled in a waste basket night after night, and it's a head-scratcher.

During a productive February for Toronto — coming into Manhattan with points in six straight and undefeated in regulation since the Jake Muzzin acquisition — hockey's most dangerous even-strength team (165 goals) has struggled mightily and curiously 5-on-4.

It's worsening by the month. The Leafs stormed out with the league's second-best power play in October (32.3%) and registered the seventh-best in November (24.3%). In December, they were 20th (16.6%), January 25th (11.8%), and after another 0-fer, they're 29th in February (5.6%).

Toronto's PP is a miserable 4-for-43 (9.3 per cent) with the man-advantage since Dec. 20 and had difficulty even gaining the zone during Saturday's overtime win in Montreal.

Hockey Night in Canada's cameras caught Mike Babcock and power-play chief Jim Hiller engaged in a heated discussion on their Bell Centre bench as the PP went 0-for-3.

"It wasn't very good," Babcock said. "We've got five really good players [on the first unit]. Jim does a good job with his scheme. Right now, we're pressing, and we're not executing — not on the face-off circle, not on the breakout, not in-zone."

Hiller led a pre-game meeting Sunday with the power-play group. Everyone aired their suggestions and concerns, got on the same page, and Babcock was pleased with the plan.

"If you think about our group, you'd be excited to play on it. So, get out there and be excited," Babcock said.

"It would be pretty hard to look at that power play and say it wasn't good. I think it'll be good for our guys to go through to understand they had good looks and good opportunities."

Yes, we've reached the point where Toronto's bone-dry power-play is content with moral victories.

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

"We know how much skill we have in this group. It's just more about calming down, I think we did that tonight," Mitch Marner said. "We calmed down when we had the puck in our hands. On the breakouts we calmed down as well. We just read the play a little better. That's what we've got to continue doing on this road trip."

John Tavares (eight shots, no luck) felt the puck movement was sharper and the cogs were more in sync.

"With the skill we have, we expect to score on at least one of those chances if not more," Tavares said. "I mean, 55 saves, I don't think there's really much else to be said. We did a lot. We just didn't finish our chances."

The Maple Leafs threw everything they could get their sticks on Sunday and only once could solve New York's second-stringer, a wise starter choice by Quinn considering Henrik Lundqvist's career save percentage (.897) versus Toronto is worse than against any other opponent in the East.

As was the case Saturday in Montreal, the Maple Leafs dug themselves a hole in the first shift of the game.

The scorching-hot Mika Zibanejad beat Garret Sparks just 28 seconds in, his 11th goal in the past 10 games giving the Rangers an early lead.

Kasperii Kapanen tied the game when he picked off a brutal cross-ice pass by Rangers defenceman Tony DeAngelo and burst 120 feet up the gut, beating Georgiev post-and-in on a night where only the perfect puck could solve the kid.

"Lately it hasn't been bouncing my way so I just kind of thought I'd shoot blocker side as hard as I can," Kapanen said. "Thankfully, it went in."

Jimmy Vesey restored the Rangers' lead off a lovely rush, and Georgiev did the rest.

"Their goaltender stole the show," Kadri shrugged after a personal 12-shot performance. "I'm just gonna keep shooting 'em, and hopefully they fall when it really counts."

Rangers D-man Adam McQuaid added a third-period insurance goal, and Kevin Hayes iced it with an empty-netter.

With four games remaining on this, their longest road trip of the season, the Maple Leafs travel to Denver ahead of Tuesday's game versus the Avalanche.

A fine time for Toronto's painfully debated special teams to start acting, well, special.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 11, 2019

Sportsnet.ca / Meet the old enforcer keeping NHLers from hitting rock bottom – Sportsnet

by Eric Francis

He fought on the ice. He fought for his sobriety. Now Brian McGrattan is fighting for the health and safety of players on the Flames and across the NHL.

It's been more than three seasons since Brian McGrattan's days as an NHL enforcer, but dressed all in black, his tattooed arms showing and his hair cut into a mohawk, he looks like he could step right back into the role if duty called. Sitting in his kitchen at home in the south of Calgary, McGrattan is talking about how different life is today, though you can't hear much of what he's saying, because three barking dogs are frantically gunning for his front door. Lola, the tall, golden-haired one, leads the charge.

When the barking quiets, McGrattan gives Lola a pat as she passes on her way to the other end of the house, and then he returns to his last thought. He looks across the counter at his wife, Michelle, and then to his right, where their three-year-old son, Gabe, is playing with Lego on the living room carpet, blonde hair cut just like Dad's. (They go to the same barber). "Would never have had this," McGrattan says, describing what would've happened had he kept careening down the path he was on a little more than a decade ago. "I'd be dead, so I wouldn't have had it."

On Dec. 4, 2008, McGrattan locked himself inside the bedroom of his Phoenix home and called the Coyotes' trainer to say he wouldn't be making practice because he was sick. Coming off a five-day bender fuelled by cocaine and whatever booze he could get his hands on, McGrattan called his mom, Cathy, next. "I'm not sure if I wanted to die — I didn't care," he says, now. The realization scared the daylight out of him. He told Cathy: "I need to get some help."

Thanks to that decision, McGrattan is not only a husband and a dad, but the 37-year-old has also carved out a second career in hockey as a member of the Calgary Flames' front office in a role that's unique in the NHL — nobody else in the league does what he does. After a 10-year career protecting his teammates on the ice with his fists, McGrattan is now using his vast life experience to protect and help players as Calgary's Director of Player Assistance. He's not a therapist or a doctor — he prefers the terms "big brother" or "friend" — but he's here to confidentially talk to Flames and prospects about anything and everything, the goal being to ensure that none of them hits rock bottom like he did.

As he sits here at home surrounded by his family and dogs, McGrattan considers whether the other 30 teams in the NHL are doing enough to support players struggling with personal issues. Michelle looks up from her early afternoon espresso and answers first: "No." McGrattan nods in agreement. "I don't think so," he says. What's missing in every market — aside from Calgary, the team sitting atop the Western Conference, which he'll tell you is no coincidence — is an employee in that lifestyle role he occupies. "I'm not the kind of guy to preach," McGrattan says, "but hopefully it becomes a trend."

HELPING HAND

Considering himself a "big brother" or "friend" to every player on the Flames' roster, McGrattan is there to get them through any personal trials and tribulations.

It's an off-day for the Flames, and ahead of tonight's National Lacrosse League game, the Calgary Roughnecks are practicing. McGrattan is half-watching from a private box. His six-foot-four frame is wedged into a seat, his legs stretched out as far as space allows.

He has an office here at the Saddledome, kind of. It's a small desk in the corner of the office that's actually occupied by assistant general manager and former teammate, Craig Conroy. That's where McGrattan does

paperwork, since scouting is also part of his role. But his most important work doesn't happen here. No, unlike his days as an enforcer, McGrattan's biggest impact is now felt outside the rink, because any player wanting to discuss a sensitive issue won't be doing so here. "This would probably be the last place it would happen," he says. A coffee shop or a phone call is a lot more common.

McGrattan supports players the moment they enter the organization. He visits prospects and spends weeks at a time with the Flames' AHL affiliate in Stockton. He takes small groups of guys out for meals or coffee, "then give them the reason why I'm around," he explains. What he tells every player is this: "I'm here any time you have something going on. Number's on all night." Marital issues, family trouble, anxiety, addiction — you name it, "I'm here to talk and listen," he says. As for how often he's discussing personal issues with Flames and prospects, McGrattan says, "I'll just keep that to myself." Confidentiality is king.

"That gave me so much courage and hope, seeing this guy that I could relate to — finally."

Though it's now literally his job, McGrattan figures he helped more than 10 players through personal issues while he was a player himself. He helped guys without even knowing it at the time, too. An example: About nine years ago, Rich Clune was playing for the L.A. Kings. He was sitting on his parents' bed with his bags packed for rehab, but he was thinking, "Ah, f—, I don't know if I'm gonna go." Then he flipped on the TV and there was McGrattan sharing his story on TSN's Off The Record. "That gave me so much courage and hope, seeing this guy that I could relate to — finally," says Clune, who's now 31 and a member of the Toronto Marlies. "Back then it was maybe the one guy that I would look up to, this big tough fighter in the NHL who I'd watched as a kid. So I was like, alright, and I went to rehab."

Clune lasted four days that first trip to treatment, but a year later, he got sober. Eight months after that, he reached out to McGrattan just before their two AHL teams were scheduled to meet, and asked if they could talk after the game. "I was doing everything they taught me in treatment, going to meetings, but I was so desperate, right?" Clune says. "I was missing that connection with someone I could relate to." He and McGrattan talked for 45 minutes that day and they've been friends ever since.

Someone players can relate to is exactly the reason Flames general manager Brad Treliving decided the team needed a Director of Player Assistance. While the GM didn't know quite what the job would look like when he first thought about it a few seasons ago, he did know McGrattan was the perfect fit, and extended the offer when McGrattan retired in 2017 after a season with the Nottingham Panthers in England.

Treliving has plenty of experience with McGrattan: He was assistant GM in Phoenix when the team acquired the enforcer. The executive actually believed McGrattan back in those days when he lied and said he didn't have a problem with drugs and alcohol, when he said he didn't need help after the team's management offered it. "We joked the first time we talked about this, 'Who's the first person you hire to protect your home?' You hire the thief that's already been here," Treliving says. "He knows all the tricks of the trade." Not that McGrattan's here to rat out players: The point, and the hope, is to prevent potential problem situations, to encourage players to talk to him before it's too late. As Treliving describes it: "Let's not wait until the house is on fire before we call the fire department. Is there a way that we can get in front of this? Are there resources that we can give our players, people to talk to? In Brian's case, seeing signs that maybe somebody's heading down the wrong path, that we can prevent something before it becomes an issue — that's really our mindset. How do we look after our people?"

Since McGrattan joined the Flames staff, Treliving has had five or six other NHL GMs inquire about the benefits of the role and how it works. Treliving isn't one to suggest what other teams should be doing — he's too busy worrying about his own, he says — but that no other teams have added a Director of Player Assistance since he got the job surprises McGrattan. "It's kind of shocking, actually," he says, given that



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statistically, one in five people will experience mental illness at some point each year. With some 700 players in the league, he wonders, "how many guys are struggling without anybody to talk to? You do the math, it could be two players a team that could have something going on.

"A major part of our career is our life away from hockey," McGrattan adds. "When we leave this rink today, the other 10 hours of the day are very important. So why don't we have someone helping guys with that lifestyle stuff?"

"How many guys are struggling without anybody to talk to? You do the math, it could be two players a team."

That lifestyle stuff can be especially daunting for a rookie stepping into the league, as Dillon Dube can attest. The 20-year-old forward made his NHL debut this season with the Flames, and he calls the transition from junior to pro "crazy," going from no salary to a pro salary, living in a new city, learning to play the pro game. While playing last season in Stockton, Dube got to pick McGrattan's brain over the course of several visits. "He doesn't feel like a player development guy," Dube says. "He was helping me in Stockton, just getting comfortable. He was really there for me. And it's really different, what we go through, having to hold the reputation as an NHL player. If you had to talk to a stranger about that? It's hard. So I think going through him, he's been through it all.

"And it's hard to talk to people that are in the organization and management, but when you get to know him, you feel comfortable going to talk to him more than anybody else. You know he's been in the league and [knows] how hard it can be to talk."

Certainly, that McGrattan has been in players' shoes helps. But to enjoy the benefits of his wisdom, they do have to get over the fact that the man they call 'Big Ern' — named after Bill Murray's character in *Kingpin* — could beat the crap out of them if the mood struck. McGrattan may be kind and thoughtful and open, but he's also the most menacing-looking member of the Flames' front office. Head coach Bill Peters jokes (maybe jokes?) that he doesn't take part in alumni skates "because of Big Ern."

Dube admits he was a little scared to talk to McGrattan when they first met. "Have you seen what he's done in this league?" he asks, eyebrows all the way up. "The guy's an enforcer, one of the best of all time." Dube stares at his own hands and shakes his head as he talks about McGrattan's bear paw-sized mitts: "His hands are just crazy."

McGrattan laughs when Dube's descriptions are relayed to him. "Scared of me?" he says, grinning. "He's my boy now. He knows I'm here for him, any time."

THE OTHER SIDE

Breaking a cycle of substance abuse he knows would've killed him, McGrattan is now 10 years clean with plenty to smile about.

What McGrattan is doing in the NHL may be unique today, but the Director of Player Assistance role didn't begin with him. It got its start with another NHL enforcer.

Brantt Myhres had just checked into rehab for the fifth time. Every item of clothing he owned was stuffed into a Calgary Flames hockey bag. He had less than \$100 in his bank account and even fewer hours of sobriety to his name. In about a week, his first child, a daughter, would be born.

Hours later, at that treatment facility in Astoria, Oregon — where *The Goonies* was filmed and set — Myhres drew up the foundation for a player assistance role in the NHL. Having hit his rock bottom, he decided the league needed to hire someone to help players who were struggling like him. He pulled out his laptop and started to draw up a proposal that same night. He sent the finished product to both the NHL's and NHLPA's offices about a year later. "I started thinking back about some of the players that I played with that had issues, and I thought, 'Man, I want to put something together for the league,'" Myhres says now, from his home in Edmonton. "And if I can hang onto my sobriety, I believe that there's a position somewhere."

"You have to be integrated in the day-to-day stuff the team's doing, and that's how you build the trust."

It was quite the turnaround for Myhres: Three days before he checked in to rehab, his face was in a snowbank and two police officers were on his back. He remembers seeing his older sister, Cher, crying on her front porch. He doesn't remember smashing the glass table in her house, or trying to fight her husband, or drinking all the liquor in her freezer. It was Feb. 18, 2008, a couple years after Myhres had failed a fifth drug test administered by the NHL. The test had turned up cocaine in his system all five times.

Myhres knows more than most how much support the NHL offers when its players are in trouble. The day after his arrest on his sister's front lawn, in came a call from the league's head office with the offer to cover seven months of in-patient treatment and a question: "Are you finally finished?" Was he finally ready to get clean? He had no choice this time, he says. He had to.

The league had already paid for four stints of rehab, would pay for him to return to school, and would later give him a monthly stipend from the NHL emergency fund to help him get back on his feet. Myhres says he's "forever grateful that they hung in with me right 'til the end." But still, he saw room to better address a need.

It's not hard to understand why Myhres's proposal might not have been taken seriously at first. As a player, he'd gotten sober for up to two years at a time so he could be reinstated into the NHL, only to relapse. He wasn't what you'd call reliable, a guy you'd rush to hire after a trip to rehab, thinking this time it would definitely stick.

'SCARED OF ME?'

A feared enforcer in his day, McGrattan is still an imposing presence — even if he now has gentler ways of helping players.

But it turned out the fifth time was the charm for Myhres. And about six years after he sent that proposal to the league, he got a call from Dean Lombardi, then GM of the L.A. Kings, looking for help. About a week earlier, star forward Mike Richards had been arrested at the Canada-U.S. border with oxycodone in his possession, and that same season fellow Kings forward Jarret Stoll was booked on the suspicion that he had cocaine and ecstasy at a pool party in Las Vegas.

Lombardi didn't mince words: He asked Myhres how they could structure the role he'd mapped out years earlier as an in-house job in L.A. "It didn't take very long for us to agree on most of it," Myhres says. "I'd figured out a lot of it seven years earlier." That off-season, the Kings became the first franchise in NHL history with a Director of Player Assistance. Myhres came up with the job title.

For the next three seasons, Myhres spent 20 days of every month with the Kings. "I felt it was imperative that I was involved in the day-to-day functions of the team in order to build that trust with the guys," he says. "You can't come in once a month for a couple days, you have to be integrated in the day-to-day stuff the team's doing, and that's how you build the trust, not only with the players but with the trainers and with all of the staff." On his days off, he headed back to Edmonton to see his daughter, Chloe. He can't and won't say how many players he helped in that time, due to confidentiality, but he will say this: "We had no unmanageable incidences in the three years that I was employed by the Kings." In other words, no players in L.A. had to make use of the NHL and NHLPA's Substance Abuse and Behavioural Health Program (SABH). "That's me doing my job," Myhres says.

At least, it was. Last summer, after Lombardi and Sutter were fired and Rob Blake and John Stevens took over, Myhres's contract wasn't extended, leaving McGrattan as the lone Director of Player Assistance in the league. Myhres is grateful for the three years he spent with the organization, and says simply, "the vision changed."

The Kings now have a Director of Player Health and Performance on staff, in Dr. John Meyer. The team declined a request for an interview, but said via email that when it comes to support for players with personal



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issues, they use "outside services tailored for each individual as we have seen every situation as being different."

There's no doubt that every player's struggle is unique, but both McGrattan and Myhres agree that the best way to reach and help guys in times of need is through someone who's lived through something similar. "Someone guys can relate to," McGrattan says.

"With the players in the room, the hard part is breaking through," Myhres adds. "That's why I think having a guy that has played in the National Hockey League, the players instantly go, 'Oh ok, He's been in my shoes.' And that's crucial for that door opening just a little bit, because then you're just not another guy in a suit that comes in and says a speech for 45 minutes and leaves. Not to say that that's not valuable, because that is. But I know personally from the players that I helped in Los Angeles and I know from the players that Brian's helped in Calgary that being an ex-player and having 10 years of sobriety goes a long way with these guys.

"The problem with hockey players is that we're so careful on who we let into our little world of problems. And usually it's when it's too late, and that's when the NHL and the NHLPA have to step in."

On Jan. 29, the NHL announced that Predators forward Austin Watson, who was arrested and charged with domestic assault last summer, was entering Stage 2 of SABH due to alcohol abuse. Watson is suspended without pay while he undergoes treatment, and he's eligible to return to the league if doctors and the NHL and NHLPA agree to it.

If a player reaches the fourth and final stage of SABH, he's suspended without pay for one season, at minimum, while he gets treatment, and again the league and players' association decide if he deserves another shot.

Myhres, who is 11 years sober on Feb. 18, is hopeful that an NHL team will seek out his services, but he doesn't want it to take a big incident for that to occur. He believes the role should be adopted by all 31 teams, that the idea of in-house player assistance should be as natural as having home insurance. "You're running an organization that's worth \$80 million in assets," Myhres says. "Even if nothing happens, you still want to be covered. And right now, only one team is covered."

WALKING PEACE OF MIND

Myhres sees McGrattan as insurance for the Flames, allowing the front office to rest easier knowing their biggest assets — the players — are in good hands.

McGrattan's NHL dream had just been realized with the Ottawa Senators when he was first made aware of the NHL's coverage and help for players with personal issues. He remembers hearing presentations from doctors and getting a business card with a number you could call "if you were in trouble," he says.

By that time, he was already in trouble. He'd developed a dependence on alcohol. Addiction to cocaine followed as he got more money and started going to different parties. Teammates and friends, like Matt Stajan, had already asked if he needed help, and he'd told them to "beat it," he says, or even to "f— off." He wasn't willing to admit he had a problem.

When he was eventually ready to accept help, it was the NHL and NHLPA's SABH that delivered it. In addition to SABH, since 1996, the league and PA have been providing players and their families with around-the-clock offerings for confidential treatment, an 800 number they can call for help and a bevy of counsellors and doctors in every city. On top of that, the medical staffs on NHL teams have only grown to bolster these programs and offer other services. The Detroit Red Wings have two dentists, the Nashville Predators have four plastic surgeons and the Winnipeg Jets boast a medical team 13 strong.

"It was a rough and tumble game. Guys were expected to be warriors."

Still, any effort to change that long-standing tough guy narrative in hockey and offer help for players — particularly those struggling with mental illness — is relatively new. "I think our business historically has

been conservative," Toronto Maple Leafs assistant GM, Laurence Gilman says, when it comes to addressing those issues. "That's changing, but I think it's been, in some regards, provincial."

Toronto's team took a big step this season, hiring Dr. Meg Popovic as Director of Athlete Well-being and Performance. Popovic is responsible for helping Maple Leafs who may be experiencing mental illness or addiction, and with all issues that relate to their health outside of physical medical problems. And just as they are with McGrattan, conversations with Popovic are confidential. "It's blind to us," Gilman says. Popovic isn't around the team daily, but players are aware they can reach her at any time.

A front office veteran who has worked in Winnipeg, Arizona and Vancouver, Gilman says he has experienced "both ends of the spectrum" as far as what teams can provide when it comes to help for struggling players, but that offerings across the league are as good as they've ever been. "Mental health and well-being is something that, I think it's fair to say, most hockey teams didn't put a lot of time and effort into. You know, it was a rough and tumble game. Guys were expected to be warriors," Gilman says. "But things have evolved, and I think they're changing across the league. That change doesn't happen overnight, and positions like the one Calgary has for Brian McGrattan, or positions like the one the Leafs have for Meg Popovic, it's an evolutionary process."

Other leagues have evolved a heck of a lot faster, though. For the last 18 years, Major League Baseball has required all 30 of its teams to have an Employee Assistance Professional (EAP) on staff, a role that has to be filled by a licensed health care professional. Some former players who've also studied medicine in some capacity fill that EAP role, like pitcher Dickie Noles in Philadelphia. The Toronto Blue Jays employ a former U.S. Marine Corps officer and therapist. Still, other teams get former players in their front offices in other ways: Former pitcher Bob Tewksbury, owner of a masters in psychology, is a Mental Skills Coordinator for the Chicago Cubs. Rick Ankiel, who famously lost the ability to throw strikes as a pitcher and then reinvented himself as an outfielder, was hired by the Washington Nationals as a Life Skills Coordinator.

The NBA requires every team to have an employee in that lifestyle role, though the name of that job varies from team to team. In the NFL, you'll find player engagement roles listed on most team's staffs, and some are occupied by former players, like Terry Cousin in Pittsburgh and Fred McAfee in New Orleans. In the NHL, Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly says medical professionals believe that a centralized league-wide approach is best to address players' various personal issues, "with perhaps a few exceptions," he wrote in an email. "And we believe that model has worked very well for us for quite some time now."

It's McGrattan's hope that the NHL moves toward the NFL model, with every team adding personnel in a lifestyle role. For now, he says of Calgary, "we're kind of leaders." Not only do the Flames boast the lone Director of Player Assistance, but they also have a mental performance coach on staff, in Dr. Matt Brown.

A look at the standings might convince other teams to follow suit, McGrattan figures. "It's no mistake that our team is in first place right now," he says, "because of the way guys are treated here."

READY WHEN YOU NEED ME

McGrattan prefers to wait for players to reach out, but he's available and willing to jump into action or lend an ear any time of the day or night.

One of the most difficult parts of McGrattan's job today is knowing when to approach a player he can see needs help. It never worked for him when teammates or management staff cornered him, asked if he had a problem and tried to lend a hand. So he'll rarely make the first move. Mostly, he waits until a guy is ready to talk.

In a conversation that stretches for more than an hour in his kitchen, over a couple bottles of water, McGrattan revisits his story — the one he



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started telling when he was finally ready to talk, the one he still tells players today, the one that makes him both unique and relatable.

Michelle is making her coffee, listening even though she's heard the whole thing more than a few times. She started dating McGrattan after he'd been sober for two years. "Where was your girlfriend?" she asks now, of the day he finally decided to get help. "I've never asked you that." McGrattan shrugs, he's not sure. Michelle's eyes widen and she shakes her head.

"It's no mistake that our team is in first place right now, because of the way guys are treated here."

McGrattan wasn't a natural at the enforcer role. He took it up by necessity after he turned pro because he wanted to crack the NHL and figured that was the way to get there for a kid his size. He got beat up all the time when he first started dropping the gloves. "I was actually awful," he says, grinning. He found a fighting mentor in Dennis Bonvie (the most penalized player in pro hockey history), and in his third pro season McGrattan won 40 of 43 fights. He'd found his separating skill, his ticket.

No pro fight was bigger than one of his first in the NHL, a win against his childhood idol, Tie Domi, that solidified his place on the Senators' roster. And then, "I muffed out a 10-year career doing it the hard way," he says, of life as an NHL enforcer. "Probably the hardest way."

McGrattan faced anxiety about getting sent back down to the minors or being a healthy scratch. He drank and did drugs in part because it fit his tough guy image, in part because he couldn't stop, in part because it helped him manage pain. He played hungover and fought and felt superhuman even when he felt broken inside. "I look back and I don't know how I did it," McGrattan says, shaking his head. "Still at the same time, you're young and you think you're invincible and nothing can happen to you, and slowly your life starts falling apart around you, but you don't see it."

Until, of course, he finally realized he didn't have another booze-and-drug-filled run in him: "I would've died the next time."

Listen to McGrattan's story and you'll understand that when he says "there's kind of nothing I haven't been through," he really isn't exaggerating. But as good as he is at talking — McGrattan has a gift for the gab — what players who've sought out his help will tell you is the man is an even better listener.

In the summer of 2017, prospect Emile Poirier talked to McGrattan every day. Rarely was it about hockey, sometimes it was about fishing, often it was about life and feelings. A Flames' first-round pick, Poirier was battling alcoholism and had just begun treatment. "He was there for me, telling me, 'no judgement here if you want to talk,'" says Poirier, who's been sober ever since, coming up on two years. "We talked a lot, and we're still talking."

But to Poirier, 24, and now a part of the Winnipeg Jets organization, the conversations aren't the only important part of his friendship with McGrattan. It's the example the former enforcer sets. "Just to see him in his life now gives me hope," Poirier says. "He's got a kid, he's got a wife, he's got a good life, he's got a house. Seeing him and seeing that it's working, you know? It makes you realize, 'Ok, this can be done.' He showed me how it could be — you can actually be happy and enjoy life."

"He showed me how it could be — you can actually be happy and enjoy life."

Talk to enough guys who've sought out McGrattan's help and the endorsements pile up like testimonials on a pamphlet. "He's really helped me to find that happy, safe place," says Tyler Parsons, the goaltender who earlier this season chose not to attend training camp due to what he calls "dark, dark thoughts" — concussion symptoms had led to depression.

"He's our guy to talk to here. He's huge for our organization and I know everybody I talk to loves him," Parsons says. "I think what he's doing

here and what the Flames are doing, other organizations can learn from. And Brian McGrattan, all he wants to do is help."

'EVERYBODY LOVES HIM'

McGrattan's helped players like Parsons find "that happy, safe place," in part by reminding them that hockey should come second to taking care of themselves.

The morning skate is over, the Flames players have all cleared out of the dressing room, and McGrattan is sitting in Matthew Tkachuk's stall. Back when he had his own space in this room, in 2014, he remembers sitting in his own spot with his own name above it, having just taken off his shoulder pads after a morning skate. Then head coach, Bob Hartley, rushed over.

"I need to see you in my office," Hartley said. "I need to see you right now."

Still wearing the lower half of his gear, McGrattan stepped into Hartley's office and saw prospect Micheal Ferland sitting there, in tears. "I'll leave you two alone to talk," the coach said.

Ferland had just opened up to Hartley about his battle with alcoholism. For the next 45 minutes, the two players talked. Ferland broke down and opened up, and McGrattan told him about his own struggle. He told Ferland that as long as he put in the work at the treatment centre, "when you come back, we'll all be here for you."

Sitting here now, McGrattan grins, looking nothing like a tough guy, as he thinks about Ferland, who's now second in scoring with the Carolina Hurricanes. Ferland has been sober since their conversation. "Ferly, I mean, he's created a pretty special life for himself, too," McGrattan says.

What's been created in the Flames organization in that time is pretty special, too. McGrattan's right to feel pride in the part he's played and in his role here now, but he knows the secret to real happiness lies, like most of the work he does, outside this building. "Hockey is second," McGrattan says. "Everything else falls into place — family, career, hockey, all that stuff — if you take care of yourself."

In Calgary, Big Ern will do everything he can to help make sure you do.

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Sportsnet.ca / Beyond Headlines: Duchene weighing comfort, Senators' long-term direction

Chris Johnston

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'Beyond Headlines' is a deeper dive into some of the stories — and even some that weren't — discussed each week on Hockey Night in Canada's 'Headlines' segment.

These are a critical few days in Matt Duchene's life. He's reaching decision time with the Ottawa Senators.

There are a lot of things to like about his current situation, a lot of reasons to put pen to paper and sign a big-money, eight-year extension right now. He enjoys living in Ottawa and is playing more minutes than any of his previous six NHL seasons, which has helped put him on pace to set new highs for both goals and assists.



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Maybe they even make him the next captain, if he stays and Mark Stone goes.

Who knows?

But there are also a lot of unknowns in Ottawa, too, from the status of a new rink to management's plan to get this team out of the mud, to the owner's commitment to seeing the job through.

Much of the recent dialogue between Duchene's agent, Pat Brisson, and Senators GM Pierre Dorion has centred on the long-term direction of the franchise, rather than strict dollars and cents. The player wants as much information as possible before making his choice.

This week's statement from Ottawa owner Eugene Melnyk — the one in which he vaguely vowed to spend "close to the cap" from 2021 to 2025 — would seem to provide a timeline for the turnaround, but at this stage it's nothing more than an article of faith.

The Senators are dead last in the NHL and don't own their first-round pick. They aren't in the mix for Jack Hughes or Kaapo Kaako as a result.

Even if Stone and/or Duchene get moved prior to the Feb. 25 trade deadline, it's extremely unlikely Ottawa is recouping a 2019 first-rounder in the lottery. They'll be dealing with buyers who are playoff bound and own picks much lower down than that.

There hasn't seemed to be much happening on the Stone front the last week or two, but there's been plenty of dialogue with the Duchene camp. Let's call it even money he re-ups in Ottawa, a fair chance, give or take.

While Dorion isn't believed to have given the 28-year-old centre a hard deadline to make his decision, everyone knows the moment of truth is almost here. Conversations are due to pick up between Brisson and Dorion again Monday and Tuesday, and Elliotte Friedman reported on 'Headlines' that the Senators GM has told colleagues he should know by Wednesday whether he's keeping or trading his high-end forwards.

So will Duchene stay or will he go?

That's for he and his family to figure out. He can get more term, more of a role and arguably more money from the Senators than anyone else. But can he get everything else he needs to commit long-term to Ottawa, too?

DROWNING DUCKS

The wheels are completely off now.

Off and abandoned somewhere on the East Coast following a five-game road trip where the Anaheim Ducks were outscored 29-7 while sinking to the bottom of the Western Conference standings.

Consider it a test of Bob Murray's will. He'd been sincere and consistent about not wanting to make an in-season coaching change, resisting the urge to remove Randy Carlyle during previous losing streaks of seven and 11 games. The shoe finally dropped Sunday with the Ducks having dropped seven straight again, blown completely out of the water in every game.

Something had to give on a team with a minus-55 goal differential, which generates a league-worst 44 per cent of even-strength scoring chances in the games it plays, and has just lost No. 1 goalie/saviour John Gibson to injury.

Murray was spared from watching the most recent defeats first-hand, having just returned from a scouting trip in Europe, but couldn't sit idly by any longer. He's stepping behind the bench on an interim basis because he wants a closer look inside a toxic dressing room.

It wouldn't be any surprise if the eventual succession plan saw Dallas Eakins finish out the year with San Diego and then come up to the Ducks along with Sam Steel, Troy Terry, Max Jones and others he's coached in the American Hockey League.

However, the only thing written in stone is that Murray is going to handle the head coaching job himself for the final 26 games this season.

In the big picture, this isn't the worst thing for the organization. Anaheim has only drafted inside the top nine once since 2006 and managed to remain a perennial 100-point team because of strong work from its scouting staff. They're trending towards a high pick this spring — at a time when the Ducks are badly in need of a young star (or two).

But there's a way to go through a losing season you can live with and then there's embarrassing. This simply got too embarrassing.

LEAKING OIL

If it wasn't already painfully obvious, there are going to be no quick fixes in Edmonton. The Oilers have the best player in the world and three centreman capable of anchoring a Stanley Cup contender and ... a whole bunch of holes beyond that.

Oh, and cap issues. There's serious cap issues.

Ken Hitchcock sounded the alarm after Saturday's loss to San Jose, questioning whether the players were as determined as the coaches in wanting to do what it takes to win.

On one hand, the Oilers are in a playoff race. On the other, it's getting ugly in Edmonton.

The only way to truly right this ship is by finding better players to flank Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins.

With the Oilers now searching for a new general manager, they'd be wise to study the rise of the Toronto Maple Leafs under Brendan Shanahan. The Leafs got some lottery luck along the way, sure, but they were completely adrift as an organization until Shanahan came along and changed the process by which they operate.

In laying out the Shanahan plan, he said in April 2015: "The challenge here in Toronto is not to come up with the plan. The challenge in Toronto is to stick to it."

It's no different in Edmonton.

PROSPECT WATCH

This nugget from Nick Kypreos on 'Headlines' might explain how the fireworks will eventually get going in a trade period with a finite number of first-round picks in play: The Nashville Predators are open to the idea of moving winger Eeli Tolvanen, the 30th-overall pick from 2017.

Kyper also mentioned Winnipeg Jets prospect Sami Niku, a skilled puck-mover and the AHL's reigning defenceman of the year.

Neither of those players is far from being a regular NHL contributor and each amounts to big currency in a buyer's market.

EXTRA 1 PER CENT

So you want to be a hockey agent, hey?

Just know that there will probably be more hours, more travel expenses and more meetings than you could ever imagine. And the odds suggest a star client will fire you before a big payday at some point. It happens to even the biggest names in the industry.

Artemi Panarin provided a reminder of that this week, dumping Dan Milstein in favour of Paul Theofanous, just as he had once fired Tom Lynn to hire Milstein. The impending UFA is going to sign a massive contract when he hits the open market this summer and told Columbus reporters, "I'm more of a businessman now. ... Right now I'm thinking about this as a business."

In the last year, the list of players to change agents includes Drew Doughty (who represented himself in the negotiation of his recent extension), Taylor Hall, Auston Matthews, Max Pacioretty, Connor Hellebuyck, Roman Josi and Jeff Skinner.



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There are individual reasons behind each of those decisions, ranging from wanting more experienced representation to more service and attention to someone who will advocate more fiercely for your interests.

But as one team executive put it this week: "The first question and answer is always money."

Yes, there's that, too. Agents typically charge a fee of three per cent, but the rate can be negotiable, especially when a client is jumping ship. Shaving even one per cent off the cost of an agent can translate to a big savings for a player when signing the kind of deals these guys get.

HAKSTOL WORLD TOUR

Dave Hakstol could be sitting on a beach or playing golf or doing anything he wanted right now. The former coach of the Philadelphia Flyers will continue to be paid by the NHL team through the end of next season.

Instead he found himself in Stockholm this week, going behind-the-scenes with Tre Kronor coach Rickard Gronborg and his staff during the Beijer Hockey Games tournament. Hakstol's visit was documented by well-respected Swedish hockey journalist Uffe Bodin here.

The coach told Bodin that he hasn't felt the need to take a break from the game, despite being urged by friends to do so after he was fired by the Flyers in December.

During their time together, Hakstol and Gronborg exchanged best practices and kicked around different ideas for running a team. Taking that kind of initiative and adopting a growth mindset should be beneficial when Hakstol gets his next job.

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TSN.CA / Leafs stymied by Georgiev in road loss to Rangers

Kristen Shilton

The Maple Leafs threw a season-high 56 shots at the New York Rangers on Sunday, but couldn't manage more than a single goal past Alexandar Georgiev in a 4-1 road loss. Playing on the second night of a back-to-back, Garret Sparks was in the crease for Toronto, turning aside 27 shots while the Leafs saw their four-game win streak come to a halt. Toronto moves to 34-18-3 on the season.

Takeaways

Big numbers, no results

In a game where the Maple Leafs put a season-high 56 shots on New York Rangers back-up goalie Alexandar Georgiev and controlled possession for most of the night at 56-percent, they came away with only one goal and one big loss.

Facing the fourth-worst team in the Eastern Conference on the second night of a back-to-back, the Leafs weren't prepared for the Rangers early push, and for the second straight game, were down within the first minute of the opening frame.

It was only 28 seconds into the action when Mika Zibanejad, one-third of the Rangers' swarming top line, potted the early marker to put the Leafs in a hole.

Toronto didn't sit back though, taking over possession and keeping the pressure firmly on the Rangers with a 21-1 advantage in shots. Kasper

Kapanen finally evened the score halfway through the first frame with a breakaway chance past Georgiev, and the Leafs were emboldened to press for more.

But as has so frequently been the case for Toronto, a defensive miscue, this time by Ron Hainsey, cost them a goal. Streaking into the offensive zone unobstructed, Jimmy Vesey beat Sparks short side with the Rangers' fifth shot of the game, not only restoring their one-goal lead but shifting momentum away from the visitors.

Toronto entered the second period having put 22 shots on Georgiev, but the back-up kept stymying the Leafs, even as they controlled possession at 65-percent in that frame and peppered him with 17 shots. The futility on Toronto's part was reminiscent of their game against Tampa on Dec. 13, where the Leafs blasted 49 shots at Andrei Vasilevskiy only to lose the game, 4-1.

Mike Babcock shortened his bench in the third looking for an equalizer, but the Rangers continued to frustrate the Leafs with well-placed sticks and boxing out in front of their net.

New York hardly managed extended zone time in the third, but they managed to hem Auston Matthews' line with Kapanen and Patrick Marleau into their own end for over a minute, and when Jake Muzzin sent a lazy pass to the point right on Adam McQuaid's tape, the defenceman rifled the one-timer past Sparks.

Kevin Hayes added an empty-netter to secure the win and send Toronto off on the strength of Georgiev's excellent goaltending and an overall stronger defensive effort from the Rangers than the Leafs put together.

Lacking in Spark

Perhaps it's the long layoff between starts for Sparks, but the first period of his last three games have all produced the same result: two goals in the net and a 2-1 deficit for the Leafs.

Toronto's back-up goalie generally only plays the second night of back-to-backs, which come around a few times per month. Before facing New York, Sparks had earned only two starts, against Florida and Pittsburgh, dating back to Jan. 18. In those outings and on Sunday, the starts were eerily similar.

In New York, Sparks gave up a sloppy first goal to Zibanejad, unable to hold the pressuring first line at bay. Then when Vesey came rushing in on the wing late in the opening frame, Sparks had a clean look, but was down quickly and Vesey's wrister beat him high short side.

With two goals-against on five shots, Sparks was in familiar territory, and just like those previous contests, he responded with a tighter game between the pipes. The Leafs aided their goaltender by keeping play in the Rangers' end, but Sparks was also called upon to make some tough saves in the third period to hold Toronto within striking distance for a time.

It wouldn't last, though. McQuaid's goal was a floating shot from the blue line, and Sparks was down early, so the puck whizzed over his outstretched glove similar to how Vesey beat him in the first. It was a disappointing sequence all around for the Leafs, and Sparks looked dejectedly to the ice as soon as the goal lamp was lit. He finished with 27 stops for an .897 save percentage.

Sparks' record now moves to 7-4-1 on the season, while he's 1-3-0 in his last four starts with 11 goals-against.

Power play perking up?

It's not that Toronto's struggling power play finally converted against the Rangers; it actually finished 0-for-4, putting those units at 1-for-18 in the Leafs' last six games. But there were moments with the extra man where the Leafs didn't look as predictable and ineffective as recent games, interspersed with fewer sequences where they looked stagnant once again.



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Toronto started off well enough on their first power play, registering six shots on net in the two-minute span while being thwarted repeatedly by acrobatic goaltending from Georgiev. The Leafs appeared to be invigorated, crowding the crease and cycling the puck well to create chances for every skater on Toronto's top unit.

From there, the other power play tries weren't as strong, but the Leafs did attempt to show off some new looks, rotating players differently down low and moving the puck more quickly with more precision.

The changes could have something to do with how Mike Babcock was seen in heated conversation with assistant coach Jim Hiller, who runs the power play, on the bench during Saturday's game in Montreal after those units went 0-for-3. Whatever the reason, it was among the first times all season the Leafs have shown some true adjustment on the power play, and even if the results weren't there, the effort reflected much better on the man advantage.

One old trick that did resurface, though, in Sunday's game was the drop pass zone entry, a favourite move of Jake Gardiner's on Toronto's second group. It didn't yield a lot of positive results, but was another example of how the Leafs are attempting to switch things up in multiple facets of their power play.

Back to life

Right from the first period, Nazem Kadri's line with Connor Brown and William Nylander had impressive push, and they kept on top of the Rangers as well as any Toronto line in Sunday's matchup.

It was good pressure from that group in the offensive zone that drew the game's first penalty less than three minutes into the contest, with Toronto already trailing 1-0 and needing an opportunity to score quickly. In the first period alone, Kadri had seven shots and Nylander was all over the Rangers' end.

Kadri would finish with 12 shots on net, not only a career-high, but also the first time he's ever reached double-digit shot totals.

Nylander emerged even stronger in the second period, showing off some of that speed and skill that's helped him score two goals in his last four games. After a slow start to his shortened season, Nylander is finally able to get separation on defenders in the offensive zone, creating space for himself to shoot. Babcock has long called for Nylander to play harder on the puck and he showed that as well on Sunday, battling in the neutral zone and forcing turnovers.

The efforts of Kadri and Nylander didn't turn into points on the scoresheet, but they were among the Leafs' most effective players on an off-night and both boasted possession over 58-percent on the night.

Kap Attack

With his breathtaking speed, Kapanen is known to frequently elude opponents, and the Rangers saw quickly what damage an unmarked Kapanen can do.

Left alone at the Leafs' blue line in the first period, Kapanen intercepted a pass and took off on a breakaway towards Georgiev, blasting his shot off the post and into the net to tie the game 1-1.

The winger hadn't scored in nine games prior to that, and was coming off a game in Montreal where he put up a career-high seven shots on goal. The relief that washed over Kapanen after the puck went past Georgiev was proof positive of how long he'd been frustrated by the lack of production.

His line with Matthews and Marleau has also been stalling lately, adding to his offensive struggles. After coming out of the bye week to start February hot, the chemistry on that unit has cooled and they struggle to hit each other with passes and get the puck out cleanly. They were out on McQuaid's dagger of a goal in the third, unable to clear the puck once again, but prior to that error the line had been having a better showing. If Kapanen has re-ignited his scoring touch, that could pay dividends for them going forward on the road trip.

Blue and White Trending

Tracking Leafs' trends all season long

Toronto is 1-15-2 on the season when trailing after two periods.

Next game

The Leafs continue their six-game road trip against Colorado on Tuesday.

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